



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

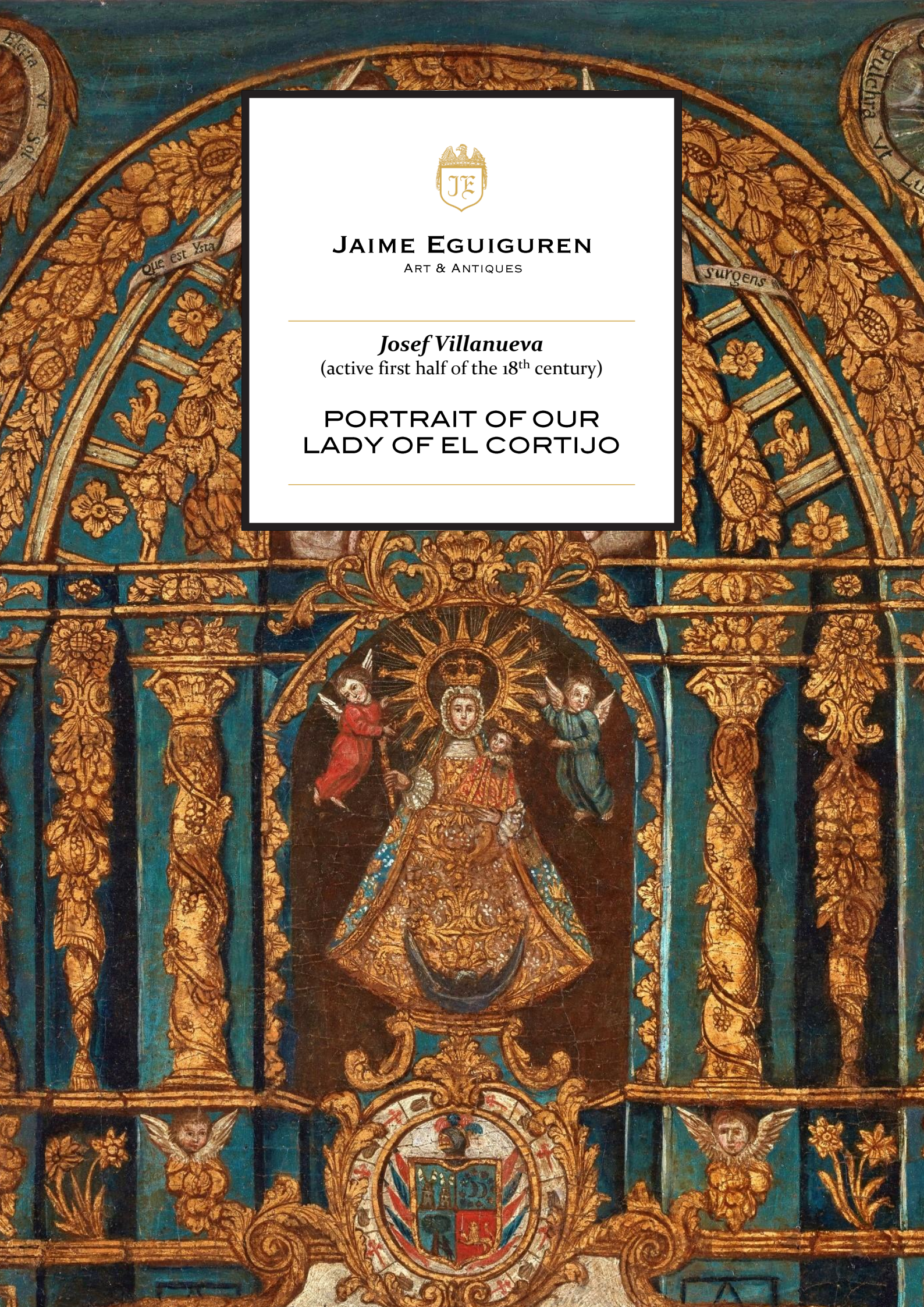
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*Josef Villanueva*  
(active first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century)

**PORTRAIT OF OUR  
LADY OF EL CORTIJO**

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**Josef Villanueva**

Potosí (Bolivia)

(active first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century)

## ***Portrait of Our Lady of El Cortijo***

Oil on canvas

53 x 38 cm

Provenance: Private Collection, Spain.

