



Unidentified Artist  
*Saint Rita of Cascia with Angels*, 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Oil on canvas, 33 ¼ x 31 inches  
Cusco School

Saint Rita of Cascia was born in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century in the Umbrian village of Cascia, near Perugia. Following the death of her husband and sons, she embraced the monastic life as an Augustinian nun. According to legend, at the age of 60, while meditating on a crucifix, a small

wound appeared on her forehead, resembling the pricking of a thorn from Christ's crown. Her forehead wound was regarded as a stigmata, a wound that corresponded to those left on Jesus' body by the Crucifixion, and that was impressed by divine favor on the body of Saint Rita, remaining open and intermittently bleeding for the remainder of her life. Following her death and subsequent burials, Saint Rita's body was exhumed multiple times, revealing its incorrupt state. For this reason, shortly after her death, she was venerated in Cascia as a *beata*, or holy figure, though the official beatification by the Church did not occur until 1626, with canonization following in 1900 by Pope Leo XIII.

In the Thoma Collection painting, Saint Rita is portrayed at the pivotal moment of her miraculous experience when her forehead was pierced by a thorn. Kneeling before an altar, clad in a black nun's habit adorned with gold trim that is typical in Cuzco School paintings, she extends her arms. Rita gazes intently at a sculpted crucifix on the altar, partially shaded by a small, red fabric baldachin. Accompanying her are two resplendently attired angels, offering support as she appears to faint, as initial droplets of blood begin to flow down the bridge of her nose. Her status as a holy figure is accentuated by the halo and star hovering above her head, and she wears a crown of thorns, just like Christ.

Although Saint Rita was an Italian saint, in this depiction, she is presented with what seems to be a distinctly New World iconography. Unlike European paintings where she was often shown accompanied by her two deceased sons, in the Thoma painting her sons appear to have been transformed into two angels, bearing witness to the moment of her sacred transformation. Furthermore, the altar and the rug upon which she kneels exhibit a distinctive Spanish colonial aesthetic in their decoration and design. The flowers strewn on the ground hold a special significance that refer to the saint's legend. According to the story, during her final moments at the Augustinian convent, Rita requested her cousin to bring her a rose and two figs from the garden of her former home. Despite it being winter, the cousin indeed found a single blooming rose as well as the figs in the garden and presented them to her. For this miracle, Saint Rita is considered the patroness of impossible causes.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Héctor H. Schenone, *Iconografía del Arte Colonial. Los Santos*, vol. 2 (Buenos Aires: Fundación TAREA, 1992): 674.

In line with the distinctive style of the Cuzco School, *Saint Rita of Cascia with Angels* diverges from a strict pursuit of naturalism. Instead, it embraces a more stylized and decorative treatment of the subject matter, one consistent with the ornamental taste prevalent in the city's artistic tradition. In addition to the gold details in the figure's garments, the red and green tones and the blue sky link the work to the workshops of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Cuzco. Although Saint Rita was a relatively minor saint with infrequent depictions in European art, she garnered a following in Cuzco by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, likely promoted by the Augustinians. As Jorge Cornejo Bouroncle's archival research demonstrated, there is at least one documented case of a patron in Cuzco commissioning in 1714 a "Saint Rita with her angels" of *dos varas de largo y vara y media de ancho* to the *maestro pintor, vecino de esta dicha ciudad* Don Cristóbal Tapia.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Jorge Cornejo Bouroncle, *Derroteros de Arte Cuzqueño* (Cuzco: 1960): 274.