There are a number of devotions to a Virgin Mary “of Miracles” in South America. This small painting on copper repeats the iconic images of a particular version based on a miracle that occurred in seventeenth-century Cuzco.¹

At the Franciscan monastery in Cuzco there was a painting of the Virgin Mary placed at the doorway to the choir where the friars would traditionally sing a hymn following vespers. During the earthquake of March 31, 1652 Mary’s face was damaged, and at some time later arrangements were made for a painter to repair the spoiled image. However, the artist found the painting to be in perfect condition, even better than before the earthquake, repaired without human hands ever having touched it.²

The copies of the miraculously restored painting, such as this small oil on copper in the Thoma Collection, are all nearly identical. In all of them the unusual placement and shape of Mary’s mantle are replicated. The mantle does not quite rest on the head of the figure and it is painted with sharp, asymmetrical folds. It is possible that this angular treatment of the textiles has origins in paintings by Bernardo Bitti.³ The composition often includes bust-length figures of Saints Francis and Diego de Alcalá at the bottom,⁴ but here the Franciscan saint on the left is
probably not Francis of Assisi, as there are no stigmata on the hands, and the saint on the right
is clearly Anthony of Padua with his usual attributes, the Christ Child, and a stem of lilies. Along
the vertical sides of the painting are symbols of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception and
Mary rests on the crescent moon that also visually recalls that doctrine so dear to the
Franciscan order. Although the blue mantle with its gilded stars and gilded lining gives an
impression of flatness, the faces of Mary and the two saints are delicately rendered in a
naturalistic style.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

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i See Héctor Schenone, Iconografía del arte colonial: Santa María (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Universidad
Católica Argentina, 2008), 441-442.

ii “... pero se halla entera y sin señal de rotura, mayor el lienzo que de antes, y la efigie tan Hermosa que no hubiese
necesidad de que humanas manos no llegasen a ella, con haber sido tan manifiesto el daño del golpe.” As told by
Diego de Esquivel y Navia, Noticias cronológicas de la Gran Ciudad de Cuzco vol. 1 (Lima: Fundación Augusto N.
Wiese, 1980), 93-94.

iii Schenone, as in note 1 above, refers to paintings of the Virgin Mary by Bitti in La Merced and the convent of
Santa Teresa in Cuzco.

iv Schenone, ibid.