



1998.020

Diego Quispe Tito (1611-1681)

The House at Nazareth

Peru, Cuzco

Oil on copper, 15 1/16 x 12 1/8 inches

Signed, middle left: "D D° qvispi TiT(o) Inga" (Don Diego Quispe Tito Inca)

Diego Quispe Tito was born in the indigenous village of San Sebastián near Cuzco. A member of the Inca nobility, he proudly signs this painting "Inga." Between 1634 and 1663 Quispe Tito painted four large series of paintings, based entirely on Flemish engravings, for the parish church of San Sebastián, making the church the repository of most of his work.ⁱ The church, which had been restored and all its paintings conserved between 2008 and 2013 (fig. 1) was destroyed by fire in 2016, with nothing left standing but its walls. As a result, probably 80 percent of Quispe Tito's entire oeuvre was lost.



Fig. 1. Interior of the church of San Sebastián, Cuzco, with paintings by Diego Quispe Tito, before its destruction by fire.

Among his extant works are a *Marriage of the Virgin* and a *Christ Among the Doctors* signed in 1667 (Museo Nacional Casa de Moneda, Potosí). His painting representing the Four Last Things, signed and dated 1675, is in the Monastery of San Francisco, Cuzco (fig. 2). Quispe Tito's career culminated in 1681 with the paintings, essentially landscapes inhabited by small figures, representing the signs of the zodiac that were commissioned for the Cathedral of Cuzco by Bishop Manuel de Mollinedo y Angulo. Mollinedo was a connoisseur of European painting, of which he had brought some fine examples with him to Cuzco, so his patronage speaks highly of Diego Quispe Tito's mastery of his art.



Fig. 2. Diego Quispe Tito, *Four Last Things*, 1675, oil on canvas, Cusco, Monastery of San Francisco.

Sophisticated patrons like Mollinedo must have been the collectors of Quispe Tito's small paintings on copper like the one in the Thoma Collection.ⁱⁱ The Thoma copper has the distinction of being signed, in gold script, to the left of the flowerpot on the floor. The Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneira wrote that "Saint Joseph was a poor carpenter, and the saints who write about the life of Christ envisage how he helped Saint Joseph in his work, and helped his parents

with household necessities; and they [the saints] ponder the humility and confusion that it would cause.”ⁱⁱⁱ The childhood of Christ was depicted in a series of engravings (figs. 3 and 4) by the Antwerp printmaker Hieronymus Wierix (1548-1624) that became popular compositional sources for Spanish colonial painters and their patrons.



Figs. 3 and 4. Hieronymus Wierix, scenes from the Infancy of Christ, before 1619.^{iv}

This composition of the Thoma copper is somewhat haphazard, perhaps because Quispe Tito did not rely directly on a single print, as he usually did, but rather combined motifs from several sources. He does not seem to have been interested in the art of perspective, reflecting a lack of formal training in the European fashion, nor does he seem to care much about the correct scale of the figures. However, the refined medium of oil on copper allows Quispe Tito to show off his mastery of detail in this pastiche composition.

The Holy Family is here joined by Saints Elizabeth and Zachariah and their son, the little Saint John the Baptist. Tiny figures of the Christ Child and Saint John with his lamb are placed in the foreground. At lower right is Saint Lawrence with his attribute, the gridiron on which he was martyred. Lawrence is undoubtedly included because he was the name saint of the patron who commissioned the work. Saint Joseph, right of center, is at work with his carpenter's tools. To the left is the Virgin Mary at her embroidery. Her diminutive features, golden tresses, fine lace veil, and the dainty gold embroidery on her robe are among the most delicate touches in the painting. Behind her is a window onto a landscape – or is it a landscape painting on the

wall? At top center is a *gloria* with three musical angels and a muscular, dramatically foreshortened, fully nude putto who flies directly into the room, bearing a basket of flowers.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ The print sources for the paintings are identified by José de Mesa and Teresa Gisbert, *Historia de la pintura cuzqueña* (Lima: Fundación A. N. Wiese, 1982), vol. 1, 155 as a set by Jan Sadeler I and Adrian Collaert created in 1585. The Mesas' analysis of Quispe Tito's career is found on pp. 141-160.

ⁱⁱ Another two paintings on copper attributed to the artist are in the Museo de Pedro de Osma in Lima. See Luis Eduardo Wuffarden, in *Los Siglos de Oro en los Virreinos de América 1550-1700*, exh. cat., Museo de Américas (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 1999), 342-44. The paintings in the Museo de Pedro de Osma are, like the Thoma painting, domestic scenes of the Holy Family: *The Vision of the Cross* and *The Workshop at Nazareth*. The two small paintings do not resemble each other stylistically, though it might reasonably be argued that Quispe Tito never settled on a personal style.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Flos sanctorum, libro de las vidas de los Santos* [1616] (Madrid: En la Imprenta Real, 1716-1717), 1:18.

^{iv} See M. Mauquoy-Hendricks, *Les Estampes des Wierix conservés au cabinet des estampes de la Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1er*, 3 vols in 4 (Brussels: Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1er, 1978) 1:54-64.