

(DETAIL)

TEACHER NOTES

MUSEUM COLLECTION

Francisco de Zurbarán

St. Francis of Assisi in His Tomb

ARTIST Francisco de Zurbarán (Spanish, 1598–1664)

TITLE Saint Francis of Assisi in His Tomb

DATE ca. 1630/34

MEDIUM Oil on canvas

SIZE About 6 ½ feet tall by 3 ¾ feet wide

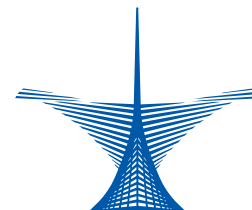
ACCESSION NUMBER M1958.70

LOCATION Gallery 6, Collection Galleries

Prepared by Chelsea Kelly
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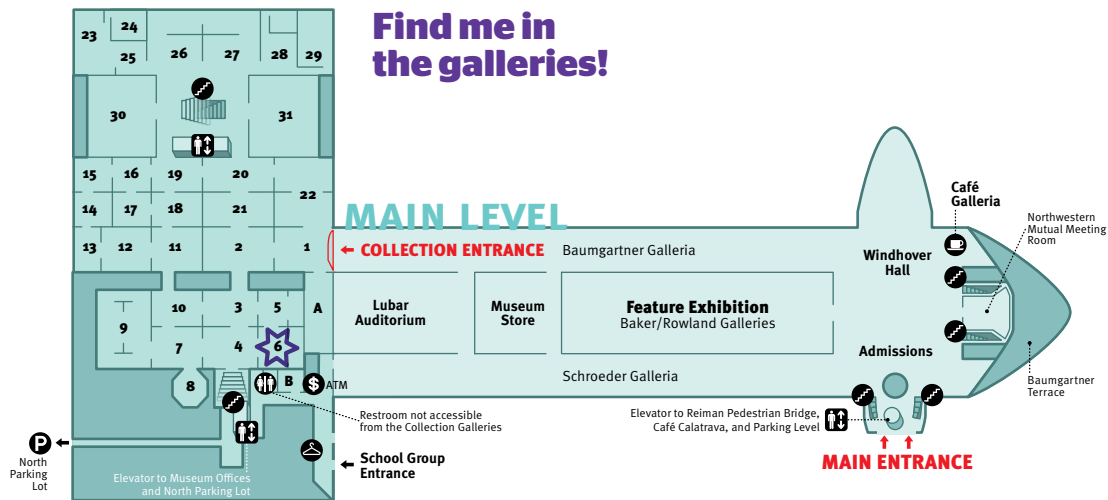
Research assistance by Athena Naylor

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FOR CLASSROOM USE ONLY Francisco de Zurbarán (Spanish, 1598–1664), *Saint Francis of Assisi in His Tomb*, ca. 1630/34. Oil on canvas. Purchase, M1958.70. Photo by John Nienhuis, Dedra Walls



Find me in the galleries!

MAIN LEVEL

← COLLECTION ENTRANCE

MAIN ENTRANCE

Discussion Starters

Take your students to Zurbarán's *St. Francis*. Give them a few minutes to look closely and silently at this painting. Encourage them to look at it from close up (but not less than a foot away), and from farther back. Use the following questions to guide your class discussion in the galleries.

- If you already saw an image of this work in the classroom, what do you notice now that you didn't notice when you looked at the photograph?
- What is the very first thing you notice about this work of art? How did the artist draw your attention to this area?
- Where do you think this painting might have been displayed? Describe the space you imagine this in.
- What kind of **mood** do you think this painting has? Why do you get that feeling from it?

Who made this?

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664) was a Spanish painter, working mainly in the city of Seville, who is most famous for his works of Christian figures. He used strong shadows and realistic details to create mystical spaces that seem real.

Who is this? What is the story?

This man is St. Francis of Assisi, a **friar** who lived in Italy in the late eleventh/early twelfth century, about four hundred years before Zurbarán was working. St. Francis was born rich. As a young man, he was used to the best of everything, but at the age of twenty-one, he had a religious **epiphany**. He realized that his calling in life was to live simply, and he eventually gave away all his money to live a life of poverty. He attracted many followers, founded the Franciscan order of Christianity, and was made a saint. He received the **stigmata** on his body—the very same wounds of Christ on the cross, a miracle that underlined his sainthood.

