

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Unidentified artist

(New Spain (Mexico), first half of the 18th century)

*Our Lady of Guadalupe*

oil on canvas

192 x 129 cm.; 75.6 x 50.8 in.

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Provenance

Private Collection, Spain.

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This anonymous work of exquisite *fattura* and complex composition belongs specifically to the 18th-century New Spanish Baroque repertory of religious imagery depicting Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The previously unpublished canvas we are presenting here portrays the miraculous episode narrated in the *Nican Mopohua* text, where the Virgin appears to the indigenous Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac. This legend dating back to 1531 goes on to tell how Our Lady asked Diego to request Friar Bishop Juan de Zumárraga build a temple in her name, leaving an impression of her image on the former's cloak, or "tilma", as physical proof and justification. Although this has been the most frequently represented and venerated episode from the Marian canon in the visual arts of New Spain since Baltasar de Echave Orio first painted it in 1606 (fig. 1), the way in which it has translated artistically has undergone superficial, but not fundamental, alterations, as beyond the ornamental elements surrounding the scene, the image of the Mother of God has, over the centuries, remained true to the image preserved on the "tilma".

As a result, Our Lady appears full length, standing face-on to the devotee, depicted as an indigenous Virgin and yet with European features. Her light brown skin, shaded with a range of grey tones, is much the same on both face and hands, the latter clasped together over her breast in an act of prayer, imbuing the scene with a serene mysticism, heightened by the downward tilt of her both beautiful and ingenuous face.

Over her shoulders the Virgin is wearing a blue cloak which, dotted with a host of gold stars, also covers the Mother of God's head, accommodating her crown. The cloak, which opens evenly on both sides of her torso, reveals Our Lady's pinkish and decorated robe, fastened at the neck and extending beyond her feet in a series of folds. This excess cloth is being gathered up by a cherub who, leaning on the crescent moon that serves as a base for the Virgin, is also unfurling his tricolored wings and tilting his face towards his left shoulder in a clear sign of respect.

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The final element we need to highlight as in keeping with the genuine composition of this Marian iconography is the aureole surrounding the figure of the Virgin which, simulating sunrays, gives way to a host of clouds that serve as a pictorial frame and in which, regularly arranged in the four corners of the canvas, we find the rest of the compositional elements which, by deluging the image with narrative content, allow us to date the creation of this beautiful work to the first half of the 18th century.

“The iconography of apparitions was established in the four engravings made by the Seville artist Matías de Arteaga y Alfaro in the 18th century, illustrating Luis Becerra Tanco’s opus *Felicidad de México*” (fig. 2).<sup>1</sup>

It is as such that the work before us displays a complex composition in which four oval medallions bordered by floral garlands contain the scenes from the Virgin’s three apparitions to Juan Diego and the Miracle of the Roses.

In conclusion, the painting we are studying here is a magnificent 18th-century work which, while acting as a showcase for the author’s enviable technical skills, also combines a taste for devotion with an accomplished aptitude for drawing and a display of dazzling luminosity, mixing up a palette of brilliant colors (reserved for the central image) with earthier tones, so typical of Seville Baroque, and which infuse the outer scenes of this beautiful Marian narrative.

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**Figure 1.** Baltasar de Echave Orio, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, 1606, oil on canvas. Private Collection, Mexico

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**Figure 2.** Matías de Arteaga y Alfaro (Villanueva de los Infantes 1633 – 1703 Seville), *First apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe*, from *Felicidad de México en el principio, y milagroso origen, que tuvo en santuario de la Virgen María Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, 1685, xylographic print

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Barea Azcon, 2007, p. 189.