

## Hispanic American Art in the Museo del Carmen de Maipú<sup>1</sup>

Investigation: Isabel Cruz de Aménabar (Dr. Art History)

Translation: Catalina Lucero Arenas (@Bilingual Translation and Interpretation)

The artistic historical heritage of a country is linked to its roots. It reveals its idiosyncrasy as people and their identity as a nation. The museum that holds such patrimony in that way is an extension of the past into the present, a proper synthesis of the past that is projected to the here and now, reaching its full validity in the communication with the people. Hence, the importance of the legacy in the Hispanic American Art of the Museo del Carmen, one of the most interesting and complete in Chile in its genre, formed over many years thanks to the love for history, interest in art, and dedication of many people and institutions. Among them we must mention the Museo del Seminario Pontificio, the Presbyter Mr. Elias Garcia Huidobro, Mr. Roberto Zubiaguirre and specially to Mr. Ramon Eyzaguirre Gutierrez, its organizer and first director.

### **Mestizo art**

Hispanic American Art is the result of cultural contact between two worlds: European and native. It appears as an expression from miscegenation and acculturation between Spanish conquerors and conquered Aboriginal.

A specialist called the conquest a real “trauma” for the American Indigenous people, which had negative effects for a while, although it did not mean the total extinction as ancient historians believed, only its momentary decline. Yet, during the two last viceroyalty centuries, a gradual revival of some native features and values continued, which mix and merge with Hispanics, brewing a mestizo culture and art.

According to this approach, Hispanic America is no longer a simple receptor of the consecrated art in the Old World, nor is this art limited to being a mere minor manifestation of European art. A more complete study of culture during the viceroyalty period shows that America changes the development of European styles and transform the formal features of plastic, architecture, and handicrafts.

Paradoxically, the Christian religion whose divulgation in the New World used by the theologians and jurists of the time as a decisive argument in favor of the Conquest, and even of the destruction of the Aboriginal cults and deities, it becomes a factor of cohesion, to fill up with to countless forms of syncretism. Spanish and natives coincide in their dramatic religious conception, sensitive and full of greatness.

It is entrusted with the extraordinary power of suggestion of images as the extension of Catholicism to all Hispanic America. The size of this will be understood if it is considered that art, painting, sculpture, drawing, and engraving, were the means of communication par excellence of that time of

---

<sup>1</sup> From "*Museo del Carmen de Maipú, editado en homenaje a la visita de S.S. Juan Pablo II*", 1987.

oral and visual culture since most of the society was illiterate and had not yet assimilated the message of the written word.

Of religious origins since Middle Ages, painting and imagery in America intensify their content, tragic or happy, to make themselves accessible to popular devotion and multiply their number to reach those vast multitudes of creoles, mestizos, and Indigenous people. These phenomena of expressivist exacerbation and massive multiplication of images are variants and adaptations of what European and peninsular art experiences in the New World. Indeed, native and mestizo are particularly sensitive to baroque emotional overflow, to its decorative exuberance, familiarity with sacred figures, the splendid environments in which all art and craft merge to give glory to God and the King and re-elaborate these approaches according to their way of feeling. Thus, behind the Western Christian clothing of colonial art, Aboriginal elements, traits, and meanings can be glimpsed that appear from the 18th century, in those regions with the highest percentage of Indigenous and mestizo people, appearing their art very clearly manifests its dual origin.

Mary, in certain Cuzco paintings, acquires the features of a mestiza maiden, making evident the racial and cultural fusion, and in some canvases executed in Upper Peru (Alto Perú) where a greater degree of interpenetration of symbolic content is reached since the Virgin is represented as *Pacha Mama*, with an indigenous face and a triangular mantle that symbolizes the *Cerro de Potosí*.

The phenomenon of *amestizamiento*<sup>2</sup> is also noticeable in the viceregal imagery since Christ and sometimes the saints, get the somatic characteristics of Aboriginal people and mestizos, seen in works from Quito to distant Chile.

Silverware, furniture, crafts, and useful arts are also testimonies of this rich cultural contact as the decorativism and fantasy of the Indigenous people capture in them typically American motifs of the local flora and fauna including pineapples, guavas, peppers, hummingbirds, pumas, monkeys, snakes, and human and mythological beings, among which the mermaid playing charango is especially popular.

Throughout the far and wide of Hispanic America, workshops appear where Creole, mestizo, and Indigenous artists and craft people give birth to paintings, sculptures, pieces of silverware, and furniture impregnated in local sensibility.

In the large cities, these workshops have strong cohesion, and consequently, a community of style and thematic concerns that sometimes perpetuate their formal features for more than two generations, as is the case of painting in Cuzco and imagery in Quito. In towns and minor shantytowns, circles of artisans and artists united by certain common characteristics are created.

From Mexico in the north to Chile in the south, Hispanic America is a great community of religion and culture in which raw materials and manufactured products, arts, crafts, and written cultures are exchanged with relative freedom, thus strengthening the ties and interrelation between different regions.

---

<sup>2</sup> Process of adaptation of the deities as mestizos.

The Kingdom of Chile, the most remote province of the Spanish empire overseas, participates in the formidable artistic and cultural development of the Peruvian Viceroyalty, producing modest local works in painting, carving, silverware, and furniture, and increasingly importing art from the main centers further north. In this Captaincy, the paintings of Cuzco mixed with the carvings of Quito, the portraits and silverware of Lima with the furniture of Upper Peru (Alto Perú), and the simple local production.

The collection of the Museo de Maipú is expressive of the richness and diversity of origins of the viceregal artistic heritage of Chile which for its study must be divided according to its different manifestations and provenances.

## The Painting

Here in the museum, there is a spectrum of regional manifestations paintings that reached the Viceroyalty of Peru. It is shown in this group works from Cuzco, Quito, and some places in Chile and Upper Peru (Alto Perú).

Certainly, the artists from Cuzco were the ones who achieved a more genuine expression of the viceroyalty's artistic mestizaje. Cuzco's painting appeared in the late 17th century as a synthesis of Spanish, Italian, Flemish, and Indigenous contributions, reaching its full uniqueness during the 18th century. The exacerbated religiosity that dominates the spiritual atmosphere of the ancient *Ciudad Imperial*<sup>3</sup>, overturned with special success in the candida and joyful side of Catholicism, impregnating the paintings with an extraordinary narrative sense that transforms them into an extension of the anecdotal and popular art of the Middle Ages.

The scenes are situated in beautiful forests in the Nordic remoteness, taken from Flemish engraving, with forests, streams, and medieval cities that merge with pieces of local nature and leafy trees full of multi-colored birds. The characters have youthful faces of a candid childlike beauty and dressed in flamboyant costumes and tunics in the brightest shades of color. The painting also expresses the drama of the Christian religion through Passion of Christ. The faces turned upset and the chromaticism deaf and dark. The *brocateado* or *sobredorado*,<sup>4</sup> an update medieval tradition in the viceroyalty during 18th century in the circle of the Indian and mestizos painters, filled with its complex and precious designs the characters' costumes, enriching the appearance of the paintings.

---

<sup>3</sup> Also known as *La Imperial*.

<sup>4</sup> Technique in paintings or the painting of sculptures in which gold leaf is applied to depicted costume or other textiles, or other details, to intensify the visual effect. Also known as brocade in English.



“Huida a Egipto”

Anónimo cuzqueño, siglo XIII, óleo sobre tela 54 x 43 cm.

One of the paintings that museum treasure is *Escena de la vida de Francisco Javier*, a usual image in 1750. Two small paintings, almost miniatures, represents *La Circucision* y *La Huida a Egipto*, both extremely popular in the 18th centuries, enriched with *brocateado*. An original *Calvario* from late 1700's in dark tonalities in which the characters present archaizing and hieratic features has frame simulating mestizo ornamentals elements and motifs of the sun and moon as aboriginal deities. Also, *Virgen de Loreto* from 18th century with an interesting local interpretation. With a great iconographic value, the canvas of *Reyes Incas y Reyes Españoles* of the latest years of the viceregal period symbolizing a final touch the fruitful union of races and powers that blossoms in America, claimed at the end of the 18th century by the indigenous movements.

The Quito painting is more European and with less evidence of indigenous features, turning in a true prolific manifestation in late viceregal period. On the other hand, in Cuzco's painting, the predominant theme is religious, although bequeath many portraits. Rosy and kindly air of divine air sacred characters, the pastel chromatism and the abundance of architectural elements of the rococo style, which had a greater flow in Quito, highlights in the last stage of Quito's pictorial production.



“Calvario”

Anónimo cuzqueño, siglo XVIII, óleo sobre tela 167 x 188 cm.

Dated in 1718, the *Retrato de don Luis Francisco Romero*, bishop of Santiago de Chile and Quito, is the most valuable painting of this origin in the museum’s possession. Prior to the period of the massive expansion of Quito art, this effigy shows gloomy tonalities, the posture and setting obey a fixed formula throughout the viceroyalty when it comes to represent civil and ecclesiastical dignitaries. On the other hand, the face is free of stereotypes and has received an adequate characterization.

The painting executed in Upper Peru (Alto Perú) during the viceregal Audiencia de Charcas period, distinguished by the colorful somber and the great pathos of the devotional scenes which deal especially with the tragic contents of Catholicism.

*San Pedro y San Pablo* by the Upper Peruvian painter Nicolas Ecoz, reveal the mark of Melchor Perez Holguin, the greatest master of Charcas, creator of a mystical expressiveness, saturated with the environmental devotion and the ancestral cosmic sense of the Andean man. Traits in Holguin’s style like the accentuation of the size of the heads, the monumentalism of the isolated figures, and the stark detail with which the painter analyses the epidermis, and the anatomical peculiarities of his characters are continued by Ecoz worsening them.

Chilean painting, very modest and handmade, is present in three canvases with scenes of the Way of the Cross: *Jesus ante Caifas*, *La Veronica*, and *La Caída*. The first two repainted.

## Imagery

Most of the heritage of the colonial images preserved in Chile corresponds to pieces of Quito origin. In the mid-18th century, the old Ecuadorian capital workshops transformed into real industries with different specialists and work division mass producing for export.

Despite large-scale manufacturing, the Quito artists preserve the quality of the imagery in which distinguish two sides clearly differential in terms of content and realization. The figures of sweet, childish grace with rosy, jovial faces and dressed in colorful ornate curds of gold brocade that show the friendly aspects of Catholicism through childhood moments of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and *belenes*<sup>5</sup> with processions of accompanying figures including types touched by the local use, animals, birds, angels, children, archangels, and representation of some saints. Instead, this imagery becomes painful when portraying the Passion of Jesus, testing moments, and suffering of the lives of saints. The polychrome of the flesh then becomes gaunt and livid, dotted with bruises, cardinals and streaks of garnet blood that reinforce the dramatic effect of these images.

The technical procedures worn by Quito artists, the most perfect of all viceregal sculpture, which achieve a different esthetic to the Spanish and to which others Hispanic American centers emerge, are noteworthy. One of the characteristics of polychrome is shiny carnations –different from Spanish imaginers who from Montañez preferred matte surfaces– so meticulously crafted that resemble ivory and porcelain. The perfection of *estofado de oro*<sup>6</sup> that preserve until today its glittering splendor and the use of *barniz chinesco*, procedure that imitates oriental lacquer<sup>7</sup>, consistent in put under the painting a light silver layer which gives color to an exotic shine.



“Retrato del Obispo Luis Francisco Romero”  
Anónimo cuzqueño, 1718, óleo sobre tela, 223 x 143 cm.

From the collection of Quito imagery of the museum, it is necessary to highlight two exquisite carvings representing *Tobias y el Arcangel* of delightful style, polychrome with *barniz chinesco* and *estofadas*

<sup>5</sup> Native scenes or crèches.

<sup>6</sup> Technique used in painting or in polychrome wood which involves working a painted surface to create a golden pattern.

<sup>7</sup> Also known as *urashi*.

*en oro*, remarkable for the woodwork and the fantasy of the archangel's custom with graceful billowing cloths. *Belén* and the set *Jesus niño y San Juanito* manage to capture the childish charm and the morbidity of the bodies denoting that kind grace, a rococo characteristic, assimilated with so much property by the Quito art in the 1800s. Works such as those mentioned, come undoubtedly from the models of the famous Capiscara, creator of delightful child imagery.

The *Inmaculada* with the moon beneath her feet from the famous Quito sculptor Bernardo Legarda. The great *Cristo bendecido* is a late work that shows the industrialization of production and the lovely *Virgen del Carmen* framed by a silver filigree garland.

They reveal the dramatic feeling of the Catholic religion in creations, for example, the *Cristo yacente*, also derived from those of Capiscara, the *Calvario* with polychrome and stewed figures, and the beautiful crucifix known as *Cristo de la Real Audiencia*, masterpieces in their genre.



"Tobías y el Arcángel"

Anónimo quiteño, siglo XVIII, madera tallada, policromada y estofada.

Tobías 22 x 11 cm. Arcángel 33 x 22 cm.

Like the Upper Peruvian painting, the sculpture executed in the old Audiencia de Charcas is tragic and moving. Emaciated faces, waxy or swarthy carnations, grim or convulsed expressions, and emotional or violent attitudes reinforced by means of implements such as crystal tears, human teeth, long natural hair, ropes, and silicon that cooperate to give them a ghostly and frightening air.

A representative work of the characteristics of the Upper Peruvian imagery is the spectral *Cabeza de San Juan Bautista*, which picks up the rawest notes of the realism of Hispanic sculpture, accentuating them. Within this same expressiveness is the *Mal Ladron*, with a convulsive gesticulating naturalism

and the *Cristo atado a la columna* impressive for the wounds that completely cover his body. *San Francisco de Paula* is majestic, with a rich halo and silver banner.



“Cabeza de San Juan Bautista”

Ánonimo altoperuano, siglo XVIII, madera tallada y policromada, 21,5 x 31,5 cm.

Among the sculptures made in Chile during the viceregal period, the most outstanding are those executed by Jesuit artists of Germanic origin who arrived in the Kingdom in the mid-18th century like Juan Bitterich, Jacob Kellner, and Jorge Lanz being the most renowned. Although there is no certainty about their author, the interesting wooden sculptures representing *San Ignacio y San Francisco Javier* in this museum, which reveal the hand of a European artist, can be attributed to this group.

Following the example of the carvers of the neighboring Viceroyalty, in Chile humble *santeros* made devout images, for example, the nice group of the *Natividad* with polychrome and dressed figures and the small *Crucifijo* of primitive features.

In addition to wood, the art of carving captured during the colonial era in a kind of exceptionally soft alabaster from the region of Ayacucho formerly called Huamanga, a material that was known as *piedra de Huamanga*, in which delicate images were executed as the *Calvario* of mestizo style that this museum possesses.



“San Ignacio”

Anónimo jesuita, siglo XVIII, madera tallada, 154 x 100 cm.

### Silversmith's

Chilean documents record the activity of the silversmiths' guild in the Kingdom since 1552. The passage of time, the lack of observance of the guild rules by the silversmiths, who rarely marked their pieces, in addition to the constant transformation to which these objects have subjected according to the prevailing taste, have caused the disappearance of the oldest silverware in Chile. However, it is to presume that it followed a similar stylistic trajectory to that experienced in the Peruvian Viceroyalty, developing in both regions' variants of the renaissance, baroque, rococo, and neoclassical styles, which sometimes transformed due to the intervention of the mestizo and indigenous sensibility and here suffer this formal and decorative simplification common to all arts executed in this Kingdom.

The viceregal silverware collection includes especially liturgical objects since those for civil use such as the gourd and the incense burner already existing here are dated from the 19th century.

The beautiful tabernacle of embossed, chiseled, and engraved silver sheet with plant and floral motifs around a ciborium with rays stand out, which could date around 1750, being possible to relate its style to that of the Bavarian Jesuits. From the same period, although of probable Peruvian origin, are the two 5-light candelabras made of embossed, chiseled, and engraved silver plate, decorated with horns of plenty and cloth motifs. Three beautiful candlestands (7-light candelabras) also of probable Peruvian origin show the decorative richness of the last colonial period. One of them has the figure of *San Jose con el Niño* in the center. Another is decorated with scrolls, a shield, and garlands of tulips and a last one, exhibits garlands of laurel leaves, characteristics of the neoclassical style, interspersed with the typical little angel heads of the "mestizo baroque" decoration converging at the center in a medallion with the Lamb of God.



“Sagrario”

Ánonimo, siglo XVIII, lámina de plata repujada, cincelada y burilada, 71 x 32 x 20 cm.

Also, within the field of religious silverware, it is necessary to mention some fine implements of images that the museum has, like the silver corner pieces of some crosses, crowns, haloes, banners, and filigree garlands.

As mentioned before, the museum's civilian silverware was later. Although many of its ornamental elements are of baroque and rococo origin, the execution of the pieces is after the validity of these styles. The spherical-shaped teapot with the spout ending in a sterilized horse's head dates from the first half of the 19th century and is inspired in neoclassical models.



“Centillero”

Anónimo, siglo XVIII, plata repujada, cincelada y burilada, 63 x 75 cm.

Among the gourds – the oldest used in Chile– there are some of called *de galleta*<sup>8</sup> (gourd in this form) with cruet, stem openwork, chiseled, carved, and embossed silver ornaments. The one with a central stem in the form of a shaft with a base seems to be the oldest. The following is the one with the stem surrounded by three squirrels. Three of these gourds have built-in cruet, a feature considered to be typical of those of Chilean execution, while a fourth of the Peruvian type, rests on three small legs finished in claws that hold a ball, an element widely used by the rococo and neoclassical styles. This museum also has a couple of interesting *mates coquimbanos*<sup>9</sup>, with the typical motif of the tail of the gourd that in the entirely silver ones made of this metal; both simply chiseled.

Following are the all-silver mates, of which this museum has three. One in the shape of a goblet decorated on the handles with birds with large tails, while another has four legs in the shape of snakes and a basket where the container fits.

The incense burner, used during the colonial period to perfume rooms, spread late in Chile, only at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century. The one that owns this group dates from the mid-1800 and has a balustraded stem hat is decorated with poppy flowers.

## Furniture

The development of furniture in the Peruvian viceroyalty follows the guidelines that govern the metropolis, although with the sometimes-substantial variations introduced by the participation of mestizo and native artisans and the availability of wood and materials specific to each region. During the Hispanic period, the kingdom of Chile imported from Europe, or the neighboring viceroyalty, the finest and most important furniture including desks and cabinets inlaid with wood or precious materials, inlaid chests, chairs made of fine wood, delicately carved wardrobe, gilded cups with hangings and canopies, while the simplest furniture is made here like coarse curds, sideboards, sewing boxes and chests from Valdivia and Chiloe, benches, tables, and chairs made of cowhide for which the local tanners and saddlers worked the leather.

The collection that this museum has is especially rich in furniture from the Peruvian Viceroyalty.

Different types of chests, boxes and trunks are exhibited. The simplest and oldest are the smooth wooden chests with locks and wrought iron plates, for example, the one with the adulterated inscription indicating that it belonged to Rodrigo de Quiroga, which by any reckoning, from the 17th or 18th century. Another golden ark with incised star motifs reveals Mudejar influence. There are also small profusely carved ladies' chests, and gentlemen's, smooth on the outside, adorned only with ironwork while the interior provided with artistic carvings and numerous drawers. One of the most interesting and genuine types of viceroyalty chest is the one covered in leather, or carved cowhide, of which the museum has an exceptionally beautiful specimen datable to the mid-17th century. The leather embossed with motifs of double-headed eagles in the center, surrounded by flowers, birds,

---

<sup>8</sup> Galleta means crackers in Spanish. The name is because they look flat and round like the crackers the *gauchos* used to eat.

<sup>9</sup> A gourd cup style produced in 19th century in the area near the port of Coquimbo in northern Chile.

indigenous characters, pumas, bunches of grapes, pineapples, and foliage in a copious, fantastic, and symmetrically distributed ornamentation, characteristic of the so-called Andean baroque mestizo style. The shelled trunk is also present here with a Philippine example from the 18th century, with inlays in the shape of flowers and birds.

The already classic Spanish desk known as *vargueño*, from the town of Vargas, characterized by its beautiful cover adorned with the most diverse materials and motifs, always of great wealth, which hides or conceals the multiple drawers that used to store office supplies to write. The model in the museum is from after the colonial period and adorned with wooden inlays representing indigenous figures and plant elements.

However, the most valuable desk on display is the one that belonged to the Marquis of Casa Real, Mr. Francisco Garcia Huidobro. This writing desk, or "cabinet" as they were called in Europe at the time, is a marvelous Chippendale-style example, lacquered in red and decorated with oriental characters and themes in black and gold. Equally of excellent value is the small English Queen Anne style desk colored in the same shades as the previous one and which also belonged to said character.

Several 18th-century Peruvian cabinets or displays show this piece of furniture, widely used in the period, and enriched with copious carved ornamentation. The best quality is the one whose ownership has erroneously attributed to Ines de Suarez, since it is undoubtedly an 18th-century piece of furniture, from Lima or Upper Peru (Alto Perú). It consists of two collapsible bodies, the upper one carved with motifs of amphorae and foliage and the interior with baskets and branches. The crown and the legs are back.



"Cofré"

Anónimo barroco-mestizo, siglo XVIII, vaqueta repujada y policromada, 62 x 126 x 64 cm.

Among the colonial tables that exist on this campus, the most interesting are the one in mestizo baroque style, rectangular with legs ending in claws and drawers decorated with foliage, and two in the Americanized Queen Anne style, with their elegant cabriolet legs and profuse decoration on the lower part of the front body.



“Armario”

Anónimo peruano o altoperuano, siglo XVIII, madera tallada 300 x 170 x 83 cm.

Also numerous in this museum are cowhide armchairs, another typically Spanish piece of furniture that made in the viceroyalty during the three colonial centuries. Most of the models on display here are from the 19th century, and although the wooden structure maintains the colonial design, the cowhide embossed with traditional and romantic motifs. On the other hand, those from the colonial era wear it decorated with vegetal and heraldic designs arranged symmetrically.



“Escribanía” perteneció al marqués de Casa Real

Anónimo inglés, estilo Chippendale, siglo XVIII, madera lacada y dorada, 236 x 100 x 55 cm.

The so-called *de carretilla* (wheelbarrow) benches with turned balusters on the back and under the seat, brought from Peru during the colonial era, the simplest design manufactured in Chile. There is a Peruvian model from the 18th century that has little angels, vegetable scrolls, and carved birds on its back and another possibly comes from Upper Peru (Alto Perú) has a monkey, a dog, and masks interspersed with garlands of the back on the balusters.

Of great interest is the cot that, according to tradition, General San Martín used in Curimón before the battle of Chacabuco. It shows decorative elements in the Louis XVI style, like the amphora on the headboard; the garlands are typical of neoclassical.



“Banco de carretilla”  
Anónimo peruano, siglo XVIII, madera tallada, 129 x 246 x 53 cm.

Among the ecclesiastical furniture from the colonial period, the two magnificent baroque-style *Tenebrae* hearses stand out; possibly made made in Chile during the 1700s. They boast profuse carvings and openwork and belonged to the Cathedral of Santiago and the Convent of San Francisco in this capital.

All this set of works of art and crafts thus form a valuable heritage, which the Museo de Maipú offers visitors, inviting them to recreate the past through each of their testimonies.



“Tenebrario” perteneció a la Catedral de Santiago  
Anónimo barroco chileno, siglo XVIII, madera tallada 315 x 177 cm.

**Investigation: Isabel Cruz de Aménabar**

**Translation: Catalina Lucero Arenas**

**This translation is part of Catalina Lucero Arenas professional practice  
in the Conservation and Collection Department**

©Museo del Carmen de Maipú  
[coleccion@museodelcarmen.cl](mailto:coleccion@museodelcarmen.cl)

2022