

New World Marian Paintings

A distinctively New World type of Marian image is referred to as “dressed statue” painting. “Dressed statue” paintings are two-dimensional representations of popular religious statues with cloth garments that give the sculpted figure a triangular, often massive and rigid appearance. The custom of dressing statues can be traced to Spanish traditions that were imported to the New World colonies . *Confridas* (religious fraternities) often assumed responsibility for the maintenance of statues’ garments. Jewelry and regalia - all donated by the faithful to enhance a revered statue - several such Confridas continue this tradition today. Frequently “dressed statue” paintings were adorned with real jewelry attached to the canvases.

The painting depicts a dressed statue of the Virgin of the Rosary. Painted in the tradition of miracle-working cult figures of the Virgin found in native parish churches. This presentation of the Virgin reveals how enthusiastically indigenous peoples of the Americas adopted the Spanish practice of dressing and otherwise embellishing sacred images, a tradition that corresponded to the Precolumbian Andean custom of lavishing precious textiles on ritual objects. Some Christian missionaries encouraged a link between the Virgin and the indigenous earth-mother goddess Pachamama.

Many local Andean versions of the Madonna were venerated with particular fervour, and painted or printed images of such dressed statues—replicating the altar statues, rigid frontal pose, and ornamented pyramidal robe—were widely circulated.



Virgin as Pilgrim
ca. 1733, Anonymous, Peru, Lima School
Oil on canvas, 32 3/4 x 25 1/4 inches
Private Collection Lima



Our Lady of Pomata
1700-50
Peru, Cuzco School
Oil on canvas, 26 x 21 inches



Virgin of Pomata (Virgen de Pomata)
17th Century, Anonymous, Bolivia
Oil on canvas, 183 x 115.5 cm
Museo Nacional de Arte, La Paz



Virgin del Rosario (The Virgin of the Rosary)
Late 18th Century, Artist Unknown, Bolivian; Spanish Colonial
Oil on canvas, 65 5/8 x 61 1/4 inches
Joslyn Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frederick H. Lowell



Detail.
Virgin of Pomata (Virgen de Pomata)
The jeweled, four-petal flower shape on the gown can be traced to ornaments found in tombs as far back as the Moche Civilization (200 B.C. - A.D. 700) on the north coast of Peru and to Inka vessels. Swags of pearls across the gown are characteristic of Andean images of the Virgin.

.....The Virgin of the Rosary: Her History and Her Symbols.....

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, mestizos and Indians. Her worship became so popular that her chapels became the most sumptuous in the Spanish Viceroyalties. Her wardrobe was embellished with pearls and precious stones set by Spanish artisans. Later, skilled Indians and mestizo craftsmen were entrusted with the task of creating crowns, orbs, brooches, rings, and chains often copied from European images.

According to legend, the Virgin Mary herself introduced the devotion of the rosary by giving a string of prayer beads to Saint Dominic (1170-1221) in a vision. The **rosary** takes its name from the **rose**, a symbol of Mary. The Dominican order spread the cult of the Virgin of the Rosary and the use of the rosary as a devotional practice throughout Europe and New Spain (the New World). This devotion consists of a series of meditations and prayers centered around the life of Christ and the Virgin.



Crescent moon

The Virgin, in these New World paintings, is the woman of Revelation 12.1 “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet”, she is surrounded by symbols of her purity. Under her feet the inverted **crescent moon** symbolizes the Immaculate Conception, chastity and the victory over evil. The symbols of the **radiant Sun** and **new Moon** were both important in both Christian and Inka religious belief and meaningful to both civilizations - European and Indian. In some images the **triangular figure of the dressed Virgin** is united with sacred mountains in the Andes.

Discussion Questions

- What do you see? ○ What colors do you see?
- How many symbols can you find?
- What are they? ○ What do they mean?
- What are the similarities and differences among other “dressed statue” paintings?
- What is a custom or tradition?
- What are some of your customs or traditions?



Crown & feather plumes

The Virgin and Christ child are both crowned and holding the rosary. The **crowns** are gold and inlaid with gem stones. Both precious, gold and gems were natural resources of the New World most sought after by the Spanish. The crowns are adorned with **feather plumes**, resembling ostrich feathers, of white, green, and red symbolizing faith, hope, and charity. A crown or **headdress of feathers** is the symbol of America, one of the *Four Parts of the World*. The brilliantly-colored plumes also recall Inka festive headdresses. Feather headdresses, crowns and garments were long associated with ritual objects in the Andes and represent royalty in Inka iconography. Feathers adorned Andean deities. The most obvious association of feathers is with birds, the communicators to the spirit world. Birds are present in Andean iconography as guardian figures. Feathers were important objects of ritual dressing. A crown of feathers was worn by the supreme Inka sun priest.

In most images the **rosary is red** - possibly **red coral**. In the 16th century it was believed that the only way to cross large bodies of water safely was to carry a piece of red or white coral. **Coral** was thought to imbue the wearer with wisdom and provide protection. Even today many people give children coral jewelry to protect them from harm. It is seen as protection, usually as a string of beads, in pictures of the Virgin and Child. The Christ Child holds an **orb** as well as a rosary. The **orb, or globe**, held in the hand of a king, signifies his sovereignty over the world. In religious images the orb signifies Christ as *Salvator Mundi* - Saviour of the World.



Red coral

The Virgin's gown is embellished with strands of **pearls** - pearls symbolize the realm of the feminine - the moon, chastity, patience, purity, beauty, and perfection. The pearl, as the 'most precious jewel', is used as a symbol of salvation and is worth more than all the treasures on earth. Indian women had a preference for lavish jewelry like that shown



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on the Virgin, who is bedecked with a pearl collar and multiple strings of pearls draped in arcs across her gown and held in place by bejewelled bows. Stone studded hair ornaments, earrings, and brooches complete her costume.

