

Audio Guide Transcript

**ART &
IMAGINATION**
IN SPANISH AMERICA, 1500-1800

June 22–September 1, 2024
Ticketed Exhibition Galleries

SAINT LOUIS ART MUSEUM

STOP 1

Taylor Hall

Introduction

Speaker

Min Jung Kim

Barbara B. Taylor Director

Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I am Min Jung Kim, Barbara B. Taylor Director of the Saint Louis Art Museum.

I am delighted to welcome you to the audio guide for *Art and Imagination in Spanish America, 1500–1800: Highlights from LACMA's Collection*.

This exhibition features more than 100 works drawn from the collection of Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts on view underscore the generative power of Spanish America and its central position as a global crossroads. In this audio guide, offered in English and Spanish, you will hear a wide range of perspectives on some of these fascinating works. We encourage you to experience this guide in any order you like. You may follow it in numeric order or pick and choose. Each featured object can be located by following the floorplan on the webpage or by identifying the audio icon on the object's label in the exhibition. Whether you're listening from home or in the Museum's galleries, I hope you enjoy this audio guide and your visit.

STOP 2

Gallery 241

Virgin of Guadalupe

Speaker

Clare Kobasa

Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I'm Clare Kobasa, Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs.

As you look at these two paintings with the same title – the *Virgin of Guadalupe* – what similarities do you notice? What are the differences? In large scale at the center of each canvas appears the Virgin herself, the mother of Jesus in Catholic tradition, but as she miraculously appeared to Juan Diego in 1531 in Mexico. This story is recounted in the four roundels at the corners of each, culminating in the bottom right, where Diego has dropped his tilma, or cloak, to reveal the heavenly apparition in material form as a painting. By both replicating the miraculous image and including the narrative of its making, these two later copies participate in and expand on a long history of powerful images in Catholic practice. The Spanish introduced Catholicism as part of their often-violent colonial project, seeking to convert Indigenous inhabitants to this new religion. This process often occurred through the appropriation of existing sacred practices, such as the landscape where Diego first encountered the Virgin – the hilltop of Tepeyec, the site of previous Mexica worship of the goddess Tonantzin. In Antonio de Torres's painting, he also included a depiction of a new sanctuary completed in 1709, which quickly became the site of pilgrimage, the goal of a journey. While people could go to the image, the image itself also began to travel in the form of these copies, whose authority was confirmed by the involvement of celebrated artists who closely followed rules laid down for the reproductions. The extent of that spread extends to the present, with images of her still visible worldwide today.

STOP 3

Gallery 242

Folding Screen with Indigenous Wedding, Mitote, and Flying Pole

Speaker

Miguel Valerio

Professor of Spanish

Washington University, Saint Louis

Hi, my name is Miguel Valerio, and I am a Professor of Spanish at Washington University in Saint Louis.

As a scholar of festive culture in colonial Mexico, I have always loved this painting. Its scene comes from another time and transports us to another place, but we can all relate to its theme: a wedding celebration. If we look at it from right to left, the first thing we see, on the right, is the bride and groom leaving the church. They are greeted by dancers performing a *mitote*. One of them, with a large green *quetzalapanecáyotl* or feather headdress, represents the emperor Moctezuma, in this dance that recalls Mexico's Aztec past. In the center of the painting, the flying dancers steal the show. I had the great fortune of witnessing this feat of dexterity on my visit to Teotihuacan, outside Mexico City, in 2016. My attention, however, is drawn to the man at the base of the pole. It is either a Spaniard with a black mask or a Black man. Although this is the only figure that gestures to Mexico's Black population, which reached 200,000, Afro-Mexicans regularly contributed to festivities in colonial Mexico, as I explore in my scholarship. On the left of the painting, a mixed group of Indigenous men and women as well as several Spaniards wait for the newlyweds in front of their house. A great banquet probably awaits everyone inside the house. In front of the crowd, a man juggles a log with his feet. These feet jugglers accompanied Emperor Charles V to his coronation in Bologna in 1536, as documented by the German painter Christoph Weiditz. Taken together, as suggested by people going about their daily lives in the background, the painting documents an ordinary event – a wedding celebration – and at the same time, it showcases the richness of festivities and culture in colonial Mexico.

