

Andean Angels in the Collection of Carl and Marilynn Thoma

Paintings of angels from present-day Peru and Bolivia are among the most popular creations of Spanish colonial artists. They were painted as individual angels with specific iconographical allusions and in series. We know from an engraving that paintings of angels decorated homes (fig. 1), and, despite the despoliation of rural churches, the series of angels in the church of Calamarca near La Paz, Bolivia (fig. 2) remains intact.



Original in the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University

Fig. 1. *Domestic Interior in Lima*. Amédée François Frézier, *A Voyage to the South Sea...* (London: J. Bowker, 1717), plate 36. John Carter Brown Library.



Fig. 2. Nave of the church of Calamarca, Bolivia. Photo: Antonio Suárez Wiese.



1997.010

Saint Michael the Archangel

Unidentified workshop
Peru, Cuzco
Eighteenth century
Oil on canvas, 65 x 47 inches

Pedro de Ribadeneira, writing in the late sixteenth century about the feast day dedicated to Saint Michael the Archangel, noted that the observance was twofold: to thank God for giving this particular angel, the commander-in-chief of the celestial army, to the church for its defense, and to celebrate the existence of all the angels, “to give them reverence, and honor them, and give thanks to the Lord, for creating them so excellently, for his glory and for our benefit.”ⁱ

Ribadeneira would have been surprised at the role that angels would come to play in the art of the Spanish viceroyalties in America. Artists in present-day Peru and Bolivia did not limit their subjects to the seven traditional archangels, but expanded the cast of characters to include an array of figures based on the apocryphal book of Enoch.

This painting of Saint Michael the Archangel represents an angel considered canonical by the church, alongside Gabriel and Raphael, and the one most often painted. For Ribadeneira, Michael was the Caudillo y Capitán of all the angels, the defender of the church, intercessor of mankind, Príncipe de la Corte Celestial (Prince of the Celestial Court), who receives the souls of the elect (as he does in the *Last Judgment* in the Thoma Collection). For the faithful, Saint Michael Archangel was a protector and willing listener.

He does not neglect those who pray to him, nor reject those who confide in him, nor distance himself from those who love him, for he defends the humble, encourages the pure, embraces the innocent, guards our lives, guides us along the way, and takes us home [*a nuestra patria*], where Jesus Christ our Lord, the true husband of the Church, reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the centuries of the centuries.ⁱⁱ

The textual source of this painting is Revelation 12:7-9, in which Michael and his angels went to war with the dragon, and “the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.”

The style of this *Saint Michael the Archangel* is characteristics of the Cuzco school: the plumes on his helmet, the beautiful coloring of the wings, and the stenciled patterns in gold that enliven the surface of the predominately red and blue garments and armor of the angel. Another touch particular to Cuzco painting is the sword hilt sending out a flaming “blade.” There are other paintings of this subject which are similar in composition, probably based on the same print source.



2016.060

Unidentified Artist

Saint Michael the Archangel

Eighteenth century

Peru, Cuzco

Oil with gold on canvas, 64 x 43 inches (164 x 109 cm.)

Collection of Carl and Marilyn Thoma, inv. no. 2016.060



Fig. 3. Unidentified artist, (Lima or Cuzco), *Saint Michael the Archangel*, c. 1660-1690, oil on canvas. Colección Barbosa-Stern, Lima.

It is likely that this painting of Saint Michael the Archangel was intended as a single canvas representing the Prince of the Angels. It is also possible that it once belonged to a series of paintings of angels like those sent from Spain to the Viceroyalty of Peru in the seventeenth century. A painting of Saint Michael in the Barbosa-Stern collection in Lima (fig. 3) is noted by Eduardo Luis Wuffarden to bear certain similarities to a version in the Convent of the Conception in Lima, where it belongs to a series of paintings of angels from the workshop of the Spanish artist Francisco de Zurbarán. This, and the portrait-like quality of Michael's face, suggested to Wuffarden an approximate date of the last third of the seventeenth century for the Barbosa Stern painting.ⁱⁱⁱ

While these paintings are both similar representations of Saint Michael Archangel, the Thoma painting must be of a later date, when the artists of Peru and Bolivia created more fanciful dress in their paintings of angels, whether military or not. Gone is the full set of armor, replaced with puffy sleeves, a lacy petticoat, and embellishments in gold that characterize so many paintings from eighteenth-century Cuzco, but are not common in the seventeenth.



2013.008

Unidentified artist

Saint Michael the Archangel

Bolivia?

Late 17th- 18th century

Oil on canvas, 67 x 39 inches

The composition of this painting of Saint Michael the Archangel refers to Revelation 12:7-9, in which Michael led his angels in battle, and “the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.” The same composition, with Michael treading on the fallen devil, brandishing his sword, is also frequently used by painters in Cuzco, but their versions are more likely to include decorative details and perhaps the application of gold. The devil is depicted as a serpent with a human face.



2007.057

Saint Gabriel the Archangel

Unidentified Artist

Bolivia

First half of the 18th century

Oil on canvas, 45 x 35 ¾ inches

Inscribed: *GABRIEL VIR DEVS*

Saint Gabriel the Archangel is the messenger among the archangels. Even without an inscription, the dove of the Holy Spirit at upper left and the lily he holds indicate that this is the Angel of the Annunciation.

