

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

Cuzco School (Peru)
Late 17th century - Early 18th century

**CHEST WITH A RELIGIOUS
SCENE AND LANDSCAPES**

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES



Anonymous Authors
Cuzco School (Peru)

Chest with a Religious Scene and Landscapes

Painting Inside: Late 17th century - Early 18th century
Paintings Outside: Second Third of the 18th century

Wooden chest with iron fittings, handles, and lock. Lid of the chest lined in studded leather, with S motifs and the IHS monogram. Paintings on stucco, representing a Eucharistic celebration in the inside and scenes of hunting, fishing, and shepherding in the outside.

24 cm x 88 cm x 52 cm [9.45 in x 34.65 in x 20.47 in]

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

A few details to picture the pictorial School of Cuzco

Since it was founded in 1542, until its disintegration in 1824, the Viceroyalty of Peru, with its changing borders, was one of the most important cultural centers in colonial America. The practice of painting was cultivated very early because it was used as an evangelization tool. It developed from Italian, Spanish, and Flemish models that came from the Old World, and the settlement of European artists, such as the Jesuit Bernardo Bitti in 1575, who introduced the Mannerist current.

Due to the search started by indigenous painters of a self-identity recognizable in their creations, developed out of necessity, of an anthropological root, to depict their sensitivity when understanding reality, local features gradually prevailed over Western traditions. This is how the Cuzco School was born in the last third of the 17th century, which reached its height during the following century, expanding its influence to the physical and temporal limits of the viceroyalty.

The turning point was in 1688. The abuses inflicted on indigenous and mestizo painters by their Spanish colleagues were most effectively denounced by means of the refusal of the former to participate in the construction of the arc for the Corpus Christi procession of that year, which resulted in the disarticulation of the guild which had brought them together since 1649, a decision which was supported by the authorities to avoid racial conflicts. The Spanish, who were a minority and were devoid of aboriginal labor in their workshops, partnered with guilders and sculptors, while native artists forged a new path for plastic expression once they were free from the constrictions of a corporation that was alien to them.

Mestizo painting ended up overshadowing the Westernizing trends. Although themes, iconographies, compositions, technical procedures, etc. learned in Europe did prevail, their aesthetic was generated independently, based on assertiveness criteria. Rejection to Baroque tenebrist realism and Academicism constituted an idealized, anecdotal, spontaneous, decorative art of vibrant colors, conventional forms, stereotyped figures, and naive narrative, aspects that prevailed over mastering perspective, light, and anatomy. The intention of these

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

works is more to delight the senses than to put intellect to test. They are provided with an unquestionable grace and appeal.

Some distinctive features of mestizo painting were proliferation of original issues such as *ángeles arcabuceros* (arquebusier angels), profuse application of gold leaf to imitate the sumptuousness of brocades and jewelry, the appearance of characters with indigenous features and clothing, or a palette based on red, ochre, green, blue, and white shades.

The prominence given to landscape is inherent to this school, prevailing over a human presence, which sometimes appears as a mere pretext, a stage preceding its establishment as an individual genre within pictorial categories. The succession of leafy trees of flaky foliage, fertile valleys, and soft hills, flooded with a clear and uniform light, which end in a rocky horizon, covered in a blue mist, where water surfaces and architectures are inserted, are all elements faithfully taken from Flemish panels of artists such as Joachim Patinir (c. 1480-1524).

While Patinir spread animals in his backgrounds, since 1660 exotic birds in mid-flight or standing on the vegetation became a constant which identifies the school, catching the observer's attention with their feathers, abundance, and exaggerated size. Macaws, herons, hummingbirds, crested golden orioles, cocks-of-the-rock, etc. can be distinguished together with other imaginary birds (Fig. 1).

The importance that had never before been given to landscape in those latitudes and the unprecedented inclusion of birds in the aforementioned manner have been attributed to Diego Quispe Tito (1611-1681), one of the most relevant painters from Cuzco. In these earthly paradises there was a glimpse of yearning for mentally escaping to the primitive indigenous habitat, a nostalgic recreation of the state before the landing of the conquerors. It would be interesting to add the well-known myth of the noble savage, which arose from such contact and was developed in literature during the Modern Age, an idea that humans are essentially good, and society is the cause of their moral perversion (Figs 2-).

In any case, Cuzco School painters were fully aware of the fact that they were doing something different and peculiar. This is evidenced by documents such as a contract signed in 1754,

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

which will be dealt with again in these pages, mentioning a “new art” and clarifying that the works would be executed “*according to custom within the masters of our art*”.



Fig. 1 Joachim Patinir, The transition from lagoon Estigia, 1520-1524.
Madrid. National Museum of the Prado.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES



Fig. 2 Anonymous, Flemish, *Penitent Saint Jerome*, 1525-1530. Madrid, National Museum of the Prado.



Fig.3 Diego Quispe Tito, *Penitent Saint Jerome*, c. 1670.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES



Fig. 4 Circle of Diego Quispe Tito, *The legend of Saint Sophronia*, late 17th century. New York, Brooklyn Museum.



Fig. 5 Anonymous from Cuzco, *Saint Mary of Egypt and Saint Zosimus of Palestine in the desert*, late 17th century. Private collection.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES



Fig. 6 Anonymous from Cuzco, *Saint Sebastian's carriage* (within the series *Procession of Corpus Christi*), c. 1675. Cuzco, Museum of Religious Art of the Archbishopric.



Fig. 7 Anonymous from Cuzco, *Ángel arcabucero*, late 17th century-early 18th century. Museum of Salamanca (Spain).

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES



Right Side



Back Panel



Back Panel

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

The prestige gained by Cuzco painting in the last decades of the 17th century and the particular devotion, in the privacy of homes, promoted by the Council of Trent, led to a unique situation that affected both local art and economy during the following century. Commissions increased significantly, turning workshops into authentic mass production factories which stocked merchants who, in turn, sold the works to other cities, such as Trujillo, Ayacucho, Arequipa, and Lima, or even faraway places in the current of territories of Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia. The enormous number of orders to do in a short-term limited the artists' creative capacity, who were forced to resort to repetition, loss of quality, and stagnation. A good example of this industrial activity is the aforementioned contract of 1754, in which Mauricio García and Pedro Nolasco agree to deliver Gabriel Rincón 435 paintings in seven months, which meant they had to do more than two paintings a day.

In short, the essence of Cuzco School of painting may be summed up with the following words by the experts José de Mesa and Teresa Gisbert: *“The phenomenon of Cuzco is unique and, from the pictorial and cultural point of view, marks the moment when the American successfully faces the challenge of constant pressure of Western culture”*.



Inside

Formal and Iconographic Analysis of the Painted Chest

External surface of the lid



The wooden lid that closes the chest is lined in the outside with leather embellished by studs, some of which are of a greater diameter and gadrooned, forming S motifs. In the center, inserted in a cartouche of a rounded rectangle shape, we can see the monogram in small capitals of the name of Jesus with the cross overlapped.

The acronym IHS is one of the oldest symbols of Christianity. It includes the first three letters of Jesus' name in Greek, Ἰησοῦς (Iesous), in capital letters ΙΗΣΟΥΣ. When Latin became the main language of this region, the sigma (Σ) was replaced by the letter S and the eta (Η) was assimilated as the Latin H.

It was the Franciscan order which, since the 15th century, promoted the devotion to the name of Jesus, using the Christogram as a representation of divinity itself. In particular, Saint Bernardine of Siena (1380-1444) frequently resorted to it in his sermons, showing his followers a table with IHS painted in Gothic letters inside a Sun. Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) adopted it as an emblem of the Society of Jesus, which led to the ultimate dissemination of the ideogram throughout the world.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

Painting inside the lid



The painter depicted a heterogeneous group of worshippers attentively participating in the culmination of the Eucharist, piously kneeling, the women with their heads covered, and the men without their hats as a sign of respect. The ethnic features and clothing tell us of the presence of criollo, mestizo, and indigenous people, as well as of their social status: in the first couple, the richness of embroidery and fabrics, the sword carried by the gentleman and the pearl necklace and earrings worn by the lady denote their well-to-do position.



JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

In fact, men's clothing, constituted by long jackets, knickers, socks, and a flashy rectangular collar of an intricate lace that falls on the chest, allows us to date the painting no earlier than the period between the years before and after the turn of the 17th to the 18th century, by comparison with other works which have a more precise dating (Figs. 8 & 9).



Fig. 8 Anonymous from Cuzco, *Carriages of the Brotherhoods of Saint John the Baptist and Saint Peter*, detail (within the series *Procession of Corpus Christi*), c. 1675. Cuzco, Museum of Religious Art of the Archbishopric.



