



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

ART & ANTIQUES

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Second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century  
Mexico

**PAIR OF  
WALL HANGINGS**

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Second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century  
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## Pair of Wall Hangings

Silk embroidered in silk and metallic thread  
244 x 149 cm (each)



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A pair of wall hangings richly embroidered in silk and metallic thread. This truly spectacular pair of masterfully embroidered wall hangings stand as testimony to the lavish use of metallic thread (flattened silver wire coiled around a silk core) in the decoration of mid-18<sup>th</sup> century textiles, a period of true splendour in the European and colonial decorative arts. The richness conveyed by the use of this kind of metallic thread in such abundance is evidence not only of a prosperous economic time, but also to a princely, costly commission. The decorative arrangement of the present wall hangings clearly derives from Indian printed textiles, namely chintzes produced in the Coromandel Coast which combine European designs - in the present case almost Rococo in style, and of simple, clear design based on symmetry - with Indian flower motifs, large, boldly coloured flowers such as the ones seen on this mid-18<sup>th</sup> century chintz below (detail) from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acc. no. 1975.212.1 - see Peck 2013, p. 197, cat. no. 46. The flower motifs were embroidered in silk using a typical stitch, the long and short stitch (*punto matizado* in Spanish), which is used to blend colours and also create a feathery texture. This stitch is a way of filling patterns, where the stitches are laid in a brick-like pattern and shading is achieved using a different coloured threads for each subsequent row. In fact, this stitch, set with uneven lengths of thread, allows the shades to melt into one another in a painting-like manner.

