



2024.4
Unidentified Artist
Our Lady of Succor
Peru, 18th century
29 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches
Oil on canvas

Inscription: *La portentosa y milagrosa imagen de n[uestra] s[eñora] del Socorro a devocion de so humilde capellan Miguel de Sacrino.*

“The portentous and miraculous image of Our Lady of Succor, at the devotion of her humble chaplain Miguel de Sacrino.”

This painting belongs to the genre of statue paintings, devotional images that reproduce revered sculptural effigies in two-dimensional form. Far from being mere imaginative exercises, these trompe-l'oeil representations functioned as pictorial testimonies of cult devotion, replicating specific miraculous statues that were often “touched by the original” to transfer their sacred presence.¹ Through this act of replication, it was believed that the aura of the original sculpture could be extended to new settings, particularly private or domestic altars. In the viceroyalties of Spanish America, and especially in the southern Andes, this genre not only took root but flourished beyond its Iberian origins, playing a vital role in the dissemination of local Marian cults such as Our Lady of Cocharcas (Fig. 1) or Our Lady of the Rosary of Pomata (Fig. 2)



Fig. 1. Unidentified Artist, *Our Lady of Cocharcas*, 1751. Peru. Oil and gold on canvas, 50 x 41 ½. Collection of Carl & Marilyn Thoma.

¹ Luis Eduardo Wuffarden, “The Rise and Triumph of the Regional Schools, 1670-1750,” in Luisa Elena Alcalá and Jonathan Brown eds., *Painting in Latin America, 1550-1820: From conquest to independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014): 345.



Fig. 2. Unidentified Artist, *Our Lady of the Rosary of Pomata*, 1669. Bolivia. Oil on canvas, 65 x 43 ½. Collection of Carl & Marilynn Thoma.

This particular painting depicts the sculpture of the Virgin of Succor, enthroned with the Christ Child on her lap. She is seated on what appears to be a friar's chair, further elevated by a sumptuous cushion placed at her feet. The Virgin is dressed in a richly embroidered traveling cloak featuring floral motifs, trimmed with golden brocade and delicate lace cuffs. The Christ Child, standing upright, wears a blue French-style suit whose sleeves echo the decorative elements of his mother's garments, creating a visual continuity between the two figures. Framed by parted red curtains that evoke a *camarín* or an altar, the composition mimics the theatrical unveiling of a cult image. Both the Virgin and Child wear black pilgrim hats, attributes that underscore their roles as protectors of pilgrims and travelers, thus linking this image to the broader visual and devotional tradition of itinerant Marian icons, such as the Pilgrim Virgin of Quito (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3. Unidentified Artist, *Our Lady of Mercy, Called "The Pilgrim of Quito," Entering a Town*, c. 1730-1735. Cuzco. Oil and gold on canvas, 31 x 50 ½ inches. Collection of Carl & Marilyn Thoma.

The advocacy of the Virgin of Succor is most likely grounded in the widespread Marian devotion to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, or *Nuestra Señora del Perpetuo Socorro*, a tradition whose origins trace back to a Byzantine icon depicting Virgin and Child looking upon the instruments of the Passion. This image achieved particular renown due to the legend that the Virgin miraculously intervened to save a merchant caught in a storm while transporting the icon from Crete to Rome.² This painting evokes similar themes of protection and intercession, particularly in relation to travelers and seafarers. As noted by the Jesuit scholar Rubén Vargas Ugarte in 1930, veneration of the Virgin of Succor in the Viceroyalty of Peru began in the 17th-century in the port town of Huanchaco (present-day La Libertad), centered on a statue brought by Franciscans missionaries and associated with maritime miracles. According to Vargas Ugarte, the cult expanded in the early 18th century to Malambo (present-day Rimac, Lima), where a church was constructed in her honor in 1711.³ Although the Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Lima was destroyed during the 19th century, the cult associated with this advocacy transcended regional boundaries, as a painting housed in the Palacio Arzobispal del Cuzco attests (Fig. 4).

² Daniel Vifian López, "Our Lady of Socorro," in Jaime Eguiguren ed. *Beyond Borders: Viceregal Crossroads Unveiled* (Buenos Aires: Jaime Eguiguren Art & Antiques, 2023): 113.

³ Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Historia del culto de María en Iberoamérica y de sus imágenes y santuarios más celebrados*, 2nd edition (Buenos Aires: Editorial Huarpes, 1947): 542.



Fig. 4. Unidentified Artist, *La Portentosa y Milagrosa Imagen de Nuestra Señora del Socorro*, 18th century. Cuzco. Oil and gold on canvas. Palacio Arzobispal del Cuzco, Cuzco.

Supporting the Franciscan origin is the ensemble of kneeling saints flanking the Virgin. On the left appear Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Joseph holding the Madonna lilies that symbolize his chastity and divine election. On the right are Saint Francis Xavier, wearing a black habit and surplice, and Saint Anthony of Padua, also shown with lilies. Both Anthony of Padua and Francis Xavier are known for the missionary travel and peripatetic ministry, reinforcing the image's itinerant and devotional character.

The lower register of the composition is especially rich in symbolism. St. Barbara, with palm frond and flaming tower, appears on the far left, while St. Thomas of Villanova, an Augustinian bishop known for his charity, is seen to the right with a bag of alms. His association with "Socorro," or aid, resonates semantically and thematically with the Virgin's advocacy.⁴ At the center, seven naked souls in Purgatory pray toward the Virgin, emphasizing her intercessory

⁴ Daniel Vifian López, "Our Lady of Socorro," p. 114.

power not just in earthly affairs, but in the salvation of souls. The depiction echoes traditions associated with Our Lady of Mercy and the “demandas de ánimas”, wherein donations or prayers were offered to aid the dead in leaving Purgatory. The presence of a bishop and a king beside the purgatorial souls introduces a subtle vanitas theme—death as the great equalizer across social hierarchies.⁵ In a rural setting, such imagery may have reinforced communal bonds and spiritual obligations through vivid theological narrative.

The inscription along the lower edge of the painting is as enigmatic as the work itself. While it identifies a certain “Capellán Miguel de Sacrino,” nothing is known about this individual or the diocese in which he served. However, the painting’s material history offers important clues. During a previous conservation treatment, the canvas was remounted onto the stretcher it retains today.⁶ Originally, it was affixed to wooden rods, a format widely employed for transporting, storing, and displaying works of art both across the Atlantic and within the viceroyalties, we can imagine that the chaplain Miguel de Sacrino took the piece with him during his travels. Commonly referred to as *lienzos de enrollar* (scroll paintings) in period inventories, surviving examples of these mounts typically consist of a lower rod and an upper carved molding that sometimes doubled as a carrying case. Such mounts are preserved today in Spain’s Historic Collections (Fig. 5), the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Fig. 6), the Brooklyn Museum and the Museo de América, collectively suggesting that the format was likely introduced in the eighteenth century.⁷ More than mere functional devices, these supports also acted as elegant framing systems that enabled ritual and devotional activation: easily unrolled, these paintings could be displayed on feast days, during pilgrimages, or even in moments of collective crisis such as epidemics or natural disasters.

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⁵ Daniel Vifian López, “Our Lady of Socorro,” p.114.

⁶ Daniel Vifian López, “Our Lady of Socorro,” p. 113.

⁷ For more information about two New Spanish viceregal scroll paintings, see: Luisa Elena Alcalá, “Gathering at the Ahuehuete Tree: A Conversation Piece,” in *The Significance of Small Things: Essays in Honour of Diane Fane*, edited by Luisa Elena Alcalá and Ken Moser (Madrid: Ediciones El Viso, 2018): 20, 14-22; Ilona Katzew, ed. *Archive of the World: Art and Imagination in Spanish America, 1500–1800: Highlights from LACMA’s Collection*. Exh. Cat. (Los Angeles and New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and DelMonico Books/D.A.P., 2022): 193-194.



Fig. 5. Unidentified Artist, *The Ahuehuate of Atlixco*, 1767. Oil on canvas, 29 x 20 ½ inches. Inv. No. 2398. Colecciones Históricas del I.E.S El Greco, Toledo.



Fig. 6. Miguel Cabrera, *From Spaniard and Morisca, Albino Girl* (6. *De español y morisca, albina*), 1763. Oil on canvas, 51 5/8 × 41 3/8 in (canvas), 54 3/4 × 44 1/4 × 2 3/8 in (mount). M.2014.223. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.