



Unidentified artist
Christ Child Blessing
Peru
c. 1600-1630
Oil on canvas
38.25 x 27.625 in

The Christ Child sits three-quarter view, gazing directly at the viewer from a friar's chair, his sandaled feet resting on tasseled cushion. He has curly, reddish hair, a feature found in depictions of the Christ Child by the Italian Jesuit Bernardo Bitti, who was active in South America in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Set into Christ's pale skin are a rosebud mouth, pink cheeks, and round eyes. The long, elegant fingers of his right hand are raised in a gesture of benediction while his be-tinged left hand cradles a *globus cruciger* decorated with stars, a symbol

of his position as *Salvator Mundi*, or Redeemer of the World. To either side are dark curtains, and beyond them is a patterned wall decoration that evokes the detailing of an engraving or etched silver. In the top left corner of the work is an escutcheon bearing a cross surrounded by the Latin inscription “*Ad omnia paratus*” – “ready against everything” – above which the crown of thorns rings the three nails with which Christ was crucified. The inscription, notably, derives not from a religious source but from the letters of Cicero and was adopted as a heraldic motto.¹ Perhaps the inscription relates to the motto of the member of the family who commissioned this work.

Images depicting the *Salvator Mundi* were popular in Early Modern Europe, particularly in the Low Countries; paintings are known from artists like Jan van Eyck and Hans Memling. The iconography derives from the Pantocrator, a depiction of Christ as the almighty ruler popular in Byzantine art. A variation of the *Salvator Mundi* shows Christ as a young child; in the Hispanic world this advocacy is known as the *Niño de la bola*. Several European advocations gained significant followings, including two sixteenth-century sculptures: the Christ of Mechelen and the Infant Christ of Prague.² Indeed, Mechelen (also known as Malines), was a major producer of sculpted depictions of the Christ Child as the *Salvator Mundi* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³

The iconography made its way to South America most likely via the Jesuit Order, who worked to disseminate devotion to the Christ Child. Notable examples can be found at Museo de Arte de Lima, the Museo Santa Clara in Bogotá, Brooklyn Museum, and Denver Art Museum.⁴ Following European models, these images typically show the Christ Child standing, weight resting on one leg, or framed tightly on Christ’s face and the globe. A notable variation on this iconography is a statue painting from Cuzco showing the Christ Child wearing Inca vestments (an *uncu* and *mascaypacha*) and holding the *globus cruciger*.⁵ Sculpted depictions of the *Niño de la bola* can be found in major collections in Mexico, Ecuador, and Peru.⁶ In 1621, the Sevillian sculptor Juan Martínez Montañez created an image of the Christ Child as the *Salvator Mundi*, a copy of an image in the Cathedral of Seville, for a client in Lima.⁷ The iconography also achieved a wide dissemination via the ivory carvings of the Spanish Philippines and Portuguese Goa, which were exported across the Iberian empires.⁸

The Thoma painting almost certainly derives from a print; one possible source may be found in examples by the Wierix family (fig. 1) or Jan Saenredam after Hendrik Goltzius (fig. 2).

¹ William Walker, *A treatise of English particles: shewing much of the variety of heir significations and uses in English: and how to render them into Latine...* (London: T. Garthwaite, 1688), 54.

² According to pious tradition the statue of the Infant Christ of Prague originally belonged to St. Teresa of Ávila and was therefore of Spanish facture.

³ Héctor Schenone, *Iconografía del arte colonial: Jesucristo* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Tarea, 1998), 106.

⁴ For more on these examples, see Ricardo Kusunoki and Luis Eduardo Wuffarden, eds., *Arte colonial: Colección Museo de Arte de Lima* (Lima: Asociación Museo de Arte de Lima, 2016), 64-65; *Catálogo Museo Santa Clara* (Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2014), 104; *Converging Cultures: Art & Identity in Spanish America*, ed. Diana Fane (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1996) 218, 221-22.

⁵ See Ramon Mujica Pinilla, *Perú indígena y virreinal* (Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior, 2004), 102-106.

⁶ Schenone, *Iconografía*, 106.

⁷ *Converging Cultures*, 222n4.

⁸ Examples can be found in the collections of the San Antonio Museum of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The painting departs from the prints in depicting Christ in the sumptuous, fur-trimmed robes of a cleric and seated in a friar's chair rather than draped in a tunic and seated on the ground.

The style and palette of the work suggest that it was created in Lima in the early seventeenth century. The slightly clumsy perspective of the chair and the less refined painting of the Christ Child's features suggest that the work was made not by a master painter from Europe, but likely by a local follower.



Fig. 1 Anton II Wierix, *The Infant as Salvator Mundi*, before 1604, engraving.



Fig. 2 Jan Saenredam after Hendrik Goltzius, *Christ Child as Salvator Mundi*, after 1597, engraving. British Museum, London.