



Acc. no.

Unidentified South American artist

Creation of the Soul of Mary

Second half of the 18th century

Oil on canvas, 69 ¼ x 51 1/8 in.



Baltasar Troncoso (active 1743-50), *Anima virginis prima create*, 1749. Published as frontispiece to *Opusculum Theophilosophicum* by Francisco Javier Lazcano, S.J. by the College of San Ildefonso, Mexico City (1750).

The composition of this painting is closely based on an engraving from Mexico, and the title is based on the inscription at the top of the engraving: *Anima virginis prima create*. According to theologians who defended the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, she was “conceived in the mind of God before all things.” In the heavenly zone of this composition, the “soul” of Mary is accompanied by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the middle zone, alongside the image of the Immaculate Virgin, are Saint John the Evangelist and Saint John Damascene whose writings were variously used in defense of the doctrine of Mary’s Immaculacy.

Below are her earthly parents, Saints Joachim and Anne. From their breasts are stems that bear Mary, the flower of their union. In colonial South America “The Holy Stems,” an infelicitous title, was given to this type of depiction of the Immaculate Conception, which was far more popular than other compositions more closely rooted in the visual arts of Spain.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt