

Spanish Colonial Art at Joslyn Art Museum

As part of Spain's conquest and rule of Latin America from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, the Catholic Church dictated the artistic development in Spanish settlements. The merging of Christian imagery with the rich indigenous traditions of the Americas became an essential part of Europe's zealous colonizing.

Assimilating European practices and beliefs with the diverse faiths of the Americas, images of patron saints and the Virgin Mary quickly became the dominant subject matter in the Spanish colonies. Brilliant color, applied gold, extensive patterning, and severe stylization are the chief characteristics of colonial art during this period. As indigenous populations were encouraged to adopt Christianity, portrayals of Old World saints often incorporated New World landscapes, costumes, and even facial features, creating a unique hybrid of local iconography and European Catholicism. Serving as devotional works, these paintings provide a record of the evolution of the complex faith which persists in Latin America today.

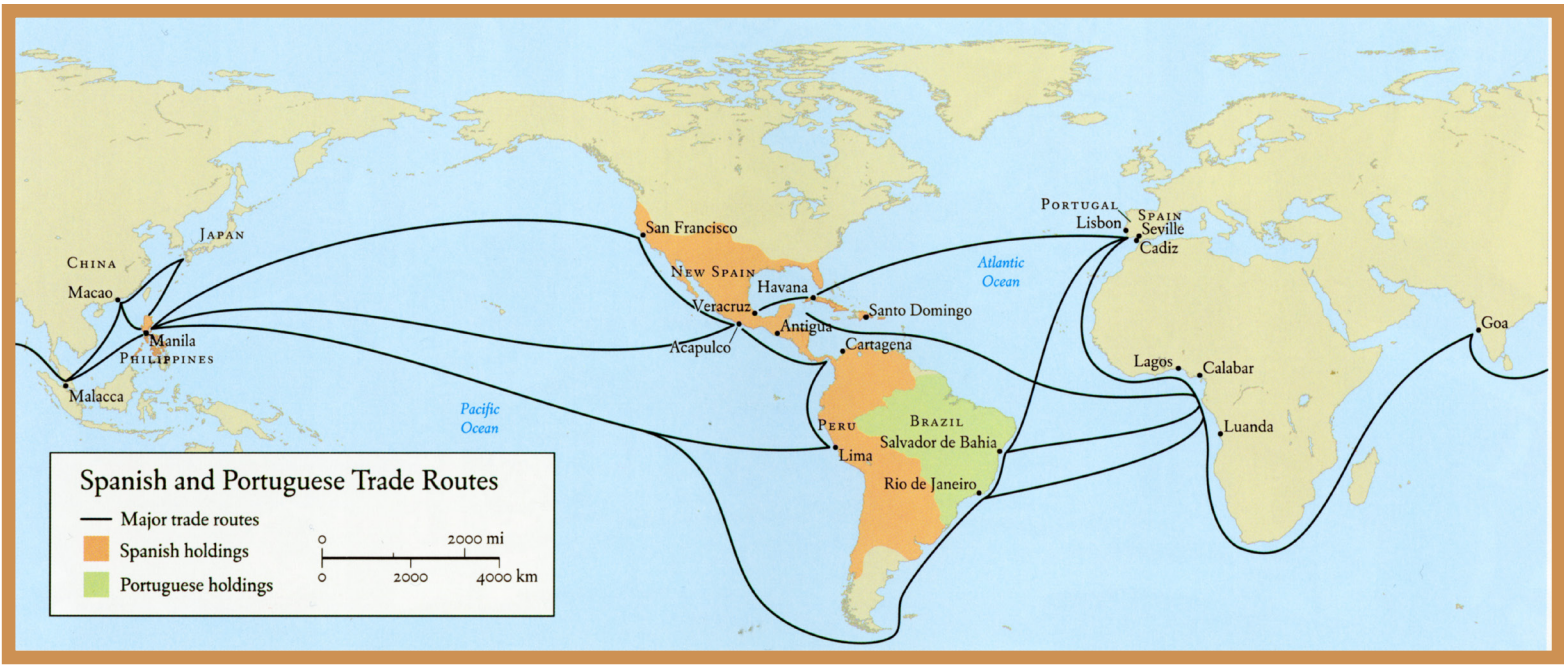


*The Virgin of the Rosary* was perhaps the most ancient devotional in the Americas; brought to the New World soon after 1535 by the Dominican Order. Legend has it that by 1541, a statue of the Virgin of the Rosary had been sent to Lima, Peru, by Charles V, where it was worshipped in the church of Santo Domingo. Brotherhoods in her honor were established for Spaniards and later for more humble *criollos* (a Spanish-American of European, typically Spanish ancestry), *mestizos* (descendant of mixed Indian-European parentage), and Indians. Her worship became so popular that her chapels became the most sumptuous in the Spanish Viceroyalties. The custom of embellishing the statues can be traced to Spanish traditions that were imported to the colonies. Skilled Indians and mestizo craftsmen were entrusted with the task of creating crowns, orbs, brooches, rings, and chains often copied from European images. Confradías (religious fraternities) often assumed responsibility for maintenance of the garments, jewelry, and regalia - all donated to enhance a revered statue's image - and several such organizations continue this tradition today.

These popular religious figures of the Virgin were turned into two-dimensional representations of statues. This distinctively New World type of *Marian* imagery is referred to as "dressed-statue" painting and shows cloth garments that give the sculpted figure a triangular and often massive and rigid appearance. Frequently, "dressed-statue" paintings themselves were similarly adorned with real jewelry attached to the canvas.



Artist Unknown (Bolivian), *Saint Michael (San Miguel)*, late 18th century, oil on canvas, 61 x 42 1/2 in., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick H. Lowell, 1965.667



*Our Lady of Guadalupe* is the most venerated religious image in Mexican culture. According to tradition, in 1531 the Virgin Mary twice appeared to an Indian named Juan Diego near Mexico City, instructing him to have the bishop of Mexico build a church at the spot. When presented to the bishop, roses that Juan Diego had been told to carry in his tilma (cloak) fell out and a miraculous image of the Virgin, clothed in the sun and standing on the moon, was found imprinted on the garment. This image, preserved in the Basilica of Guadalupe, became the model for countless copies, such as this one.



The artist commonly known as *Molleno* worked as a *santero* (maker of religious images) in northern New Mexico from about 1805 to about 1850. This particular painting by Molleno is exceptional as it is only one of fifty paintings on animal hide known today to have survived from the early colonial New Mexican period.

During the revolt by Pueblo Indians against the Spanish conquerors in 1680, many Spanish missions and their contents were destroyed throughout New Mexico. In the early 1700s, Franciscan friars rebuilt the missions using whatever local materials were at hand. Because animal hides were more plentiful than painters' canvases, priests used skins as the support upon which to paint devotional images for their altars. Paintings on animal hides, however, were by 1820 deemed to be unsuitable for the display of sacred images, and such works were largely destroyed.

IMAGES (Left to Right): Artist Unknown (Bolivian), *Our Lady of Sorrows*, 19th century, oil on canvas, 32 3/4 x 23 3/4 in., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Lowell, 1964.113; Artist unknown (Bolivian, 19th century), *Virgin del Carmen (The Virgin of Mt. Carmel presenting a scapular medal to St. Theresa of Avila)*, ca. 1800–1820, oil on canvas, 28 x 20 3/4 in., Gift of Mr. & Mrs. Frederick H. Lowell, 1965.661

This work represents Saint James the Greater, one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. Here he is shown in the armor of a Spanish soldier, as it was believed that he miraculously appeared to fight for the Christian army against the Moors during an important battle in 844. James is framed by heavy drapery swags across which flit small birds. Below the horse's belly appear small stick figures holding swords or guns which represent the Moorish army.

"It seems obvious to me that the figure represents Santiago, Saint James the major patron saint of Spain. According to legend, St. James frequently appeared in the sky on a white horse to encourage the faithful in a battle. Santiago himself is carrying a lance as though he were rising into battle, and his hat is the typical hat of the Pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela. I suspect that on the front of the hat there is a cockle, which was the sign of the Pilgrim to Santiago, this type of shell being associated with the Santiago legend," noted Ronald Hilton, Director of Hispanic Studies, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.

This piece came to Joslyn Art Museum with the Bourke Collection, a collection of ethnographic material amassed by U.S. Army Captain John G. Bourke (1843–1896). One of the first activists for Indian rights, he was recognized in his own time for his ethnological writings on indigenous peoples of the North American Southwest, particularly Apachean groups. This work was rescued by Bourke during a sojourn in New Mexico in 1881. Bourke wrote: "At Pojuague, bought an old oil painting taken from the old ruined church . . . . It is a representation . . . of Santiago, mounted on a prancing white charger . . . ." Bourke entered the military at age sixteen, during the Civil War. He received a Medal of Honor for "gallantry in action" at the Battle of Stones River, Tennessee, and later saw action at the Battle of Chickamauga. He attended West Point, and upon graduation in 1869, was assigned as a second lieutenant in the Third U.S. Cavalry, stationed in New Mexico Territory. Bourke served as an aide to General George Crook in the Apache Wars from 1870 to 1886. As Crook's aide, Bourke witnessed every facet of life in the Old West—the battles, wildlife, internal squabbling between the military, the Indian Agency, settlers, and Native Americans. An avid diarist, he wrote in sequential journals throughout his adult life.

While with Crook, Bourke was stationed at Fort Omaha, during which time he met and married Mary F. Horbach of Omaha. The couple later had three daughters, one of whom, Mrs. A. H. Richardson, later gifted the extensive collection of her father's material to Joslyn in 1956.



The patron saint of Madrid, St. Isidore the Farm-Laborer was also much revered in the Spanish colonies. Isidore was a poor peasant working for a master who begrudged him the time he devoted to religious observance. Once, when he was about to rebuke Isidore for neglecting his tasks, the master saw two angels doing his field work for him. This image identifies Isidore's religious significance, but otherwise depicts him as a contemporary peasant in knee breeches and hat. Folk art elements like flat perspective and imperfect anatomy suggest that the painting is the work of a self-taught artist, perhaps of Indian heritage.

Artist Unknown (Bolivian), *St. Isidore (San Isidro Labrador)*, mid to late 19th century, oil on canvas, 32 1/4 x 27 1/2 in., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick H. Lowell, 1965

Timeline

1500 Artist Unknown (Peruvian), *Madonna* 17th century, oil on canvas, 41 x 33 in., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Wiesenberger, 1962.396

1519-21 Hernán Cortés conquers Mexico

1525 1533 Pizarro executes the

1545 First great epidemic in Americas: 800,000 Indians die

1550 1553 University of Mexico opens in Mexico City

1557 First ordinance for painters & guilds in Latin America

1575

1600 1608 Jesuit state of Paraguay established

1609 African slaves rebel in Veracruz

1610 First Jesuit missions in Argentina & Brazil

1623 The Church of Our Lady Cocharcas oldest church in South America

1630 Artist unknown (Bolivian, 19th century), *Saint Onuphrius (San Onofre)*, late 19th century, oil on tin, 12 x 10 in., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick H. Lowell, 1965.669

1673 Catholic support for the arts & encouragement of native artists creates Cuzco School & some of the greatest art treasures

1675

1700 Artist unknown (Bolivian, 19th century), *Our Lady of the Wall retablo (la Virgen en el Paredon)*, 1866, oil on tin, 7 x 4 3/4 in., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Lowell, 1964.106

1737 Our Lady of Guadalupe proclaimed patroness of Mexico

1750

1767 Expulsion of the Jesuits

1775

1781 Destruction of wealth, power & the status of traditional Indian nobility

1800 1816 French Artistic Mission arrives in Rio de Janeiro

1818 Chilean Independence

1819 Simón Bolívar leads armies to liberate Venezuela & Columbia

1821 Mexican Independence

1825 Bolivia achieves independence

BACKGROUND IMAGE: Artist Unknown (Peruvian), *Madonna* (detail), 17th century, oil on canvas, 41 x 33 in., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Wiesenberger, 1962.396





SANTERO OF NAMBE MOLLENO (NEW MEXICAN, ACTIVE 1805–CA. 1850)

**MAJOR SAINT JAMES (SANTIAGO *DE* COMPOSTELLA)**

BEFORE 1820, OIL ON BUFFALO HIDE

JOSLYN ART MUSEUM© OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Gift of Mrs. A.H. Richardson, 1956.99