



Unidentified artist

Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception

Bolivia

Late 18th century

Oil with gold on canvas, 47 ¼ x 38 inches

By the eighteenth century, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, though not yet dogma of the Catholic Church, was evidently accepted throughout the Spanish Americas without dissent. The subject, that Mary herself was born without sin, was pictured in the region of Charcas, now Bolivia, in a variety of ways.¹ However, one type seems to have

¹ See Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt, "The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception in Paintings in Colonial Bolivia," in: *The Art of Painting in Colonial Bolivia/El arte de la pintura en Bolivia colonial* (Philadelphia, PA: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2017), pp. 444-454.

established itself quite firmly throughout Charcas, and even spread south into present-day Argentina.²

This type of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is widely represented in Bolivian collections (figs. 1 and 2). The Virgin Mary, with hands joined in prayer, head tilted slightly to her right, and wearing a voluminous cape with a semi-circular, deep hem, is seen in this way in the Thoma painting. This type of the Virgin Mary is also found in paintings representing another iconographical interpretation of the doctrine that includes her parents, Anna and Joachim, whose “embrace at the Golden Gate” was interpreted as the moment of her Immaculate Conception (fig 3). This uniquely Bolivian type of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception also appears in paintings whose subjects might seem to be quite separate from the doctrine itself, as in this *Coronation* (fig. 4).

Paintings representing Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception were certainly imported into Charcas from Cuzco, so the stylistic formulations more typical of that artistic center were well known to collectors in what would become Bolivia (see, for example, 2023.28). However, the artists of the region seem to have deliberately adopted a type that distinguished itself from the “Cuzco school.” The Thoma painting, which probably dates from late eighteenth century, continued a visual tradition at least a century long.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

² Héctor Schenone attributed a version of the iconography to the still mysterious Mateo Pizarro, which he used as a cover image and illustrated on p. 47. See *Santa María* (Buenos Aires: Editorial de la Universidad Católica Argentina, 2008).



Fig. 1. Unidentified artist, *Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception*, Sucre, Bolivia, Santa Clara.



Fig. 2. Unidentified artist, *Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception*, Potosí, Bolivia, Museo de la Casa de la Moneda.



Fig. 3. Unidentified artist, *Creation of the Soul of Mary (The Holy Stems)*, Bolivia, Church of Jesús de Machaca.



Fig. 4. Unidentified artist, *Our Lady Crowned by the Trinity*, Bolivia, Potosí, Museo de la Casa de la Moneda.