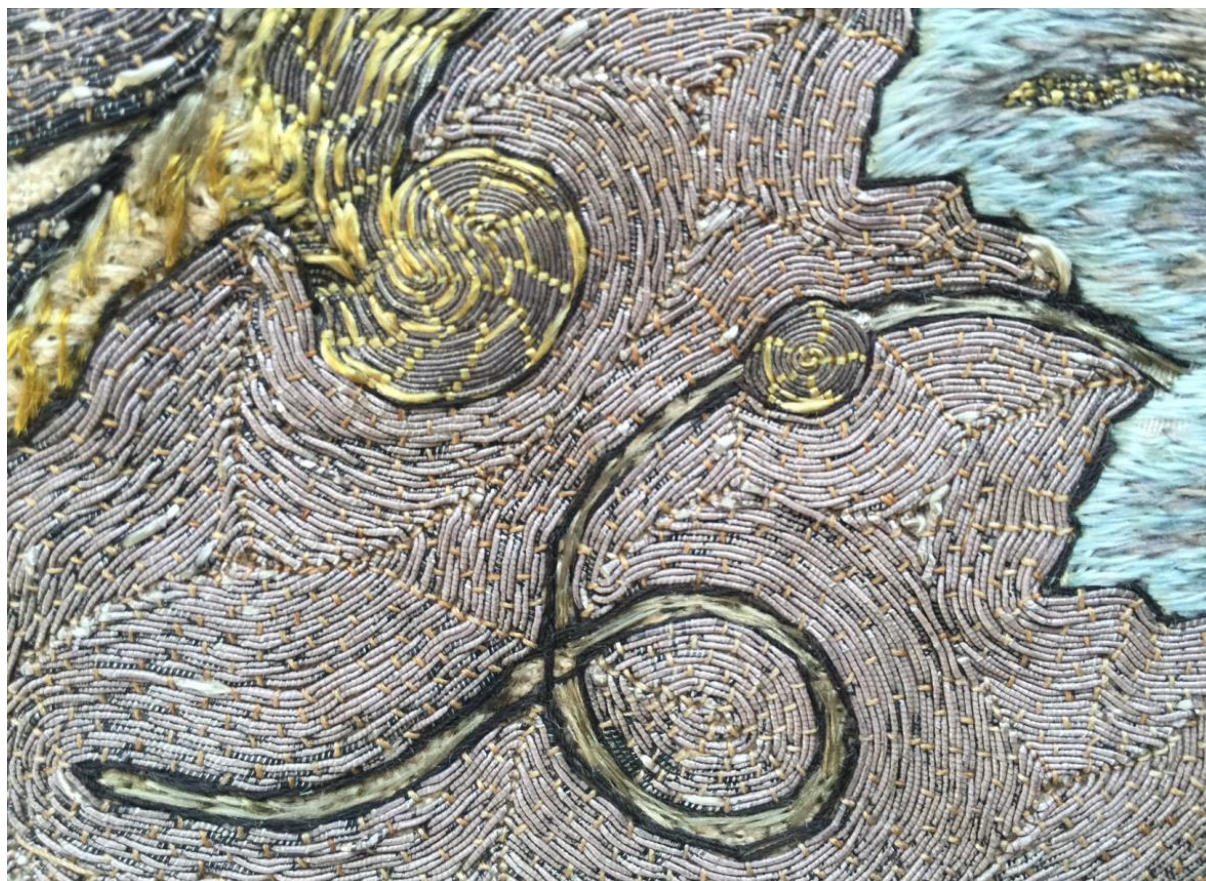




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The entire ground surface of these wall hangings (as seen from the details illustrated above and below) is decorated with what is known as "goldwork" embroidery - in the present case with silver thread in what seems to be two shades of grey -, a type of embroidery decoration particularly prized for the way light plays on it, especially with large surfaces such as seen on the present wall hangings. "Goldwork" is always a surface embroidery or free embroidery as it is commonly called, and the vast majority is a form of laid work or couching - see Lenon 1987. Couching and laid work are techniques in which yarn (in this case metallic thread) is laid across the surface of the ground fabric and held onto its surface by a second thread with small stitches, usually of fine silk - in the present case with light yellow and pale yellow silk thread. The ends of the metallic thread are simply cut off and carefully secured with the couching thread. The surface couching technique used on the present pair of wall hangings uses two metallic threads laid on the fabric surface at a time and sewn to the fabric at regular intervals producing patterns. In fact, one of the techniques used here is known as "bricking", in which the position of the couching stitches is offset between rows, producing an appearance similar to a brick wall. One other type of "goldwork" embroidery used on the present wall hangings is the so-called "rococo", a fine "gold" wire tightly wrapped around a silk core. The resulting cord has wavy or serpentine appearance and is couched down singularly in a brightly yellow sewing thread.



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According to the heraldry present on the centre of each of these two extraordinary wall hangings, they were made for a bishop. In fact, the coat of arms, set on a Mannerist-style cartouche, which is surmounted by an open crown, features on the top part a bishop's mitre its two lappets (*infulæ*), which would be sewn to the back of it, and below a sword and a crosier in saltire (in an X-shape, a diagonal cross) which signify both the temporal and spiritual jurisdiction of this particular bishop. Unfortunately, the lack of other heraldic devices, apart from these, does not allow any other identification and place of manufacture. A very similar, albeit understudied, wall hanging (or coverlet) in silk satin embroidered in silk (303 x 194 cm) from ca. 1780, now in the Museu Nacional do Traje e da Moda, Lisbon, inv. no. 17674, came from a Portuguese lady, Maria Antónia Tavares Mora which lived in the old village of Ribatejo or "aldeia do Ribatejo", nowadays Montijo - on Portuguese embroidery, see Taxinha & Guedes 1976; and Alarcão & Carvalho 1993. It is possible that it was made locally, or in an important Portuguese centre of manufacture.

Nonetheless, it is almost impossible, without further technical and scientific analyses (materials and dyestuffs), to determine with more certainty its centre of production. In fact, similar works using these quite common types of stiches (the long and short stitch and couching with metallic thread) are now from 18<sup>th</sup> century Spanish colonies who mastered in the production of luxury silk textiles, namely Mexico. One piece which share many similarities with our pair, both in style and design, is a chasuble and its pairing dalmatic - embroidered in silk and gilt thread using the long and short stitch and metallic thread couching - which was made in the Dominican Convent of Saint Rose of Lima in Puebla, came from the Cathedral of Mexico, Mexico City and is now on display at the Museo Nacional del Virreinato in Tepotzotlán, Mexico (see Rishel & Stratton-Pruit 2006, p. 170, cat. no. II-7). It is not surprising to see European-types of embroidery, certainly inspired in Asian, namely Chinese prototypes and designs made for export to Europe, being produced in 18<sup>th</sup> century Mexico according to the latest trends in design. In fact, Mexico City had its own embroiderers guild from 1546, was known for the production of richly embroidered ecclesiastical vestments with several female convents particularly recognized for their embroideries and was home to European embroiderers such as the Munich-born Benito Gainer, who worked on the Calera de Tango workshops founded by the Bavarian Jesuits (see Blum 2006, p. 153). Wherever these truly exceptional wall hangings were made, either in Europe or, most likely, in South America by European-trained master craftsmen, possibly in Mexico, their high level of technical mastery, richness of materials and appealing design stand as testimony to a long-forgotten era of textile opulence which would never be repeated again.

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