



2004.007

Unidentified Artist

Peru

*The Christ Child Painting the Four Last Things*

Late 17th-18th century

Oil on canvas, 33 1/4 x 44 inches

Around 1585-1586, when the Antwerp printmaker Anton Wierix was working for the Jesuits, he created a series of 18 prints illustrating “the human heart conquered by the Christ Child.”<sup>1</sup> The prints were reproduced in several series over the years. *Les divine opérations de Jésus dans le coeur d’une âme fidelle* [the divine operations of Jesus in the heart of a faithful soul] with a text by G.D. Mello was published in Paris in 1673, and eleven of the images were reproduced in Fulgence Bottens’s *Het Goddelick Herte ofte de woonste Godts in het Herte* [The

Godly Heart, or the Dwelling of God in the Heart] . . . (Bruges, 1685). Although many compositions in South American viceregal painting have been identified as “after a Wierix print,” it was even more likely that a “print after a Wierix print” was the immediate source, as these were reproduced by other hands for years after the Wierix workshop closed.

The title page of the series shows a Jesuit and a Franciscan, aided by two women and two men, supporting a flaming heart that is crowned with the monogram of Christ. The heart itself is inscribed COR/IESV/AMANTI/SACRUM. There follow images of the Christ Child framed by the heart, reading, singing, playing a harp. The print (fig. 1) that served as inspiration to the painter of the Thoma work shows the Christ Child painting the Four Last Things: the Last Judgment, Death (as a catafalque), Heaven, and Hell.



Fig.1. *The Christ Child Painting the Four Last Things*, Anton Wierix, ca. 1585-1586. Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

However, the South American painter has expanded the iconography to include a number of figures outside of the heart itself. God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit appear at the top of the composition, flanked by archangels. To the left of the heart are three female figures representing the three virtues of Faith (with a monstrance), Hope (holding a book), and Charity (nursing an infant). To the right a Guardian Angel guides two children to see what Christ is painting, a reminder of death with its threatened rewards or punishments. It is possible that this painting was one of a series modeled on the prints, but it is impossible to know unless others come to light.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Ramón Mujica Pinilla for identifying the graphic source of the Thoma painting. The interpretation of the subject as “the human heart conquered by the Christ Child” is by Marie Mauquoy-Hendrickx, *Les Estampes des Wierix conservées au Cabinet des Estampes de la Bibliothèque Royale Albert 1<sup>er</sup>* (Brussels: Bibliothèque royale Albert I, 1978), 1:68.