

ART FROM THE ANDES

Spanish Colonial Paintings from the Elvin A. Duerst Bequest



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PORTLAND ART MUSEUM, OREGON



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The Spanish conquest of the vast Inca Empire in South America was accomplished in forty years, beginning in 1532. The new colony, known as the Viceroyalty of Peru, eventually encompassed virtually all of South America, excepting Brazil and Patagonia. While greed for the continent's mineral riches and other resources served as powerful incentive, the principal motivation and justification for Spain's colonization of America was its evangelical mission to spread Christianity to the far corners of the world.



Early missionaries realized that indigenous people responded strongly to images of the new gods. Initially, paintings, sculptures, and prints were imported from Europe. Then, artists were dispatched, principally from Spain, Italy, and Flanders, to teach native talent. Distinguished local schools arose throughout the vast Andean chain to supply an increasing demand for images for new churches and for private devotion.

Most of the paintings bequeathed to the Museum by Elvin A. Duerst were made in the great Altiplano of Bolivia and Peru. The artists were based in colonial cities such as La Paz and Potosí, as well as the former Inca capital of Cusco, but there is also one example from Quito, Ecuador. A few of the paintings were produced at the end of the sixteenth century, when the religion was new, but most date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of the artists have not been identified, but they most probably encompass the range of colonial society. Certainly included are indigenous and mestizo, or mixed-race, artists. *Criollos*, or Spaniards born in America, might also be represented.

Two of the most significant painters of the seventeenth century deserve special mention. Diego Quispe Tito was a descendant of Inca nobility and became the leading painter of his native Cusco (no. 9). His mestizo contemporary Leonardo Flores was the foremost painter in La Paz and the area around Lake Titicaca (nos. 3–6). While both were informed by Mannerism, brought to their cities in the previous generation by European artists, each developed a distinctive style characterized by great clarity, humanity, and sincerity, as well as a fondness for beautiful surface pattern.

The paintings in the Duerst bequest represent not only the triumph of the Catholic faith in South America, but also the endurance of indigenous cultures. The melding of European styles and iconography with local beliefs and tastes produced a new, distinctive art. The paintings illustrate some of the key artistic traditions that emerged in the process of re-envisioning Christianity in the Andes.

Devotional Paintings

Most of the paintings were created to inspire prayer and devotion. Some of the larger examples were probably made for a church or monastic setting (nos. 1, 3–6, 10). However, the majority were intended for use in the home, where they could serve as objects of meditation and be an ever-present reminder to lead a Christian life.

The cult of the Virgin Mary was the aspect of Christianity most eagerly embraced by native Americans. More approachable than an omnipotent God, Mary was a mother and would understand the human condition. Her adoption in the Andes has also been interpreted as a transference of devotion from the pre-Hispanic earth goddess Pachamama. Images of the Virgin with the infant Christ were by far the most popular, as was true in Europe (nos. 8, 9, 11, 16–18). Devotion to the Virgin was most especially focused on cult statues (see below). The other principal object of Christian meditation, Christ's Passion, is represented by only one example. *The Ecce Homo* (no. 13), based on the work of the great Spanish master Luis de Morales, is so small that it was probably intended to be carried by its owner.

While relatively few saints venerated in Spain became popular in South America, Saint Joseph was an exception. He was a down-to-earth family man and his followers sought the nurture and protection he had given the young Jesus. One painting (no. 15) shows the saint and the Christ Child standing before an Andean lake, as if invoking his patronage of the region. Another (no. 7) demonstrates a cheek-to-cheek tenderness usually seen in depictions of the Virgin and Child. Joseph also looks off sadly as if foreseeing the boy's suffering and death.

Three of these devotional images were painted on metal plates (nos. 7, 15, 16). The practice of using copper as a support for oil paintings was long established in Europe. In the Andes, there were rich supplies and indigenous people had long believed that metal was a gift of the gods, so it seemed appropriate for works depicting holy figures.

Statue Paintings

Statues, particularly ones of the Virgin and Child, quickly became and remain



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objects
of
great

devotion in the Andes. Credited with answering prayers and performing miracles, some led to the development of pilgrimage sites comparable to the holy places of Old World Christianity. Inca culture had long lavished the finest fabrics on ritual objects, and indigenous communities enthusiastically adopted the European tradition of dressing such statues with sumptuous gowns and fabulous jewels.

Statue paintings depict these cult images and were created in great numbers and at all levels of quality for the faithful throughout the New World. For some, the paintings were souvenirs of a pilgrimage, but many others believed that the intercessory powers of the original object were transferred to such copies. Interestingly, while statue paintings are meant to refer to the original, they are not usually literal reproductions of the sculptures, but seek to bring the Virgin and Child to life.

The specific statue depicted in *The Virgin of Mount Carmel* (no. 9) has not been identified, but Diego Quispe Tito suggested the original context by echoing the custom of using honorific drapery to frame shrines. *The Virgin of the Rosary* (no. 18) probably depicts the dressed statue sent by the

Spanish crown to the Church of Santo Domingo in Potosí, Bolivia, following the discovery of the world's largest silver deposit in the sixteenth century. The painting's original frame features mirrors inset into the carved and gilded wood, a technique used in the decoration of Andean churches to create an otherworldly environment.

The Virgin of Pomata (no. 11) depicts the miracle-working statue in the Peruvian town of Pomata on the shore of Lake Titicaca. The cult image is immediately recognizable from the feathers inserted in the crowns. A true Andean tribute, they derive from a rhea, the small native species of ostrich. The African ostrich had long been a symbol of the Virgin and this coincided with ancient indigenous beliefs that linked feathers with celestial beings. Depicted up-close, the holy figures are endowed with vivacious presence to encourage devotional interaction.

Archangels

Flamboyantly costumed archangels were one of the most popular and distinctive subjects to develop in the Christian art of the Andes. The highest order of angels serves principally as God's messengers to humans and as his warriors against evil. Archangels were also dispatched by God to serve the righteous as guides and protectors. Church authorities promoted archangels in the Andes to supplant the indigenous cult of stars, citing the Book of Enoch on archangels controlling stellar movements.



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The existence of winged celestial warriors in pre-Hispanic cultures no doubt contributed to their reception by indigenous people.

Series of paintings of archangels were created to decorate the naves of churches, most famously in Calamarca, Bolivia. *Archangel Rafael* (no. 6) is large and might have derived from such an ecclesiastical context. Paintings of archangels were also found in domestic interiors, whose inhabitants apparently sought their angelic protection as well as their decorative pres-

ence in their daily lives.

In the Andes, weaving had long been considered the highest form of art and painters always showed archangels dressed in sumptuous textiles. Sometimes they are shown in fanciful female garb combined with Roman military boots to denote their sexless status, as in *Archangel Rafael*. Other Andean depictions of God's soldiers were inspired by imported prints illustrating the clothing, arms, and poses of Spanish and Flemish militiamen. Sometimes archangels were shown bearing firearms or swords, but Archangel Gabriel (no. 12) appears with a banner because he is God's principal messenger to humans.

Secular Objects

Only two objects in the collection are not of a religious nature. One is a rare example of an independent landscape painting from the eighteenth century (no. 14). In the Andes, landscape usually served only as a backdrop for narrative subjects, mostly drawn from the Bible. The artist of this whimsical painting delighted in quickly executing an impression of an Andean lake or river. In all likelihood, it does not depict a specific place, even if it includes local attributes, including a reed boat and great egrets fishing from the bank.

A silver "wedding cup" (no. 19) was a common good luck present for newlyweds. A llama, a symbol of prosperity, is depicted perched on the handle. The principal beasts of burden in the Andes, llamas transported the silver from the mines high in the mountains to the coast for shipment to Spain.



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CHECKLIST

All works are from the bequest of Elvin A. Duerst.

- Master of Calamarca**
(Bolivian, active ca. 1700–1750)
Saint Agnes, 1700–1725
Oil on canvas
63 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 43 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
2010.25.18
- Workshop of the Master of Calamarca**
(Bolivian, active ca. 1700–1750)
Archangel with a Wreath of Flowers, ca. 1700
Oil on canvas
36 x 28 inches
2010.25.15
- Leonardo Flores**
(Bolivian, active 1665–1683)
Saint Agnes, ca. 1665
Oil on canvas
28 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches
2010.25.12
- Leonardo Flores**
(Bolivian, active 1665–1683)
Saint Helen, ca. 1665
Oil on canvas
29 x 22 inches
2010.25.8
- Leonardo Flores**
(Bolivian, active 1665–1683)
Saint Mary Magdalen Relinquishing Her Worldly Possessions, 1680s
Oil on canvas
40 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 32 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
2010.25.17
- Leonardo Flores(?)**
(Bolivian, active 1665–1683)
Archangel Rafael, 1670s
Oil on canvas
67 x 44 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches
2010.25.19
- Workshop of Melchor Pérez de Holguín**
(Bolivian, ca. 1665–after 1732)
Saint Joseph and the Christ Child, ca. 1720
Oil on zinc or alloy plate
5 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 4 inches
2010.25.2
- Francisco de Quiñones de la Campaña**
(Bolivian, 17th century)
The Virgin Nursing the Christ Child, 1667
Oil on canvas
23 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 19 inches
2010.25.13
- Diego Quispe Tito**
(Peruvian, 1611–1681)
The Virgin of Mount Carmel, ca. 1675
Oil on canvas
37 x 27 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches
2010.25.10
- Attributed to Andrés Sánchez Gallque**
(Ecuadorian, active Quito 1599)
Saint Clare with a Monstrance, ca. 1600
Oil on canvas
31 x 22 inches
2010.25.16
- Attributed to Juan Tupu Chili**
(Peruvian, 18th century)
The Virgin of Pomata, ca. 1725
Oil on canvas
26 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches
2010.25.9
- Unknown artist**
(Bolivian, La Paz)
Archangel Gabriel, ca. 1730
Oil on canvas
52 x 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches
2010.25.14
- Unknown artist**
(Bolivian)
Ecce Homo, 1590–1610
Oil on canvas mounted on panel
4 x 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches
2010.25.4
- Unknown artist**
(Bolivian)
Landscape, 18th century
Oil on canvas
21 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches
2010.25.5
- Unknown artist**
(Bolivian)
Saint Joseph Carrying the Christ Child, mid-18th century
Oil on copper or tin
9 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 7 inches
2010.25.6
- Unknown artist**
(Bolivian)
Virgin and Child, 1575–1610
Oil on copper
8 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches
2010.25.1
- Unknown artist**
(Bolivian, perhaps Potosí)
The Virgin Crowned by the Holy Trinity, mid-17th century
Oil on wood
5 $\frac{5}{16}$ x 3 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches
2010.25.7
- Unknown artist**
(Bolivian or Peruvian)
The Virgin of the Rosary, ca. 1690
Oil on canvas
22 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches
2010.25.3
- Unknown artisan**
(Bolivian or Guatemalan)
Wedding Cup, 18th or 19th century
Silver, chased and punched
4 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches
2010.25.20

The Patron

Elvin Albert Duerst (1915–2006) was born in McMinnville and graduated from Oregon State College (now University) in 1937 with a degree in agricultural economics. From 1948 until his retirement in 1966, he worked for the State Department as an advisor on agricultural development in Central and South America. Duerst had already begun amassing a considerable collection of contemporary art and became fascinated with the Spanish colonial paintings and objects he encountered in the Andes. His generous bequest to the Portland Art Museum includes thirty-five works of modern art, some of which are on view in the Jubitz Center for Modern and Contemporary Art, and the nineteen works of Spanish colonial art listed here.

Dawson W. Carr, Ph.D.

The Janet and Richard Geary Curator of European Art

Suggested Reading

Fane, Diana, ed. *Converging Cultures: Art and Identity in Spanish America*. New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1996.

Rishel, Joseph J. with Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt. *The Arts in Latin America, 1492–1820*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006.

Stanfield-Mazzi, Maya. *Object and Apparition: Envisioning the Christian Divine in the Colonial Andes*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2013.

Stratton-Pruitt, Suzanne. *The Virgin, Saints, and Angels: South American Paintings 1600–1825 from the Thoma Collection*. Stanford: The Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, 2006.

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