



Unidentified Artist

Sculpture of Saint Judas Thaddeus Carried in Procession

Peru, Cuzco

18th century

Oil on canvas, 30 x 40 ½ inches

Collection of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation, acc. no. 2025.5

Public processions, sometimes including ephemeral triumphal arches and tapestries hung from windows, were well established in Spain and adopted enthusiastically throughout Spanish America. They included members of the religious orders and of civic society. Sculptures of religious figures, like that of Saint Judas Thaddeus in this painting, were carried aloft by distinguished personages. In Peru, there are extensive written records of these processions reported in vivid detail by the chroniclers of seventeenth and eighteenth-century viceregal Peru. The diaries of Josephe de Mugaburu and Francisco de Mugaburu describe processions in Lima (1640-1697). Diego de Esquivel y Navia reflects on life in the “*gran ciudad del Cuzco*” in the mid-eighteenth century. Religious celebrations in the “silver city” of Potosí, Bolivia, from 1676 to 1736 are closely observed by Bartolomé Arzáns de Orsúa y Vela.¹

Written descriptions of the viceregal era processions that played crucial roles in the cohesion of life in the colonial cities far outnumber reflections in the visual arts. A series of large canvases representing the Corpus Christi procession in Cuzco, Peru are so well known and widely published, that we might lose sight of how rare they in fact are.² The paintings are called the “Santa Ana” series after the Indigenous church for which they were created in the last quarter of the seventeenth century.

In this example (Fig. 1), members of the Mercedarian order are shown alongside Indigenous elites elaborately dressed as Incas. Created by Indigenous artists for an Indigenous church, the painting features Indigenous figures prominently, along with other characters. By contrast, an eighteenth century Cuzco painting of the Corpus Christi festival (Fig. 2) highlights the diversity of the crowd—from disreputable figures to a bewigged gentleman accompanied by a monk—while noticeably downplaying the presence of Indigenous participants.

Although the image of Saint Judas Thaddeus does not appear in any of the known viceregal-era paintings recording the Corpus Christi procession in Cuzco, the Thoma painting clearly identifies the gilded sculpture of the saint through the inscription on the placard he holds. As in eighteenth-century Cuzco processional scenes (Fig. 2), the saint’s image is modeled after polychrome wooden sculptures commonly adorned with gold and featured in church interiors

¹ These primary sources have been transcribed, edited and published.

² See especially Carolyn Dean, *Inka Bodies and the Bodies of Christ: Corpus Christi in Colonial Cuzco, Peru* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1999).

and public rituals. The painting was almost certainly created by one of the many Indigenous or Mestizo artists active in Cuzco during the eighteenth century, likely familiar with compositions from the “Santa Ana” series. Elements such as the marching figures, the tapestries hung from windows along the route, and the mother and child observing from the lower right all recall earlier processional imagery. Notably, however, this painting omits any reference to Inca participants or presence.

The modest dimensions of the Thoma painting are radically different from the large scale of the “Santa Ana” paintings. The latter were intended for the walls of a church, but this canvas was probably created for a domestic setting, a painting created “*a devoción de*” a Creole patron who was especially dedicated to Saint Judas Thaddeus, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the kneeling figure nearest the viewer represents the devotee himself. The urban setting, with its view into a deep landscape, and the clerical and secular figures carrying candles along the flower-strewn route are all skillfully painted. Many of the figures look out at the viewer, inviting us to participate in this celebration of Saint Judas Thaddeus.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt



Fig. 1. Unidentified artists. *Procession of Mercedarian Friars*. One of the series of paintings in the Museo de Arte Religioso del Arzobispo, Cuzco.



Fig. 2. Unidentified artist. *Corpus Christi Procession in Cuzco*. Museo de Pedro de Osma, Lima, Peru.