This painting, though, tells a story that takes place roughly two hundred years after St. Francis's death. Pope Nicholas V was visiting the tomb of St. Francis and had a **vision** in which he saw the body of the saint standing in the tomb, as if he were alive. Zurbarán shows that moment here. We are standing in front of the saint as if we are sharing the Pope's vision. St. Francis seems to walk towards us, illuminated only by the light of the torch the Pope must have held. St. Francis holds a skull, which reminds us of his death, and his chest and feet show the stigmata.

When was this made?

Zurbarán painted *St. Francis* in 1630/34, at the beginning of the Baroque period (about 1600–1700). Baroque art is known for drama, often showing moments that are intense and emotional, and using dark shadows to enhance this effect. The word “baroque” comes from the Spanish word “barroco,” meaning a rough or imperfect pearl. It was originally used as an unkind way to describe artwork from this period, because it was thought to be excessive, and the name stuck.

Many artists of this time depicted the stories in their work directly so they made sense to the masses. The majority of the population could not read, and art was a visual way for churchgoers to understand the stories of the Bible. Religious paintings, paid for by the Church, were the main way artists made money, and so they had to follow the Church’s requests.

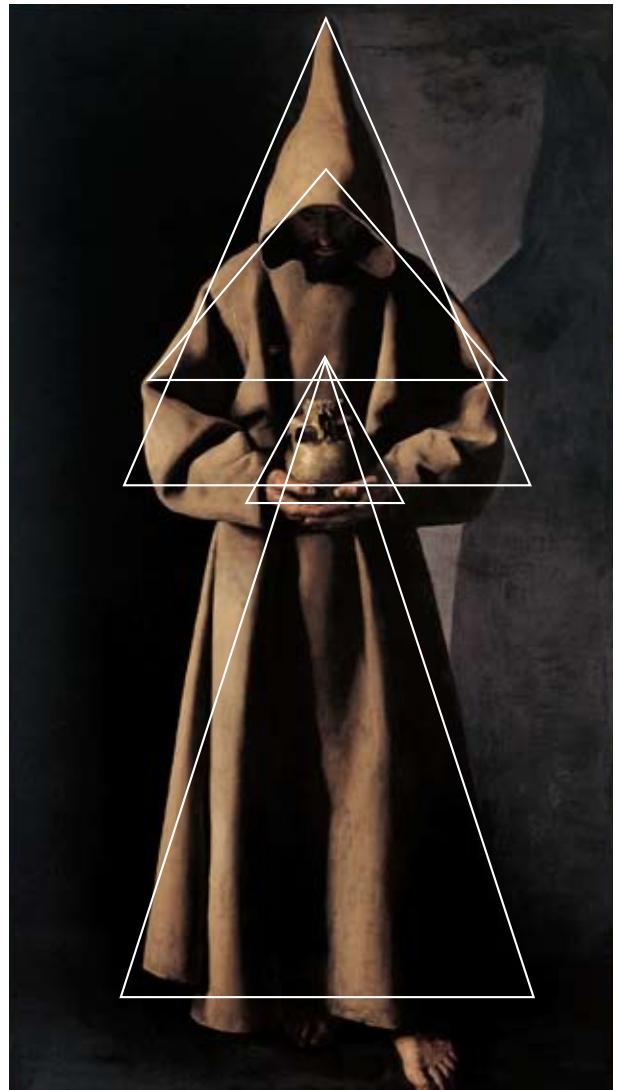
How was this made?

Zurbarán created a very deliberate **composition**. The nearly life-size painting shows only St. Francis, with no background; he seems huge, about to step out towards us, his foot almost in our space. Zurbarán creates this effect by implying triangles in the image—in fact, you can even divide the painting into many triangular shapes (see diagram, right). By doing this, Zurbarán gives the saint mass and importance.

Zurbarán’s use of dramatic lighting, creating intense shadows against an empty background, makes the shapes even more clear. The darkness, with its single **light source**, gives this painting an almost eerie, spooky feeling as we share the Pope’s vision of the saint standing in his tomb.

Why was this painting made?

Zurbarán painted a very specific story about St. Francis and, in true Baroque fashion, chose to use the most dramatic moment. Zurbarán made this work at the request of a single **patron**, the Duke of Olivares, who was an advisor of King Philip IV of Spain. The size and detail of this work suggest that the Duke must have paid a fair bit of money to Zurbarán. Likely, it would have been used for religious **contemplation**—it was a way for the viewer, the Duke, to think meaningfully about Christianity, specifically the pure ideals of St. Francis, when he prayed.



Ideas for the classroom

- LANGUAGE ARTS** Choose a book that your class has been reading. Ask students, individually or in small groups, to identify what they think is one of the most dramatic moments in the story and why. Share with the class. In his painting, Zurbarán gave us, the viewers, the perspective of the Pope, who had a vision of St. Francis. In this spirit, ask students to rewrite the key moment in the classroom story from a different perspective.
- MATH** Show the reproduction of the painting. Draw one of the many implied triangles Zurbarán used to create his composition on the reproduction. Ask students to continue to find triangles in the composition and draw them in (perhaps using a white crayon or colored pencil so that it shows up on the image) on their own copy of the painting. Count how many triangles there are. Ask older students what type of triangles they see. (Are they right triangles? Isosceles?) Do they think using this kind of triangle was an important choice? Are there relationships between the triangles—are some of them exactly half or a quarter the size of the others? Then, discuss why using these many layers of triangles might have been important. What effect does it give the painting?
- ART** Zurbarán painted the vision of a Pope. Visions are similar to dreams, and dreams are often very vivid. Ask students to remember dreams they've had. Students may want to jot down quick ideas or images about their dream when they choose one. Ask students to choose the most important, dramatic moment of their dream and to create a work of art about it. They might use black and white watercolors, thick markers, or heavy brush strokes of acrylic to create a work of art inspired by the high-contrast Baroque style. Encourage them to use one light source.
- SOCIAL STUDIES** Show a map of Spain, pinpointing Seville, the city where Zurbarán worked. Have students research the many locations of Franciscan orders around the world. In groups, create Google Maps to show this saint's influence.
- FOREIGN LANGUAGE** Use Zurbarán's painting as a way to explore Spanish culture. The following vocabulary words in English and Spanish begin to describe the work. If possible, use the experiences and knowledge of bilingual students to add to the list. Can students think of any other words or pairs of opposites, in either language, that describe this painting? Say each word aloud and talk about how similar or different the words sound in each language.

Opposite Pairs	Other Words
luz (light) sombra (shadow)	cráneo (skull)
vida (life) muerte (death)	religión (religion)
oscuridad (dark) resplandor (brightness)	tumba (tomb)
dramática (drama) calmo (calm)	triángulo (triangle)

Resources



On the Web

- Zurbarán painted St. Francis many times. See and compare many of these paintings on Wikimedia Commons. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Francis_of_Assisi_by_Zurbaran
- Watch a video that compares images of St. Francis from before the Baroque period. <http://www.artbabble.org/video/berlinghieri-altarpiece-st-francis-c-1235-church-san-francesco-pescia>
- For older students, screen scenes (especially the Conversion scene) from the 1972 film by Franco Zeffirelli, *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, a biographical movie about St. Francis's life. You can find clips on YouTube.

Vocabulary

Composition The way that a painting is laid out on the canvas.

Contemplation Meaningful thinking about an idea, story, or object.

Epiphany A moment of sudden revelation or insight.

Friar Someone who is part of a specific religious belief system and is dedicated to serving a wide community through those beliefs.

Light Source Where the light in a work of art is coming from.

Mood The emotion(s) that a work of art makes us feel.

Patron Someone who pays an artist to create a work of art for him/her.

Stigmata The wounds on Christ's hands, feet, and chest from the Crucifixion.

Vision When a person, thing, or event appears as if it is real, although it is not actually there.

Let us know what you think of this guide and how you use it. Email us at teachers@mam.org.

