

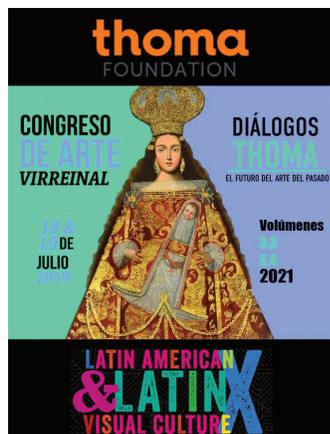
Exploring Distance in the Art of the Spanish American Viceroyalties



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The art history of viceregal Spanish America has come into its own in the last decades and is now flourishing worldwide. The methodologies applied to the arts produced in the continent during the early modern period has also multiplied. Along old questions pertaining to style and authorship, which still require attention, new ways of thinking emerge. This exploratory essay analyzes how the concept of distance might further engage with art and artistic process in the Americas through an object-based approach.

The concept of distance, paradoxically concrete and elastic at the same time, has a long tradition in cultural history. However, one could argue that owing to the recent convergence of different paths of inquiry, it is now more visible as a fruitful avenue of research for the art history of Spanish America. Approaches in which a sense of distance is essential prominently include those involved with the “spatial turn,” originating in the work of historians and geographers who drew attention to space, place, and cartography as it relates not just to texts and maps but

also images.¹ Studies on global trade and circulation obviously constitute another area in which distance is always involved. In the last twenty years, and through their often micro-historical approach, many stories about the movement of peoples, objects, and ideas in the early modern world have been uncovered. Sometimes, these narratives come together to better explain the way the Spanish monarchy operated and how both sides of the Atlantic, and parts of the Pacific and Africa, were connected, such as in Serge Gruzinski’s *Les quatre parties du monde*.² A wider worldview can also revise perspectives about a specific theme, such as painting in the multi-volume effort *Pintura de los reinos. Identidades compartidas*.³ And, at times, an approach gains momentum through the accumulation of case studies, as in the expanding bibliography on stories of *tornaviaje*, evidencing many points of contact between the Iberian Peninsula and the Americas.⁴

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1. For the development and impact of the “spatial turn” see Barney Warf and Santa Arias, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Giuseppe Marocci, Wietse de Boer, Aliocha Maldavsky and Ilaria Pavan, eds., *Space and Conversion in Global Perspective* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014); and Jordana Dym, “Taking a walk on the wild side. Experiencing the Spaces of Colonial Latin America,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 21, no.1 (2012): 3-16.

2. Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde: histoire d’une mondialisation* (Paris: La Martinière, 2004).

3. Juana Gutiérrez Haces, coord., *Paintings of the Kingdoms. Shared Identities. Territories of the Spanish Monarchy, 16th-18th centuries* (Mexico City: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 2008-2009).

4. *Tornaviaje* refers to the return trip of Spaniards living in the

Looking at these historiographical trends, it is also important to recognize that a major theoretical influence, often in the background of circulation narratives, has been the volume edited by Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, which invited thinking about the agency not just of people (and artists), but of objects.⁵ For art historians of viceregal art, traditionally plagued by anonymity and documentary lacuna impeding even the apparently simple task of dating, such approaches have proven liberating and enriching.

Globalization and global networks, the spatial turn, and the biography of the object are among the methodological tools that are now embedded in the history of Spanish American art even though they originated outside its traditional disciplinary parameters. Many of these new studies indirectly reconfigure the places of origin of the circulating objects and agents (Spain and other parts of Europe, including Italy),⁶ while geographical areas that had hitherto received less attention, such as the Canary Islands, gain visibility.⁷

The earlier historiography of art, however, had its own way of dealing with distance. Most methodologies concerned with distance in the twentieth-century were related to time and style, activating it as an explanation for artistic influence and cultural diffusion across territories and periods. George Kubler's *The Shape of Time* theorized about duration -- slow and fast -- in relation to a hierarchical sense of place and geography in order to track the pace of the assimilation of forms in multiple directions.⁸ Indeed, for decades geography,

viceregal art in America to their homeland, and with it, to the transfer of objects in their possession to Iberian Spain. Although this kind of study has a long and fruitful tradition in the historiography of colonial art, especially as regards the literature produced by scholars in Spain, in recent years there has been a notable and more international resurgence. See, for instance, the recent volume from Fernando Quijles, Pablo Amador y Martha Fernández, eds., *Tornaviaje: tránsito artístico entre los virreinos americanos y la metrópolis* (Seville: Universidad Pablo de Olavide, 2020).

5. Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

6. For an assessment of the impact on Italian studies, see the excellent introduction by Elizabeth Horodowich and Lia Markey, eds., *The New World in Early Modern Italy, 1492-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

7. This, from the outside, because for those who study art in the Canary Islands and its connections to the Iberian Peninsula, as well as America, such as Pablo Amador Marrero, there has always been an acute awareness of geography as a central player. In this respect, also see Carlos Rodríguez Morales, "Presencia e influencia de la escultura andaluza en Canarias," in *La escultura del primer naturalismo en Andalucía e Hispanoamérica* (1580-1625), coord. Lázaro Gila Medina (Madrid: Arco Libros S.L., 2010), 457-472.

8. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the History of Things*

and with it implicitly distance, has been a part of the discussion on how to explain forms and their originality (or its assumed absence) in the so-called peripheral areas, which are to be found -- it is important to remember -- not just in Spanish America but throughout Europe.⁹

As a result, art history has constantly been reconceptualizing the old binary of center and periphery. The model has moved from one that only considered certain locations to be "centers" (Rome, Florence and Venice, but also Madrid and Seville if the focus was on the Spanish empire), to one that accepts multiple centers, in which even what was once considered the periphery can become a center for another location.¹⁰ Nonetheless, for some, seeking to decenter discourse, being flexible in identifying centers is not enough since the paradigm is in itself considered colonialist. While debates persist, all revisions contribute to diversifying and enriching the art history of the viceregalities.

The new geography of art is thus more open to exploring all kinds of dynamics of transmission and production. Conceptual frameworks, which ultimately have the potential to impact how to think about the wider world of the early modern period, are discussed and revised. For example, Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann's analysis of cultural fields posits looking more globally at artistic production through specific objects, since some of them allow for the discovery of unexpected connections: eighteenth-century sculpture in Chile by the Jesuit artist Biterich becomes, in this way, "closer" to Central Europe than to the presumed centers of viceregal art.¹¹

Summing up, in many texts operating within the above-mentioned concept parameters, a sense of geography is a constant, and there are no shortage of claims being placed on its relevance for all kinds of disciplines: "Space is not simply a passive reflection of

(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).

9. And, even for Italy, as in: Enrico Castelnuovo and Carlo Ginzburg, "Domination symbolique et géographique artistique dans l'histoire de l'art italien," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales. Sociologie de l'oeil* 41 (Nov. 1981): 51-72.

10. As in Nelly Sigaut, José Juárez. *Recursos y discursos del arte de pintar*, exhibition catalogue (Mexico City: Museo Nacional de Arte, 2002), 37-38.

11. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, "Painting of the Kingdoms: A Global View of the Cultural Field," in *Paintings of the Kingdoms. Shared Identities. Territories of the Spanish Monarchy, 16th-18th centuries*, coord. Juana Gutiérrez Haces (Mexico City: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 2008), vol. 1, 87-135; and the Chilean example in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Towards a Geography of Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 262-271.

social and cultural trends, but an active participant, i.e., geography is constitutive as well as representative.”¹² For viceregal art, space (as well as place) has come into focus most evidently in studies in which it is manifested through iconography, such as in maps and the depiction of specific locations in paintings and manuscripts.¹³ There is also a growing body of literature on symbolic evocations of place, which was considerable in the ephemeral art produced for religious and political festivals where personifications of different cultures and peoples were a staple of the imperial and colonial imaginary. Nonetheless, with only a few recent exceptions, it seems that real physical distance -- a basic and literal aspect of the experience of geography -- has not been explored to its fullest potential: too often, it seems to be the conditioning, but rather passive constant in the background.¹⁴

Distance as Experienced in and from America

If we accept that a fundamental defining element of a significant amount of viceregal art (not the only one, but an important one) is its relationship to European art as model and referent, then one must take into account the enormous distance that separated both continents. However, as is well known, the artistic relationship between Europe and Spanish America is extremely complex, the result of a violent imposition of Hispanic culture upon many diverse indigenous cultures. Far from constituting a one directional relationship of dependence on European models, viceregal art is the sum of many processes, including resistance, negotiation, appropriation, *mestizaje*, syncretism, hybridity and more. But, if one agrees with the premise that European models were initially

imposed and subsequently used widely, then it seems necessary to deal with the distance that separated these two worlds.

How did that distance make itself visible? To what extent did it matter in the production of art in the viceroyalties? Was it at play in processes of reception, which ones, when, and were there occasions when it mattered less to some audiences? Is distance part of the explanation of specific works of art, or a topic of discussion in itself? Finally, should it be considered a more pertinent element for the study of Spanish American art than art in other geographies during this period?

Regarding the latter, thousands of people went from Europe to America in the early modern period, despite the costs and risks, while travel in the reverse direction was less frequent. For most inhabitants of the viceroyalties, visiting Europe was not possible, and yet, paradoxically, (and again depending on the period and place) part of their cultural referents -- including art works which were assimilated and contributed to forging a local artistic tradition - came from far away. Admittedly, one could argue that the distance between Seville (or other European cities) and, for instance, Rome, a central place of reference for Europe, would also not be traversed by most of the population in the Old World. While this is so, there were far more travelers between Madrid or Seville and Rome, as well as many more points of direct and indirect contact between these locations than, for example, between Lima and Rome. Europe was, and still is, smaller and more connected. By contrast, the American continent's enormity, as well as the distance to and from Europe, was a significant player in forging the early modern worldview.¹⁵

Despite their pertinence and interest, in the present essay, I will not be addressing distance from the vantage of diffusion, stylistic development, or originality and authorship vis-à-vis imported models, nor is the pursuit of a widely applicable theory the aim. To the contrary, the enormity of the continent fostered such diverse experiences that there are limits to how much any one approach can explain. Rather, I wish to explore two specific, inter-related aspects. First, how foregrounding a sense of distance in some

12. Santa Arias, "Introduction: The Reinsertion of Space into the Social Sciences and Humanities," in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Barney Warf and Santa Arias (New York: Routledge, 2009), 10.

13. Among other studies, the classic contributions of Barbara E. Mundy, *The Mapping of New Spain. Indigenous Cartography and the Maps of the Relaciones Geográficas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996); Alessandra Russo, *El realismo circular. Tierras, espacios y paisajes de la cartografía novohispana, siglos XVI y XVII* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2005); and Richard L. Kagan, *Urban Images of the Hispanic World, 1493-1793* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

14. Most notably: Dana Leibsohn, "Made in China, Made in Mexico," in *Art at the Crossroads. The Arts of Spanish America and Early Global Trade, 1492-1850*, ed. Donna Pierce and Ronald Otsuka (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2012): 11-40; and Aaron M. Hyman, "Inventing Painting: Cristóbal de Villalpando, Juan Correa, and New Spain's Transatlantic Canon," *The Art Bulletin* 99, no. 2 (2017): 102-135. The latter explores this issue with respect to invention in the work of Cristóbal de Villalpando noting how "distances were mobilized, performed and embodied through the work of 'copying,'" 105.

