

Press release

## The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung in Frankfurt am Main acquires a hitherto unknown sculpture by Pedro de Mena

Long-term research and conservation project on the *Maria Inmaculada Concepción* launched

Frankfurt am Main, 21 February 2024 – The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung in Frankfurt am Main has acquired a hitherto unknown work by the renowned Spanish Baroque sculptor Pedro de Mena (ca. 1628–1688). The *Maria Inmaculada Concepción* (17th century) depicts a Virgin standing on a crescent moon. Its acquisition represents an outstanding enhancement to the collection while at the same time marking an important new conservation and research focus at the museum. The sculpture spent many decades undiscovered and unattributed in a private German collection. Numerous changes were made to it over the course of the centuries. The museum’s German-Spanish conservation team has already gained instructive insights through its initial technological examinations. In a conservation project funded by the Ernst von Siemens Kunststiftung, the original polychromy of Frankfurt’s Pedro de Mena sculpture will be exposed and chips filled in in the proper form and colour. The removal of overpainting is among the most laborious steps in the conservation process.

**Pedro de Mena** is considered one of the most prominent exponents of Spanish sculpture of the so-called “Siglo de Oro” (Golden Age) in the seventeenth century. The iconographic depiction of *Maria Inmaculada Concepción* was so popular at the time, that the figure was declared the patron saint of the whole of Spain. Today Spain’s most important museums – among them the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid, the Museo Nacional de Escultura in Valladolid and the Museo de Bellas Artes de Sevilla – all have examples of de Mena’s art in their collections. Masterworks by this artist are moreover found in many of the country’s churches and cathedrals, for instance in Málaga and Cordoba. De Mena is known for his unique sculptural techniques and an aesthetic concept distinguished by highly developed craftsmanship and as well as virtuoso and realistic polychromy. In the first half of the 17th century, the guilds of sculptors and painters or barrel painters were strictly separated from each other. As the century continued, however, this segregation began to weaken, enabling sculptors to apply polychromy on their work of art inside their own workshops. De Mena was one of the first artists to deviate from the highly patterned garments that had previously been common in Spain in favour of hyper-realistic polychromy. To heighten the naturalistic impression, he moreover made increasing use of materials such as glass for the eyes, real hair, ivory for the teeth, branches to depict crowns of thorns, ropes, cords, et cetera in addition to paint. The Frankfurt *Maria Inmaculada Concepción* exhibits the typical attributes.

Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung director Philipp Demandt on the discovery: “Pedro de Mena’s works are among the most prominent examples of Baroque sculpture in Spain. Outside that country, sculptures by Spanish masters of the Baroque long went largely unheeded by specialist circles and the wide public alike. That has changed in recent years thanks to international research, exhibitions, and publications.

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The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung's German-Spanish conservation team is now devoting itself to the in-depth study and conservation of the Frankfurt Pedro de Mena work. We are extremely pleased, not only because the results of our research will help increase the international renown of the prominent Spanish sculptor's oeuvre, but also because ours is the first museum collection outside of Spain to call an Inmaculada by Pedro de Mena its own."

The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung is planning to carry out in-depth research on the sculpture and present the results in the framework of a special exhibition.

### **The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung**

The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung is one of Europe's leading sculpture museums. Its collection encompasses some 3,000 works spanning the ages from ancient Egypt to Neoclassicism and offers unique insights into the history of sculpture. The Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung devotes itself to the study, conservation and presentation of sculptures from all over the world and invites visitors to discover the fascinating universe of sculpture in its permanent display and many special exhibitions.

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