



2009.015
Unidentified Artist
Cuzco
Saint Augustine in his Study
Eighteenth century
Oil on canvas, 22 x 17 inches

This small painting was undoubtedly one of a set of four fictive portraits of Saints Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory the Great, and Jerome, called the Latin Doctors of the Church because of their early role in establishing the rituals and doctrines of the Catholic Church. Series of portraits of the four, based on engravings, are fairly common in South American colonial art. An example of a series that has remained together is a set by Bernardo Rodríguez and his workshop in Quito, Ecuador, painted in 1796 (Museo de San Agustín, Quito). Although these saints may be represented in other ways, such as the image of Saint Jerome as a penitent in the desert, in the portrait series they are always depicted as theologians in their studies, gazing heavenward toward the divine source of their inspiration.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was born in present-day Algeria to a pagan father and a devoutly Christian mother who later was canonized as Saint Monica. Augustine's turn to

religion was slow, but he was finally baptized by Saint Ambrose in 387. He founded a monastic community in North Africa, became a priest, and finally Bishop of Hippo. Augustine is particularly noted for his writings, the *Confessions* and the *City of God*, which were important sources for theologians during the controversies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He is usually, as in this painting, depicted as a bishop with a miter and cope, and with his attributes of a flaming heart and the triangular “Eye of God.” Both refer to Augustine’s treatise on the Holy Trinity.

The predominate reds and blues in this portrait of Saint Augustine are characteristic of the palette of paintings created in Cuzco in the eighteenth century, as is the naïve handling of the perspective of the body of the figure and the chair in which he sits. The ruddy cast of his high cheekbones is also characteristic of the Cuzco school.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt