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ARTS & ANTIQUES

**“ESTRADO”
COMMODE**

Colombia, Pasto, 18th century

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Wooden lacquered, painted, silvered and gilded

Measurements: 56.5 x 50 x 38.5 cm

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Spectacular small wooden lacquered “*estrado commode*”, which is rectangular in shape with a truncated pyramid-shaped lid. It has two drawers, with the piece opening in the middle and on the top. The rectangular box has a beautiful oriental-inspired decorated black stand. Usually used for storing gloves, ribbons, and other objects belonging to women, they were usually reserved for use in the “*estrado*” in the noble ladies’ rooms. It is decorated all over with flowers, baskets, vases and birds, on a gold shimmery lustrous background.

The front of the commode has two drawers and two openings, in the middle and on top of the truncated lid. It is decorated with a symmetrical decoration throughout with different kinds of flowers, peonies, carnations and poppies, motifs taken from Chinese and Japanese paintings, and textiles. In the middle of the commode, there is what seems to be a hummingbird smelling a flower between the upper and lower keyholes. On the truncated pyramid is a basket with an arrangement of flowers and fruits, taken from European still life paintings.

The sides have the same type of foliage decoration, flowers, scrolls, leaves and branches, but with a new model of a basket or vase on a stand.

The back has a beautiful bird of paradise with spread wings standing delicately on a branch. In the center two new baskets models with flowers and fruit are depicted.

On top, the lid depicts a hummingbird smelling a flower or a piece of fruit, surrounded by grapes and other fruits. This astonishingly beautiful small piece of furniture is outstandingly well preserved and is decorated with an enormous variety of floral species, birds and baskets. All the motifs are marked with incisions to reinforce the patterns. The artisan who made this “*estrado commode*” had an incredible fantasy which can be appreciated in the variety of flora and fauna reminiscent of the Garden of Eden.

The layers of *mopa mopa* resin, green, pale blue, yellow, blue and white, alternate with silver and gold leaves creating an embellished surface related to Andean, Oriental and European motifs.

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Sala de Estrado

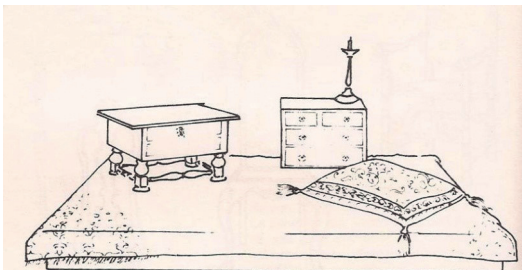
The room before 1780, the “*estrado*” was an Hispanic institution that was adopted in America from the beginning of colonization and lasted almost three centuries. This was an elevated place in the house, like a raised platform. The “*estrado*” was exclusively used by women and its main identifying features were that it was covered in rugs, cushions and very rich cloths and tapestries. The women sat on the cushions of this “*estrado*” and here they welcomed their friends, with whom they gossiped, drank “*mate*” and did handicrafts such as sewing and embroidery. The origins of this “*estrado*” are oriental and Islamic; only women from the upper classes and nobles had this “*estrado*”. It also housed small pieces of furniture such as little tables, caskets, braziers, trunks, that are called “*muebles ratones*” always in jacaranda, and caskets, boxes and small commodes with inlaid tortoiseshell ivory and mother-of-pearl, or Barniz de Pasto as our very unusual “*estrado commode*” described above.



Estrado, Sala de Estrado, El Greco Museum, Toledo.



Extraordinary unusual silver Estrado Table, Spanish colonial, 18th century, 38 x 38 x 38 cm. Jaime Eguiguren Art and Antiques Collection.



Estrado, Sala de Estrado, 18th century, Museum of Arte Antiga, Lisboa (Portugal).



Sala de Estrado, Museum Histórico Casa de Allende, Mexico City.

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Barniz de Pasto (Portable Desk), circa 1684, wood, silver fittings, Hispanic Society of America in NYC.



Barniz de Pasto (Portable Desk), second half 17th century, Private Collection.

Barniz de Pasto

From the 16th through the 18th century, the indigenous, African, Asian, and European artists and artisans of colonial Latin America created some of the most extraordinary decorative arts ever produced, drawing freely upon the rich artistic traditions and techniques of the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. Hybrid art forms emerged as indigenous media and techniques were adapted to European forms. European designs were incorporated into the indigenous arts, and Asian motifs, techniques, and forms were reinterpreted by both European and indigenous artisans.

In general the decorative arts of colonial Latin America followed the pattern of the major European stylistic movements, from Renaissance to Neoclassical, but regional preferences permitted some styles and motifs to endure long beyond their passing in Europe. For example, 16th-century Renaissance C-scrolls and Mannerist strapwork cartouches remained popular motifs in the arts of the Andes well into the 18th century. The enormous wealth of the viceregal capitals of Mexico City and Lima attracted more artists and artisans, which accounts for the disproportionately large number of decorative arts produced around these centers throughout the colonial period. Taking their inspiration from Asian porcelains and lacquers, Colombian artisans perfected the indigenous *mopa mopa* lacquer technique, which they combined with gold and silver leaf, transforming wooden chests and writings boxes into luxury objects destined for European nobility.

Mopa Mopa lacquer technique

The *mopa mopa* is a translucent greenish resin which is the principal medium for the production of the lacquer objects generally known as *barniz de Pasto* produced in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru from colonial times up to the present day. The pre-Columbian cultures also used it, as beads of *mopa mopa* were discovered in tombs of the Pasto Indians. During the colonial period the Indians from the Sibundoy Valley in Colombia delivered the *mopa mopa* resin in blocks to the lacquer artisans who processed it and colored the resin to apply it to the different objects they produced. The botanical origin of the *mopa mopa* resin was identified in 1977 by the Colombian botanist Luis Eduardo Mora-Osejo. The *mopa mopa* resin is obtained from the *Elaeagia pastoensis* Mora tree, native to the tropical woods of the southwest Colombian mountains, near Mocoa, department of Putumayo.

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Procedure

The transformation of the *mopa mopa* resin blocks into a decorative lacquer was a procedure that began by cleaning it of leaves and dust. Then it was chewed, boiled and melted to make it elastic enough to stretch it into thin layers and laminate into foils. When it was thin enough it, was dyed with organic and mineral colors. It was stretched again until very thin layers were obtained. Then from the center of the foils the motifs were cut and were applied with heat to the wooden objects. This lacquer was permanent, impermeable and resistant to organic solvents.

During the colonial times, there were two independent traditions related to the *mopa mopa* lacquer: one related to the Andean culture of Peru, Ecuador and Bolivia, applied to the *queros* and the other one done in Pasto, and in Quito more related to European and Asiatic motifs and subjects.

The first reference of the production of *mopa mopa* lacquer objects dates from 1666, but it was already widely known in Europe, where the objects created using this technique were much sought after and were already part of large important collections. During the 18th century, many explorers and botanists who traveled to Latin America visited Pasto and described this procedure. The famous naturalist Alexander von Humboldt visited Pasto in 1801 and registered in his diary many details regarding the history, manufacture and trade of the Pasto lacquer. He also identified the organic colors used for dyeing the layers.

What distinguished the artisans from Pasto from the indigenous tradition was the technique known as “*barniz brillante*”. It was named as such because it combined the *mopa mopa* lacquer with layers of gold and silver sheets. Different layers were applied combining the motifs and the colors as onion layers to obtain some relief too. On the lacquer, incisions were made to achieve details, in the case of flowers and leaves, nerves and fine details.

During the colonial period, the *barniz de Pasto* lacquer was used in the decoration of many religious or secular objects such as boxes, caskets, coffers, writing desks, frames, barber dishes, dishes, plates. The designs of the 17th century include flowers and real or mythological animals. All these very early motifs clearly show their European origin, such as drawings, etchings, paintings and illuminated manuscripts. In the second half of the 17th century and during the 18th century, the motifs are very eclectic. European, south American and Asian motifs such as squirrels and grapes, very common in the Chinese and Japanese paintings from the 16th century, peonies and carnations from porcelain and Chinese textiles, the bird of paradise, green man or man of the forest, pomegranate flowers from the Andean culture, the double headed Habsburg eagle and European heraldic, mythology and still life paintings, which include a variety of flowers.

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