



2022.73

Unidentified artist.

Bolivia, Potosí.

Saint Francis of Assisi Interceding for Mankind

Mid-18th century.

Oil on panel, 18 1/8 x 12 1/2 inches.

The intercession of the saints is a doctrine of the Catholic Church which asserts that saints may be asked to pray for others. In this small painting on wood framed with elaborately worked silver, Saint Francis of Assisi is pictured praying to Christ and his mother Mary on behalf of all mankind, represented by a pope, two kings, a monk, and a gentleman in a frock coat and powdered wig. At the lower left are the Souls in Purgatory to which many prayers were devoted by pious Catholics asking for an end to or an amelioration of suffering. Purgatory in Catholic doctrine was a place or state following death in which those who died in God's grace could expiate past sins through suffering and thence be admitted to Heaven. Throughout Spanish America confraternities and their chapels were dedicated to these prayers.

The facial styles of the figures, notably that of the Virgin Mary, recall the work of Melchor Pérez Holguín (c. 1660-c. 1732), the outstanding painter of colonial Potosí, Bolivia (see 2003.003 and 2018.004). However, the unidentified artist's palette of bold reds and blues suggest the continued influence of paintings from Cuzco, which were imported to present-day Bolivia in great numbers during the colonial period.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt