

PAINTINGS OF SAINT ROSE OF LIMA IN THE THOMA COLLECTION



2014.068

Unidentified Artist

Peru, Cuzco

*Saint Rose of Lima*

Eighteenth century

Oil on canvas, 40 3/8 x 52 inches

Saint Rose of Lima was born Isabel Flores de Oliva in Lima on April 20, 1586, one of many children born to Gaspar Flores, a harquebusier in the Imperial Spanish army, and his wife María de Oliva. “Rose” was a nickname bestowed, according to tradition, when a servant saw the infant Isabel’s face appear like a rose, but she formally adopted the name when she was confirmed in 1597 by the archbishop of Lima, Toribio de Mogrovejo. Her parents eventually accepted their daughter’s insistence on a life of spirituality, perpetual virginity, and good works. Her father gave her a room in their home where she made lace and embroidery sold to raise

money for the poor. She lived as a recluse, eventually entering the Third Order of Saint Dominic, leaving the family home only to attend mass. She died in 1617 at the young age of 31. Rose of Lima became the first saint born in the Americas in 1671.

The iconography of Saint Rose of Lima in Andean paintings was rooted in the hagiography by the Dominican Leonhard Hansen, *Vita mirabilis et mors pretiosa Rosae de S Maria Limensis*, published in Rome (Typus Nicolai Angeli Tinasii, 1664) in support of Rose's beatification in 1667 or 1668. Hansen was the inspiration for a number of publications that followed Rose's canonization in 1671, one of which, the *Vita et historia S. Rosae a S. Maria* by Juan del Valle, was illustrated by engravings by Cornelis Galle II (1615-1678).

The Cuzco painter who created the Thoma painting of Saint Rose based his composition on several of the engravings by Cornelis Galle II. The main subject of the composition (based on fig. 1) depicts the companionable appearance of the Christ Child to Saint Rose as she embroiders the letters "IHS." In the background, she is shown mortifying her flesh (based on fig. 2) in the grotto she had installed at the family home. And, in the background, Satan appears to her in the guise of a fearsome mastiff (based on fig. 3). The unidentified *cuzqueño* artist has added the bright birds that typify paintings by masters of that city.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt



Fig. 1. Cornelis Galle II, engraving, *Saint Rose of Lima Embroidering*, after 1671.



*S. ROSA asperrimo cilicio multas acus intexit, coronam capiti instruit aculeis obarmatam, cingendis lumbis triplicem catenam nectit.*

*C. Galle*

Fig. 2. Cornelis Galle II, engraving, *Self-flagellation of Saint Rose of Lima*, after 1671.



*S. ROSA diabolicis larvis spectrisque terrificis  
saepe tentata, semper victrix, hostem præterit.*

*C. Galle*

Fig. 3. Cornelis Galle II, engraving, *Satan appears to Saint Rose of Lima in the Guise of a Mastiff*, after 1671.



2020.10

*Saint Rose of Lima and the Miracle of the Roses*

Peru

18<sup>th</sup> century

Oil on canvas, 42 ¼ x 35 ½ inches

The Dominican Leonhard Hansen's hagiography of Saint Rose of Lima in Latin was published in Rome in 1664 as part of the campaign to secure her beatification, then canonization. In the book, Hansen describes one of Saint Rose of Lima's ecstatic visions in which she found herself surrounded by roses scattered on the ground and saw an apparition of the Christ Child on the lap of his mother Mary. He gave her one of the roses and she gathered up the rest that she wove into a wreath.<sup>1</sup> The wreath of roses became emblematic of her sanctity.

The painting is based on a print, which is in turn based on Hansen's text. The engraving by Benoit Thiboust (b. 1619) follows, according to the inscription, a painting by Lazzaro Baldi (1624-1703). As indicated in the entry on the print source in the Project on the Engraved



Fig. 4. Benoit Thibaust after Lazzaro Baldi, *The Miracle of the Roses*, Madrid: Real Academia de Bellas Arte de San Fernando (PESSCA 78A/6443B).

Sources of Spanish Colonial Art, Rose of Lima is not pictured in the print with a halo, nor is she referred to as *beata* or *sancta*, but as *venerabilis*, a first stage in the complex process of canonization.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 5. Unidentified artist, *The Miracle of the Roses with Indigenous Converts*, 18<sup>th</sup> century, oil on canvas, Cuzco, Convent of Santa Teresa de Jesús.

Both the style and iconography of this painting (fig. 5) suggest the hand of an artist working in Cuzco and it may be that the Thoma painting was created there as well. However, the stylistic contrast with many other works from that artistic center, so often notable for the addition of gold to the painted surfaces, suggests that it was aimed at a different clientele. The artist closely followed “European” style, with its rounded forms and attention to perspective.

The Thoma painting might have been created with an eye to art lovers in the viceregal capital at Lima, where elite collectors favored paintings in a European manner. This preference was evident in the collection of Pedro José Bravo de Lagunas (1703-1765), whose inventory attached to his will included 100 paintings attributed to European painters or to the local artist Cristóbal Lozano (1705-1776), whose “Europeanizing” style differed radically from that of the artists of Cuzco.<sup>3</sup> Although painting in the Viceroyalty of Peru has received increasing scholarly attention, there has been little research on collectors.

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<sup>1</sup> Leonardo Hansen, *Vida admirable de Santa Rose de Lima: patrona del nuevo mundo*, transl. by Jacinto de Parra (Vergara: Editorial “El Santísimo Rosario/ Lima: Centro Católico: 1985, pp. 267-68. Parra’s translation into Spanish was first published in Madrid in 1668.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Almerindo Ojeda for alerting me to the discovery of the proper print source and its discussion in PESSCA.

<sup>3</sup> Holguera Cabrera, Antonio. “Un coleccionista criollo de la Lima del siglo III: Pedro José Bravo de Lagunas (1703-1765),” *Laboratorio de Arte* 29 (2017), pp. 503-524.