



2021.25

Unidentified artist

*Virgin and Child with Saints*

Lima, Peru

After 1671

Oil on canvas with original fictive frame

With his right Christ touches the roses offered to him by Saint Rose of Lima, first American-born Catholic saint who was canonized in 1671. This recalls an episode known as the Miracle of the Roses (see 2022.10). Leonardo Hansen records in his *vita* of Rose, first published in 1664, that she experienced a dream or vision of herself surrounded by roses before an apparition of the Virgin and Christ. Christ asked her to gather them up, taking one and telling her “This rose is you, for which I have a special care.”<sup>1</sup> In this image, Rose is dressed in the brown robe of a Franciscan. This might represent a young version of Rose, as she wore the Franciscan habit until she was twenty.<sup>2</sup> However, her headdress is black and white, which is correct for the Dominican order of which Rose was a tertiary.

Other figures include Saint Joseph, with his emblematic lily, and an unidentifiable old man who offers the Christ Child a pelican, symbol of Christian sacrifice. In the bottom left corner, the Infant Saint John the Baptist kneels, holding a cross, with his attribute the lamb at his side. Above the Baptist are two figures who stand behind the Virgin’s proper right shoulder. One appears to have been borrowed from an angelic choir, its hand once holding a choir book, lips open in song. The painting is a naïve pastiche of faces and figures borrowed from print sources.

The faces of the figures are unusual for Peru, having rather strong noses. The proportions of the figures are somewhat awkward, with several having small heads and large hands (that of the angel in the background is particularly schematic).

However, the painting was richly adorned with a fictive frame made of plaster in imitation of Spanish tooled leather (known as *cordobán*, *guadamecí*, or *guadamecil*). Amid foliate and floral designs, a lozenge at the top of the frame displays the letters AVE MA (Ave Maria). At the bottom is a pair of escutcheons, one holding a large black bird and the other bearing vertical stripes (paly) with a band (fess) with three fleurs-de-lis perhaps the family escutcheon of the patron. Atop these two shields is a knight’s helmet with exuberant plumage. This fictive leather frame can also be seen on 2004.004, also believed to have been created in Lima. According to a scientific study undertaken by the Madrid-based conservation studio Icono I&R the “plaster” is made of linseed oil, red and ochre earth, white lead, red lead, and boneblack and was shaped using molds and applied while wet to the canvas.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The full quote is “‘Esta rosa eres tú, de esta se encarga mi providencia para mirar por ella con especial cuidado; tú podrás disponer de todas esas otras como te dictare el gusto y mayor te pareciere.’” Hansen, *Vida admirable de Santa Rosa de Lima: patrona del nuevo mundo*, trans. Jacinto Parra and ed. El Zuavo Pontificio Sevilla (Vergara: El Santísimo Rosario and Lima: Centro Católico, 1895), 267-68.

<sup>2</sup> Hansen, *Vida admirable*, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Clara Alonso, Adelina Illán, Rafael Romero, and Cecilia Simón, “Una tecnica decorative inedita del arte colonial limeño: La Imitación en estucos del trabajo de cordobán. Examen, tratamiento y aproximación estética.” Poster presentation. Date unknown.



Fig. 1 Guadamecí wall panel, 16<sup>th</sup> century, sheepskin. Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, Madrid.