



Unidentified artist

The Woman of the Apocalypse

Ecuador, Quito

2nd half of the 18th century

Oil with gold on copper, 12 x 9 inches

Inscribed on a banderole: *Signum magnum aparuit in Caelo. C.12.v.1*

The scene illustrates the description found in *The Apocalypse of St. John the Apostle*, chapter 12, 1-5:

“And a great sign appeared in heaven; A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars:
And being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered.

And there was seen another sign in heaven: and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads, and ten horns: and on his heads seven diadems:

And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman who was to be delivered, and he might devour her son.

And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all the nations with an iron rod: and her son was taken up with God, and to his throne.”

In the distance we see John himself, alone on the isle of Patmos, writing the biblical book of the Apocalypse, called Revelations in the King James translation. John’s prophecies of the end of the world were written in Greek while he was banished to Patmos during the persecutions of Emperor Domitian. Church exegetes identified the woman as Mary, mother of Jesus Christ.

This painting on copper was evidently based on an engraving widely disseminated in Spanish America because the composition, the main figure, and even the inscription can be found by New Spanish artists as well as this unidentified painter in Quito. Miguel Cabrera’s enormous painting now in the National Gallery of Art (MUNAL) in Mexico City (fig. 1), which borrows elements from the print and expands on them, is dated 1760, which give us an approximate date for this *quiteño* adaptation. There are other paintings based on the unidentified engraving created by New Spanish painters like Cabrera (d. 1768) and Andrés López (active 1773-1811).

The Thoma painting adheres closely to the engraved model, ascertained by comparison to other paintings based on it. The role of Saint John, nearly lost in Cabrera’s vigorous composition, is enhanced in the Quito painting through the use of color and touches of gold. His emblematic eagle helpfully offers a gilded ink pot for his master’s use. The figure of the Virgin Mary, who holds the Christ Child reaching up to his heavenly father, rests uncertainly on the head of a dragon. Her blue gown is trimmed with gold lace, and the twelve stars around her head, the infant’s crown, and the Trinitarian triangle behind the head of God the Father are also in gold.

This restrained use of gold, far from the exuberant applications of the Cuzco painters, is typical of Quito paintings from the eighteenth century.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt



Fig. 1. Miguel Cabrera, *The Woman of the Apocalypse*, 1760, 340 x 352.7 cm.

MUNAL, Mexico City.