Signed: Josef Villanueva â 16 de Enero de 1737

Inscription: R. de N S<sup>a</sup> del Cortijo de la Villa de Soto de los Cameros Obpdo. de Calaorra Cop.<sup>de</sup> su original â devocion de D<sup>n</sup> Antonio de Benito y Vallejo Natural de dicha Villa por Josef Villanueva â 16 de Enero de 1737

Whichever road one takes into Soto de los Cameros (**Fig. 1**), the first thing one sees is the Templo del Cortijo (Temple of the Grange) crowning the town, like a banner representing the identity of those who live there. As it happens, it was in a cheerful grange owned by a respectable family of farmers where St. Indaletius<sup>1</sup>, in his long travels across Spain, deposited the image of Our Lady, under the title of El Cortijo, to popularize devotion to the Virgin. This worship has continued down the generations to the present day, and across borders, as an icon for personal devotion, and has reached a myriad of places in the Americas through the strong ties to the Spanish Fatherland by those who longed for home.<sup>2</sup>



**Fig. 1:** General view of the town of Soto de los Cameros, La Rioja (Spain), with the Chapel of Nuestra Señora del Cortijo in the background.

The following paragraph from the Soto-native, Silverio Domínguez, invites the reader to ponder briefly on this work titled *Our Lady of the Grange*, and to be carried away by the short tale, empathizing and creating an emotional bond with the contracting party of this canvas, even if no information exists beyond what this brief study presents, aiming, not to delve into the person's life but, rather, to catalogue the possible origin of the painting and its painter as reliably as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Indaletius is also known as one of Seven Apostolic Men sent by Sts. Peter and Paul to continue with the evangelization carried out by their Master James the Great during the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. He was the first bishop of Almería.

<sup>2</sup> Silverio Domínguez, *La Virgen Del Cortijo, Episodios históricos donde se venera esta imagen*. Logroño, Imprenta de Federico Sanz, Estación, 1888. pp.14-18.

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*“For any Soto native, the feeling of homeland is condensed in Our Lady of the Grange because she represents Spain, our province, our town, our own individual self: by remembering Our Lady, one remembers one’s youth fondly, flooded by the most delicate feelings of the soul, forming the intimate essence that is the feeling of homeland taken to fanaticism, yes; a fanaticism that is legitimate and necessary for those kept apart from their homeland, to find in it comfort for their affliction and hope for their return, which constitute the highest ambition of those who are absent, the joy of any expatriate. Soto natives are overcome by emotion at Our Lady of the Grange because in her shrine our lips have spoken our first words; in her shadow we have spent our youth; she has served as shelter to cure our pains; and, at night, when slumber closed our eyelids, the tolling of her bell would sweetly lull our sleep while our lips spoke the salutation: in our affliction and our joy we turned to Our Lady of the Grange, shaping an inseparable entity of family and individuals.”<sup>3</sup>*

Several miracles are attributed to Our Lady of El Cortijo: the *Miracle of José González Torecilla*, whom she saved from a charging bull, the animal transfixed while in charging position, the *Miracle Cure of Don Inocente Romer*, to whom Our Lady returns his sanity, the *Healing of Little Girl Ambrosia*, who suffers rickets and is unable to walk on her own and, finally, she is also attributed with *The End of Cholera in 1855*.

Inscription on the Cartouche: *“R. de N S<sup>a</sup> del Cortijo de la Villa de Soto de los Cameros Obpdo. de Calahorra Cop.<sup>de</sup> su original â devocion de D<sup>n</sup> Antonio de Benito y Vallejo Natural de dicha Villa por Josef Villanueva â 16 de Enero de 1737.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Silverio Domínguez, *La Virgen Del Cortijo, Episodios históricos donde se venera esta imagen* (Our Lady of the Grange, Historical episodes where this image is venerated). Logroño, Printworks of Federico Sanz, Estación, 1888. pp.14-18

<sup>4</sup> “Portrait of Our Lady of the Grange of the Town of Soto de los Cameros, Bishopric of Calahorra, copy of the original by devotion of Don Antonio de Benito y Vallejo, born in said town, by Josef Villanueva on 16 January 1737.”

