



2001.005
Unidentified Artist
Mexico
Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners
Eighteenth century
Oil and gold on canvas, 51 1/3 x 39 1/2 inches

The feast of Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners celebrated on January 30 was authorized by Pope Innocent XI in the seventeenth century, as was a confraternity under her patronage, but the cult was not established in the Americas until the eighteenth century.

In 1709 the Blessed Antonio Baldinucci, a Jesuit, commissioned a copy of the famous “Madonna of the Oak” that was venerated in Italy in Poggio Prato near Montepulciano. In a letter to a friend written in 1716 Baldinucci claimed that the image was very efficacious in the conversion of souls, and he embarked on an effort to have the Italian painting granted the golden crown reserved for the most important images of the Virgin Mary. In 1717, with the help of Cardinal Annibale Albani of Frascati, Baldinucci’s wish was fulfilled: Pope Clement XI “crowned” the image on 4 July 1717. The original “Madonna of the Oak” now resides in the Cathedral of Frascati, whence a number of copies were carried to Mexico. One of those is venerated in the sanctuary of Nuestra Señora del Refugio in Puebla, where the cult is very popular, but the avocation, promoted by the Jesuits, spread throughout Mexico and Guatemala, where a chapel in the cathedral of the capital city was dedicated to Nuestra Señora del Refugio in 1720.ⁱ

The “portrait” of Mary and the Child is framed by an oval garland of flowers, they both wear crowns, and her head is circled by twelve stars. The infant’s nudity is covered with a sheer wrap, symbolic of modesty, and the Virgin’s rose-colored gown is draped with a blue mantle. The Thoma Collection painting is particularly notable for the delicacy with which her drapery

has been illuminated with gold in a lacy pattern that respects the folds indicated by light and shadow.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Historia del culto de María en Iberoamérica y de sus imágenes y santuarios más celebrados* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Huarpes, 1947), 167-271. For the cult and image in Mexico, see Lenice Rivera, “Nuestra Señora del Refugio,” in *Zodiaco Mariano. 150 años de la declaración pontificia de María de Guadalupe como patrona de México*, exh. cat. (Mexico City: Museo de la Basílica de Guadalupe and Museo Soumaya, 2004), 139-42.