



Manuel Zambrano
A Miracle of Our Lady of Quinche, ca. 1888
Oil on canvas
45,9 x 31,9 in. (116,50 x 81 cm.)

Inscription (on recto): “La Portentosa Imagen de la Peña de Oyacachi que fue trasportada al Quinche en 1604” - The Portentous Image of the Rock of Oyacachi that was transported to Quinche in 1604

Although little is known about Manuel Zambrano’s origins, the artist was active in Quito during the second half of the 1800s and left behind a small group of work related to the devotion of Our Lady of Quinche. He created this painting around 1888 as part of a series dedicated to the miracles of Our Lady of Quinche; two of these paintings are currently housed in the Convent of San Francisco of Quito (Fig. 1) and in the Museo Nacional del Banco Central del Ecuador (Fig. 2).

Our Lady of Quinche, officially proclaimed the patroness and protector of Quito in 1698, was one of the most important miraculous images in colonial Ecuador.¹ An early 17th century account ties the origins of this image to Oyacachi, a small town located in the moorlands separating the Andean highlands from the jungle of the Amazon basin. This account confirms that the statue was made in 1591 by the Spanish artist Diego de Robles, who was also the sculptor of the Virgin of Guápulo.² The first miracle performed by the Virgin benefited the sculptor himself, who had nearly lost his life on the dangerous trip back to Quito. From then, many other miracles occurred and the image’s power became famous, attracting innumerable pilgrims. Two of these miracles are depicted in this painting: the first when Our Lady of Quinche saved the son of the Indian Marta Sumanguilla from being devoured by a bear, and the second when the natives of Oyacachi witnessed a beautiful spectacle in which thousands of birds of all colors fluttered around the image of the Virgin all day and, at dusk, a great light from the sky illuminated Our Lady and transformed her image into a luminous body.³ As in in the other two paintings by Zambrano, the lower register of the canvas depicts the inhabitants of Oyacachi kneeling and praying to the holy image. The image of the Amerindians, clothed in neutrally colored ponchos, reveals local attitudes typical of festivities, such as a man playing a *zampoña*, an Andean pan flute.

On March 10, 1604, despite the benefits that the thaumaturgic statue provided to the inhabitants of Oyacachi, the bishop Luis López de Solís commanded the priest Diego de Londoño to remove the image from its chapel and transport it to El Quinche, a town situated in the periphery of Quito, as the inscription on Zambrano’s painting states.⁴ Although the 17th-century chronicles reveal the importance of the image in inculcating civility amongst Oyacachi’s Indigenous population, López de Solís’s decision could be considered a response to idolatrous practices within the town, whose practices of worship seemed to desecrate the image. In one particular instance, during a feast organized by Oyacachi’s Indigenous governor to celebrate the construction of his new house, drunken Natives placed a bear’s head on an altar and presented it with offerings.⁵ From this incident arose a scandal in the capital of Quito, as the whole city erupted in protest and demanded that the bishop resolve the matter, taking into consideration that not only were the

¹ Juan de Velasco, *Historia del reino de Quito en la América meridional*, vol. 3 (Quito: Editorial Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1979): 123; Federico González Suárez, *Historia general de la República del Ecuador*, vol. 2 (Quito: Editorial Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, 1970): 374.

² Carmen Fernández-Salvador, “Images and Landscape: The (Dis)ordering of Colonial Territory (Quito in the Eighteenth Century),” *Arts* 10, no. 36 (2021): 7.

³ Magdalena Vences Vidal, “Manifestaciones de la religiosidad popular en torno a tres imágenes marianas originarias. La unidad del ritual y la diversidad formal,” *Latinoamérica* 49, no. 2 (2009): 119.

⁴ José María Vargas, *Patrimonio artístico ecuatoriano* (Quito: Santo Domingo, 1972): 351.

⁵ Carmen Fernández-Salvador, “Images and Landscape: The (Dis)ordering of Colonial Territory (Quito in the Eighteenth Century),” *Arts* 10, no. 36 (2021): 7.

Oyacachi not completely evangelized, but that the roads to visit the image were very dangerous. As a result, in March 1604, the image of the Virgin Mary arrived at the town of El Quinche, where her sanctuary is still located, and where the Virgin of La Peña received the title of “Our Lady of the Presentation of Quinche” in honor of her feast day, the 21st of November.

In 1868 El Quinche’s colonial church was destroyed in the earthquake of Ibarra. Therefore, the date of the execution of the canvas, around 1888, corresponds with the reconstruction of the sanctuary. As Carmen Fernández-Salvador argues, it is likely that Zambrano’s paintings were produced to raise funds for the reconstruction work to be done in El Quinche.⁶ Like many Marian images from the colonial period, such as that of Guápulo (2021.10) or La Merced (2012.022 - 2015.100), this painting may have been paraded in remote places in order to collect alms for its temple.



Manuel Zambrano, *Primer milagro de la Virgen del Quinche* [sic] (1888)
Reserva de Pintura de Caballete del Convento de San Francisco, Quito.

⁶ Carmen Fernández-Salvador, “Siguiendo el camino del peregrino: como imaginar una geografía cristiana y moderna (1880-1910),” *Escenarios para una patria: Paisajismo Ecuatoriano, 1850-1930*, ed. Alexandra Kennedy Troya (Quito: Museo de la Ciudad, 2008): 66.



Manuel Zambrano, *Nuestra Señora de la Peña de Oyacachi* [sic] (1888), 100 x 78 cm.
Museo Nacional del Banco Central del Ecuador, Quito