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Virgin of Quito

Ecuador, second-half of 18th century

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**Virgin of Quito
or Our Lady of the Apocalypse**

Anonymous Artist

Ecuador, second half 18th century

Carved, gilded, and polychomed wood, silver wings, silver earrings with pearls

74 x 46 x 24 cm (with wings)

Provenance: Private collection, Argentina

Vivian Velar
Art Historian

The Virgin of Quito, also referred to as the Virgin of the Apocalypse, Winged Virgin of Quito, and Dancing Madonna, stands as a quintessential masterpiece of the Quito School of art. The sculptural representations flourished under the skilled hands of the Quiteño artist Bernardo de Legarda (ca. 1700-1773) during the Spanish viceregal period in Ecuador (Fig. 1).

This portrayal of the Virgin Mary draws heavily from the scriptural depiction articulated in Apocalypse 12:1, which describes her as “A woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” This imagery, laden with symbolic significance representing both the church of God and the Virgin Mary, served as the foundational inspiration for the creation of a notable variant known as “The Virgin of Quito.” Crafted in 1734, Bernardo de Legarda revered wooden sculpture was originally conceived and commissioned as the Lady of the Immaculate Conception, finding its permanent place of veneration at the altar of the Church and Convent of San Francisco in Quito. Its profound spiritual significance has transcended time, as evidenced by the proliferation of innumerable replicas throughout the northern Andes, maintaining its revered status in the hearts of devotees. This rendition became an icon of religious artistry, inspiring the production of numerous replicas across South America (Figs 2&3).

Our beautiful and expressive free-standing Virgin of Quito sculpture here embodies a profound iconographic tradition, maintaining a consistent portrayal of the Virgin characterized by her pose, attire, and accompanying symbolic elements. Her arms outstretched and raised, she exudes a sense of divine grace and power. Her elevated posture suggests a gesture of blessing and protection. The upward movement of her arms creates a dynamic and uplifting effect, conveying a sense of spiritual elevation and transcendence. This gesture, combined with her serene facial expression and graceful posture, symbolizes the Virgin’s triumph over evil, represented by the serpent beneath her feet.

The Virgin’s depiction with wings, a departure from traditional representations, reflects the evolving artistic interpretations within the Ecuadorian context. Influenced by 16th-century European prints, such as Albrecht Dürer’s Revelation series, the Virgin’s dynamic pose and gesture convey both flight and ecstasy



Fig. 1 Bernardo de Legarda (Ecuador, 1700-1773). *Virgin of Quito*, 1743, wood, polychromy. Ethnological Museum, Berlin, Germany

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Fig. 2 Bernando de Legarda (Ecuador, 1700-17730. *Virgin of Quito*, 30cm, polychromed wood, silver. Brooklyn Museum, New York



Fig. 3 *Virgin of Quito*, Ecuador, 1750, 30cm, polychromed wood, silver. Denver Art Museum.



Fig. 4 Albert Dürer, «Apocalyptic Woman and Seven-Headed Dragon,» in *Apocalypse cum Figuris*, woodcut, 1498.

(Fig. 4). Her mantle, adorned with silver stripes, and her mestiza facial features add depth and cultural resonance to the sculpture.

The meticulous polychrome techniques employed, including engravings, gilding, and mecca gilding, enhance the sculpture's aesthetic appeal and reflect the artistic innovation of the Quito school. The use of crystal eyes and flesh colors polished to a glossy porcelain-like finish further accentuate the sculpture's naturalistic qualities.

Beyond its artistic appeal, the Virgin of Quito's enduring influence reflects the profound devotion of the Franciscan order to the Immaculate Conception. The widespread dissemination of replicas throughout the region underscores the imagery's popularity and cultural resonance, serving as a testament to its enduring relevance in religious iconography.

This sculpture of the Virgin of Quito stands as a pivotal exemplar of the Quito School's technical mastery and artistic innovation, embodying the enduring spiritual significance and cultural impact of religious iconography in the Latin American context.





