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Unidentified Artist

Peru, Cuzco

Portrait of Gregorio de Viana

C. 1760-1770?

Oil on canvas, 43 ½ x 37 ½ inches

Portraiture in the Viceroyalty of Peru reflected the conventions of contemporary Spanish portraits in the poses of the sitters and the accoutrements symbolizing their professions and social status. However, colonial portraits are often distinguished from peninsular models by the inclusion of textual biographical information. In this portrait, the life and achievements of the sitter Gregorio de Viana are documented on a cartouche at the right of the canvas and continue in a border along the bottom of the painting. His high social position is indicated by his family heraldry at the upper right, and, at the left, a classical column is hung with crimson velvet, a nearly inevitable element of portraiture in colonial South America.

Although there are some paint losses in the inscription, it is sufficiently legible to reveal quite a lot about the sitter. Gregorio de Viana came to Peru from Spain through the port of Buenos Aires in 1744. When Lima was devastated by an earthquake in October of 1746, Viana played a significant role in the rebuilding of the city, here reflected in the compass he holds in his right hand and the additional scientific equipment (an astrolabe?) seen at his proper left. His service to the Spanish Monarchy continued with his intervention in the uprising of the indigenous people of Lima and Huarochirí in 1750, perhaps symbolized by the military baton in

his left hand as well as the sword hilt protruding modestly from beneath the hem of his jacket. Viana was appointed administrator of the *repartimiento*, the system in which the indigenous people provided labor. Then, as governor of Abancay, he regularized tax collection and promoted important public works. Returned to Lima, Viana was appointed by Viceroy José Antonio Manso de Velasco (r. 1745-1761) as royal commander of the viceroy's three guard regiments. On January 1, 1759, Viana "risked his life" to put out a fire in the Cathedral of Lima as well as in the house of the count of Santa Ana de la Torres and the nearby Dominican monastery. Later he was governor (*corregidor*) of Tinta (Cuzco) and in charge of the silver mines in Abancay. He was there in 1761 when the new viceroy, Manuel de Amat y Junyent, arrived in Lima and asked Viana to intercede in a destabilizing event in Cuzco, which he handled with such aplomb that he was considered the restorer of the city. Note to reader: the inscriptions on the painting were no doubt dictated by Viana himself.ⁱ

While it is possible that the portrait was painted, as Luis Eduardo Wuffarden has suggested, as "part of a political strategy devised by Viana in order to obtain a promotion as a consequence of the brilliant public career performed until that moment in the Viceroy of Peru," it is also a portrait of a man with very real achievements who seems to have had every reason to celebrate them by commissioning a portrait.

Viana wears a modest powdered wig and a striking blue jacket elaborately embroidered in silver thread with geometric designs along the edges of the jacket and its red cuffs. This is worn over another red garment with the same geometric pattern in silver. Suggestions of a lacy under-blouse are sketchily painted at his wrists. The sitter is posed in a three-quarters view that allows the painter to not only show off the rich materials and workmanship of Viana's costume, but a sensitive and individualized treatment of the man's features.

Wuffarden has suggested that this portrait was painted in Cuzco sometime between 1760 and 1770 "by the hand of one of the most important masters active in the city," admitting, however, that there are few portraits from this period in Cuzco known with which to compare it. Further research into the biography of Gregorio de Viana should enable us to date and perhaps attribute the work with more precision.ⁱⁱ

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ Records regarding Viana's service to the crown between 1766 and 1770 are to be found in the Archive of the Indies in Seville and the Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN) in Madrid. C.f. AHN, Consejos 20330, Exp. 3, "Residencia tomada a Gregorio de Viana, Capitán de la Guardia de Caballería de los Virreyes del Perú, al término de su mandato como Corregidor de la provincia de Canes y Canches, también llamada Tinta, por el Coronel Antonio Mendoza Chavarría y Guzmán," 1766-70.

ⁱⁱ I am grateful to Wuffarden for his transcription of the inscriptions in a document dated July 18, 2013 that was prepared for the seller of the portrait.