



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

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Peru  
17th century

**TABLE WITH  
“ENCONCHADO” INLAY**

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***Table with “Enconchado” Inlay***

Wood, tortoiseshell and mother-of-pearl  
Measurements: 71 cm diameter, 72 cm high  
Provenance: Private Collection

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What we have here is an object of unquestionable value from both an artistic and historical point of view. This is an exceptional table, executed using a decorative technique known as “enconchado”, which would have adorned the “sala de estrado” (room with a raised platform on which furniture was arranged in an oriental style) of some major Viceregal or Spanish palace.

If we pay attention to the work’s construction from a compositional perspective, we see a wooden structure divided from top to bottom into four different parts. Firstly, we have the tabletop itself, which is round with a 71-centimeter diameter. Next we come to the stem, made up of an octagonal cross-section, which widens at the bottom forming a semi-curved eight-sided foot. Finally, and serving as the base, there is an ensemble of eight lion’s claw feet with balls located on the apex of each of the eight sides of the bottom of the table.

With regard to its technique of construction, the most notable material aspect of the table we are presenting here is its use of inlay. As such, the artist has chosen to employ a range of different exotic woods and tortoiseshell to create shapes and backgrounds, and mother-of-pearl to generate attractive contrasts and to trace out the ornamental motifs.

The marquetry adorning the entire visible surface of the table includes beautiful and abundant decoration featuring geometric and highly idealised floral motifs that are perfectly symmetrical throughout the composition.

As such, the viewer is first struck by the beauty of the tabletop, with its exquisite and abundant mother-of-pearl inlay on a tortoiseshell background. Respecting the round shape of the surface, the master artisan has devised a perfectly-symmetrical decorative composition coming out of a fleuron located in the middle which, in perfect harmony with the rest of the piece, comprises eight little petals. From here, another eight larger petals emerge, the insides of which are adorned with phytomorphic motifs arranged, once again in line with the overall decorative pattern, in a symmetrical fashion. This second series of larger petals is crowned with scroll motifs and a little chain of semicircles concluding the compositional foreground, giving way to the outer border of the tabletop, also featuring mother-of-pearl inlay. The tabletop has a 10cm skirt running along the entire diameter, lending the composition further dynamism and sumptuous élan.

As we move down the stem, designed in the geometrical form of an octagonal prism, we find that each of its eight sides is decorated with a sort of vertical garland made up of mother-of-pearl inlay. Finally, when we get to the bottom, in the continuation of the stem where it widens providing a sense of movement in its convex curving of each of its eight sides, we observe more symmetrical decoration made up of phytomorphic mother-of-pearl motifs. Concluding the ornamental composition are the eight lion’s claw feet with balls, this time without any inlay decoration, leaving the wood exposed.

These types of pieces of furniture, known on account of their decorative inlay technique as *enconchados*, are the result of the cultural exchange that characterised the artistic panorama of the Latin American viceroyalties in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, in particular that of Peru (**Figs. 1&2**), where we can identify this exceptional piece as having been executed.

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**Fig. 1** Enconchado cabinet, Peru, 18th century.  
Museo Pedro de Osama, Peru.



**Fig. 2** Enconchado cabinet, Peru, 18th century. Museo Pedro de Osama, Peru.

As such, “conch” inlay constituted the main channel for Latin American expression, whereby one series of homegrown cultural elements fused with others arriving from the Pacific trade routes and the influences, tastes and requirements of the European colonial settlers. It is, therefore, if one will forgive the term, an undeniable example of the “mestizo” art that became widespread in Peru.

It is thus that we can contextualise this beautiful inlay table as bearing material and unavoidable testimony to the exchange of influences between Asia and the Americas, in which the trade route between Manila and Acapulco played a major role once the Philippines had been colonised by the Royal Spanish fleet in 1565. The commercial exchange between the two regions was constant from that time onwards, with the Manila galleons transporting a huge quantity of exotic products such as silks, porcelain, ivory, pearls and other luxury items to the port of Acapulco. This trade route also brought the first pieces executed in mother-of-pearl to Peru, whose luxurious and exceptional qualities were the wonder of the colonial elites. It was as such, and given the burgeoning demand for this sort of exotic, luxury items, that a hybrid artform came into being, whereby technical elements of traditional oriental marquetry were adapted to the aesthetic tastes and skills of Latin American artisans, while also being combined with imported western decorative artforms.

Pieces of furniture were the most popular items among colonial settlers and the viceregal elite classes, due to the sumptuous appeal of their material components and the sophistication of their elaborate techniques, so we can identify an extensive array of objects including boxes, baskets, chests, trunks, cabinets and tables, all of which made the journey to the old continent as part of the furnishings

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brought back by returning families who had successfully sought their fortunes in the Americas (**Fig. 3**).

The above should help to explain how the aesthetic nature of this item, at the time a far cry from anything previously seen in Europe, transformed this both local and exotic artform into an object of desire for major European collectors, with it being by no means unusual to find visitors marvelling at such exquisite pieces of mother-of-pearl inlay furniture in major international museums including New York's Hispanic Society of America, the LACMA in Los Angeles, the National Museum of Viceroyalty (Tepotzolán), Mexico City's Franz Mayer Museum or Madrid's National Museum of Decorative Arts, to name just a few (**Fig. 4**).



**Fig. 3** Enconchado table, Peru, 18th century. Museo Pedro de Osama, Peru.



**Fig. 4** Chest. Wood, tortoiseshell, inlaid mother-of-pearl, Perú, 18th century, LACMA.

## Bibliografía

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