STOP 4

Gallery 242

Noble Woman with Her Black Slave

Speaker

Carmen Ulloa

Ecuadorian Botanist

Missouri Botanical Garden

Hello, my name is Carmen Ulloa, I am an Ecuadorian botanist with the Missouri Botanical Garden.

These two paintings are by Vicente Albán, born during the colonial era in the city of Quito, which is the capital of present-day Ecuador. Albán was a painter of the famous Quito school, at that time part of the viceroyalty of New Granada. The characters are painted in a contrasting and exaggerated way to mark the different social classes. Both paintings depict various fruits that are quite enlarged in relation to the main characters and the trees behind them.

Look now at the painting with two figures and a basket of fruit. Find in the basket the fruit with the letter B, placed at the right. This orange-colored fruit corresponds to the *granadilla* or sweet passionfruit, and as a reference its actual size is like of a tennis ball. The granadilla is a delicious fruit with juicy and sweet flesh that is grey in color. You can see the split granadilla and the flesh next to an entire one.

Notice the woman in white in the center of the painting: she is eating a piece of what appears to be papaya, because of the orange flesh with many black seeds.

All of the fruits in this painting correspond to plant species native to tropical America that were already common at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards in what is present-day Ecuador. The exception is the Chilean *coquitos* that come from the temperate zone of Chile. These small coconuts are on the ground to the right of this painting, next to common coconuts. Coquitos are less than an inch in diameter (or less than 2 centimeters) and their flavor is like very concentrated coconut.

Now look at the painting with one figure in black in the center, and in particular the basket with fruits. As a reference, within the basket are several fruits, including strawberries, which are clearly distinguished by their shape and color. To the right of the strawberries, there is fruit with the letter D, which is the *chigualcán*, a type of mountain papaya, which is a species of plant

native to the Andes of Ecuador. The chigualcán is the size of a pear, has a sweet fragrance, the skin is yellow, and the flesh is white; it is usually eaten cooked in syrup.

Most of these plants were, and still are, grown in the temperate valleys of the Andes mountains in Ecuador. One exception is the mamey fruit typical from the coast. The mamey fruit can be seen split at the bottom left of this painting, its size is of a grapefruit, the skin is brown and the flesh is bright orange.

STOP 5

Gallery 243

Nun's Badge with the Immaculate Conception and Saints

Speaker

Sister Barbara

Docent

Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I'm Sister Barbara Vork, and I've been a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet for 65 years. I've also been a docent at the Saint Louis Art Museum for 15 years.

Historically, two groups of women have served the Catholic church: nuns and sisters. Nuns take solemn vows and spend their lives working and praying within their convent or monastery. Nuns dress in plain clothes or a habit decorated with a cross or symbol of their founder. Nuns in 17th and 18th century Mexico wore painted badges on vellum or copper as seen in this case.

Sisters, on the other hand, take simple vows, and are more active in the world. Sisters engage in different kinds of work or ministries in their communities outside of convents and monasteries. Both nuns and sisters live together in groups and are guided by the spirit of the person who founded their order. Both nuns and sisters give themselves entirely to God for life.

The Sisters of St. Joseph, the order I belong to, were founded in France in 1650. They were called to walk out in the world and help those in need, visit the sick and poor in their homes and hospitals, and teach in schools. They lived without cloister or habit and served their "dear neighbor" by doing whatever was necessary. Following the French Revolution, the Sisters of St. Joseph left France and relocated in Saint Louis City in 1836 at the request of Bishop Joseph Rosati, who invited them to teach the deaf.

Today the Sisters of St. Joseph are an apostolic community who combine a life of prayer with a life of active ministry doing various works among the people of God.

STOP 6

Gallery 244

Herb Box

Speaker

Amy Torbert

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of American Art

Saint Louis Art Museum

I'm Amy Torbert, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of American Art at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

South American animals hide within the decorations on this elaborate silver box. In the middle of the lid sits a hairy armadillo, and along its sides, figures that resemble monkeys blow trumpets. Around the back crouches a jaguar, perhaps running from the nearby hunters. The animals and the material used to represent them both originate from high in the Andes Mountains. The city of Potosí was founded in 1545 after a large vein of silver was discovered in the “Cerro Rico,” or the “Rich Hill.” By 1600, this isolated mining camp in present-day Bolivia had grown into one of the largest, wealthiest, and most cosmopolitan cities in the world.

