



2022.57
Unidentified artist
The Christ Child with Symbols of the Passion on His Apron
Peru
c. 1700
Oil on canvas, 37 ½ x 20 ½ inches



2016.010
Unidentified artist
Child Christ with Symbols of the Passion on His Apron
Peru
Late 17th or early 18th century
Oil on canvas, 38 ¼ x 28 ¾ inches.

The image of the Christ Child wearing an apron bearing the symbols and instruments of the Passion is rare in Spanish colonial art. Several paintings that can be ascribed to artists working in Cuzco may reflect a single engraving that might have circulated in that artistic center. The engraving by Nicolas de Mathonière (fig. 1) was published in Paris in the early seventeenth century and perhaps made its way to the Viceroyalty of Peru.¹ A recent study of this unusual iconography reveals that it was spread world-wide and probably not by one print, but through several means of dispersal.² The particular subject seems to have no connection to a particular religious order or devotion.

A painting in the Brooklyn Museum (fig. 2) closely replicates the iconography of the engraving, including the orb offered in Christ's proper right hand, the position of the fingers of his left hand, and his moderately long coiffure. The addition of a floral frame and the positioning of the figure on an altar decorated with vases of flowers and a cloth trimmed in lace are typically *Cuzqueñan*.

Two earlier works, datable stylistically to the early seventeenth century, suggest that the print circulated in Cuzco quite early on. In the painting in the Priet-Gaudibert collection (fig. 3) an artist influenced by the international Mannerist current, absorbed the image into a composition that includes the Virgin Mary and a Franciscan. Another early representation is faithful to the engraving in that the symbols on the apron are nearly exactly replicated (fig. 4). The Christ Child in this painting by an unidentified artist is walking hand in hand with Saint Joseph. At the lower left corner is Saint Catherine, perhaps the name saint of the donor of the painting.

¹ I am grateful to my colleague Almerindo Ojeda for identifying this print for me. It can be found at PESSCA (www.colonialart.com), 3177a along with the Brooklyn painting after it.

² Alessis Frassani, "Note sulla ricerca di campo virtuale a partire a due dipinti fiorentini," *Predella journal of visual arts*, no. 52 (2022), pp. 83-97.

Other elements of one of the Thoma paintings permit a clearer understanding of the meaning of the painting: the Child Christ contemplating his own death. To the symbols of the Passion on his apron are added the skull on which he rests his proper right elbow, and a stone tomb lies on the ground at the lower right of the canvas. Christ's role as *Salvator mundi* (Savior of the world) is indicated by the serpent on which he treads and by the *laburnum*, the imperial standard adopted by the emperor Constantine after his conversion to Christianity, a symbol normally only included in art in illustrations of the Descent into Hell. The vanquished serpent and the flag are emblems of Christ's triumph over evil and the pagan world. This painting is close to other versions probably created in Europe, suggesting that those and the Peruvian one in the Thoma collection were based on an engraved model.

The second version in the Thoma collection is a far simpler composition. The Child Christ is shown with his left hand raised in blessing and bearing in his right hand an orb of the earth containing a landscape. The composition is thus close to the Mathonière print (fig. 1). The *arma christi* ("weapons of Christ") painted on his apron represent the so-called "Instruments of the Passion" that became the weapons of his victory. They include the cross and crown of thorns, the hammer and nails that fixed his hands and feet to the cross, the pincers that removed the nails, the dice that the Roman soldiers tossed for his robe, and the ladder by which his body was brought down from the cross. The selection of these object in paintings from the Middle Ages on can be quite varied. This selection seems to include a pendant fitted with coral, an amulet against harm during the Renaissance. The Christ Child is sometimes shown in paintings wearing a necklace of coral beads as in this example.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt



Fig. 3. Unidentified Artist. *Virgin Crowned by two Angels in the Presence of the Christ Child and Saint Francis of Assisi*. Peru. Ca. 1600? Oil on panel, 66 x 55 cm. Priet-Gaudibert Collection, Versailles, France



Fig. 4. Unidentified artist. *Saint Joseph and the Christ Child with Saint Catherine*. Seventeenth century. Oil on canvas, 183 x 124 cm. Cuzco, Convento de San Antonio de Padua de la Recoleta.