



2007.033

Unidentified Artist

*The Virgin and Child Enthroned*

Peru, Cuzco or Lima

Seventeenth or early 18th century

Oil and gold on canvas, 57 x 37 inches

The use of painted garlands of flowers to frame images of, in particular, the Virgin and Child, started in Flanders in the seventeenth century. It was common for the floral garland to be painted by a specialist, with the figures by another hand. This painting seems to have been created in that tradition, for the flowers are executed in a paler, more subdued palette than the true red and blue that appear in the garments of the Virgin Mary. Canvases with only the painted frames were imported to Seville, where local artists could add the image of a favorite

saint or particular devotion to the Virgin Mary. There is no documentary evidence that such works were imported to Peru, but then there is very little documentation at all about the many paintings that we know were imported to South America during the colonial period.

Nonetheless, it does seem that the hand that created the floral border here is not the same hand that created the figures of the Virgin and Child where the brushwork is not nearly so loose and painterly. The hard contours of the throne itself stand in marked contrast to the soft blossoms surrounding it. A provincial hand is at work on the application of golden embroidery to Mary's gown, for the decorative details do not follow the shaded contours of the folds of the cloth. As well, there are a few infelicities in the proportions of Mary's arms and hands.

The type of the Christ Child may reflect the rounded limbs and face, large eyes, and strawberry curls in the paintings executed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by the Italian artist Bernardo Bitti (see 2010.056). The apple he holds in his right hand symbolizes the orb of the world. The Virgin Mary wears two crowns, an imperial one of silver, and the twelve stars that surround the head of the Woman of the Apocalypse in the book of Revelation. The three *potencias* emanating from the head of the Christ Child reflect a tradition more commonly seen in polychrome sculptures, where the rays are crafted of silver.



Fig. 1. Bernardo Bitti, *Virgin and Child*, ca. 1592-1605, oil on panel, Collection of Carl and Marilyn Thoma, inv. no. 2010.056.

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