
Loan, Donation, Acquisition: Art of the Spanish Americas at the Blanton Museum of Art



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All museum collections are, in essence, collections of collections. That is to say, museum collections are sets of objects grouped according to varied criteria, resulting from the desires and interests of diverse individuals—private collectors or curators—and defined by different historical contexts. Analyzing the ways in which museums have been able to expand their collections is an important and exciting exercise, for it allows us to uncover intentions that would otherwise remain unnoticed, even for the protagonists of those stories.

In this essay, I will focus on the exhilarating period during which the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin consolidated a permanent collection of more than two hundred artworks from the Spanish Americas in less than three years, while simultaneously creating an ambitious strategy to attract diverse audiences their enjoyment and understanding. This is a recent story; thus, there will likely be others who, in future years, will study its consequences, contributions, and limitations in more detail. Be that as it may, and to help the researchers in the future, I believe it is important to state here the premises that cement this transformation and the theoretical framework that underpins it.

No institution exists isolated from its cultural milieu, and so to begin, it is necessary to first understand the broader context of the Blanton's case study. In the United States only twenty-five museums own art of the Spanish Americas as part of their permanent collections. This is undoubtedly a very small number, considering that in 2018, 2,620 museums of art were officially recognized in the country (fig. 1).¹ In some institutions, especially in some areas of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, the collecting of viceregal art was primarily an exercise of accumulating artifacts produced or used in the region in the years during which the southwestern United States was part of the viceroyalty of New Spain. As it is the case with many of the people who live in these regions, objects did not cross the border but were instead crossed by it when, during the nineteenth century, the limits of national territories were defined. Therefore, it is no surprise, that it was likely in New Mexico during the 1930s where the term “Spanish colonial” was coined, a term that was, until recently, the most common way to refer to viceregal art in the United States.² On the contrary, the wealthiest and largest museums of the East and West coasts, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, or the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, were instead recipients of donations from several female collectors, the majority of whom were wives of diplomats or businessmen, who acquired objects during their residencies in Mexico and other Latin American countries, starting

1 Lisa Frehill and Marisa Pelczar, “Data File Documentation: Museum Data Files, FY 2018 Release” (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2018), https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/museum_data_file_documentation_and_users_guide.pdf. Accessed on May 17, 2021.

2 For a discussion of this term and others such as “Art of the Spanish Americas,” see Thomas B.F. Cummins, Estrella de Diego, Rosario Inés Granados, Jorge F. Rivas Pérez, and Natalia Majluf, “Re/Neo/Des/ Colonial. ¿Una cuestión de nomenclatura?” in *Debates de la Colección Cisneros*, October 25, 2019, <https://www.colecccioncisneros.org/es/editorial/debate/reneodes-colonial-%C2%BFuna-questi%C3%B3n-de-nomenclatura>.

Museos en los Estados Unidos con colecciones de arte virreinal hispanoamericano

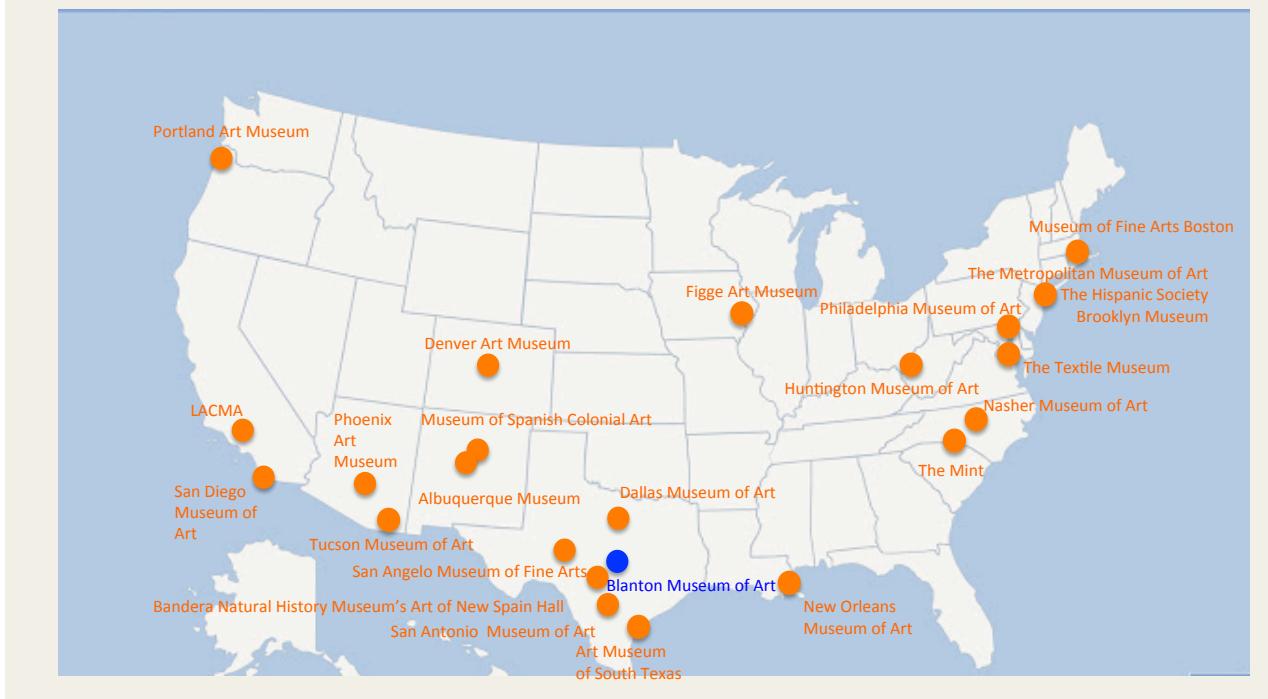


Figure 1. Museums in the United States with collections of Spanish American art (map produced by the author, with original research)

in the last decades of the nineteenth century.³ These instances of direct acquisition took place before the creation of national and international laws and guidelines for the protection of cultural patrimony.