15. For a most recent analysis of this issue and how it affected cultural manifestations, see Fernando Bouza, "Cultures and Communication across the Iberian world (fifteenth-seventeenth centuries)," in *The Iberian World, 1450-1820*, ed. Fernando Bouza, Pedro Cardim y Antonio Feros (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 211-244.

object histories provides a greater awareness of the owner's or beholder's sense of place, and with it, of subjectivity as fundamentally at play in the dynamics of circulation and mobility. And secondly, how we might apply the idea that distance can be constitutive of certain objects in Spanish America to a broader range of artworks, analyzing how it forged meaning and affected production and reception.

In terms of the first question, it is elucidating to foreground the actual place from which one experienced distance vis-à-vis art and image in Spanish America. If one takes the point of view either of the sender or receiver of a moving object, then it is possible to incorporate experience into the historical narrative to a greater extent than if one merely documents or maps passages across geographies. Here is where sources are fundamental, such as in the vivid statement by the governor of New Mexico, Diego de Vargas, who in 1692 stated that this territory was “at the ends of the earth and remote beyond compare.”¹⁶ Indeed, although colonial texts rarely tell us everything we desire to know, sometimes, they help visualize how certain sectors of viceregal society thought about the distance that separated them from other places which they considered a point of reference. An example is found in Francisco de Florencia's chronicle on the Italian cult of the Virgin of Loreto. Written in Mexico after a ten-year sojourn in Europe, which included travel to the sanctuary, Florencia explains that he is going to tell his readers about this devotion so that they can travel with the imagination, “without sailing the seas, or changing climates or traversing immense roads.”¹⁷ His personal experience along with his emphasis on the plurals (seas and roads) captures that from Mexico, Italy was considered terribly far away, which consequently justified his role as the correspondent destined to bridge that distance for the local readership.¹⁸

16. Cited from Donna Pierce, “‘At the Ends of the Earth:’ Asian Trade Goods in Colonial New Mexico, 1598-1821,” in *Art at the Crossroads. The Arts of Spanish America and Early Global Trade, 1492-1850*, ed. Donna Pierce and Ronald Otsuka (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2012), 155.

17. In the original: “sin navegar mares, ni mudar climas, ni trasegar inmensos caminos.” Francisco de Florencia, S.J., *La casa peregrina* (Mexico City: Imprenta de Antuerpia de los Herederos de la Viuda de Bernardo Calderón, 1689), fol. 1v.

18. It may be worthwhile to note that, like Florencia, the Jesuits were particularly apt at capitalizing on ideas and experiences related to distance, something that has been analyzed with respect to how they raised funds in Europe for their missions worldwide: Luke Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

While such texts evoke real distance, how it was understood varied depending on individual circumstances. As many historians have noted, while distance is concrete, a space that can be measured, it is also highly perceptual and, thus, subjective. Each individual's perception depends on different variables, including tangible matters such as the available means of transportation and communication between locations, each person's travel possibilities, prior knowledge of the geography, familial ties and professional networks that might stretch across places, personal expectations and so forth. To provide an example, in studying the colonial postal system, Sylvia Sellers-García explains that Veracruz, at an 800 kilometer distance, was closer to the city of Guatemala than Verapaz, at merely 100 kilometers, owing to better roads.¹⁹ And, in the history of painting, for instance, Juan Miguel Serrera convincingly argued that for the Spanish painter Francisco de Zurbarán (and many Sevillians), America was remarkably close “pese a las distancias” (“despite the distances”).²⁰ Distance thus implies a sense of placement: how the place one occupies is compared to other places known, imagined or desired. In any given community, not everyone shares the same concept or sense of place, and regardless of whether they are long or short distances, these can be construed in different ways. Historians of the colonial period, and especially those working on travel literature, and with texts in general, have long been aware of the relevance of a sense of place and its impact in the formation of colonial discourse and in our understanding of colonial society, but one might ask if more can be done as concerns art and image.

In the context of this essay, I am interested in distance from the experience of being in America itself, and particularly in stories about people and objects in the viceroalties in which there is a conscious and overt experience of distance. The paths of art, artists, patrons and other agents involved with Spanish American art are numerous and multi-directional, including regional, inter-viceregal, trans-Atlantic, and trans-Pacific. No doubt, there are many “distances” to explore, as well as many ways to do so. Regional distance relationships have been detected between Quito and Bogotá, as well as between Guatemala and Caracas through the

19. Sylvia Sellers-García, *Distance and Documents at the Spanish Empire's Peripheries* (Los Angeles: Stanford University Press, 2013).

20. Juan Miguel Serrera, “Zurbarán y América,” in *Zurbarán*, exhibition catalogue (Madrid: Museo del Prado, 1988), 66.

flow of sculptures and paintings.²¹ Some distances and the dynamics that developed to deal with them go a long way in explaining artistic development in remote areas, something which emerges in the studies by Gabriela Siracusano on painting in northern Argentina, and in those by Clara Bargellini, and more recently Katherine Moore McAllen, on frontier territories of northern New Spain.²² Longer distances have also been reconceptualized, as in Dana Liebsohn's analysis of Chinese imports in the Americas which moves the discussion beyond the discourse of exoticism and into the realm of the lived practices of buying, selling, and owning, by placing an emphasis, among other questions, on the issue of distance and the meaning it imprinted on objects.²³

Evidently, the field is presently primed for thinking about these matters. There are plenty of traces in colonial period texts underscoring the extent to which people were aware of their surrounding geography, and the distance that separated them from other points of cultural, religious, and political reference in their existence. As Jordana Dym has pointed out, it is not so much a matter of finding new sources as it is of rereading them with new questions.²⁴ It is for this reason that one might ask if there are ways to think about colonial art through the lens of distance that go beyond iconographic representation of space and place and the inventory of circulation. Currently, a few scholars are constructing new object histories that seem to move in this direction, while larger trends, such as the recent and much needed expansion of regional studies, suggest that the field might benefit from thinking collectively about the underlying role that distance plays in many contexts, both historical and historiographic (although the latter falls beyond the scope of this essay). In the spirit of working in that

direction, below I explore four ways to activate and consider distance in terms of the history we write about specific objects.