Fig. 9 Anonymous from Cuzco, *Wedding of Martín de Loyola and Beatriz Ñusta, and of Juan de Borja and Lorenza Ynga de Loyola*, detail, late 17th century. Cuzco, church of the Society of Jesus.

As a member of the Cuzco School, the author did not pay as much attention to the realism of the portrait, perspective perfection or correct application of lights and shadows as to transmitting his original conception of art and beauty through the decorative (e.g. the design of the carpet and the altar frontal), the anecdotal (the altar boy turning his head towards his mate or the person looking directly at the observers, introducing them into the scene), and lively colors, predominantly green and earth tones, opposite colors on the color wheel, details that give the painting a special candor.



JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

The priest, assisted by three acolytes, consecrates the bread and the wine with his back to the parishioners, as it was usual until the Liturgical Reform carried out by the Second

Vatican Council (1962-1965). Above the altar there is a painting representing Saint Joseph holding Infant Jesus in his arms, in a blessing pose with his right hand, and the world globe, a symbol of the universality of his message, on his left hand. The Saint can be identified by the floral rod on which he is leaning: according to the New Testament apocrypha, when Mary turned 14 years old, the High Priest summoned all the unmarried men of the house of David. Even though he was much older, Joseph of Nazareth was among them. The candidates were ordered to leave a crook before the altar, and the one whose crook bloomed would win the maiden's hand. The Holy Spirit came down like a dove over Joseph's, making it bloom. Madonna lilies are an allegory of their virginal marriage.

Until the 16th century, Saint Joseph was systematically disregarded while the Virgin was exalted, because the intention was to show Christ's divinity, born of an immaculate young girl by the intervention of the Holy Spirit, and to prevent people from thinking that Joseph could be his biological father. This is why he was depicted as an old man with a white beard and a bald head, limiting his role to a mere extra, or, at best, a protector, in the scenes of Jesus' childhood. Even in some medieval literature works, he was mocked as if he were a jester.

The current iconography of Saint Joseph was developed later, in parallel with the evolution of his worship, and both were fixed in the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Artists in the 16th century began rejuvenating him until he was given the appearance of a 40-year old man, in the prime of his life, a path started down by theologians of early 15th century: in the Council of Constance (1414-1418), Jean Gerson (1363-1429), the Chancellor of the University of Paris, maintained that Saint Joseph was younger than 50 years old when he married Mary, as implied by the biblical texts (including events

from the Flight into Egypt to the daily maintenance of the Sacred Family), contradicting assertions such as Saint Epiphanius' (c. 315-403), who had maintained that Joseph had gotten married at the age of 89.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

After the Counter-Reformation, he became one of the most revered saints of the Catholic Church. The final recognition is attributed to Saint Teresa of Jesus (1515- 1582), who considered Saint Joseph as her protector, the father of her soul, and she dedicated the first convent she founded in Ávila to him. The Spanish mystic even told her personal experience regarding Joseph of Nazareth in her autobiography *Libro de la vida*. In addition, for example, with the initials of their names, Jesuits created the trinity acrostic J. M. J. (Jesus, Mary, and Joseph). Finally, Pope Pius IX in 1870 proclaimed him Patron of the Universal Church.

With a renewed image and meaning (evidenced by the popularization of his name), Saint Joseph was honored by being represented with the same importance as the Virgin in unprecedented iconographies, such as the Earthly Trinity or the Double Trinity, and in isolation holding Infant Jesus in his arms or grabbing him by his hand, expressing paternal love. These issues were recurring in paintings of the Cuzco School. No wonder Saint Joseph is the Patron of Peru (Figs. 10 & 11).

