



2021.16

Unidentified Artist

Saint Dominic of Guzmán

Peru

First half of the 17th century

Oil on canvas

33 ½ x 26 inches

Saint Dominic of Guzmán was born in the kingdom of Castile in 1170. Unable to conceive, his mother, Jane of Aza, made a pilgrimage the Abbey at Silos where she dreamed that a dog leapt from her womb with a flaming torch in its mouth. The dream foretold the child she would bear who would set the world aflame with his preaching. In the early part of the 13th century, Dominic established a new religious order, the Order of Preachers, or Dominicans, named after him. He was canonized as a saint by Pope Gregory in 1234, only a few years after his death in 1221.

The Dominicans were the first religious order to arrive in Peru as part of Pizarro's company and began to establish missions in 1532. The order led the evangelical effort in Peru, quickly establishing churches, monasteries, and schools. This votive image of their founder may have been originally intended for one of these Dominican institutions.

This fictive portrait of Dominic, with his symbolic lily, was probably painted in Peru during the first half of the seventeenth century, as its elegance and refinement reflect the Italianate influence that predominated there before the establishment of regional styles less loyal to European modes. In this work, Dominic holds a book and wears the characteristic black and white robes of the monastic order he founded.

Perhaps the most unusual aspect of this painting is the fictive frame that surrounds it, a painted black frame with imitation wood grain along either side to suggest three-dimensionality. The black "frame" is adorned with a stylized scroll vine in yellow at the corners. A comparable example can be found in a painting by Angelino Medoro of St. Michael vanquishing the devil (fig. 1), auctioned at Alcalá Subastas in 2012. The fictive frame in the Medoro painting shares the same vine design in black and gold, which can also be seen in other period frames. In Peru, as elsewhere in the early modern world, frames could be more expensive than the paintings they housed, and their role was twofold, increasing the painting's economic value and to "setting their

imagery off from the mundane world.”¹ This addition suggests that the work was possibly produced for a client or institution without the means to acquire a more expensive frame or where a talented frame maker could not be sourced.



Fig. 1 Angelino Medoro, *Saint Michael*, c. 1621-27, oil on canvas. Auctioned in October 2012 by Alcalá Subastas, current location unknown.

¹ Maya Stanfield-Mazzi, *Clothing the New World Church: Liturgical Textiles of Spanish America, 1520-1820* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2021), 273.