1. Bridging Distance through Painting and Text

The role of text in Spanish American paintings has been of interest in the field for some time. Inscriptions operated on many levels and some overtly drew attention to the distance that separated the viewer, and his or her place, from the location represented on the pictorial surface. An elucidating example is Baltasar Echave Orío's monumental painting *Martyrdom of Saint Ponciano* commissioned for the Jesuit Colegio Máximo de San Pedro and San Pablo in Mexico City. As a group of Mexican scholars have recently demonstrated, the painting was made to decorate an altar for the body relics of this early Christian martyr, which arrived from Rome in the early seventeenth-century (ca. 1605).²⁵

The composition is canonical in terms of its interpretation of the saint's martyrdom in a triumphant and international Counter Reformation style. However, at the bottom center a small child gazes out of the picture, inviting the beholder to read the scroll he holds: "If Rome ingrate and cruel / today tortures Ponciano / Mexico, gleeful and content / will become rich with him."²⁶ With this play of words, time and distinct historical periods are folded onto each other so that pagan Rome (of the past) is juxtaposed with a contemporary Christianized Mexico. As is well known, relics were sent from the Old World to the Spanish American territories to sacralize the continent, but here the implication is that through the reception of the saint's body, Mexico partakes of the foundational history of Christianity in Rome.

As in many other viceregal paintings with inscriptions, the message intended for the local audience would be somewhat different without the text. Language here is not merely didactic or explanatory, but rather rhetorical and persuasive. Without the scroll,

21. See, for instance, Carlos F. Duarte, *Catálogo de obras artísticas mexicanas en Venezuela* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1998); Alfonso Ortiz Crespo y Adriana Pacheco Bustillos, coords., *Arte quiteño más allá de Quito* (Quito: FONSAL, 2010).

22. Gabriela Siracusano, *El poder de los colores* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005); Clara Bargellini and Michael K. Komanecky, eds., *The Arts of the Missions in Northern New Spain, 1600-1821*, exhibition catalogue (Mexico City: Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso, 2009); Katherine Moore McAllen, "Time and Space on the Missionary Frontier: Cultural Dynamics and the Defense of Northern New Spain," in *San Antonio 1718: Art from Mexico*, exhibition catalogue (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2018), 9-15.

23. "The value of Chinese things drew sustenance from their site of origin, but no less so from the ways in which they traveled and took up residence in American homes." Liebsohn, "Made in China. Made in Mexico," 21.

24. Dym, "Taking a Walk on the Wild Side," 10.

25. Jaime Cuadriello, Elsa Arroyo, Sandra Zetina and Eumalia Hernández, *Ojos, alas y patas de la mosca. Visualidad, tecnología y materialidad de El martirio de San Ponciano, de Baltasar de Echave Orío* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2019).

26. In the original: "Si Roma ingrata y cruel/ oy a Ponciano atormenta / México alegre y contenta / se enriquecerá con él."

the scene of martyrdom would transmit a message of Christian virtue and exemplum, but the accent on incorporating Mexico into the universal history of the Catholic Church would be less effective. In conclusion, in this kind of example, a specific sense of distance (the separation between two place names) is purposefully triggered, and then bridged for the viewer in Mexico, ultimately bringing him or her closer to Rome as the setting of representation and history. Although beyond the scope of this essay, here the construction of a sense of local identity -- creole pride -- is also at play, and indeed a lot of colonial painting uses place and issues of distance and location in this way.

2. Recovering the Travel Narrative in the Object's History

The impact of travel on objects and the idea that mobility is constitutive of meaning is a growing field of analysis. For one group of scholars analyzing religious images, it warrants developing the category of the “nomadic” object.²⁷ For Jennifer Roberts working on paintings by Copley shipped from Boston to London, distance needs to be incorporated into the narrative of these travelling works in order to understand the way they look.²⁸ Many avenues of research for imported objects in the Spanish American vicerealties are potentially available here. One example of how one might explore this issue for Mexico is provided by the export of a sculpture of the Virgin of Sorrows from Naples to the viceregal capital in the late 1720s through the agency of the Jesuit Juan Ignacio de Uribe.

Owing to their regular attendance at the congregational meetings of the Society of Jesus in Rome, Jesuit procurators from the vicerealties, like Uribe, had the opportunity to travel to Europe periodically. On these trips, they visited many cities and undertook a variety of tasks, including the acquisition of a considerable quantity of objects to distribute in the vicerealties: books, prints, medals, rosaries, relics, crucifixes, and modest paintings and sculptures, the latter usually from Naples. Typically, these Neapolitan works were small (images of the Christ Child or a saint), or else sculpted hands and heads

27. Christine Göttler and Mia M. Mochizuki, eds., *The Nomadic Object. The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018).

