

Endocrinology and Art



EUGENIA MARTÍNEZ VALLEJO, «LA MONSTRUA VESTIDA»

Juan Carreño (1680). Madrid. Museo del Prado.

“La Monstrua Vestida”, a case of Prader-Willi syndrome.

Juan Carreño de Miranda (born 1614, died 1685), one of the most important painters in Spain in the 17th century, was appointed Court Painter in 1671 by King Charles II of Spain. In 1680 he painted Eugenia Martínez Vallejo, a 6-yr-old girl who was exhibited at court mainly because of her extreme obesity. The child was considered such a “freak of nature” as to be called “monster”. Carreño de Miranda painted her both clothed and unclothed as Bacchus.

In the clothed version she is portrayed dressed in rich clothes of red and white brocades, holding one apple in each hand probably symbolizing her great appetite. She has almond-shaped eyes and a small mouth with down-turned corners. She is so fat that seems neckless. The dress covers her feet, but we are aware of the small size of the hands. Her physical features are typical of the Prader-Willi syndrome, a chromosomal disorder characterized by hypotonia, hypogonadism, hyperphagia, cognitive impairment and difficulties in behaviour. Prader-Willi syndrome can affect people of both sexes and of any race or country. Three Swiss doctors - Prader, Labhart and Willi - first described it in

1956. Children affected by this disease have strong appetite, often associated with compulsion to eat and an obsession for food. The increase in body weight is usually gained between the age of 1 and 6 years and can lead to morbid obesity if no measures are taken to prevent it. Carreño's Monstrua has a very intense sad look in her eyes, that shows her awareness of being treated differently from her peers and at the same time relates a feeling of loneliness.

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