



n extraordinary altarpiece and several stone funerary monuments within the fifteenth-century monastery church of Santa María de Miraflores in Burgos have just been unveiled following a two-year WMF-sponsored restoration.

Located in northwestern Spain, the Cartuja (or Carthusian monastery) de Santa María de Miraflores was designed by Hans and Simon of Cologne and completed in 1482. The complex was built atop the remains of an early fifteenth-century hunting lodge that was given to the Carthusian Order by King John II in 1442 and which was subsequently gutted by fire. Within the monastery church is one of the most important ensembles of late Gothic art and architecture to survive in Spain—two intricately carved stone sepulchers and a massive gilt and polychrome wooden altar—all the work of “wandering Jewish” artist Gil de Siloé, executed between 1493 and 1499.

The principal tomb is that of King John II and his second wife Isabel. The second belongs to their son, the Infante Alfonso, who died at the age of 14, having been poisoned in the wars of succession. His death paved the way for his sister Isabella—principal patron of Christopher Columbus’ New World voyages—to ascend to the throne. Her marriage to Ferdinand in 1469 joined the royal houses of Castille and Aragon, leading to the creation of modern Spain.

The carved alabaster mausoleum of King John II and Queen Isabel is in the shape of an eight-pointed star, a representation of the Maltese Cross and an emblem of the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem at the time of the crusades. Atop the star-shaped chamber are carved representations of a recumbent king and queen surrounded by miniature angels, several of which were stolen by French soldiers stationed there during the Napoleonic wars. The tomb chamber of the Infante Alfonso, which is against the wall to the left of the altar, is capped with a statue depicting the young prince kneeling in prayer, surrounded by cherubs.

Spanish Splendor

CELEBRATING THE LATE GOTHIC AT THE CARTHUSIAN MONASTERY OF SANTA MARÍA DE MIRAFLORES



A CONSERVATOR CAREFULLY CLEANS A SCULPTED SCENE OF “THE FLAGELLATION,” ONE OF THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS DEPICTED IN THE MASSIVE CARVED ALTARPIECE. A VIEW OF THE CHAPEL, FACING PAGE, SHOWS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ALTARPIECE AND TWO ROYAL FUNERARY MONUMENTS.

The altarpiece, which was carved by artisans from Siloé’s workshop between 1496 and 1499, measures 13 by 9.5 meters and comprises some 50 individual figures, including members of the holy family, saints, martyrs, monks, King John II, and the royal arms of Castille and León. The carvings and other exquisite decorative flourishes, which were painted by Diego de la Cruz, bear a Moorish motif that echoes the design of the mausoleum.

Over the centuries, the wooden elements of the altar had been damaged by humidity and biological growth, resulting in a weakening of structural supports and pigment loss, while the stone elements had suffered material loss and damage during the Napoleonic period. For decades, the monks who continue to live at the monastery had tried to engage the preservation community to carry out comprehensive study and conservation of the extraordinary artworks, yet funding for such a project seemed to constantly elude them. That was until 2004, when the Fundación Iberdrola, the philanthropic arm of one of Spain’s foremost private electric companies, stepped forward to support the conservation project, joined shortly thereafter by WMF, with whom the company had partnered on a prior restoration effort.

In 2005, WMF Spain officially launched the jointly funded project with a technical team from Junta de Castilla y León supervising the conservation efforts. The work involved documenting and conserving the main altar and mural paintings, the intricately carved tomb of Infante Alfonso, the alabaster mausoleum of King John II and Queen Isabel, and the wrought-iron rood screen. During the project, the conservation team made the surprising discovery of Infante Alfonso’s remains, thought to have been removed from his crypt and lost during the Napoleonic invasion.

The restoration of the church’s altar and mausoleums, which cost \$700,000, was funded by





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JAUME BLASSI, BARCELONA (3)



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THE REMAINS OF THE INFANTE ALFONSO, LONG THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN DESECRATED DURING THE NAPOLEONIC WARS, ABOVE LEFT, WERE FOUND IN THE PRINCE'S SEPULCHRE, BELOW LEFT, DURING RESTORATION. AN EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE CHAPEL, ABOVE. FACING PAGE, THE MAUSOLEUM OF KING JOHN II AND QUEEN ISABEL.

grants from the World Monuments Fund—including the Robert W. Wilson Challenge to Conserve Our Heritage and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation European Preservation Program. Additional funding for this project and for the conservation of the stained glass was provided by the regional government of Castille and León, the archdiocese of Burgos, and the Foundation of Castillian Patrimony.

“We are very proud to have taken part in the restoration of this exceptional monument,” said Juan Carlos Fierro, President, WMF Spain, during a formal inauguration of the restoration on March 19, “since it demonstrates our commitment to the conservation of Spain’s historic patrimony.” The Cartuja de Miraflores, he added, “is full of history, from its awe-inspiring architecture to the centuries-old rites that are still performed today. This is a place that Spain—indeed, the world—cannot afford to lose.”

“The inauguration is particularly special for the World Monuments Fund,” said Bertrand du Vignaud, president of WMF Europe at the event, “as it is the last in a recent series of noteworthy ceremonies that show the ever-stronger presence of WMF in Europe.”

The ceremony was attended by Her Royal Highness Infanta Doña Pilar, the Duchess of Badajoz; the Most Reverend Francisco Gil Hellín, the archbishop of Burgos; Juan Vicente Herrera, president of the Regional Government of Castille and León; Vicente Orden Vigara, President of the Burgos Provincial Government; Juan Carlos Aparicio, Mayor of Burgos; Ignacio Sanchez Galán, President of Iberdrola Electric Company; and Santos Llamas, president of Historic Patrimony of Castille and León Foundation.

In December 2006, conservation work drew to a close at the Cartuja de Santa María de Miraflores, one of the few places in Spain where rosaries are still made from roses. ■

—ANGELA M.H. SCHUSTER AND HOLLY EVARTS