28. Jennifer L. Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

which could then be assembled into dressed sculptures at their point of arrival. Within this panorama, the case of the Virgin of Sorrows is exceptional because it was entirely carved and full-length. Although no longer extant or still to be identified, a lot is known about its shipping history through Jesuit correspondence.²⁹

The Jesuits took on this task as a favor for one of their most important benefactors in Mexico, the priest Buenaventura Medina Picazo. Requested in 1729, it took three years for the sculpture to arrive and, by the time it did, probably June of 1732, the patron had died (September 3, 1731). Getting the sculpture to Mexico was complicated, and in a letter sent to Medina Picazo from Seville (25 March 1730), Uribe summed up the difficulties: “I assure you that the fatigue, care, and cost, and gifts...that this requires...is not easy to explain....”³⁰ The “gifts” were probably gratuities for customs and port officials, typically used to move cargo along without delay or excessive taxation. In the same letter, and while also asking for additional funds, the Jesuit reassures the patron that his international network was working to expedite delivery. He then advises on how to handle the sculpture upon arrival in Veracruz, recommending that the crates be opened and the objects within redistributed: the sculpture had been packed with two copper paintings protected by glass; these should be separated out and it should all be taken to Mexico City by Indian carriers (on their backs) to prevent damage.³¹ Finally, Uribe satisfies Medina Picazo’s curiosity and prepares him for the reception of the sculpture, praising its elevated artistic quality and narrating that it is “so precious, that two artists that saw it in Cádiz, did not tire from gazing at her, and one of them repeated various times, that he came to see and make a drawing after her and that he would give 200 *doblonos* for her.”³² Evidently, the image of the Virgin Mary was taken out of the crate in Cádiz, displayed

29. This case study is expanded upon in: Luisa Elena Alcalá, “‘...Fatiga, y cuidados, y gastos, y regalos...’: Aspectos de la circulación de la escultura napolitana a ambos lados del Atlántico,” *Libros de la corte. Monográfico 5 Tejiendo redes-acortando distancias: España e Hispanoamérica* 5, no. 9 (2017): 164-181, <https://repositorio.uam.es/handle/10486/678391>.

30. In the original: “...le aseguro, que la fatiga y cuidados, y gastos, y regalos que esto cuesta..., no es fácil referirlo.” Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City (AGN). Jesuitas IV-54, caja 2, exp. 88, fol. 163r-164r.

31. AGN, Jesuitas IV-54, caja 2, exp. 88, fol. 163r-164r. The two paintings belonged to a set of 15 works on copper representing scenes from the Life of the Christ and the Virgin: Alcalá, “‘...Fatiga, y cuidados, y gastos, y regalos...,’” 182-83.

32. In the original: “es tan primorosa, que dos artifices, que la vieron en Cádiz, no se saciaban de mirarla, y uno de ellos repitió varias veces, que

temporarily, and made available for viewers, including artists.

Beyond the documentary value of the correspondence, its content and tone suggest that the Jesuit's task of keeping his patron informed generated a travel narrative for the sculpture. Whether consciously or unconsciously so, the sculpture's trip, with all its delays, with the crate probably opened on several occasions, and with its encounters with various people along the way, created a story that was probably inscribed in the reception of the image when it finally arrived in Mexico City. Most likely, these anecdotes added value to the sculpture, and were, at the very least, known and retold in the Jesuit circle augmenting appreciation for it.

Neapolitan sculpture was indeed highly valued in the vicerealties, and the knowledge of the distance that Medina Picazo's large sculpture of the Virgin of the Sorrows had travelled distinguished it from other images made locally, and even from those imported from Guatemala or Cádiz, both of which were more frequent and familiar points of contact for polychromed wood sculpture, although they too could potentially transfer their own travel narratives. Of course, although large quantities of imported objects arrived in the vicerealties and moved from one territory to another, this does not mean that in every case the journey was significant or always actively participatory in their reception. To what extent and in which types of works was there an active consciousness that the object came from far away, and what was said about the distance travelled or place of origin?³³

The idea that a travel narrative could be inscribed in an audience's knowledge of a specific artwork is something that achieves legendary proportions in many histories of miraculous images. A good example is provided by Cusco's Virgin of Belén and the well-known painting hanging in the cathedral, representing its foundational story.³⁴

el venía a verla, y sacar su dibujo, y dijo daría por ella doscientos doblones." AGN, Jesuitas IV-54, caja 2, exp. 88, fol. 163r.

33. The idea that location and point of origin is an added value for certain objects is explored in the classic study on souvenirs by Susan Stewart. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993).

34. On this painting and its pendant see, in the recent literature, the essays by Luis Eduardo Wuffarden and Thomas B. F. Cummins in *Pintura cuzqueña*, ed. Luis Eduardo Wuffarden and Ricardo Kusunoki, exhibition catalogue (Lima: Museo de Arte de Lima, 2016), 36-37 and 87-89, respectively. Illustrations of this work are available online in many places, such as through the visual archive project "Arca," <http://artecolonialamericano.az.uniandes.edu.co:8080/>

The sculpture supposedly arrived in Callao, floating off the coast in a crate. When it was opened, a note inside indicated that the image was destined for Cusco, so it undertook a second voyage, by land, over the Andes, and into the ancient capital of the Inka. The painting portrays the port and the distant sea on the upper right corner, as well as the episode of the opening of the crate in the foreground. These details perpetuated the memory of the trip as a foundational episode of the image, reminding viewers in Cusco of its distant provenance, just as texts would do through words, including the lengthy inscription on one side of the canvas.

Analyzed together through the lens of distance and mobility, one might ask if these two images – the Virgin of Belén and the Neapolitan sculpture of the Virgin of Sorrows – are that different. In the historiography, they belong to distinct categories of analysis: the Virgin of Belén speaks to the history of religious images, local devotional identity and the ecclesiastical reforms of Bishop Mollinedo in Cusco; whereas Neapolitan sculpture has mostly been addressed through formalism and attribution and, more recently, in terms of Mediterranean circulation.³⁵ Nonetheless, one could argue that they are two sides of a similar travel narrative with one, the Virgin of Belén, cast in legendary and miraculous fashion, and the other, the Virgin of Sorrows, belonging to the more mundane sphere of documentary history.

