

Harvard Art Museums

Fogg Museum
Busch-Reisinger Museum
Arthur M. Sackler Museum

Press Release

Harvard Art Museums present Spring 2023 Exhibition *From the Andes to the Caribbean: American Art from the Spanish Empire*



Artist active in the Viceroyalty of Peru, after Diego de Ocaña (1585–1608),
Our Lady of Guadalupe at Extremadura, 1730–80. Oil on canvas.

Carl & Marilyn Thoma Collection, [TL42430.6](#).

Image: Courtesy of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation; photo by Jamie Stukenberg.

Cambridge, MA
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This spring, the Harvard Art Museums invite visitors to discover a more expanded story of American art through an unparalleled collection of Spanish colonial paintings. ***From the Andes to the Caribbean: American Art from the Spanish Empire*** presents 26 works from the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation—the premier U.S. private collection of 17th- to 19th-century paintings from South America and the Caribbean—together with works from the Harvard Art Museums and other Harvard University collections. The presentation marks the museums' first ever exhibition combining religious and secular art of the Spanish Americas.

The exhibition has been organized for the Harvard Art Museums by **Horace D. Ballard**, the Theodore E. Stebbins, Jr. Associate Curator of American Art, and is Ballard's first major exhibition at Harvard

since joining the museums in 2021. **Natalia Ángeles Vieyra**, Associate Curator of American Art at the Worcester Art Museum, contributed to the early thinking of the show when she served as the 2019–22 Maher Curatorial Fellow of American Art at the Harvard Art Museums. *From the Andes to the Caribbean* will be on display March 3 through July 30, 2023, in the museums' special exhibitions gallery on Level 3. All in-gallery materials will be presented bilingually, in Spanish and English.

The Spanish empire and its mercantile companies were the dominant colonial force in America from 1492 to 1832. Five years before Portugal established American settlements and nearly a century before Britain and France claimed land in the hemisphere, wealth from America's colonial territories (viceroyalties) of New Spain and Peru made Spain the richest nation on Earth. Though Spain is no longer an empire, its colonial past continues to inform the art and culture of the Americas.

From the Andes to the Caribbean emphasizes three key themes related to culture and empire: the political and spiritual work of Catholic icons, the ways in which empire begets hybrid cultural identities, and the relationship between labor, wealth, and luxury. Paintings from present-day Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Peru, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela are presented alongside works on paper and design objects made with Cuban and Honduran mahogany, Mexican cochineal, and Peruvian silver, underlining the great diversity of works of art broadly referred to as either "Viceregal," "Spanish colonial," or simply "American."

"My hope for this exhibition is to begin to unravel decades-long assumptions and half-truths about the definitions and origins of American art," said Ballard. "In exploring works of print and design, as well as painted icons and portraiture from the 17th and 18th centuries in the Viceroyalties of Peru and New Spain, I aim to expand the narratives that many North American collections, including the Harvard Art Museums, have told for generations."

The 50 objects on view include 26 paintings on loan from the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation, dating from roughly 1600 to the mid-19th century, including exquisitely rendered depictions of Christian saints, angels, and the Holy Family, as well as portraits of those who had political and military influence within the royal court of Spain; 18th-century wood furniture and silver tableware from the Harvard Art Museums' collections; samples of pigments and metals from the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies that show some of the materials mined by Indigenous laborers and used by Spanish colonial artists in their work; a 1729 volume of *The English Pilot*, a series of sea atlases produced in England that chart the major ports and cities in the Americas, on loan from the Harvard Map Collection; and on loan from Harvard's Arnold Arboretum Library, a 1787 French text that explains the production of carmine, a highly prized pigment whose secrets of manufacture were closely guarded by the Spanish.

"The names of many of the artists of the works in the exhibition are unknown to scholars, as racism, market factors, customs of religious humility, and the ethos of the guilds or workshops in which the works were created makes it difficult to assign authorship," said Ballard.

However, key examples of paintings from three African diasporic makers are on display: Juan Pedro López (1724–1787), considered the finest artist active in 18th-century Venezuela; José Campeche y Jordán (1751–1809), arguably the greatest religious painter born in America during the centuries of colonial rule and occupation; and Diego Antonio de Landaeta (active 1749–1799), a member of a large family of artists working in 18th-century Caracas. López's *Our Lady of Guidance* (1765–70) depicts a statue that was installed in a niche within the Catholic church of San Mauricio in Caracas, Venezuela, in 1704. *Tobias and the Angel* (1787), by Campeche y Jordán, is based on a narrative from around 300–200 BCE, in which the archangel Raphael disguises himself and accompanies the blind Tobias on a long journey. Landaeta's portrait of Petronila Méndez (1763), a wealthy child from colonial Venezuela, is the only extant work by the artist that has been identified.

Importantly, the exhibition also explores materials that artists used in their work and that were traded extensively across the world, including copper, silver, gold, cochineal, and mahogany. Silver from the Viceroyalty of Peru (present-day Bolivia) was extremely significant in the world economy, including colonial-era Boston. It is estimated that 60–80 percent of the world’s silver during America’s colonial era came from Potosí, an Inkan settlement in the Andes. A majority of the eight silver works on display, including casters, sugar vessels, and coins from the Harvard Art Museums’ collections, are believed to be molded from silver mined at Potosí. A tea chest, tea table, and bombé secretary desk of English design provide elegant examples of transatlantic furnishings crafted from mahogany, a prized shipbuilding material with a history inseparable from colonialism and the enslaved labor used to grow, fell, and process the wood for manufacture.