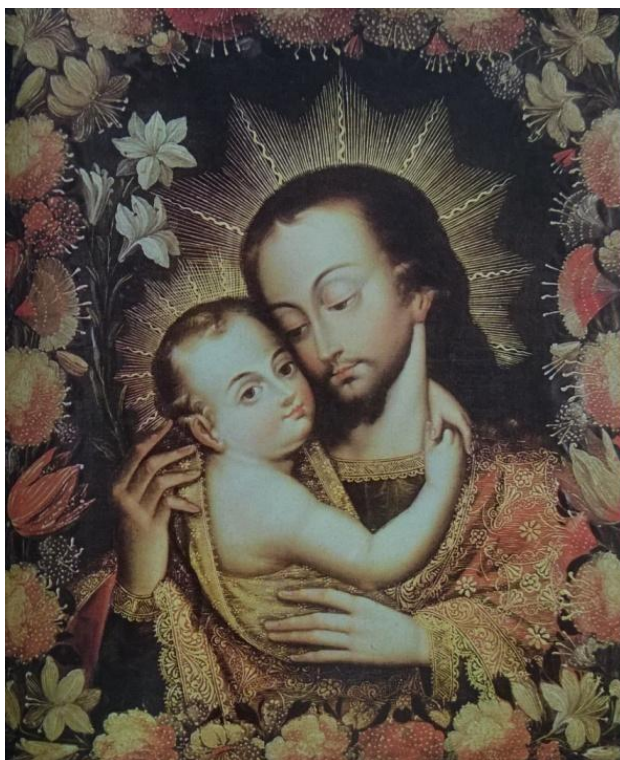


Fig. 10 Anonymous from Cuzco, *Saint Joseph holding Infant Jesus in his arms*, late 17th century. Private collection.

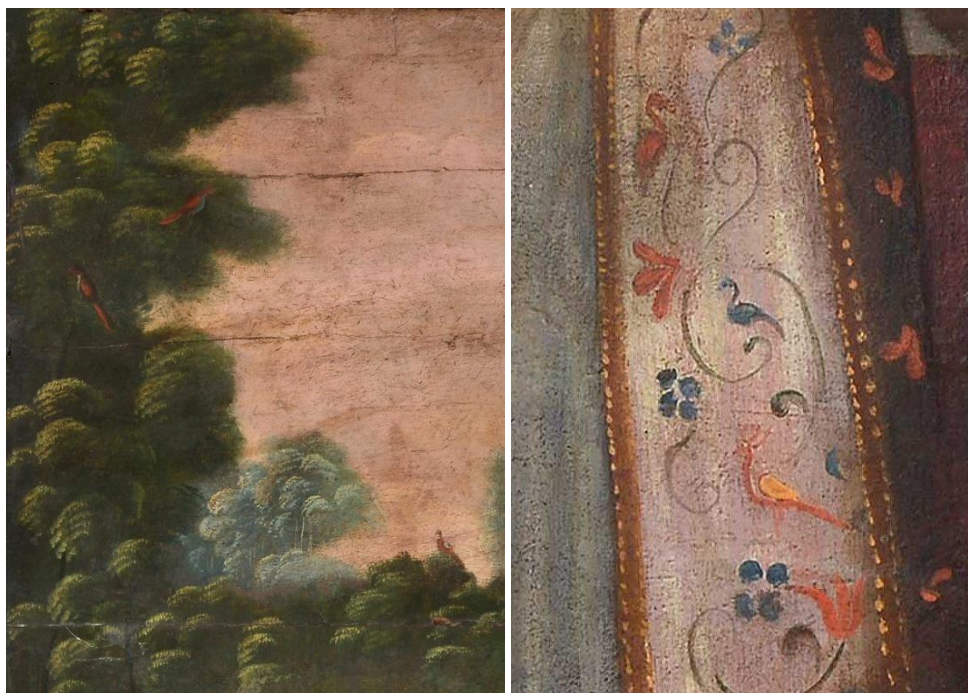


Fig. 11 Anonymous from Cuzco, *Saint Joseph and Infant Jesus walking hand in hand*, 18th century. Unknown location.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

Going back to the painting in the chest, a wide opening in the chapel shows an exuberant forest where exotic birds are perching, which are paralleled by the ones embroidered in the priest's chasuble. Thus the sacred place is joined to nature, the most sublime divine creation.



Paintings in the outside of the chest

While the previous painting shows a balance of prominence between the human figure and the landscape, in the panels that decorate the outside of the chest, the human figure is made smaller by its greatness. This fact, together with a more delicate and looser construction, and with a more calibrated and lighter use of colors, allows us to establish not only a different authorship, but also a later date, approximately in the mid-decades of the 18th century.

The shepherdess and her sheep herd (front), the fisher (left side), the hunter who, shotgun in hand, chases a buck (right side), and his mate guided by two hounds (back) are developed in an idyllic, unalterable country setting, where there seem to be no lurking dangers or inclemencies, with the ground carpeted with flowers and the heights full of singing birds.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES



Left side



Right side



Back panel

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES



Front Panel

This type of secular and largely landscape paintings, only intended to delight the sense of sight, proliferated as the 18th century proceeded, sponsored by French courtly circles. The Cuzco School cultivated it, expressed it in structures such as chests, folding screens, wardrobes, doors, etc. However, there were precedents: similar paintings by Diego Quispe Tito, for example, one of a river and a hunters' ship plowing through it, and another one of hunters warming themselves up by a bonfire.