3. Material Traces of Distance and the Artist's Workshop

To a certain extent, part of what this essay explores belongs to the field of study of circulation and trade, which typically informs about artists, objects, and agents in movement in the connected world of the early modern period. What, who, when and where are the building blocks of circulation histories, but another question to consider is what happens to the works of art during travel. As seen above, occasionally a travel narrative takes shape through the course of transportation, potentially inflecting the reception.

35. The growing body of literature includes: Letizia Gaeta, ed., *La Scultura meridionale in età moderna nei suoi rapporti con la circolazione mediterranea* (Lecce: Università del Salento, 2007); Isabella Di Liddo, "Nicola Salzillo entre Nápoles y España. Un entramado de relaciones entre talleres," in *Salzillo, testigo de un siglo*, exhibition catalogue (Murcia: Museo Salzillo, Iglesia de Jesús, and Iglesia de San Andrés, 2007).

On a more practical level, one can also ask how long-distance movement conditions production. Are there material traces of the travel in the objects? How do you move an entire altarpiece from Seville to Honduras? And did this affect the way these objects were made and how artists approached their work?

The technical difficulties involved in long distance travel stimulated practical, material, and artistic solutions. Although there is no shortage of information on this matter, it has typically been an accessory - a side note -, and not fully integrated into the analysis of the works and the artists. In other words, the historiography has made visible the point of origin as well as the point of arrival of many objects but has left the story in between out of the picture when, in fact, Latin American and Spanish historians as early as the 1920s and 30s uncovered relevant documentation. For instance, quite a lot is known about commissions for altarpieces to be shipped from Spain to churches in America in the sixteenth century. Demand was high because local expert *ensambladores* were still few and far between in the viceroyalties. The 1582 agreement between the congregation of the Rosary in the church of Santo Domingo in Lima and Juan Bautista Vazquez el Viejo (1525-1588) in Seville specifies that he produce a *retablo* in small and light-weight pieces to facilitate transport.³⁶ To further assist in assemblage at a long distance, the parts were numbered or marked. A contract for another altarpiece, destined for the high altar of the cathedral of Comayagua (Honduras), asked that this not be done with ink, which could easily wash away but rather by incision on the wood.³⁷ Such measures were crucial in the trans-Atlantic market since they replaced the installation process that was typically carried out by the artists (or their assistants) travelling to the churches which had commissioned them.

Regarding paintings on canvas, a lot has been gleaned about the relationship of mobility to production from the Sevillian art market of the seventeenth-century. Documentation reveals that Sevillian artists, including Francisco de Zurbarán, tended to use the same dimensions for the paintings in any one shipment,

36. Jesús Miguel Palomero Páramo, "Retablos y esculturas en América. Nuevas aportaciones," in *Andalucía y América en el siglo XVI: Actas de las II Jornadas de Andalucía y América*, ed. Bibiano Torres Ramírez and José J. Hernández Palomo (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1983), vol. 2, 432. For an updated analysis of this artist, see Jesús Porres Benavides, *Juan Bautista Vázquez el Viejo* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 2019).

37. Palomero Páramo, "Retablos y esculturas," 432.

probably in response to the size of the crates.³⁸ Further analysis on the Flemish painting export market destined both for Seville and the Spanish viceroyalties suggests that paintings conceived for this clientele adapted to taste as well as the local market economy, which even affected if instructions were given to thinly paint canvases.³⁹

In the context of inter-viceregal and regional mobility of art within Spanish America's own vast geography, similar mechanisms of production and transport operated. The marking of materials to assist in local assemblage could affect not just retablos but also the mounting of rolled canvases onto prefabricated stretchers, as is evidenced by a series of paintings representing the Life of the Virgin in the Comprensión chapel in Tlacotes (Zacatecas), recently studied by Magdalena Castañeda Hernández and a group of young conservators. Signed by José de Ibarra around 1730-32, some of the stretchers show matching and paired sets of markings on adjoining wood pieces that would guide local hands on how to assemble them once they arrived from the workshop in the city of Mexico.⁴⁰ As these conservators observe, this kind of evidence has often been lost because of the widespread practice of substituting old stretchers for new ones, without recording their original appearance for posterity; and, one might add, because still there is not enough collaboration between historians and conservators.

In conclusion, for all kinds of circulation, the communication necessary for assemblage at distant points relied as much on written instructions in correspondence and contracts as on the language of numbers and symbols inscribed on the objects. For the most part the system worked, although sometimes mistakes occurred. Visual examination of monumental canvases by renowned eighteenth-century painters of Mexico City sending their work to churches in distant locations in the viceroyalty occasionally reveals adjustments made on site, specially to fit architectural

38. Serrera, "Zurbarán y América," 69; Duncan Kinkead, "Juan de Luzon and the Sevillian Painting Trade with the New World in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century," *The Art Bulletin* 66, no.2 (1984): 303-310.

39. Neil de Marchi and Hans van Miegroet, "Exploring Markets for Netherlandish Paintings in Spain and Nueva España," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 50 (1999): 80-111.

40. María Magdalena Castañeda Hernández et al., "Consolidando decisiones: reflexiones sobre la intervención de dos pinturas del artífice novohispano José de Ibarra," *Estudios sobre conservación, restauración y museología (ENCRyM)* 5 (2018), 127.

frames, often by cutting a corner or adjusting inscription cartouches on the edges.⁴¹

Along with these mechanisms, mostly universal, it is also possible that new ways of dealing with distance developed in the Spanish American viceroyalties. One possibility is explored by Evonne Levy in her analysis of “multi-field” Andean paintings in which artists used a single canvas to compose various independent works that would then be cut and separated at destination.⁴² Another example of new pictorial modalities responding to mobility is the scroll or rolled painting.

4. New Objects: Rolled Paintings and Their Travelling Cases

One of the most obvious examples of how the experience of distance generated an artistic response in the viceroyalties is found in paintings which were made deliberately to be rolled and stored in permanently attached cases. Although it is unknown when and where such paintings began to be produced, they were extremely popular in eighteenth-century Spanish America. Rolling canvases for transport had always been a common practice both in Europe and America, but here a temporary solution for travel purposes becomes a structural and permanent quality of the object, one that is also given ornamental value because of the case’s decoration, usually with chinoiserie tonalities and motifs. Once unfolded and hung, the case and rod become a kind of frame at the top and bottom edges, which also explains that even de inside of the case is decorated.

Previously, these paintings were thought to relate mostly to itinerant mission contexts, as visual props unfolded for didactic and dramatic effect during sermons (fig. 1).⁴³ Currently, however, more contexts of production and varied iconographies are known, including non-religious subject matter such as casta painting, portraiture (fig. 2) and elements of nature (fig. 3).⁴⁴ There is also evidence that even the most successful



Figure 1. Unidentified artist, New Spain, *Religious Orders Adoring the Sacred Heart of Jesus*, eighteenth century, oil on canvas, 37 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 25 9/16 in. (95 x 65 cm). Museo de Historia Mexicana, Monterrey, Mexico

painters, such as Miguel Cabrera, produced them. Unfortunately, many rolled paintings were and are still sometimes restored by eliminating the case and rod, so it is likely that some paintings in museums and collections were once rolled paintings but have gone unnoticed as such. It is also true that in some examples, the original cases and rods have been replaced with newer and simpler ones.

When the support survives, material analysis shows that painters adapted their techniques to the format: the surface is thinly painted, with hardly any base preparation, and the lateral vertical edges are usually reinforced with a textile strip to protect the image from damage caused by repeated unfolding. Often painted in bright colors or gilded, these edges provide a sense for a frame, in combination with the case and rod (fig. 4).⁴⁵

In the context of this essay, what is of interest is not only that a new kind of pictorial format was

41. An example is found in some of the paintings by Francisco Antonio Vallejo in the choir of the parish church of El Carmen in San Luis Potosí.

42. Evonne Levy, “‘Mass’ Produced Devotional Paintings in the Andes: Mobility, Flexibility, Visual Habitus,” in *The Nomadic Object*, 271-290. These works are also addressed by Marta Penhos, “Una constelación de imágenes. Pinturas andinas en la Argentina,” in *Pintura cuzqueña*, 140.

43. For more on this example, see Marion Oettinger Jr., ed., *San Antonio 1718: Art from Mexico*, exhibition catalogue (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2018), 145.

44. Luisa Elena Alcalá, “Gathering at the Ahuehuate Tree: A

Conversation Piece,” in *The Significance of Small Things. Essays in Honour of Diana Fane* (Madrid: El Viso, 2018), 14-22.

45. Rocío Bruquetas Galán, “De camariñas a Cuzco: la imagen de Nuestra Señora de Monte Farello, protectora de navegantes,” in *Tornaviaje: Tránsito artístico entre los virreinos americanos y la metrópolis*, ed. Fernando Quiles, Pablo Amador and Martha Fernández (Seville: Universidad Pablo de Olavide, 2020), 491-509.



Figure 2. Unidentified artist, New Spain, *Portrait of Captain Antonio Jose Clemente de Arostegui*, 1783, oil on canvas scroll mounted on gilt wood, 28¾ x 18½ in. (73 x 47 cm). Gift of the Collection of Frederick and Jan Mayer, Denver Art Museum

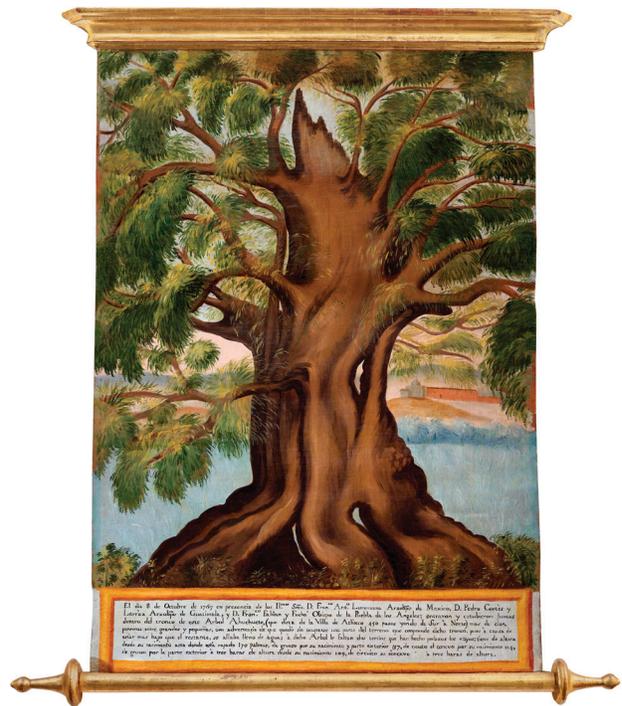


Figure 3. Unidentified artist, New Spain, *The Abuehuetle of Atlixco*, 1767, oil on canvas scroll mounted on gilt wood, 29⅞ x 20⅞ in. (74 x 53 cm). Colecciones Históricas del I.E.S. El Greco, Toledo, Spain (photograph by David Blázquez)

