



2016.067

Unidentified Artist

Peru, Cuzco

*Annunciation to the Virgin Mary with Saints Catherine and Gertrude*

Eighteenth century

Oil on canvas, 24 1/16 x 17 9/16 inches.

This small painting, with its deliberate contrast between the rounded forms of the figures and the flattened areas decorated with gold, offers an opportunity to focus on the use of gold in paintings from the Spanish Americas, notably those created in Cuzco.

The use of gold to simulate richly embroidered brocades was evidently adapted by painters to evoke the similarly brilliant surfaces created by the teams of carvers, gilders, and painters who created polychromed sculptures in Spain and Spanish America. The painters of these wooden sculptures were experts in creating convincing flesh tones (*carnaciones*) or in

finishing the carved draperies with colors and with gold (*estofado*). Underlying these artistic traditions, both in the treatment of sculpture and the surface of Cuzco paintings, was the high regard in which rich textiles were held in the Early Modern era. In recognition of this close relationship between weaving and painting, art historians call the use of gold in Cuzco paintings *brocateado* (“brocaded”).

The Thoma *Annunciation with Saints Catherine and Gertrude* shares stylistic characteristics with other paintings from Cuzco: a deliberate combination of realistic figures painted in “European” style with areas of drapery not merely sprinkled with gold stars or other shapes stenciled on to the surface of the canvas, but delicately wrought as a continuum across a flat surface (fig. 2).





Fig. 1. Unidentified artist, *Virgin Mary and Child with Angels*, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Convent of San Antonio de Padua de la Recoleta, Cuzco. Photo: Raúl Montero Quispe.





Fig. 2. Unidentified artist, *Virgin Mary “of the Chair” with Saints*, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Church of San Jerónimo, Cuzco. Photo: Raúl Montero Quispe.

For decades, art historians have referred to paintings created in the Peruvian city of Cuzco as representing “the Cuzco school” or “Cuzco style.” As more and more of these works

of art have been restored and published it is clear that there is not a single Cuzco style, but rather modes of composition and finish that often suggest a particular workshop. A comparison between the Thoma *Annunciation* and the other two paintings illustrated here demonstrates a particular aesthetic that skillfully combines well modelled figures and flat areas that deliberately show off a command of intricate applications of gold. These highly refined paintings were evidently created for a particular clientele willing to pay extra for their high quality. It is known through documentary evidence that paintings enhanced with gold were more expensive than those without such embellishment.

There is no single “Spanish colonial” style as is strikingly evident by comparing this painting with two others in the Thoma collection: one from the early viceregal period (1997.017) and another created in present-day Bolivia (2016.001).

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