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Although the canvas whose origin we are trying to elucidate in these few lines is the only work known by the hand of its author, we can place it within the historical-artistic framework of the school of Potosí in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. More precisely, the date of production, as the cartouche indicates, was 16 January 1737.

In claiming it originated from Potosí, we rely exclusively on the formal and compositional analysis of the work, as stated below. This type of Marian advocacy represented in pictorial supports such as canvases, panels or murals, corresponds to the genre of *painted sculptures* that depict popular devotional effigies shown within their respective altars. As the inscription states, this canvas is a *Retrato de Nuestra Señora del Cortijo de la Villa de Soto de los Cameros* (*Portrait of Our Lady of El Cortijo from the Town of Soto de los Cameros*) (**Fig. 2**). Villanueva's representation of the High Altar includes a niche within which the Crowned Virgin appears in bright, starry splendor. Standing on a half-moon symbolizing female divinity and fertility, she is presented at the center of the composition, facing forward and cradling the Holy Child in her left arm and holding a candle in her right hand. She is wearing an elaborate robe, decorated with gold brocade, and two angels hold her bright splendor. Decorations with plant motifs with brilliant gilt motifs superimposed upon them present a peculiar aesthetic effect characteristic of paintings from Cuzco, Quito, Potosí and New Spain.



**Fig. 2:** Josef Villanueva, *Our Lady of El Cortijo*, Jaime Eguiguren Art & Antiques Collection.

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We find several decorative architectural elements that rise up towards the vault, where we observe a group of peering cherubs, lit by a glowing starfish, an allegory of intervention for the human race. Above these cherubs, the following cartouche: *Quaest Ysta Que pro greditur Quasi Aurora con surgens*, together with the cartouches of the Sun: *Elefra ut Sol*, and the Moon: *Pulchra ut Luna*, located on the top left and top right-hand corners of the composition respectively, form an extract of the Panegyric prayer of the founder of the Ursuline order, St. Angela Merici. These beautiful fragments can be interpreted as: *What is that which looks like a crescent sunrise? Beautiful as the Moon and Brilliant as the Sun*. Integrated into the scene, almost merging with the base on which the Virgin is standing, is the coat of arms of Solar de Tejada, accompanied by the aforementioned cartouche, framed by golden rocaille.

The frontal and flat execution of the painting may be linked to the work of the renowned and multifaceted Luis Niño who, besides being a painter, was also a skilled joiner, sculptor and metalworker. Our richly ornamented painting is the earliest record we have of the Josef Villanueva's oeuvre, a work that brings together many elements of Andean imagery, some of which are also present in the magnificent *Mestizo* stone-carved façade of the church of San Lorenzo, attributed by some scholars to Luis Niño (Fig. 3), and which may have served Villanueva as a source of inspiration for this painting. This façade is considered an essential reference point for studying syncretism in the school of Potosí and, consequently, for the painting carried out across the vast territory of the Viceroyalty. Both works present vine leaves with bunches of

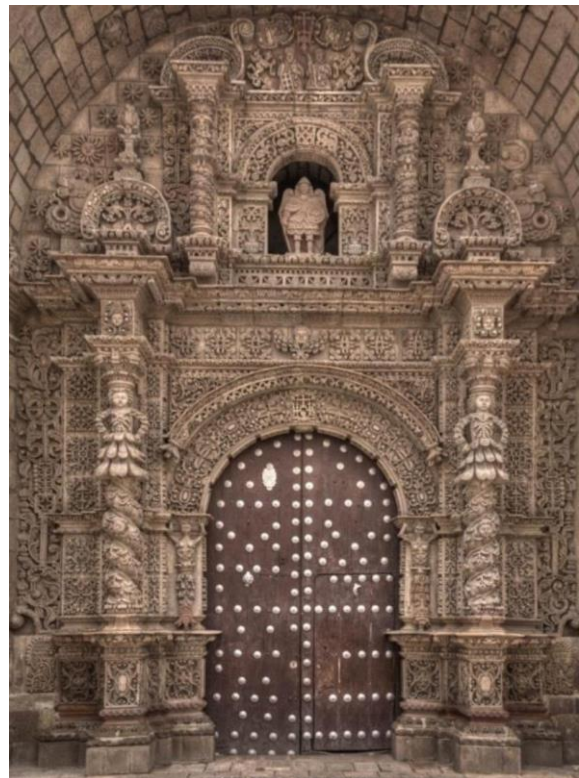


Fig. 3: Luis Niño (attrib.), *Mestizo* facade of the Church of St. Lawrence, in Potosí, Bolivia.