About the Carl & Marilynn Thoma Foundation

The Carl & Marilynn Thoma Foundation recognizes the power of the arts to challenge and shift perceptions, spark creativity, and connect people across cultures. The foundation lends and exhibits artworks and supports pivotal initiatives in the arts, providing grants to nonprofit organizations whose innovative projects and original ideas will advance scholarship in the arts. Founded in 2014, the Carl & Marilynn Thoma Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization based in Chicago and Santa Fe.

The 26 paintings on display in *From the Andes to the Caribbean* are part of a recent initiative by the Thoma Foundation to share the beauty and material complexity of works from their Art of the Spanish Americas collection with institutions across the United States.

The Harvard Art Museums have partnered with the Carl & Marilynn Thoma Foundation since late 2019 to present paintings from their collection. In addition to the works in the exhibition, two paintings by artists who were active in Cuzco, Peru, are on view in Gallery 2240, on Level 2: Mama Ocllo (1835–45) and Saint Rose of Lima (18th century).

Public Programming

A robust lineup of public programs will bring *From the Andes to the Caribbean* to life for a range of visitors. Unless noted, all events are held in-person at the Harvard Art Museums, 32 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138. Admission is free to all on Sundays; there is no additional charge for these programs. For updates, full details, and to register, please click the links below or see our calendar: harvardartmuseums.org/calendar.

Lecture – on Thursday, April 13, at 6pm, **Rosario I. Granados**, the Marilynn Thoma Associate Curator, Art of the Spanish Americas at the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, will give a free public lecture. Details forthcoming.

Gallery Talks – thematic 30-minute talks by museums staff focused on select objects in the exhibition:

- Sunday, March 5, 2023, 12:30pm (led by exhibition curator Horace D. Ballard)
- Sunday, March 26, 2023, 1:30pm (led by exhibition curator Horace D. Ballard)
- Thursday, April 6, 2023, 12:30pm (led by exhibition designer Madelyn Albright)
- Thursday, April 20, 2023, 12:30pm (led by exhibition curator Horace D. Ballard)
- Thursday, May 11, 2023, 1pm (led by exhibition curator Horace D. Ballard)

Exhibition Tours – hourlong, in-depth tours of the exhibition by curator Horace D. Ballard on Sundays:

- March 19, 2023, 12pm
- April 2, 2023, 12pm
- May 7, 2023, 12pm
- June 4, 2023, 12pm
- July 16, 2023, 12pm

Art Talk Live – an online 30-minute discussion about the exhibition by curator Horace D. Ballard hosted on Zoom:

- Tuesday, April 4, 2023, 12:30pm

Website

Learn more about the exhibition at harvardartmuseums.org/andestocaribbean

Credits

Loans and exhibition coordination courtesy of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation. Support for the exhibition is provided by the Henry Luce Foundation Fund for the American Art Department; the Bolton Fund for American Art, Gift of the Payne Fund; the Alexander S., Robert L., and Bruce A. Beal Exhibition Fund; and the Gurel Student Exhibition Fund. Related programming is supported by the M. Victor Leventritt Lecture Series Endowment Fund.

The curatorial team extend their special thanks to artist and educator **Gabriel Sosa**, who served as the chief translator of exhibition materials; curator and scholar **Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt**; **Kathryn Santner**, 2022–24 Mayer Center Fellow, Denver Art Museum; **Thomas B.F. Cummins**, Dumbarton Oaks Professor of Pre-Columbian and Colonial Art, Harvard University; and colleagues at the Harvard Map Collection, the Harvard University Herbaria & Libraries, and Harvard's David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies.

About the Harvard Art Museums

The Harvard Art Museums house one of the largest and most renowned art collections in the United States, comprising three museums (the Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler Museums) and four research centers (the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Fogg Museum includes western art from the Middle Ages to the present; the Busch-Reisinger Museum, unique among North American museums, is dedicated to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries; and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum is focused on art from Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. Together, the collections include over 255,000 objects in all media. The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and the public. For more than a century, they have been the nation's premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in the United States. The Harvard Art Museums have a rich tradition of considering the history of objects as an integral part of the teaching and study of art history, focusing on conservation and preservation concerns as well as technical studies. harvardartmuseums.org

The Harvard Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

Hours and Admission

Open Tuesday–Sunday, 10am–5pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission: \$20 adults, \$18 seniors (65+). Free to all visitors on Sundays (all day) and the last Thursday of every month (5–9pm); on other days, free to: members, all students (with valid ID), youth under 18, Cambridge residents (proof of residency required), Harvard ID holders (plus one guest), active-duty military personnel (NEA Blue Star Museums), and individuals with SNAP benefits or an EBT card. On Saturdays, 10am–noon,

Massachusetts residents receive free admission (proof of residency required). For further information about visiting, including important COVID-19 policies, see harvardartmuseums.org/visit.

For more information, please contact

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