The box sits on the shoulders of four figures, each wearing a stereotypical feathered headdress and skirt. The production of silver at Potosí was also carried on the backs of Indigenous men. Forced by the Spanish government to work in the mines, they were required to carry 25 bags of silver ore, each weighing about 100 pounds, to the surface every day. As a result of this brutal labor, combined with environmental hazards, the hill became known in the region's native language as “the mountain that eats men.” As one overseer noted, “if 20 healthy [workers] enter on Monday, half may emerge crippled on Saturday.”

Due to this forced labor system and Spanish innovations in mining technologies, Potosí produced nearly half of the world's silver in its first century. Its fame spread as far as a small town in southeastern Missouri. Established in 1798, during the period when Missouri was a Spanish colony, its founders named it Potosi [Puh-TOE-see] in the hopes that the region's lead mines would prove as prosperous as the famed city of silver.

STOP 7

Gallery 244

Side Table

Speaker

Genny Cortinovis

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of Decorative Arts and Design

Saint Louis Art Museum

I'm Genny Cortinovis, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Associate Curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

This pedestal table incorporates two techniques typical of *encochado* furnishings. Its apron and hexagonal base rim are veneered in tortoiseshell inlaid with heart and leaf-shaped sheets of mother of pearl, or nacre. The fish-scale like surface of the bulbous base and circular top show a different technique: sheets of mother of pearl cover the entire surface, fitting together like a jigsaw puzzle within a network of silver filament.

A fixture of wealthy households in Lima, Peru, scholars once believed *encochado* furnishings like this table were also made there. But period inventories, or lists of the contents of a residence, from the likes of the first Count of Monteblanco consistently describe tables, small boxes, writing desks and other “curious works” “inlaid with mother-of-pearl,” as made in Guatemala. Scholars suggest these mother-of-pearl objects were produced specifically for export to Mexico and Peru accounting for their stylistic differences from colonial furniture made in Guatemala for the domestic market.

Regardless of where exactly in Spanish America these shimmering furnishings were made, scholars widely acknowledge the influence of Asian decorative arts on their development, positing that early examples were based on models imported from the Philippines on the famous Manila Galleons. China, Korea, Japan, India, and Thailand have long traditions of incorporating mother-of-pearl into a variety of precious objects, especially lacquerware, many traded as diplomatic gifts or designed for export. The Saint Louis Art Museum's collection includes a small, lidded container sheathed in mother-of-pearl tiles fastened by silver pins. Made in Gujarāt, India around 1550, the Christian symbols applied in tortoiseshell, indicate Portuguese merchants or perhaps Franciscan missionaries commissioned the splendid container for the European market.

STOP 8

Gallery 244

Herb Box

Speaker

Franco Schmidt

Student

Washington University, Saint Louis

Hello, my name is Franco Schmidt and I'm a student at Washington University in Saint Louis.

Yerba mate is drink originating from South America, and dates back to the pre-Columbian era. It is traditionally prepared by filling a hollowed, dried gourd with yerba, and hot water. The tea is then consumed through a filtered wooden or metal straw. It may seem to be just a beverage however, when I think about mate, I immediately think of family and friends. When entering someone's home in Argentina you will always be welcomed with a kiss and yerba mate. Now, people do have their own preferences for mate. Some people like theirs with honey, others with sugar, and my mom puts an orange peel in hers for a slight citrus flavor, yet the ritual is always the same. What makes mate so unique is the communal nature of it. Everyone shares the same cup, the same straw, and everyone gets to drink. The tradition is not about drinking tea, but spending time with loved ones. Countless hours of my life have been spent sitting in the hot Argentine sun sharing mate with friends and family, eating pastries and making small talk. From the outside it may not seem that there is anything special about mate. It is just tea after all. Yet, I think it is often the simplest moments, and the smallest gestures that are the most impactful.

