



2018.046

Unidentified Artist

The Last Judgment

South America

Seventeenth or eighteenth century

Oil on canvas, 65 x 50 inch

In many of the colonial churches in South America there were chapels dedicated especially to indigenous congregants. And in many of these there was a painting like this one representing *The Last Judgment*. At a time and place where the conversion of the indigenous people was of paramount importance to the clergy of the Catholic Church, these painting of the Last Judgment usually included a lurid depiction of Hell. The Quechua nobleman Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala noted in his 1615 *Nueva crónica y buen gobierno* that “in each church there is a painted judgment and there is shown the coming of the Lord to the judgment, the heavens and the earth

and the punishments of Hell.”¹ The priest Antonio de la Vega noted that in the Jesuit church in Cuzco “. . . there have been notable changes and conversions through the consideration of the judgment and glory and punishments of the condemned that is all painted on the walls of this chapel, and particularly [in consideration] of the penalties and punishments that the vices of the Indians receive which are well portrayed as to their types and differences; because the Indians are greatly moved by paintings, often more so than by sermons.”²

This painting is a good example of the type. At the top of the canvas Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father oversee the proceedings. At a slightly lower level are the Virgin Mary, to whom Christ gestures, Saint Dominic, Saint Joseph (identified by his flowering rod), and Saint Anthony of Padua. To the left of the cross is Saint Michael the Archangel with the scales of judgment and the fallen angels he expelled from Heaven. To the right of the cross the Virgin Mary, Saint Francis, and Saint John of the Cross (?) give solace to the praying sufferers in the cleansing fires of Purgatory. At the earthly level, God the Father introduces Adam to Eden, and Adam and Eve pick the fateful apple of Original Sin. In the maw of the Leviathan we see figures burning in Hell, each of them suffering according to his sins: pride, greed, lust, wrath, gluttony, envy and sloth.

The selection of saints suggests that this painting was intended for a Franciscan church, but there are no other indications to help us place the work. Nor is it really possible to date the painting, for which we would depend on elements of style. This is a naïvely painted work, probably by the hand of an Indian or mestizo artist for whom the changing artistic styles over time was of no importance.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

¹ “Y en cada iglesia haya un juicio pintado allí muestre la venida del Señor al Juicio, el cielo y el mundo y las penas del infierno” quoted in Teresa Gisbert, *El paraíso de los pájaros parlantes: la imagen del otro en la cultura andina* (La Paz: Plural Editores, 1999), 209.

² Quoted in Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Historia del Colegio y Universidad de San Ignacio de Loyola en la Ciudad del Cusco*, vol. 4 of *Biblioteca Histórica Peruana* (Lima: Publicaciones del Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1948), 43.