



2024.2

Unidentified Artist

Our Lady of the Rosary of Bogotá with Donors, 18th century

New Granada

Oil on canvas

17 x 13 inches

Collection of the Carl and Marilyn Thoma Foundation, acc. no. 2024.2

In 1556, Our Lady of Chiquinquirá became the first Marian miraculous image to originate in the Kingdom of New Granada—a subject well represented in the Thoma Foundation’s collection (2013.046, 2014.020, 2022.7). Painted by Alonso de Narváez, the image depicted the Virgin of the Rosary. Alongside this revered icon, other Madonnas were also venerated under the Rosary advocacy during the colonial period in New Granada, including the Virgin of the Rosary of Bogotá—also known as Our Lady of the Rosary of the Conquest—who appears in the present painting accompanied by two donor figures.

Since the 15th century, the devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary has been closely associated with the Dominican Order. According to a well-known legend, the Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Dominic of Guzmán, the order’s founder, and bestowed upon him the rosary as a spiritual weapon to combat the Albigensian heresy in the thirteenth century. The Dominicans’ promotion of the Rosary received papal endorsement in 1491, when Pope Innocent VIII issued a bull granting the Order the exclusive privilege of establishing Rosary confraternities.¹ This support was further consolidated in 1571, when Pope Pius V, a Dominican himself, entrusted the Spanish Armada to the protection of the Virgin of the Rosary on the eve of the Battle of Lepanto against the Ottoman forces. The Christian victory was widely attributed to the intercession of the Virgin, prompting Pope Gregory XIII to institute the Feast of the Rosary, to be celebrated on the first Sunday of October.² Given this institutional support and long-standing tradition, it is not surprising that the introduction and diffusion of Our Lady of the Rosary devotion in the Kingdom of New Granada was spearheaded by the Dominicans, who had arrived in the region by 1525 and actively fostered confraternities dedicated to this Marian advocacy.

In 1551, Dominican friar José de Robles established the Dominican monastery in Santafé de Bogotá. Two years later, while in Seville, he commissioned “the miraculous image of Our Lady of the Rosary, so that by authorizing his convent with it, it would become the most venerated and miraculous relic possessed by the city of Santafé”³ (Fig. 1). The sculpture of the

¹ Roberta Olson, “The rosary and its iconography, part I: background for devotional tondi,” *Arte Cristiana* 86 (1998): 264. Cited in Olga I. Acosta, *Milagrosas imágenes marianas en el Nuevo Reino de Granada* (Madrid-Frankfurt: Iberoamericana-Vervuert Verlag, 2011): 213.

² *Ibid.*, 214.

³ “La milagrosa Imagen de Nuestra Señora del Rosario, para que autorizando con ella su Convento, fuera la reliquia de mayor veneración, y Milagro, que tiene esta ciudad de Santa Fe,” cited in: Alberto Ariza, “Nuestra Señora del Rosario de la Conquista del Convento de Santa Fe de Bogotá,” *Anales de la Provincia de San Luis*

Virgin of the Rosary arrived at the convent in 1556 and was described by the chronicler Flórez de Ocariz as being “of good stature, beautiful with nobility, and of a tanned complexion.”⁴ However, it was not until the mid-seventeenth century that devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary of Bogotá reached its peak, following her designation as patroness and protector of the Kingdom of New Granada by Royal Decree of Philip IV on November 5, 1646.⁵ It is within this context that painted portraits of the image venerated in the Dominican convent of Santafé began to proliferate. At least one was painted by Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos and others have been attributed to Gaspar de Figueroa and Baltasar Vargas de Figueroa, the leading artists of the seventeenth-century Santafé School of Painting (Figs. 2-5)

As in all representations of the Virgin of the Rosary of Bogotá, the Thoma Foundation painting depicts the sculpted image of the Virgin and Child unveiled and framed by heavy red curtains. Perched upon a cloud with cherub faces, Mary stands on an altar draped with a lace-edged cloth. She wears a jeweled crown and a rosary around her neck, holds a baculus in her right hand, and cradles the Christ Child in her left. A radiant halo emanates from the heads of both figures, set against a dark background that enhances their divine presence. The Virgin is dressed in a sumptuous white gown adorned with floral motifs and intricate gold embroidery, a design that is echoed in the elaborate decoration of her mantle and the Christ Child’s garment. Mary casts a gentle gaze upon her son, richly dressed in a tunic with a delicate lace collar, who extends both hands in a gesture of blessing.