produced for those who desired or needed to travel with paintings, but also that these objects elicited a new type of viewing experience which included physical interaction with the object, thus involving touch as much as sight. This is suggested by an allegorical painting about the Franciscan mission enterprise in the Colegio de Propaganda Fide in Zacatecas (fig. 5). Surrounding the Virgin of the Refuge and Saint Francis in the center, there are inscriptions in Latin, smaller scenes, including the expulsion of Adam and Eve and Noah's ark, symbols from the Marian Litany, and the kneeling portrait of Francisco Rousset de Jesús y Rosas (1749-1814), Bishop of Sonora, who had trained here. For our purposes, the interesting detail is behind him: the Jesuit Juan José Giuca delivers a copy of the Virgin of the Refuge to the Franciscan José María Guadalupe y Alcivia. According to the order's chronicler, Giuca donated the copy in 1747 and thereafter the Virgin became the mission's patron saint. Significantly, it describes the gift as "un lienzo de enrollar" ("a canvas to roll"), and it is this mode of painting (although without the case) that appears in the lunette.⁴⁶

46. José Antonio Alcocer, *Bosquejo de la historia del Colegio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe y sus misiones* (1768), ed. Rafael Cervantes (Mexico

The scene projects an intimate and personal meeting between the two men involving both sight and touch (fig. 6). Giuca leans down to offer the scroll, and he unrolls it while the Franciscan kneels in adoration, thankful at the promise of ownership of something special that has come from far away and offers spiritual salvation for this territory. A sense of distance inscribes the composition, not only through the painting within the painting, and the journey it evokes in light of the documented cult history of the Virgin of the Refuge in Zacatecas, but also through the vast landscape, pale blue and white, entirely unreal, remote and nonspecific. The absence of the carrying case in the depiction of the rolled canvas is certainly deliberate, since it would be the only touch of contemporary life were it to be included; and, as such, it would distract from the enveloping otherworldly atmosphere of the allegory.

City: Porrúa, 1958), 186. Also, on this cult, see the entry by Lenice Rivera in *Zodiaco Mariano*, exhibition catalogue (Mexico City: Basílica de Guadalupe, 2004): 142.



Figure 4. Blas Tupac Amaru, *Altarpiece with donor Antonio Bernardino Venel*, 1760, oil on canvas scroll mounted on painted wood 23¼ x 21 in. (59 x 53,4 cm). Museo Histórico Nacional, Santiago, Chile. (Copyright© Colección Museo Histórico Nacional)

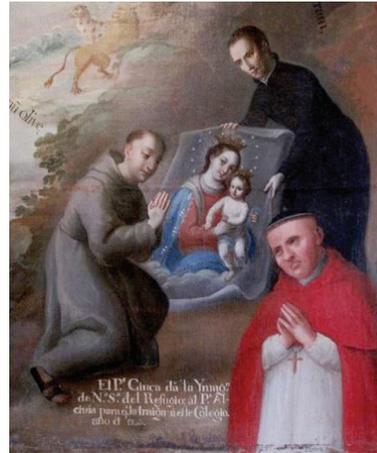


Fig. 6. Detail of Fig. 5



Figure 5. Unidentified artist, New Spain, *Allegory of the Virgin of the Refuge*, late eighteenth century, oil on canvas. Museo de Guadalupe, former convent of Propaganda Fide de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Zacatecas, Mexico

Conclusions: “Desde donde miramos...”⁴⁷

Art and distance come together in the previous examples in a variety of ways. What they have in common is that the object histories are inflected in a powerful way by an active experience of movement and geography. As we have seen, distance can help forge local identities that emerge in the pictorialized and/or narrated journey of a travelling object, and affect transport strategies, materials, and techniques. In which other cases this may be a fruitful avenue of research remains to be seen, especially because it is important to recognize the limits of such an approach and consider contrary situations in which the localizing history of an imported object became dominant in forging its meaning, possibly even erasing traces and memory of its point of origin or travel, or rendering them less worthy of commemoration or acknowledgement.⁴⁸ To a certain extent, the art history of the Spanish American vicerealties in the last thirty years has strongly and successfully exposed localization narratives, examining Latin American processes, scenarios, and adaptations that are fascinating on numerous levels, including for a more universal history of art, which is why it has also drawn the attention of scholars working in other fields internationally. Nonetheless, in the local/global framework, while it is beneficial to look in both directions involved in this complementary tandem, it is also important not to forget the space in between. In recovering traces of lived distance in viceregal art the ultimate challenge is to integrate it into the history we write, so that it may not be merely anecdotal, an empty generalization, or background information relegated to footnote material. Finally, thinking more about this aspect may also invite reflection and understanding on how we as art historians look at the past from our own different points of the globe, our own distances.

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Luisa Elena Alcalá is an Associate Professor in the Department of History and Theory of Art at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. She received her PhD in Art History from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. She has published widely and directed projects on the art of the viceroyalty of New Spain related to painting, circulation, religious images, and the Jesuits. In 2014 she co-edited (with Jonathan Brown) the volume *Painting in Latin America, 1550-1820*. More recently, she was a member of the curatorial team of the itinerant exhibition *Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790- Pinxit Mexici* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Fomento Cultural Banamex in Mexico City, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017-18). In recent years, she has been member and collaborator of several “Connecting Art Histories” projects at the Getty Foundation. Currently she co-directs a research project on relics and reliquaries in the Hispanic world supported by the Spanish government.

47. The phrase comes from the original title of the lecture pronounced in the Thoma conference in Lima 2019 that gave way to this essay and which was, in part, dedicated to an analysis of how place and distance also inflect art historical and exhibition practice.

48. As discussed in Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, “Hybridity and its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 12, no.1 (2003): 11-12 and 23.