Temporary exhibitions are another important way of understanding the presence of and interest in the art of the Spanish Americas. Fortunately, there have been many more institutions interested in hosting temporary exhibitions, doubling the number of permanent collections (fig. 2). Curator Aubrey Hobart counted

3 Linda Bantel and Marcus B. Burke, *Spain and New Spain: Mexican Colonial Arts in Their European Context* (Corpus Christi, TX: Art Museum of South Texas, 1979); Diane Fane, "From Pre-Columbian to Modern: Latin American Art at The Brooklyn Museum," in *Converging Cultures: Art and Identity in Spanish America*, ed. Diane Fane (New York: Harry N. Abrams/Brooklyn Museum, 1996). See also Edward J. Sullivan, *The Americas Revealed: Collecting Colonial and Modern Latin American Art in the United States* (New York: The Frick Collection; University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018). See also the presentation by Ilona Katzew, curator of Latin American Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, "Sense of Mission, Aesthetic Sense: Why Build a Collection of Spanish Colonial Art?" in the same symposium, *The Americas Revealed, Collecting Colonial and Modern Latin American Art in the United States* at the Center for the History of Collecting at The Frick Collection, New York City, May 16, 2014, <https://www.frick.org/taxonomy/term/1521/all>.

Museos en los Estados Unidos que han expuesto arte virreinal hispanoamericano

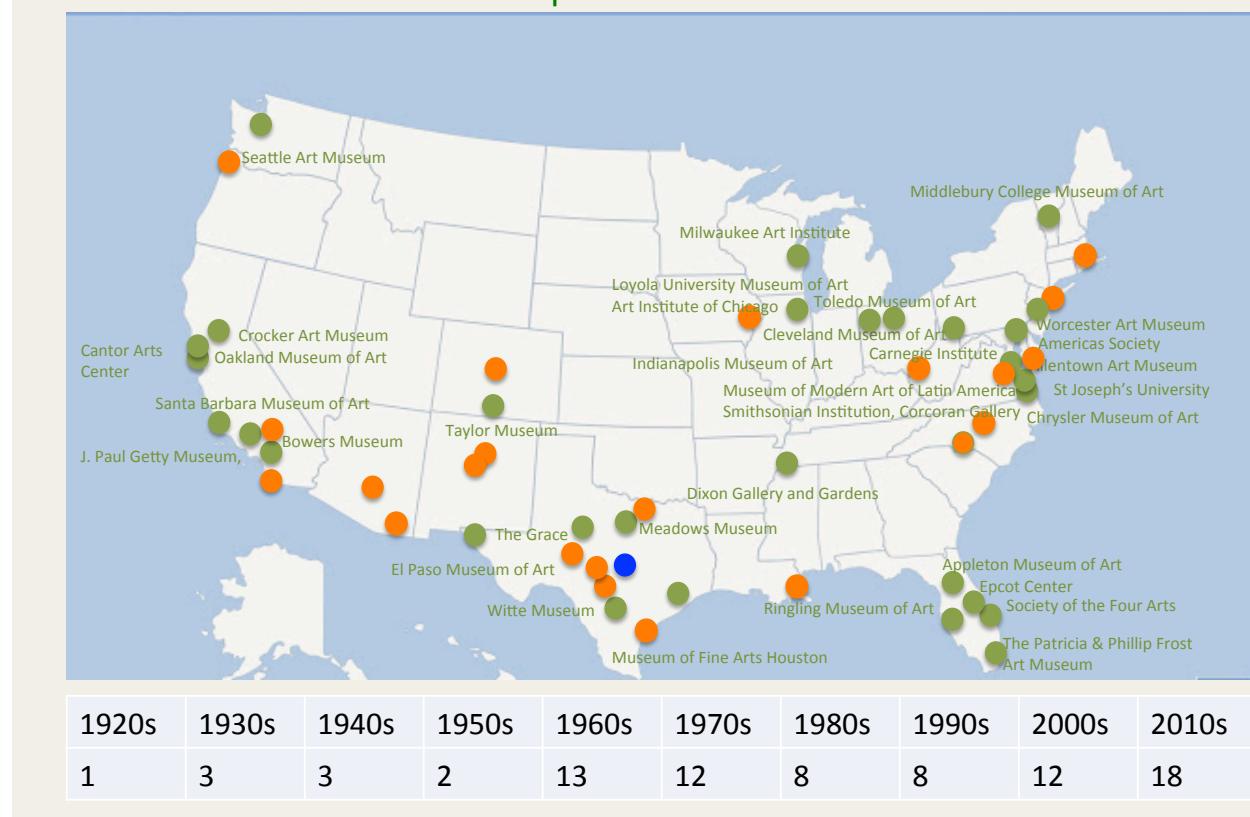


Figure 2. Museums in the United States that have exhibited Spanish American art (map produced by the author, based on Aubrey Hobart, “Treasures and Splendors: Exhibiting Colonial Latin American Art in U.S. Museums, 1920-2020,” Ph.D. dissertation in visual studies, University of California Santa Cruz, June 2018, with additional information from the author)

sixty-six institutions in her 2018 doctoral dissertation,⁴ but I have added a few more for a total of eighty institutions.⁵ This number of exhibitions reveals that the display of the art of the Spanish Americas boomed during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, even when, compared to so-called pre-Hispanic art (today also known as Ancient American Art or Ancient Americas) and modern and contemporary art, the period continued and continues to be marginal. Hobart and other authors, such as Florencia Bazzano, have noted that the interest

in Latin American art evident in the museum projects from these decades was consequence of the Cold War and the United States need to strengthen ties with its continental neighbors, the result of the political strategy known as the “Good Neighbor policy,” established by president Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 40s.⁶ Beginning in the 2010s, the number of exhibitions increased, but also their size and scope, becoming larger and more ambitious.⁷ The interest in creating temporary exhibitions

⁴ Aubrey Hobart, “Treasures and Splendors: Exhibiting Colonial Latin American Art in U.S. Museums, 1920-2020,” (PhD diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, June 2018).

⁵ The exhibitions that I added were: *Spanish Colonial Art from the Lilly and Francis Robicsek Collection*: Mint Museum of Art, Charlotte, NC., 2016; *Art from the Andes: Spanish Colonial Paintings from the Elvin A. Duerst Bequest*, Portland Museum of Art, 2015, <http://portlandart-museum.us/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record%3Bid>; *Art and Empire: The Golden Age of Spain*, San Diego Museum of Art, 2019; *Mapping Memory: Space and History in 16th-Century Mexico*, Blanton Museum of Art, 2019, <https://blantonmuseum.org/rotation/mapping-memory>.

⁶ Florencia Bazzano, “Latin American Art at The University of Texas at Austin: The University Art Museum,” in *Art Museums of Latin America: Structuring Representation*, ed. by Michele Greet and Gina McDaniel Tarver (New York; London: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 179-91.

⁷ The three most important exhibitions during this period were 1) Ilona Katzew and Luisa Elena Alcalá, *Contested Visions in the Spanish Colonial World* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2012), organized by Ilona Katzew from LACMA, centered around diverse perspectives of the conquest, 2) Richard Aste and Mia L. Bagneris, *Behind Closed Doors: Art in the Spanish American Home, 1492-1898* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2013), organized by Richard Aste from the Brooklyn Museum, innovatively centered around the domestic realm

of viceregal art, in particular, and Latin American art, in general, is undoubtedly related to the demographic change in the United States, that is to say, to the presence of almost sixteen per cent of USA inhabitants who identify as being of Hispanic or Latino origin.⁸

I will now focus on some of these temporary projects because I believe it is important to understand how perspectives on the art of the Spanish Americas have changed over the years, recognizing that the majority of these projects were conceived as traveling shows, which demonstrates a solid international network of museums that came together in strengthening and increasing the visibility of both the art they promoted and the participating institutions.

The first exhibition that I will discuss is *Colonial Art of Mexico*, organized by Robert M. Ellis, Felipe Lacouture, and Gonzalo Obregón for the National Border Program (PRONAF, for its acronym in Spanish) in conjunction with the University of New Mexico Art Museum in Albuquerque, where Ellis was professor of art. From 1968 to 1969 the exhibition traveled to the Taylor Museum in Colorado Springs, the University of Texas at Austin Arts Center (one of the predecessors of the Blanton Museum), the Los Angeles Municipal Museum, and the Museo de Arte e Historia in Ciudad Juárez, where Lacouture was director. The objective of the exhibition was to promote an appreciation and understanding of the Mexican heritage in the Southwest.⁹

in Hispanic America, and 3) Ilona Katzew et al., *Painted in Mexico, 1700-1790: Pinxit Mexici*, ed. Ilona Katzew (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017), organized by Luisa Elena Alcalá, Jaime Cuadriello, Ilona Katzew y Paula Mues with the aim of discussing the artistic process of eighteenth-century New Spanish painting and showcasing genealogies of authors and commercial routes never before considered. These three exhibitions were travelling shows.

8 At the time this essay was sent for publication in mid 2021, the 2020 census data had not been released. “According to the 2010 Census, 308.7 million people resided in the United States on April 1, 2010, of which 50.5 million (or 16 percent) were of Hispanic or Latino origin (see Table 1). The Hispanic population increased from 35.3 million in 2000 when this group made up 13 percent of the total population... Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 43% percent, which was four times the growth in the total population at 10 percent.” Sharon R. Ennis, Merarys Ríos-Vargas and Nora G. Albert, “The Hispanic Population: 2010,” May, 2011, <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-04.pdf>. Accessed on May 18, 2021.

9 Ellis, in the Introduction to the catalogue clearly stated: “The Southwest region of the United States has a deep-rooted Spanish and Mexican cultural heritage. The University desired to present a major exhibition of colonial art from Mexico to foster a greater appreciation and understanding of this heritage.” Felipe Lacouture y Gonzalo Obregón, *Colonial Art of Mexico. An Exhibition Organized by the Programa Nacional Fronterizo in Cooperation with the University of New Mexico* (Albuquerque: University Art Museum, University of New Mexico, 1968), 3. For a discussion on how the show was received in Austin, see the review published in the *Austin American-Statesman*, March 16, 1969. Accessed on April 16, 2021.

This was part of the strategies with which PRONAF sought to improve economic, urban, and cultural life in all Mexican borderland communities.¹⁰ The show, which included thirty architectural photographs, in addition to fifty paintings and two sculptures from Mexican collections (among others, from the Museo Nacional del Vicerreinato, the Colegio de las Vizcaínas, and some private collections), has not received much attention in the specialized literature, despite having been organized by one of the most important Mexican museologists, Lacouture,¹¹ and a distinguished specialist on the subject, Obregón.¹²

The next noteworthy exhibition is *Peruvian Colonial Painting*,¹³ organized by the Hungarian archaeologist Pál Kelemen for the Brooklyn Museum with only a score of pieces, some belonging to the Brooklyn Museum and others to the collection of the architect Arthur Q. Davis and the Stern Fund, a trust fund that provided educational resources for the University of New York.¹⁴ The exhibition opened to the public in 1971 at the Brooklyn Museum, and first traveled to the Art Gallery at the University of Texas at Austin (another predecessor of the Blanton Museum), and then to the Isaac Delgado Art Museum in New Orleans and the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami.¹⁵

The exhibition from the 1980s that I would like to call attention to is *Gloria in Excelsis: The Virgin and Angels in Viceregal Painting of Peru and Bolivia*,¹⁶ which

10 Wilebaldo L. Martínez Toyes, “Programa Nacional Fronterizo (El Caso de Ciudad Juárez),” *Crónicas, Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez*, October 19, 2017, https://bivir.uacj.mx/bivir_pp/cronicas/pronaf.htm.

11 Carlos Vázquez Olvera, *Felipe Lacouture Fornelli. Museólogo mexicano* (México, Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes/Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2004).

12 Judith Puente, “Gonzalo Obregón y Pérez Siliceo (1916-1977),” *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 47 (1977): 125-132.

13 Pál Kelemen, *Peruvian Colonial Painting: A Special Exhibition*. (New York: np, 1971).

14 Some of the pieces from the Davis and the Stern Fund collections are now part of the permanent collection of the New Orleans Museum of Art, which is not surprising, given that it was in this city where Davis created some of his most important architectural projects.

15 Neither the Brooklyn Museum catalogue nor the Lowe Museum mention the latter as a venue for the exhibition, (<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/1096>), but the exhibition received a most enthusiastic review, worthy of mention and knowledge: Griffin Smith, “To See It Means Love at First Sight. Peruvian Art at the Lowe: A Knockout,” *The Miami Herald* (Miami, Florida), October 15, 1972. Accessed on June 10, 2021.

16 Teresa Gisbert and Barbara Duncan, *Gloria in Excelsis: The Virgin and Angels in Viceregal Painting of Peru and Bolivia* (New York: Center

was a collaboration between the prominent Bolivian art historian Teresa Gisbert, who needs no introduction to the readers of this essay, and the North American collector Barbara Duncan.¹⁷ This exhibition traveled between 1985 and 1986 to the Center for Inter-American Relations (New York), the Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery at the University of Texas at Austin (the last predecessor to the Blanton Museum), and to the Center for the Fine Arts, today known as the Miami Art Museum of Dade County. This was, indisputably, the first museum project to historically contextualize the pieces, thus transcending the surveying nature of the previous shows mentioned above and proposing analytic categories for the study of the objects, such as Gisbert's "Statue Paintings," which refers to portraits of devotional sculptures.

The three projects mentioned above had in common that they targeted specific regions (Mexico, Peru, Bolivia-Peru). This trend began to be reverted with *Converging Cultures: Art and Identity in Spanish America*, an exhibition organized by the Brooklyn Museum, under the direction of Diane Fane.¹⁸ This was a foundational project that took scholarly rigor and depth even further, highlighting, like never before the role played by Indigenous artists and their cosmovision in the production of colonial art. The other two relevant exhibitions I will focus on are *Potosí: Colonial Treasures and the Bolivian City of Silver*, organized in 1997 by Pedro Querejazu and Elizabeth Ferrer for the American Society of New York and *The Colonial Andes: Tapestries and Silverwork, 1530-1830*, organized by Elena Phipps for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2004.¹⁹ They are both important because of their emphasis on the so-called applied arts, such as metallurgy and textile

for Inter-American Relations, 1986).

17 Barbara Doyle Duncan lived with her family in Lima between 1948 and 1955, while her husband John Duncan worked for the chemical business W. R. Grace & Company. In Lima, she learned to appreciate Latin American art in all its artistic dimension, which around 1956, inspired her to start her own collection of modern art and to become part of the International Council of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Her private files, found in the Benson Collection at the University of Texas at Austin, are an invaluable source to also understand her role as curator: <https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utlac/00128/lac-00128.html>

18 Diane Fane, *Converging Cultures: Art and Identity in Spanish America* (New York: Harry N. Abrams/Brooklyn Museum, 1996). The first comparative exercise between the viceroyalty of New Spain and Peru took place in 1931 with the show *Decorative Arts of Spain and Spanish America* from the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio. Aubrey Hobart, "Treasures and Splendors," 91.

19 Pedro Querejazu and Elizabeth Ferrer, *Potosí: Colonial Treasures and the Bolivian City of Silver* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery in collaboration with the Fundación BHN, La Paz, 1997); Elena Phipps, *The Colonial Andes: Tapestries and Silverwork, 1530-1830* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004).

production. In 2004, Donna Pierce organized a show called *Painting a New World: Mexican Art and Life, 1521-1821*, focusing on the art from the Viceroyalty of New Spain,²⁰ thus summoning several Mexican specialists. This project from the Denver Art Museum celebrated the first anniversary of the donation of the splendid collection of Jan and Frederick Mayer and the establishment of an endowment for the creation of a robust research center dedicated to Latin American colonial and pre-Columbian art, which laid the foundation for the Denver Art Museum's continuous leadership in our field of study.²¹

In 2006, the exhibition *The Arts in Latin America, 1492-1820*, organized by Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt and Joseph J. Rishel for the Philadelphia Museum of Art, was a landmark exhibition in establishing the presence of viceregal art in the United States,²² not only because of its wide geographical scope, which included for the first time Brazil, but also because of the quality of the exhibited pieces, expressly chosen to marvel the audience, the reason why the word "treasures" was used in the two venues of the exhibition within the United States. Such a term prompted some people to argue that the title referenced more to Spanish policies of the extraction of natural and cultural resources rather than an actual celebration of Latin America's artistic heritage. During that same time, Stratton-Pruitt was also working on yet another traveling exhibition called *The Virgin, Saints, and Angels: South American Paintings from the Thoma Collection, 1600-1825*, which visited the Blanton in January, 2008.²³ Marilynn Thoma began in 1996 her mission of creating the best and most complete

20 Donna Pierce, *Painting a New World: Mexican Art and Life, 1521-1821* (Denver: Frederick and Jan Mayer Center for Pre-Colombian and Spanish Colonial Art, Denver Art Museum, 2004).

21 See, for example, the series of annual symposia proceedings, which has more than twenty titles. The Denver Art Museum also received the donation and very important collection of María Encarnación Critcher, who was the wife of Frank Barrows Freyer, a U.S. Navy commander. She collected Peruvian art during the three years they spent in Lima when Frank consulted the restructuring of the local navy. See Rosario I. Granados and Kathryn Santner, "Categorías enlazadas. Lo devocional/artístico como criterios de coleccionismo y exhibición del arte hispanoamericano en los Estados Unidos (1990-2020)," paper presented on April 15, 2021 at the international congress, *El hecho religioso en América Latina: práctica, poder y religiosidad, siglos XVI al XX*, which will be published shortly.

22 Joseph J. Rishel and Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt, *Arts in Latin America, 1492-1820* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006).

23 Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt, *The Virgin, Saints, and Angels: South American Paintings 1600-1825, from the Thoma Collection* (Milan, Italy: Skira, 2006). The Blanton was the last venue of the exhibition, which began at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University in 2006 and then traveled to the Tucson Museum of Art, the Museo de Arte in Puerto Rico, and the University of Toronto Art Center.

collection of South American colonial art outside of Peru. In 2009, the collection was exhibited as *Reverence Renewed: Colonial Andean Art from the Thoma Collection* at the De Paul Art Museum. Between 2014 and 2017 the Art Institute of Chicago also organized two small shows to honor the collection: *A Voyage to South America: Andean Art in the Spanish Empire* and *Doctrine and Devotion: Art of the Religious Orders in the Spanish Andes*.²⁴

Two more traveling shows that exhibited pieces from private collections across the United States between 2016 and 2019 were *Power and Piety: Spanish Colonial Art* and *Highest Heaven: Spanish and Portuguese Colonial Art from the Collection of Roberta and Richard Huber*. The first exhibition was organized in conjunction with the Museum of Biblical Art in New York and the company Art Services International,²⁵ and it included selected pieces from the collection of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, a Venezuelan philanthropist interested in art and education. Jorge Rivas, now the Jan and Frederick Mayer curator of Latin American Art at the Denver Art Museum, was the chief consultant during the acquisition of the collection, which had as its main objective the rescuing of neglected Venezuelan patrimony. The second exhibition showcased the collection of paintings, sculptures, silver objects, furniture pieces, and ivories that Mr. and Mrs. Huber acquired after a decade of living in Argentina and Brazil, where Richard worked for the insurance company Aetna and subsequently Citibank.²⁶ Training their eye in the local museums, such as

24 "A Voyage to South America: Andean Art in the Spanish Empire," The Art Institute of Chicago, <https://www.artic.edu/exhibitions/1998/a-voyage-to-south-america-andean-art-in-the-spanish-empire>; "Doctrine and Devotion: Art of the Religious Orders in the Spanish Andes," The Art Institute of Chicago, <https://www.artic.edu/exhibitions/2493/doctrine-and-devotion-art-of-the-religious-orders-in-the-spanish-andes>.

25 Carlos Peña Plaza et al., *Power and Piety: Spanish Colonial Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection* (Alexandria, VA: Art Services International, 2015). The show's itinerary included the Society of the Four Arts (Palm Beach, Florida), the Loyola University Museum of Art (Chicago, Illinois), the Appleton Museum of Art, College of Central Florida (Ocala, Florida), the Dixon Gallery and Gardens (Memphis, Tennessee), the Figge Art Museum (Davenport, Iowa), the Middlebury College Museum of Art (Middlebury, Vermont), the Allentown Art Museum (Allentown, Pennsylvania), and El Paso Museum of Art (El Paso, Texas).

26 Erin Kathleen Murphy, et al, *Highest Heaven: Spanish and Portuguese Colonial Art from the Collection of Roberta and Richard Huber* (San Antonio: San Antonio Museum of Art, 2016). The exhibition began at the San Antonio Museum of Art and subsequently traveled to the Crocker Art Museum (Sacramento, California), the Worcester Art Museum (Worcester, Massachusetts), and the Chrysler Museum of Art (Norfolk, Virginia). Before this exhibition, the Huber collection was exhibited at the Philadelphia Art Museum. See Suzanne L. Stratton and Mark A. Castro, *Journeys to New Worlds. Spanish and Portuguese Colonial Art in the Roberta and Richard Huber Collection* (Philadelphia,

the Museo Isaac Fernández Blanco in Buenos Aires and the Museo de Charcas in Sucre, the Hubers prioritized a purely aesthetic criteria, buying pieces that they wanted to display and enjoy in their own home.

It may be said that the Thoma, Cisneros, and Huber collections are three of the most comprehensive and important collections of art of the Spanish Americas in the United States, though they are certainly not the only ones.²⁷ Today, thanks to loans, a donation, and an acquisition, those mentioned in the title of this essay, these three collections are currently displayed at the Blanton Museum of Art. As stated above, Spanish colonial art has been exhibited at the Blanton and its predecessors since 1968, with *Colonial Art of Mexico*, followed by *Peruvian Colonial Painting* and *Gloria in Excelsis*, providing evidence of the Blanton's long exhibition record and profound interest in displaying and researching the art from this period. It was, however, the exhibition of the Thoma collection, *The Virgin, Saints, and Angels* in 2008 that catalyzed a radical change in the museum's interest in the period. Building on the relationship developed on that occasion, Simone Wicha, now the Blanton's director, appealed to Marilyn Thoma indicating the museum's potential to become an outstanding teaching, research, and exhibition center of viceregal art.

This consideration was based on the record of the University of Texas at Austin's dedication to Latin American studies, as evidenced by the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection²⁸ and the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies, founded in 1921 and 1940, respectively, that merged in 2015 as LLILAS Benson.²⁹ Understanding such a long-standing commitment to the study of the region, Blanton's director Donald B. Goodall prioritized acquisitions of Latin American art almost since its foundation in 1966 as a university museum.³⁰ Thanks to Barbara Duncan's

PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2013).

27 Another noteworthy collection is the collection of Lilly Francis Robicsek, which today is part of The Mint Museum's permanent collection in Charlotte, North Carolina. The collection was exhibited here as a temporary exhibition in 2006 (see note 5).

28 The Benson is one of the top five repositories for the study of Latin American history in the United States. *A Library for the Americas: The Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection*. Ed. by Julianne Gillard and José Montelongo, Joe R. and Teresa Lozano Long Series in Latin American and Latino Art and Culture (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018).

29 The University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley, which hosted the live transmissions of the congress where this paper was presented, is our sister institution in the UT system and in its interest in this field of study, though the UT at Rio Grande was only founded in 2015, while the Austin campus dates from 1883.

30 Bazzano, "Latin American Art at The University of Texas at Austin."

support, who co-organized *Gloria in Excelsis*, and who donated fifty-three pieces on paper in 1971, the Blanton became one of the first museums in the United States to actively collect modern and contemporary Latin American art. This leading role intensified after 1981, when the University of Texas at Austin hired Jacqueline Barnitz, who worked there until her retirement in 2007, to train and teach graduate and undergraduate students in this historical period. If George Kubler, as Tom Cummins argues in this volume, may be considered the founder of the study of Latin American pre-Columbian and colonial art in the United States, it could be said that Barnitz played a similar role in the study of modern and contemporary Latin American art, not only because she authored the book, which according to many continues to be the textbook *par excellence* on the subject,³¹ but also because of the many exhibitions she organized. She also created an extensive network of artists, art historians, and students with whom she surrounded herself throughout the years. In this context, is thus not surprising that the first curatorial posting entirely dedicated to the study and exhibition of Latin American art was created at the Blanton Museum of Art in 1988. Mari Carmen Ramírez, today curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, was the first person hired for the position.

Hence, the Thoma-Blanton collaboration reigned in a two-part exhibition titled *Re-envisioning the Virgin Mary: Colonial Painting from South America*, which was opened to the public from 2014 to 2016 and galvanized the decision to finalize a long-term loan to the museum. The loan not only would bring to Austin just under a third of the collection, which is normally housed in Chicago, but the Blanton would also become the center of a broader initiative that would integrate the entire university campus to be led by a curatorial position expressly created at the museum. In 2016, I had the great fortune to be offered this position and develop a strategy that, apart from the organization of exhibitions, had a threefold goal: 1) to promote a multidisciplinary teaching curriculum in the art of the Spanish Americas for the Museum Studies certificate program, whose requirements also include an internship at the Blanton,³² 2) to coordinate short-term research scholarships,³³ and

³¹ Jacqueline Barnitz, *Twentieth-Century Art of Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001). There is a second revised and expanded edition published in 2015.

³² “Museum Studies,” Museum Studies | TEXAS Undergraduate Studies, 2021, <https://ugs.utexas.edu/bdp/programs/muse>.

³³ The scholars of this program, active between 2017 and 2019 and known as the Thoma Visiting Scholars in Spanish Colonial Art / Becas

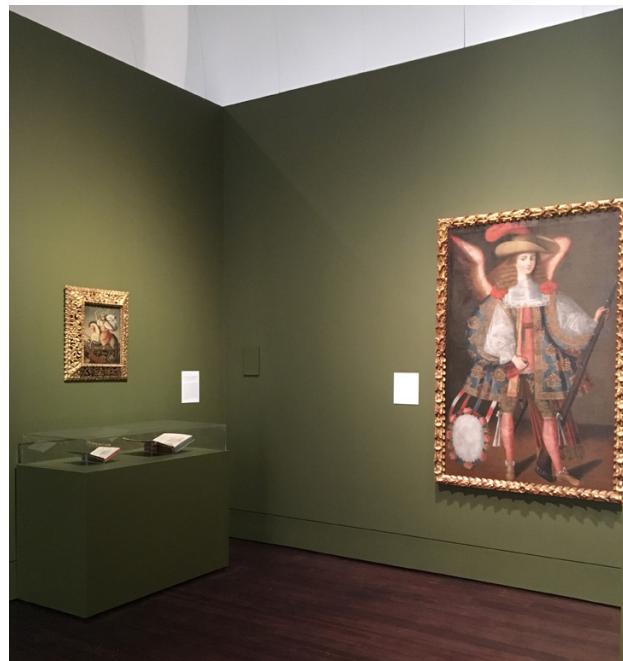


Figure 3. Detail of *Art of the Spanish Americas*, part of the first rotation (2017) of the Spanish American Viceregal art galleries at the Blanton Museum of Art, showing:

Unidentified artist (Cusco), *James the Indian slayer*, ca. 1750, oil on canvas, 15 ½ x 11 ¼ in. (39 x 30 cm). Collection of Carl & Marilyn Thoma

Unidentified artist (Cusco), *Ángel Arcabucero*, ca. 1750, oil on canvas, 64 ¾ x 44 ½ in. (164 x 113 cm). Collection of Carl & Marilyn Thoma

Diego González Holguín (1560 – 1620), *Gramática y arte nueva dela lengua general de todo el Peru, llamada lengua Quichua, o lengua del Inca*, (Lima: Francisco del Canto, 1607) Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin Libraries

Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539 – 1616), *Historia general del Perú*, (Córdoba: la viuda de Andres Barrera, 1617), Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin Libraries

(Photograph by the author)

3) to organize the annual rotation of the permanent galleries, where the loaned pieces are exhibited, presenting different themes throughout the years that can also produce an engaging visual experience enjoyable for both first-time and returning visitors (fig. 3).³⁴ This uni-

Thoma para Investigación en Arte Virreinal Latinoamericano were: Ananda Cohen-Aponte (Cornell University), Verónica Muñoz-Nájar (University of California Berkeley), Carolina Sacristán Ramírez (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), Tamara Calcaño (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), César Favila (University of California at Los Angeles), Natalia Vargas Márquez (University of Minnesota), Ricardo Kusunoki (Museo de Arte de Lima).

³⁴ The 2017 rotation was titled *Art of the Spanish Americas/Life in Colonial Times*. Here we explored the influences and contributions of colonial Peru and reflected upon the different arenas in which viceregal art could be appreciated during the years of its manufacturing. The 2018 rotation was titled *People and Things of the Spanish Americas*, formulating art as material culture, such as furniture pieces, musical instruments, and clothing. The 2019 rotation was titled *Politics and Religion/*

versity component of the initiative included generous support from the College of Liberal Arts, the College of Fine Arts, and the School of Architecture. With these funds, Dr. Susan Deans-Smith, Associate Professor in the History Department, and myself have organized the Distinguished Visiting Speakers in the Arts of the Spanish Americas, a program with two invited lectures per semester. From 2017 to 2020, the programming was in-person, but the COVID-19 pandemic required us to host it virtually, allowing us to invite two researchers to each session instead of one, and more importantly to expand our audience to a broader geography.³⁵ In 2018, Dr. Deans-Smith and I also coordinated the Lozano Long Conference, the annual LLILAS-Benson congress, focused entirely on the study of material culture.³⁶ A significant part of this initiative consisted of having Dr. Gabriela Siracusano as the Tinker Visiting Professor during the first semester of 2019, supporting the teaching role that had been previously shared by UT professors from the Anthropology, History, and Spanish Departments. In May 2019, the Thoma Art Foundation permanently endowed the curatorial position, thus assuring the continuation and expansion of the activities described here.

Inspired by the Thoma's support to the Blanton, at the end of 2016 the Fundación Cisneros donated eighty-six pieces of furniture and paintings, all from colonial Venezuela, to the museum. One of the most relevant artifacts in this donation is a painting by Dionisio José Montero, an artist of African descent (*pardo libre*, as they were called in Venezuela), working in the second half of the seventeenth century (fig. 4). Between 1773 and 1792, Montero signed as an official in the art of-

Religious Domination and Territory, and it explored the militaristic and religious colonization of the Americas. It discussed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception as the political banner for the Spanish Empire. The 2020 rotation was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022 the rotation will be titled *Life in the Afterlife*, which will explore the symbolic worlds of Catholicism, their roles in facilitating religious conversion, and how they may reflect a multiracial society.

35 The guests in the in-person format were Maya Stanfield-Mazzi, Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt, Juan Luis Suárez, Ilona Katzew, Katherine Moore McAllen, Gustavo Tudisco, Susan Verdi Webster, and Cristina Cruz Gonzalez. The guests in the virtual format have been Ananda Cohen Aponte, Elena FitzPatrick Sifford, Almerindo Ojeda, Aaron M. Hyman, Amara Solari, Danna A. Levin, Kris Lane, and Andrés de Leo. These last sessions are available on the Blanton Museum of Art's YouTube channel. In each in-person session, forty people participated, among them students, faculty, museum docents, and the general public. The number of participants tripled in the virtual talks.

36 "The 2018 Lozano Long Conference—Create, Consume, Collect: The Lives of Colonial Latin American ARTifacts," UT College of Liberal Arts: UT College of Liberal Arts, <https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/lilas/events/conferences/2018-lozano-long.php>. The program can be viewed in the following electronic archive, <https://utexas.box.com/s/mlwbwayo9si5bybsexq5i0zc141fxatz>.



Figure 4. Dionisio José Montero (Venezuela 1718–1806), *Our Lady of Mount Carmel and the Souls in Purgatory*, ca.1790, oil on canvas, 32 1/2 x 24 3/16 in. (83 x 62 cm). Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros in memory of Venerable Servant of God Mother Carmen Rendiles Martinez, SDJ, 2016

painting in a pair of testamentary acts.³⁷ However, there is also evidence that in 1771 he was paid for composing the music for the anniversary of the confraternity of Nuestra Señora del Socorro, suggesting that in addition to being a painter, he also worked as a musician.³⁸ This doubling of activities was common at the time, since painting was not considered a liberal art even in the capitals of the viceroyalties and for the most part it was considered as manual labor.³⁹ Significantly, on the back of the painting there is a small inscription on paper that reads: "Dionisio José Monte(ro)...paea/ el 11 de Julio de 1...Para José M(aría) su (Hijo)," evidencing that the painting was inherited by José María Montero, a

37 Alfredo Boulton, *Historia de la pintura en Venezuela* (Caracas: EArmitano, 1964), 1: 377.

38 Alberto Calzavara, *Historia de la música en Venezuela: período hispánico, con referencias al teatro y la danza* (Caracas, Venezuela: Fundación Pampero, 1987), 295–296.

39 Patricia Phelps de Cisneros et al., *De oficio pintor: arte colonial venezolano: colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros* (Caracas: Fundación Cisneros, 2007).



Figure 5. Unidentified artist (Colombia), *Chest*, ca. 1700, Barniz de Pasto and silver on wood, 7 x 9 1/16 x 5 in (17.8 x 23 x 12.7 cm). Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, Purchase, 2018

composer born in 1781 and very active during the celebrations of the independence of Venezuela. This piece allows us, not only to clearly explore the social status of multiracial artists, but also to examine the different canons of beauty that were present in the figures of the Virgin and the angels.

The Blanton collection expanded even further at the end of 2018 when 119 pieces—including silver objects, paintings, sculptures, maps, and furniture pieces—from Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, Guatemala, Argentina, Colombia, and Ecuador, as well as Goa and Spain, were acquired from the Huber collection. One of the key pieces in the collection is a small coffer made with *barniz de pasto* (fig. 5). This technique, which uses the resin from the mopa-mopa tree (*Elaeagia pastoensis Mora*) as its raw material, is well-known for being an amalgam of Asian, European, and Indigenous influences, which were expressed in the materials, the production process, and the flora and fauna details that adorn the coffers, desks, pans, and other domestic objects.⁴⁰ The

piece that belongs to the Blanton collection is one of the most significant pieces of these type of multicultural objects, given that it includes a silver plaque inserted in between the wood and the resin. Although at the moment of manufacture, the silver most likely enhanced the iridescence of the colors and the figures finely delineated in the resin, today it creates almost the opposite effect, due to the rusting of the metal. Regardless, it is a piece that illuminates our understanding of a diverse society.

Through the above-described loan, donation, and acquisition, the Thoma, Cisneros, and Huber collections have converged in the same space, crystallizing the Blanton Museum's very clear exhibition criteria. We are interested in showcasing pieces of the utmost aesthetic quality that can help elucidate the great contradictions of the viceregal period through the telling of clear and engaging stories. To achieve this, we contextualize the pieces with the aid of different resources, among these, the expansive Benson Latin American Collection. In the case of the first rotation, for instance, when we

40 Yayoi Kawamura Kawamura, “Encuentro multicultural en el arte del barniz de pasto o la laca del virreinato del Perú,” *Historia y sociedad* 35 (Julio 2018): 87–112, <https://doi.org/10.15446/hys.n35.69838>.

See also Catalina Ospina, “Mopa Mopa Objects and Epistemological Encounters in the Colonial Andes,” *Transregional Academies* (blog), <https://academies.hypotheses.org/2485>. Both accessed on May 21, 2021.

addressed the military conquest as the beginning of the viceregal period, we included references to the iconography of Santiago Mataincas (fig. 3). The painting's caption explained that the persistence of a ninth-century legend was intended to reinforce the Spanish control over the local population, especially at the end of the eighteenth century when Indigenous rebellions and the discontent of Spaniards born in the viceroyalties were growing rapidly. In that occasion, we spoke about mestizaje by means of the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's oeuvre and about the importance of safeguarding Indigenous languages by means of the work of Diego González Holguín. By showing the *ángel arcabucero* (angel with harquebus) from the Thoma collection, we focused on the original iconographies of the colonial Andes, beyond European influences. The label also explained the richness of the seventeenth-century art market that explained the presence of this type of representation in several regions of South America and that may even explain the blank roundel on the lower left corner. Our objective today, as with this first rotation, is to revitalize the ways in which the art of the Spanish Americas is valued, to reflect upon its historic-aesthetic context from a social and material perspective, transcending traditional linear narratives. We undertook this responsibility as an art museum at a public university and as an institution committed to fostering innovative, inclusive, and socially just education. We also want to engage with analytical frameworks that can help us connect the colonial past to the present. As such, we pay close attention to the provenance of the pieces exhibited in our galleries, carefully tracking reports of stolen patrimony and collaborating with colleagues from several countries, who share an expertise in the black market of art and its effects.⁴¹

Even though the objects exhibited in the museum have become commodities, in their new role as "cultural ambassadors" they continue to showcase a rich national patrimony, asserting, even if from abroad, a local history and identity. Equally important is the fact that displaying artifacts from the Spanish Americas expand and complement the narratives imposed by European art, considered until now to be the universal canon of beauty and artistic practice, thus multiplying the voices that express different, though equally valuable, visual codes and aesthetic standards.⁴² For the Blanton Museum, to

41 Thanks to these collaborations, we were able to identify that a piece from the Blanton's permanent collection belonged to a private collection in Peru, where it had been violently stolen. The piece was immediately returned.

42 Stephanie Anderson, "Unsettling National Narratives and Multiplying Voices: The Art Museum as Renewed Space for Social Advocacy

study and exhibition of the art of the Spanish Americas is in no way a colonizing enterprise. Instead, it conveys a genuine interest in presenting the cultural, racial, linguistic, and economic diversity that characterizes Latin America. This is especially important in the state of Texas, where the Latin American population is expected to become the majority by 2022.⁴³ Just in the context of the university, this sector accounts for 23.4% of the student body.⁴⁴ It is therefore not surprising that students in a Spanish class for heritage speakers (speakers who learned Spanish informally at home as kids but that are now interested in learning the language's grammar) understood, thanks to their own lived experiences, the importance of González de Holguín's Quechua dictionary and the role that mother tongues play in the formation of cultural identity. Thanks to the Quechua dictionary and the dialogues it established with the paintings from the Thoma collection, we were able to discuss how the viceregal period imposed a written system to languages that previously did not have one, thus transforming their very structure. Even though the Spanish authorities saw the Indigenous people as inferior, or at best as children that needed to be guided toward material and spiritual salvation, the first and all subsequent rotations at the Blanton have emphasized the local agency in recreating and transforming iconographies. It is in the conversations that take place in the galleries with audiences from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, that the value of the Latin American heritage becomes evident, ratifying its relevance in today's North American society.

The next project of the Blanton, *Painted Cloth: Fashion and Ritual in Colonial Latin America*, will also demonstrate respect toward cultural patrimony and a strong commitment to exalt its aesthetic value and critically reflect upon its historical context. This exhibition will open to the public in 2022, and it has been awarded a prestigious National Endowment for the Humanities grant for its installation. In *Painted Cloth*, we will explore the importance of secular and religious clothing in the production of social hierarchies (framed by race, gender, and class). We will also showcase the ways in which the richness of dress, or the lack thereof, con-

and Decolonization – A Canadian Case Study," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 35, no. 5 (2020): 488–531, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2020.1803111>.

43 Alexa Ura and Connie Hanzhang Jin, "Texas Gained Almost Nine Hispanic Residents for Every Additional White Resident Last Year," *The Texas Tribune*, June 20, 2019, <https://www.texastribune.org/2019/06/20/texas-hispanic-population-pace-surpass-white-residents/>. Accessed on June 1, 2021.

44 Facts & Figures | The University of Texas at Austin, <https://www.utexas.edu/about/facts-and-figures>. Accessed on June 1, 2021.

structed ideas of the sacred. We will focus on the manufacturing of clothes, as well as on the representation of textiles as miraculous objects. We want to revitalize the ways in which the art of the Spanish Americas is seen, through a novel theme that attracts diverse audiences and forges bridges between past and contemporary practices. With this project we hope to secure many more loans and donations, as well as more acquisitions, to continue to expand the exciting transformation that has characterized the success of the Blanton Museum of Art in recent years.

About the Author

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(Blanton Museum of Art)

Rosario Granados is a Mexican art historian of religious material culture. Since 2016, she has been the Marilynn Thoma Associate Curator of the Art of the Spanish Americas at the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin. In 2019, she organized the exhibition *Mapping Memory: Space and History in 16th-Century Mexico*. Currently, she is preparing *Painted Cloth: Fashion and Ritual in Colonial Latin America*, which will open at the Blanton in late summer 2022, supported by the NEH and the Thoma Foundation. Before being a full-time curator, she taught undergraduate and graduate courses at the University of Chicago's Center for Latin American Studies and at Skidmore College. She holds a BA from the Universidad Iberoamericana, an MA from the Courtauld Institute of Art, and a PhD from Harvard University.