The Virgin and Child are surrounded by **flowers** - red, white and pink roses - all symbols of the Virgin - and the rosary. A **garland of roses** surrounding the Virgin is often an allusion to the rosary and are a symbol of heavenly joy. In Christian tradition **red roses** grew from drops of Christ's blood. **White roses** and **white lilies** symbolize purity. The yellow flowers may be **marigolds**. The Native peoples of New Spain claimed the flower's color is tinted with the blood of the Aztecs massacred by the Spaniards in their quest for gold.



Roses



Cherubs

Paintings of the Virgin, either in heaven or on earth, frequently emphasize her role as heavenly mother by incorporating scores of **cherubs**, sometimes with bodies, sometimes merely winged heads. Cherubim (the plural form of cherub) rank as the second highest group in the first hierarchy in the celestial hierarchy and are the first angels mentioned in the Bible: in Genesis cherubim with flaming swords guard the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. The Cherubim know God and worship him, they represent Divine Wisdom and are portrayed in **golden yellow** or **blue**. Seraphim, the highest group of angels are absorbed in perpetual love and adoration. They represent Divine Love. They are usually painted in **red** and sometimes hold burning candles. **Blue** in the wings of Cherubim are the color of the sky, symbolizes Heaven, heavenly love, and truth.

The **gold sunburst**, like a halo, surrounding the head of the Virgin emphasizes the divine and celestial nature of the woman and child. The beautifully carved **architecture niches** and sashed **rich red curtains** stress the distinguished status of the Virgin.

The elaborate ornamentation of the Virgin's flat figure, so typical of Spanish Colonial art, shows the *mestizo* and Indian preference for flat, rather geometric patterns not only in the figure but also in the textiles of the Virgin's robes and mantles. The *Virgin of Pomata*, also a Rosary Virgin, became one of the most popular images of the other of God; she was the patroness of Indians and people of African descent. Attention to the details of iconography and the use of color can assist in dating paintings which are anonymous and can also help identify where a painting was created.



Red curtains

Timeline

Spanish Colonial History & Art

1500

- 1519-21** Hernan Cortes conquers Mexico
- 1533** Pizarro executes the Inka of Peru
- 1542** Prohibition against enslavement of native Mexicans
- 1545** First great epidemic in Americas: 800,000 Indians die
- 1553** University of Mexico opens in Mexico City
- 1557** First ordinance for painters & guilds in Latin America



Madonna, 17th c.
Artist Unknown, Peruvian;
Oil on canvas,

1550

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



Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe, (Our Lady of Guadalupe retablo)
18th century
Oil on tin

1650

1675

1700

- 1737** Our Lady of Guadalupe - patroness of Mexico
- 1767** Expulsion of the Jesuits
- 1781** Destruction of wealth power & the status of traditional Indian nobility



Nuestra Senora Dolorosa, 19th c.
(Our Lady of Sorrows)
Artist Unknown, Bolivian;
19th century
Oil on canvas

1725

1750

1775

1800

- 1816** French Artistic Mission arrives in Rio de Janeiro
- 1818** Chilean Independence
- 1819** Simon Bolivar leads armies to liberate Venezuela & Columbia
- 1821** Mexican Independence
- 1825** Bolivia achieves independence



Virgin del Carmen, c. 1800-1820 (?)
(The Virgin of Mt. Carmel presenting a scapular medal to St. Theresa of Avila)
Artist Unknown

1825

Glossary

Bulto: Three-dimensional religious sculpture

Confridas: Religious fraternities

Criollos: A Spanish American of European, typically Spanish ancestry

Inka: The head of noble family of rulers who conquered the Andean peoples

Mestizo: Descendant of mixed Indian-European parentage

Pachamama: Earth Mother

Retablo: Spanish altar; small paintings on wood or large-scale altarpieces

Santero: Saint maker

Santo: Saint

Santos Figures



Eighteenth-Century Novice
Virgin of the Candelaria (Nuestra Señora de Candelaria)
New Mexico, late 18th century (1775-1799)
Pine, gesso, oil paint
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Gaw Meem, 1985.44
Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico

Originally, imported devotional images decorated churches and private chapels and were used in religious ceremonies. But soon a group of New World artisans began to create santos (saints) of their own. Santos fall into two categories: bultos, or three-dimensional religious sculptures, and retablos, referring to either small paintings on wood or large-scale altarpieces. These mostly self-taught santeros (saint makers) used local woods such as pine, aspen and cottonwood root to develop a unique regional style of santos based on Spanish and Mexican saints. Early New Mexican santos reflected the same subjects and iconography as their colonial counterparts, while expressing a distinct local character and style. In addition to the santeros' use of native woods, they combined imported oil paint and gold leaf with mineral and vegetable paints and pigments used by the Pueblo Indians. They also adopted the Indian practice of using tanned buckskin as a painting surface to create images of saints on hide. Joslyn Art Museum holds one of the most important and rare paintings on hide. Painted by Molleno, Santero of Nambe (active 1805-ca. 1850), the oil on buffalo hide painting is of Saint James, Major (Santiago de Compostella) and was painted before 1820. (Bourke Collection, Gift of Mrs. A.H. Richardson, April 1956).



José Benito Ortega, **Virgin (Virgen)**
New Mexico, ca. 1875-1907
Milled wood, gesso, water-based paint
cape & medallions not original
Bequest of Alan and Ann Vedder, 1990.15
Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico



School of the Laguna Santero, **Virgin of the Rosary** (Nuestra Señora del Rosario)
New Mexico, late 18th-early 19th century (1775-1825). Wood, gesso, cloth, water-based paint
Bequest of Alan and Ann Vedder, 1990.13
Museum of Spanish Colonial Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico