



JAIME EGUIGUREN

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Captaincy General of Guatemala (present-day
Guatemala), First half of the 18th century

Mirror

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Wood, tortoiseshell, and mother-of-pearl

123 × 88 cm

Provenance: Private collection

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The relationship between the Americas and Asia from the sixteenth century onward manifested itself both in the exchange of raw materials and in the circulation of manufactured goods. Territories such as India, China, and Japan sent their products to the Philippines, from where, through the Manila galleon, they entered the Pacific commercial networks that connected Asia with New Spain and, subsequently, with Europe. This intense transpacific trade enabled the arrival in the Americas of materials, techniques, and ornamental repertoires that were reinterpreted by artists of the viceregal world.

In response to the growing demand of European and American markets, Japan developed during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries an important production of lacquerware intended for export, known as *namban* lacquers. These pieces were primarily applied to objects adapted to Western tastes—such as writing desks, chests, or coffers—and were characterized by their rich decoration and the frequent use of mother-of-pearl inlays, which produced highly valued effects of brilliance and iridescence. After the process of Japanese isolation that began in the seventeenth century, many of these decorative repertoires continued to circulate indirectly through Asian trade and were reinterpreted in different artistic centers of the Hispanic world.

In New Spain, experimentation with materials of Asian origin gave rise to a group of works of great technical refinement, among which those produced using the *enconchado* technique stand out. This method consisted of the inlaying of thin sheets of mother-of-pearl into wooden surfaces. Despite the difficulty of working this material—both hard and brittle—New Spanish artists developed a remarkable technical mastery that allowed for the creation of compositions of great visual richness. The prestige achieved by these works was such that commissions were even produced for the Spanish court, such as the celebrated series of the Conquest of Mexico, attributed to Juan or Miguel González, one of the best-known examples of the use of the *enconchado* technique in New Spanish painting.

The present Guatemalan viceregal mirror reflects the complex convergence of influences that characterized artistic production in the Hispanic world during the Early Modern period. Its structure combines different materials and decorative techniques: carved wood as the structural support, plates of tortoiseshell, and applications of mother-of-pearl arranged using the *enconchado* marquetry technique.

The central element is formed by a wide rectangular molding covered with tortoiseshell plates into which delicate vegetal motifs and scrolls made of mother-of-pearl are inlaid, generating a striking chromatic contrast between the dark background of the tortoiseshell and the iridescent sheen of the mother-of-pearl. These ornamental motifs, organized in continuous bands, correspond to decorative repertoires widely disseminated in the luxury arts of the Hispanic world and related to transpacific exchanges.

The inner molding presents a dentate or serrated profile composed of small triangular elements that create a continuous geometric rhythm around the central space intended to contain the mirror. This decorative device introduces a dynamic element that contrasts with the vegetal development of the main marquetry.

The mirror frame is crowned at the top by a cut-out Baroque pediment carved in wood and decorated with stylized scrolls and leaves. At its center appears a floral motif that functions as the compositional axis and symmetrically organizes the ornamental development of the ensemble. The sides and the base likewise present carved relief elements that reinforce the sculptural character of the piece and create a visual transition between the architectural structure of the carving and the ornamental surface of the marquetry.

The production of *enconchado* furniture achieved notable diffusion within the viceregal world. Various studies have pointed out that many of these pieces produced in Guatemala were destined for the South American market, particularly the Viceroyalty of Peru, where this type of object was highly appreciated. The inter-viceregal circulation of works and materials contributed to the formation of a shared

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decorative language that combined Asian, European, and American influences.

The Captaincy General of Guatemala occupied an especially favorable position for the development of this type of production. The region possessed abundant raw materials, such as tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl from the coasts of the Caribbean and the Pacific, as well as a great diversity of tropical woods—cedar, mahogany, granadillo, palo morado, and logwood—suitable for the manufacture of furniture and mirror frames. Furthermore, its relative proximity to the port of Acapulco, the arrival point of the Manila galleon, facilitated access to materials and objects coming from Asia. At the same time, its geographical position in Central America allowed it to connect the commercial routes linking the territories of New Spain with those of the Viceroyalty of Peru.

Taken together, this mirror constitutes an eloquent example of the complex cultural interaction that characterized the art of the viceregal world. Through the combination of precious materials, refined techniques, and ornamental repertoires of diverse origin, the work reflects how the commercial networks of the Early Modern period enabled the encounter of artistic traditions from Asia, Europe, and the Americas, generating objects that synthesize multiple influences within a distinctive visual language.

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