The combination in one single space of religious and secular themes has its analogy in the frescos of the chapterhouse in Saint Catherine convent in Cuzco. A decorative edge shows earthly pleasures such as banquets, concerts, hunting, courtship, etc. with overlapped hermits, penance models, the only source of redemption of sins (Fig. 12).

Fig. 12 Unknown author from Cuzco, *Hunting Scene*, 18th century, Madrid, José Félix Llopis Foundation

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES



Fig. 13 Tadeo Escalante (attrib.), *Saint Anthony Abbot and Hunting scene*, last third of the 18th century.

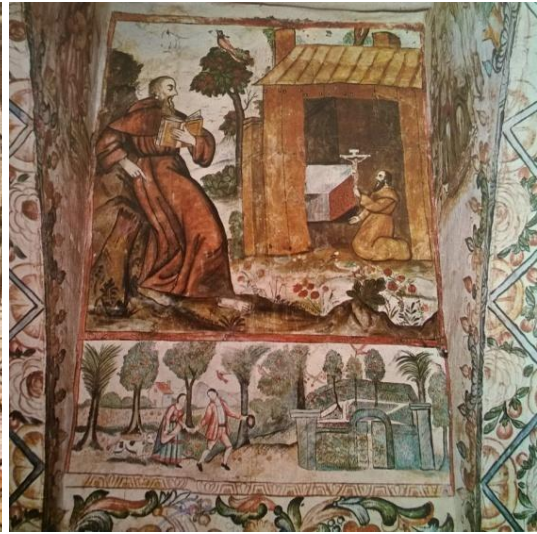


Fig. 14 Tadeo Escalante (attrib.), *Franciscan hermit and courting couple in a garden*, last third of the 18th century. Cuzco, Saint Catherine convent.

In fact, it is in the convent of Saint Catherine where the chest with a nun and a friar kneeling before the Immaculate Conception, surrounded by the symbols of the Marian litanies, painted inside the lid is exhibited. The adoration is developed in a landscape that is similar to the ones that have been analyzed in the previous pages.



Fig. 15 Anonymous from Cuzco, *Chest with a religious scene*, 18th century. Cuzco, Saint Catherine convent.

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

Bibliography

- BENAVENTE VELARDE, T., *Pintores cusqueños de la colonia*. Cuzco: Municipality of Cuzco, 1995.
- CASASECA, A., *Pintura cuzqueña en el Museo de Salamanca, Monografías del Museo de Salamanca collection, number 1*. Valladolid: Consejería de Cultura y Bienestar Social, 1989.
- CASTEDO, L., *The Cuzco circle*. Nueva York: The American Federation of Arts, 1976.
- COSSÍO DEL POMAR, F., *Historia crítica de la pintura en el Cuzco*, (Dissertation). Cuzco: University of Cuzco, 1922.
- DE MESA, J., "La pintura cuzqueña (1540-1821)", *Cuadernos de Arte Colonial*, number 4, 1988, pp. 5-42.
- DE MESA, J. y GISBERT, T., *Historia de la pintura cuzqueña*. Lima: Augusto N. Wiese Foundation, Wiese Bank, 1982.
- PAGE, C. A., "La vida de Santa Rosa de Lima en los lienzos del convento de Santa Catalina de Córdoba (Argentina)", *Anales del Museo de América*, number 17, 2009, pp. 28-41.
- RÉAU, L., *Iconografía del arte cristiano. Iconografía de los santos. De la G a la O*, book 2, vol. 4. Barcelona: Ediciones del Serbal, 1997.
- VV. AA., *Arte y cultura del Cuzco*, (exhibition catalog). Santillana del Mar: Fundación Santillana, Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, 1982.
- VV. AA., *La procesión del Corpus Domini en el Cuzco / La procession du Corpus Domini à Cuzco*, (exhibition catalog). Seville: Litografía Sáenz; Paris: Unión Latina; 1996.
- VV. AA., *Pintura Cuzqueña*, (exhibition catalog). Madrid: Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana, 1982.

Nuria Lázaro Milla

Doctor in History of Art

JAIME EGUIGUREN

ART & ANTIQUES