STOP 9

Gallery 246

The Twelve Months of the Year: January– February

Speaker

Clare Kobasa

Associate Curator of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

Saint Louis Art Museum

Printed in multiples on lightweight sheets of paper, prints could and did travel widely in this period. Distances of time and space often left room for creative responses of all kinds, as can be seen here. Continuing a longstanding practice of visualizing the changing seasons of the year through both landscape and activity, the Antwerp artist Joos de Momper the Younger was only one of many Flemish artists who produced series of the months for a demanding European public. Engravers including Adriaen Collaert and Hans Collaert the Younger translated his compositions into print, increasing the number and spread of the images. And so eventually they landed in New Spain, providing inspiration for Antonio de Espinosa to create his own set of variations about a century later. His approach to the source material exemplifies copying as a selective and creative act and demonstrates artists' interest in existing imagery alongside an ambition to transform and transcend such models. Antonio de Espinosa adapts architectural details while eliminating the interior scenes of the prints. Along with the zodiac signs, he includes the names of the months in Spanish. And across the series, he adds depictions of figures who would be locally identifiable. This question of legibility underscores much of this practice, as meaning and interpretation themselves shifted in different contexts of viewing, and continue to do so as we view them in our own moment.

STOP 10

Gallery 247

Virgin of Bethlehem

Speaker

Judy Mann

Senior Curator for European Art to 1800

Saint Louis Art Museum

Hello, I'm Judy Mann, Senior Curator for European Art to 1800 at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

This majestic painting portrays a statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus, holding her Infant son. This type of sculpture adorned the altars of churches in Spain and in Latin America. In fact, you can see that the supporting pedestal rests on an altar that is decorated with vases of flowers and roses that lie on either side. In portraying Mary's wide mantle and matching apron, the artist represented iridescent crimson silk embroidered with gold rosettes that was brought to Cuzco in trade from China via the Philippines. A red rectangular cloth hangs in the middle bearing Mary's monogram (M-A-R) in gold. It overlaps a panel of rich brown silk decorated with rosettes that adorns the altar front. It was also a product of Chinese manufacture. Topping off her outfit, Mary wears a towering gold crown scattered with emeralds and rubies, altogether an image of extraordinary opulence. The tradition of dressing statues in sumptuous clothing and jewels began in the Spanish city of Seville and was introduced later in South America. The garments that clothed the statue varied according to the particular feast day that was being celebrated.

The specific statue that is represented on this canvas is housed in the parish church of the Virgin of Bethlehem located on the outskirts of the Peruvian city of Cuzco. It is brought annually to the Cathedral of Cuzco and carried aloft in processions that accompany the feast day of Corpus Christi. When not in procession, it is kept in the upper level of an elaborate altar, far removed from the level of visitors to the church. In this painting, putti pull open a red curtain, affording us a view of a sculpture that normally would be hidden behind drapery, enhancing the idea that we are experiencing something truly special.

STOP 11

Gallery 247

Dalmatic (from a set of ecclesiastical vestments)

Speaker

Miriam Murphy

Associate Textile Conservator

Saint Louis Art Museum

I'm Miriam Murphy, the Associate Textile Conservator at the Saint Louis Art Museum.

This beautiful embroidered dalmatic is part of a matching set of vestments and ecclesiastical furnishings. Sets like this were made by master craftsmen in workshop guilds, as well as by nuns in convents. The sets were made of expensive imported materials using the highest quality of workmanship.

The ground cloth of this dalmatic is a yellow finely woven silk plain weave, or “over one, under one” weave pattern. In areas where the embroidery stitches are worn away, you can catch glimpses of the ground cloth, as well as see black ink lines that were drawn on the ground cloth to mark out the design to be embroidered.

The dalmatic's embroidery completely covers the ground cloth, and is executed with dyed silk yarns and threads of precious metal. The silk embroidery mostly consists of long-and-short stitches, which allow for gradual color transitions and give the embroidery a painterly quality. Other stitches used for definition and texture are satin stitches, French knots, and couched stitches. Couched stitches are long stitches that are held in place with perpendicular short stitches. These short stitches are often staggered in a pattern to create a texture such as zigzags or basket weave.

The metal embroidery threads in this vestment are made of pure silver and silver gilt (or possibly gold). The soft metals are pounded, flattened, and cut into long strips, which can then be couched to the ground cloth as flat strips, or spiraled around a thread core to create a metal “thread.”

Embroidery can be worked over a raised pad to emphasize certain motifs, and also to maximize the light reflective qualities of fine silk and metal threads. In the dalmatic's embroidery, the pads are cut from animal skin parchment, and in places where the embroidery is worn away you can

see the shiny white surface of the parchment that is now exposed.

I hope you've enjoyed taking a closer look at the outstanding embroidery on this early eighteenth-century dalmatic.