At the feet of the Virgin and Child, two donors, looking directly at the viewer, are depicted in prayer. The female donor wears a black dress with a bateau neckline and slashed sleeves that reveal a delicate lace-trimmed chemise, likely of European origin. Her long black hair, adorned with pink ribbons, is complemented by pearl earrings. Notably, the painter even included a prominent mole on her face,

Bertrán de Colombia (Bogotá: Octubre-Diciembre 1956): 7. Olga I. Acosta, *Milagrosas imágenes*, 227. The scholar Adrián Contreras has attributed Our Lady of the Rosary to Roque Balduque. For more information, see: Adrián Contreras Guerrero, *In Ligno Facta: artes escultóricas de los siglos XVII y XVIII en Colombia*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Universidad de Granada, 2017: 42-43. I am grateful to Adrián Contreras for his assistance with the attribution of this work.

⁴ “de buena estatura, hermosa con Señorío, y de color trigueño,” in Juan Flórez de Ocariz, *Genealogías del Nuevo Reino de Granada* [Madrid: 1674] (Bogotá: Instituto Caro y Cuervo – Instituto Colombiano de Cultura Hispánica, 1990): 194.

⁵ Olga I. Acosta, *Milagrosas imágenes*, 227, 391. For a detail narration of the election of the Virgin of the Rosary of the Dominican Convent as the patroness of New Granada, see: Alberto Ariza, “Nuestra Señora del Rosario,” 12-22.

possibly referencing a *chiqueador*; a beauty patch worn prominently by noblewomen throughout the Hispanic world. The male donor is portrayed wearing a black cape over a white shirt with a fine lace collar and cuffs. He has curly black hair, a distinct moustache and a goatee. His darker complexion suggests he may have been identified as a *pardo* or *mulatto*, categories used in colonial racial classifications to describe individuals of mixed ancestry—his skin tone appearing lighter than that of an African, but darker than a Spanish or Indigenous person.

The painting in the Thoma collection, together with a related work in the Museo Arquidiocesano de Pamplona (Fig. 6) and a 1633 testament by the Indigenous resident of Santafé, Luis de Jiménez, demonstrates the widespread devotion to the Virgin of the Rosary of Bogotá among couples of diverse racial backgrounds in the capital of the Kingdom of New Granada. In his will, Jiménez notes that he owned a painting of the Virgin of the Rosary in which he and his wife were portrayed, and he expressed such reverence for the image that he requested it be placed, after his death, in the “church of my parish in the altar of Saint Barbara, where I should be buried next to my mother Catalina.”⁶ Across these examples, the prayerful poses of the donors and the prominent depiction of Our Lady of the Rosary of Bogotá underscore the function of such paintings as devotional aids and focal points for private prayer.

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⁶ “Iglesia de mi parroquia en el altar de Señora Santa Bárbara y allí me han de enterrar donde está mi madre Catalina.” Archivo General de la Nación, Bogotá. *Notaria 3a*, 37, fols 66v-67r. Published in Pablo Rodríguez, *Testamentos indígenas de Santafé de Bogotá, siglos XVI-XVII* (Bogotá: Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá – Instituto Distrital Cultura y Turismo, 2002): 231. Cited in: Olga I. Acosta, *Milagrosas imágenes*, 415.



Fig. 1. Unidentified artist, *Virgin of the Rosary of Bogotá*, 16th century. Polychromed Sculpture. Church of Santo Domingo, Bogotá. Photograph by Adrián Contreras.



Fig. 2. Attributed to Baltasar Vargas de Figueroa, *Virgin of the Rosary of Bogotá*, 17th century. Oil on canvas. Museo de Arte Colonial, Bogotá.



Fig. 3. Attributed to Gaspar de Figueroa or Baltasar Vargas de Figueroa, *Virgin of the Rosary of Bogotá*, 17th century. Oil on canvas. Museo del Chicó, Bogotá.



Fig. 4. Attributed to Baltasar Vargas de Figueroa, *Virgin of the Rosary of Bogotá*, 17th century. Oil on canvas. Museo Arquidiocesano de Pamplona, Colombia. Photograph by Adrián Contreras.



Fig. 5. Gregorio Vásquez de Arce y Ceballos, *Virgin of the Rosary of Bogotá*, late 17th century. Oil on canvas. Museo del Seminario Mayor, Bogotá.



Fig. 6. Unidentified Artist, *Virgin of the Rosary of Bogotá with the Trinity, Saint Francis and donor*, 18th century. Oil on canvas. Museo Arquidiocesano de Pamplona, Colombia. Photograph by Adrián Contreras.