



2021.48
Unidentified artist
Mater Dolorosa
Cuzco, Peru
18th century
Oil and gold on canvas

DIMENSIONS

The *Mater Dolorosa*, also known as Our Lady of Sorrows, shows the Virgin in mourning after the Passion of Christ. Devotion to the *Mater Dolorosa* developed in the late Medieval period, when devotional literature suggested that Mary suffered her own parallel “Passion” alongside Christ.¹ Paintings of the *Mater Dolorosa* were often hung with pendant works showing the Man of Sorrows, both evocative of a more emotional, human trend in devotion that emerged in the Netherlands with the rise of the *Devotio Moderna* in the fifteenth century.

In colonial Latin American painting and sculpture, the Virgin is frequently pictured with a dagger piercing her heart (see 1997.2), a reference to Simeon’s premonition in Luke 2:25 that “a sword will pierce your own soul too.” In other images, the Virgin’s heart is wounded by seven daggers, representing the Seven Sorrows she suffered during her lifetime – which are distinct from the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary (see 2022.XX).²

Images of the *Dolorosa*, like this one and two Mexican works in the collection (1996.024 and 1997.2), are characterized by their pathos. The Virgin is depicted against a dark background with her hands clasped in prayer and her eyes cast heavenward in grief. Absent from this work, but typical in sculpted depictions of the *Mater Dolorosa*, are tears streaming down the face of the Virgin. The Virgin’s piety, even in a moment of intense pain, was intended to serve as a model to viewers as they meditated on the Passion. The color palette is subdued, in keeping with the somber tone of the work. The use of *brocateado* on the Virgin’s red dress, the edging of her blue mantle, and her elaborate nimbus locates this work in eighteenth-century Cuzco. The elaborate frame with inset mirrors helps us locate the origins of the painting to Cuzco, as the brown tones of the painting differ markedly from the expected red and blues more typical of the region.

¹ Hector Schenone, *Iconografía del Arte Colonial: Santa María* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Tarea, 2008), 211.

² The Seven Sorrows are: the Prophecy of Simeon; the Flight into Egypt; the Loss of the Jesus in the Temple; Mary meeting Christ on the Via Dolorosa; the Crucifixion; the Descent from the Cross; the Burial of Christ.