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grapes surrounding gilt spiral columns whose role is to frame the scene, leafy borders with pomegranates, a variety of flowers and the heads of angels supporting the weight of the columns, reminiscent of Atlas; also, the sun, moon and starfish mentioned above. Characteristic features such as spatial conception and the use of some of the aforementioned elements can be observed in the two only signed works by Luis Niño.

An example of this is Our Lady of Candelaria (Fig. 4), which belongs to the Chapel of San Roque, and is currently preserved in the Museo de la Casa de la Moneda (Mint Museum). Some of the elements and features mentioned are also present in an early canvas attributed to him, dated 1722, which represents Our Lady of Fuencisla (Fig. 5), which once belonged to a chapel in Segovia (Spain) and is currently housed in the Museo Nacional de Arte in La Paz (Bolivia). None of the abovementioned elements



Fig. 4: Luis Niño, *Our Lady of Candelaria*, ca. 1720, originally from the Chapel of San Roque, Museo de la Casa de la Moneda, Potosí, Bolivia.



Fig. 5: Luis Niño, *Our Lady of Fuencisla*, 1722. Museo Nacional de Arte in La Paz, Bolivia.

appear in the description made by Silverio Domínguez of the original altar with the image of Our Lady of El Cortijo, with the exception of the pillars and the niche, which our author undoubtedly embellished using local techniques and designs. In order to support our assertions regarding Villanueva's origin and, as a result of the existing worship of the aforementioned advocacy in the Americas, we will mention two paintings carried out in the Viceroyalty of New Spain. They are also representations of Our Lady of El Cortijo, but they lack the style of the *Altiplano* school which has its roots in the School of Cuzco. The first piece, carried out by Sebastián Salcedo in 1783 (Fig. 6), is currently housed in the Figge Art Museum in Davenport (U.S.). The second (Fig. 7) belongs to a Mexican artist, as yet anonymous due to a lack of study, its brushwork boasting the beauty and quality of an outstanding artist. It was sold at the Goya auction rooms in 2016 and its whereabouts are currently unknown.



**Fig. 6: Sebastián Salcedo, *Our Lady of El Cortijo*, Mexico. Figge Art Museum, Davenport, US.**



**Fig. 7: Anonymous from New Spain, *Our Lady of El Cortijo*, its whereabouts currently unknown.**



Finally, although irrelevant to establishing the origin of the canvas, we will return to the aforementioned topic of the coat of arms. The use of heraldry in a composition may refer not just to a single person but, by extension, to members of their family. Family understood not only as those who are biologically related to the holder of the coat of arms, but also people in a relationship of service or patronage with him. It is as such that we cannot claim the person who commissioned this work was directly related to the descendants of Don Sancho Fernández de Tejada. What we can do, however, is place them within the family circle since, as José Luis Sampedro Escolar mentions<sup>5</sup>, using this emblem served not only to maintain their bonds of lineage, but was useful at Court, in Extremadura, in Andalusia and in the Americas, as a means of presentation and a guarantee of their serious nature to fellow compatriot traders and officials as well as society at large, with whom they would trade and deal on legal and administrative matters. This leads us to believe that, although we don't know other works by Villanueva, he must have carried out his activity as a painter among figures of considerable renown and purchasing power.

Having analyzed our painting in terms of form and style, we may now appreciate the features it has in common with the other pieces we have addressed that served as comparative models, and which reflect the rich Andean and Meso-American imagery. In accordance with what we have discussed thus far, I will conclude by highlighting the importance of the painting we have before us here, which constitutes a significant contribution to the field, and whose author may have been a local painter linked to Luis Niño, as it clearly reflects the latter's influence.

## ***Gonzalo Eguiguren Pazzi***

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<sup>5</sup> "Coats of Arms for Lineage, not Family Names", José Luis Sampedro Escolar, *Genealogía*, pp. 389-96.

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