The numerous paintings of angels in church at Calamarca, Bolivia (fig. 2) church have long been casually attributed to the “master of Calamarca,” but they are not by the same artist. Whoever painted them, their style and iconography compare favorably with this painting. The costume, related to female dress of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is similar: a knee-length tunic (in this case richly embroidered in horizontal bands) is edged on the sleeves and hem with what is intended to resemble the highly valued Flemish lace imported to South

America. The voluminous cape also resembles those worn by the angels of Calamarca. In this painting as well as the Calamarca paintings, the energetic movement of the capes is at odds with the quiet pose of the figure.

Many paintings of the angels that were produced in the region from around 1680 reflect a type that may be found in the large paintings by José de los Ríos at Carabuco that were completed in 1684 or the angels in the presbytery of San Martín in Potosí from around the same date. The type descends from paintings by Francisco de Zurbarán and his workshop as well as print sources, but in Bolivia they develop a particular style marked by impressive costumes with generous draperies and delicate lacework, here delicately rendered.



2007.048

Unidentified artist

Angel with Harquebus

Peru, Cuzco

Eighteenth century

Oil on canvas, 164.5 x 112.5 inches

Paintings of angels carrying harquebuses (matchlock guns) are today the most popular of Spanish Colonial paintings from the Andes, and they must have been equally popular in the old Viceroyalty of Peru, for so many examples survive.

The iconography, completely original to colonial Peru, is an amalgamation of fictive portraits of angels and engravings like this print from the French military handbook titled *L'Art militaire François pour l'infanterie* (1696) (figs. 4).



Fig. 4 “François,” plate 3 from *L'Art militaire François pour l'infanterie* (1696). National Library of France, Paris.

It seems probable that there were locally made prints after such European models that circulated among the artistic workshops of the Viceroyalty of Peru. A hint of these intermediate visual sources are the ribbons seen at the lower left of the painting, just behind the cartouche. These ribbons appear frequently in Peruvian paintings of military angels, but not at all in the military handbooks. They are fictitious additions to the military costumes.

Perhaps the cartouche at the lower left was deliberately left blank so that the figure could later be identified by the owner of the canvas as a particular close angel. It is the only “unfinished” aspect of the canvas as a whole, suggesting that the painting was created for the art market.

The stance of the angel’s legs and their cast shadows, the angle of the wings, and the modeling of the rakish, plumed hat reveal that the painter had a command of representing volume and recession on the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. However, as in a number of other similar paintings, he eschews these painterly conventions when depicting the warrior angel’s costume. Despite the slight indications of folds in the embroidered waistcoat and the crushed linen emerging from its slashed sleeve, the overall impression is a collage-like flatness, a costume designed to dazzle with details, but without palpable realism.



2022.8
Unidentified artist
Angel with Baton
Bolivia
18th century
Oil on canvas



2022.9

Unidentified artist

Angel with Harquebus

Bolivia

18th century

Oil on canvas

There are military angels in public and private collections in Bolivia that differ from the flamboyant angels painted in Cuzco. Their more subdued costumes are likely closer to those worn by real soldiers in the early 18th century, as were depicted by the Bolivian artist Melchor Pérez Holguín, an eyewitness to the *Entrance of the Viceroy Archbishop Morcillo* into Potosí (fig. 5). In a detail of that vast canvas, the parading soldiers are dressed much like two Bolivian angels in the Thoma Collection. In Potosí as in Cuzco these paintings of angels were created in series and in duplicate. The *Angel with a Baton* shares a model with a painting in a private collection in La Paz (fig. 6). The *Angel with Gun* is closely related to a version in the Museo Nacional de Arte in La Paz, though the figures bear their arms differently. All of the military angels that can be assigned to workshops in present-day Bolivia wear costumes very similar, with their stiff jackets and lacy bibs, to the soldiers portrayed by Holguín.



Fig. 5. Detail of the lower left corner of Melchor Pérez Holguín's *Entry of Viceroy Morcillo into Potosí*, oil on canvas, (all) c. 1715-1721, Madrid, Museo de América.



Fig. 6. Unidentified Artist, *Angel with Baton*, early 18th century, oil on canvas, 48 x 31 ½ inches. Private collection, La Paz, Bolivia.



2013.006

Unidentified artist

Guardian Angel

Bolivia?

Late 18th century

Oil on canvas, 67 x 39 inches

The concept of a Guardian Angel is found in the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament and in the Psalms and elsewhere in the New Testament. Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote: “On this road man is threatened by many dangers both within and without, and therefore as guardians are appointed for men who have to pass by an unsafe road, so an angel is assigned to each man as long as he is a wayfarer.” Paintings of Saint Michael the Archangel and of the Guardian Angel are much more commonly found in inventories and other documents reflecting private life in the Spanish colonies than the apocryphal angels such as Uriah or Sealtiel. The Guardian Angel looks after

the spirit of the living, often pictured, as in this version, as a child. Michael guides the soul to heaven at the Last Judgment.

This highly refined painting may have been created in late-eighteenth century Sucre, Bolivia, a sophisticated and learned city then called La Plata. It is an exaggeration to say that the art of painting in Bolivia (then called Charcas) was substantially affected by European Neoclassicism, but this painting may be evidence of a certain toning down of movement and anecdotal detail toward the end of the colonial period.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Flos Sanctorum, quinta parte* 2nd ed. (Madrid, 1716), 176.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., 185-86.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luis Eduardo Wuffarden, in *Mestizo del renacimiento al barroco andino*, ed. María Cecilia Bakula Budge, et al. (Lima: Impulso Empresa de Servicios, 2008), 41.