



Unidentified Artist

*Saint Francis Xavier, Apostle of the Indies*

Peru, Cuzco

18<sup>th</sup> century

Oil on canvas, 41 x 32 2/3 inches (104 x 83.5 cm).

Provenance: Belonged to the harpsichordist Rafael Puyana (Bogotá 1931-Paris 2013) who moved to Paris decades ago and probably brought the painting, likely acquired in the 1970s, to Europe with him when he established his home there; the painting was acquired from his niece in Madrid, who inherited it in 1213; Federico Cia 2016: Collection of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation, inv. no. 2016.069.

Inscriptions: Two solar disks at the upper corners of the painting bear anagrams of the names of Jesus and Mary.

Saint Francis Xavier was born to a noble family in Navarre, Spain in 1552. He became the companion of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Company of Jesus (the Jesuits), and was

one of the first seven members of the order. He was beatified by Pope Paul V in October 1619 and canonized, along with Ignatius of Loyola, by Pope Gregory XV in March 1622.

Saint Francis Xavier was a pioneer of the Jesuit efforts to spread Christianity throughout the Far East beginning in 1540. From a base in Goa, he baptized thousands of converts in southern India and carried his missionary work to Japan, Borneo, the Moluccas, and other areas, giving him his popular title as the “Apostle of the Indies.” Francis Xavier died of a fever on the island of Shangchuan off the coast of China, waiting for a ship to carry him to the mainland. His body is enshrined in the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Goa.

In this painting from Cuzco, Saint Francis Xavier is simply depicted standing, wearing a white surplice over the black cassock of a Jesuit. The garments, including the infulae, are lightly decorated with gilding. The lily is a symbol with which he is often depicted. The painting includes the flowery frame that is typical of many Cuzco paintings.

The saint is further identified here by two scenes from his well-documented life. In the middle distance on the left is a depiction of Francis Xavier resuscitating a dead man. Many of the miracles attributed to the saint were illustrated in series of engravings about his life that were used as compositional models for paintings. This small scene was, for example, painted on a much larger canvas in the Cathedral of Cuzco (fig. 1<sup>i</sup>), attributed there to the indigenous master Basilio de Santa Cruz Pumacallao.



Fig. 1. Basilio de Santa Cruz Pumacallao, *Miracles of Saint Francis Xavier*, ca. 1691-1693, oil on canvas. Church of La Compañía, Cuzco.

A far more popular theme in Spanish colonial painting, however, is the lonely moment of the saint’s death under a crude hut, accompanied sometimes by a single companion, sometimes by a host of angels, as seen at the right of the figure in the Thoma painting. This scene is depicted in a painting (fig. 2) by an unidentified artist in the Convent of Santa Teresa in Cochabamba, Bolivia.



Fig. 2. Unidentified artist, *The Death of Saint Francis Xavier*, 17<sup>th</sup> century. Convent of Santa Teresa, Cochabamba, Bolivia (Photo: Antonio Suárez Wiese).

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<sup>1</sup> Illustrated in *Pintura cuzqueña*, exh. cat. Museo de Arte de Lima, eds. Luis Eduardo Wuffarden and Ricardo Kusunoki (Lima: Asociación Museo de Arte de Lima—MALI, 2016), 216, cat. no. 52. Photo: Daniel Gianonni.