



Unidentified Artist

Ecce Homo with Angels

Peru, Cuzco or Bolivia, Potosí

Mid-18th century

Oil with gold on canvas, 64 3/16 x 46 1/16 inches

According to John 19:3 Christ was scourged, bound, crowned with thorns, and a purple garment was draped over him. Thus arrayed, Christ was brought before the crowd and Pontius Pilate declared: “Behold the Man” (in Latin, *Ecce Homo*). The crowd responded: “Crucify him, crucify him.”

The image of Christ alongside Pontius Pilate, sometimes accompanied by Roman soldiers, on a sort of balcony overlooking the crowds, was a standard component of Passion iconography since the Middle Ages, following the Flagellation of Christ and the Crowning with Thorns. From the fifteenth century, however, this image of the suffering and beleaguered Christ was sometimes isolated from the busy narrative. Without the setting of the city of Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate and his men, and the mocking crowd, the *Ecce Homo* became a

devotional image, a quiet reminder to the pious viewer of the patience and forbearance of Christ before the Crucifixion, a stimulus to prayer and penitence.

Sometimes in paintings of the *Ecce Homo*, Christ is accompanied by angels, as in this version composed by the painter Hendrick Goltzius, engraved by Jacob Matham.



Fig. 1. Jacob Matham after Hendrick Goltzius¹, *Christ on the Cold Stone with two Angels, inscribed ECCE HOMO*, 1603, engraving. British Museum, London, inv. D,5.228.

This is not a common representation of the *Ecce Homo* in Spanish colonial art. In the Viceroyalty of Peru, other versions, such as the image of the suffering Christ with the instruments of the Passion (called the *Arma Christi*) were more popular. A seventeenth-century painting by a Spanish artist working in Potosí in what is now Bolivia, however, is evidence that this iconography that included angels was known and reproduced (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Francisco Herrera y Velarde, *Ecce Homo*, 1663, oil on canvas, 65 ¼ x 45 inches. Peyton Wright Gallery, Santa Fe.

In the Thoma painting, Christ kneels on a ledge probably intended to suggest an altar table. Two vases of flowers also indicate an altar table. Two angels to either side of Christ bear candles and another two small angels flutter in the space above. An arch defines the location further, and a red curtain drawn to the right suggests the nature of an epiphany.

Although it is possible that this painting was created in Cuzco, the dark surroundings remind us of the painting by Herrera y Velarde created in Potosí, a tenebrous setting that would be unusual in a Cuzco painting. Another possible connection to a provenance in Potosí is the anguished facial expression of Christ, not unlike that of representations of the suffering Christ in paintings by Melchor Pérez Holguín, an outstanding artist of colonial Bolivia.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

¹ This work is based on a painting on copper by Goltzius in the Rhode Island School of Design inv no. 61.006.