



Unidentified artist

Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception with Saints Francis of Assisi and Didacus of Alcalá

18th century

Cuzco, Peru

Oil and gold on canvas

60 5/8 x 40 in.

That the Franciscan saints St. Francis of Assisi and Didacus of Alcalá appear in this image of the *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* should come as no surprise given the Order's defense of the doctrine that held that Mary was conceived without original sin. At the bottom left stands St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Order, his hands clasped in a posture of prayer as he gazes up at the Virgin. At the right, hands crossed over his chest and grasping a wooden cross, is Didacus, an obscure figure today who was part of the Franciscan missionary effort in the Canary Islands in the 15th century. Both figures wear the characteristic dark brown robes of the Order and tonsure.

The Franciscans were ultimately successful in their campaign to see the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception recognized as dogma, and the Virgin was declared patroness of Spain and its territories in the 18th century. In spite of its widespread popularity, the advocacy was not especially common in the art of colonial Peru. This painting shares some of the typical iconography associated with the *Inmaculada* established by Francisco Pacheco in his treatise on the art of painting; the Virgin stands on a crescent moon, draped in a blue mantle, against the golden light of heaven. Behind her head is a nimbus with twelve stars that relates to the verse in the Book of Revelation that informs her iconography: “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (12:1). The heavy application of gold ornamentation (*brocateado*) on the Virgin’s mantle, a feature typical of painting from 18th-century Cuzco, gives the painting a dazzling appearance. Absent from the image is the serpent that typically is found at the Virgin’s feet and her dress is, unusually, a bright crimson rather than white.

Surrounding her are images that derive from the Old Testament books Song of Songs and Wisdom, such as the “spotless mirror” by her proper right hip and the gate of heaven in the top left corner. Among these symbols are bunches of lilies, roses, and irises. The lily is a symbol of purity, associated with the Annunciation; the roses likely refer to another of Mary’s divine titles from the litanies, the mystical rose. The iris is one of the symbols of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, alluding to Mary’s suffering after the death of Christ.