



2008.004

Unidentified Artist

Peru or Bolivia

*The Creation of Heaven and Earth*

Eighteenth century

Oil on linen, 18 ½ x 24 inches

Inscription: *IN PRINCIPIO CREAVIT DEVS COELVM ET TERRAM*

This charming, naively painted work was probably created for a private patron or for the art market. Although the theme is based on the opening phrases of the book of Genesis, it is not a painting of a religious subject intended as a guide to prayer and introspection. It was painted to be enjoyed.

The whole of the creation of heaven and earth is told in considerable detail on a small canvas. The waters are drawn away from dry land with a flourish of great waves, while earth seems, at the far right, to be created from a fire-breathing volcano. The sea roils with fishes of various forms, the skies are filled with bright blue and white birds, and other larger, land-bound birds are accompanied by a single recognizable chicken. The mammals of various sizes are created out of the earth itself so that some, such as a horse and a leopard, are only partially seen. Some of the fauna can be identified, whether familiar species or types such as the elephant and the unicorn that could have been known to the artist only from printed illustrations. In fact, this composition is based on a print after Raphael's painting of the *Creation of the Animals* in Rome

(fig. 1). A later engraving (fig. 2) was created to reflect Raphael's composition correctly, but the print on which the colonial painter based his work shows the scene in reverse. He probably used a print created after another model that became reversed in the process.



Fig. 1. Raphael Sanzio (1483-1520), *The Creation of the Animals*, 1518-1519. Fresco painting in the Loggia of the Vatican Palace.





Fig. 2. C. Fanetti, after Raphael, *God creating the animals*, 1675. Wellcome Collection, London.

The subject of the painting is no longer limited to the creation of the animals, but to the creation of the world. God the Father fairly zips around the heavens, creating the sun and moon and stars, a palm tree, and a volcano not found in Raphael’s fresco. It is possible that some of these details were found in the print on which the artist based the Thoma composition, for they appear as well in a painting created in Peru in the late seventeenth century (fig. 3). And the title is more expansive, drawn from Genesis 1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

As is often the case with Spanish colonial paintings, the print source has been enhanced with entirely original details. In the Thoma painting, God the Father, swathed in a poppy red mantle, floats serenely above his creation, “And God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good.”





Fig. 3. Unidentified artist, (Peru), *Creation of the Animals*, c. 1675-1700, oil on canvas, 36 x 52 inches. Photo: Osuna Art and Antiques Ltd., Washington, D.C.

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