

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Armoire

(Cuzco, 17th century)

paintings: Diego Quispe Tito's workshop
(San Sebastián del Cuzco, 1611–1681)

oil on wooden panel, gilt carved wood
and iron fittings

215 x 94 cm.; 84.6 x 37 in.

width (closed): 147 cm.; 57.9 in.

width (open): 236 cm.; 92.9 in.

Provenance

Private Collection.

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This exceptional armoire is made up of two individual sections, each separated from the other by two adjacent drawers in the middle. It was a very popular model in Spain, and may have been inspired by pieces from the Netherlands. This design was often used in the Peruvian Viceroyalty during the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century. These cupboards, or *armarios*, were used to store bedclothes and ceramic or silver dinnerware, and may have been intended for either civil or religious use, as is the case for our beautiful vestry cupboard.¹

The cabinetmakers of the Viceroyalty were quick to adopt this model featuring two main sections with separate doors, supported on feet which, in this case, present two attractive smiling lions with great manes of hair and a wide band of molding at the top. The decoration, with carved gilt grotesques covering the entire surface of the cupboard, is an outstanding design feature that has been arranged with rigorous symmetry. The front is divided into six reserves framed by carved moldings. These reserves correspond to the two upper doors, the two central drawers and the panels of the lower doors, and the motifs are different in each one. In the middle of each of the doors of the upper section we find a Baroque motif featuring a vase, out of which a range of foliage is seen to be emerging. Each of the vases is flanked by Solomonic columns, with beaded edging and, in the corners, attractive flowers. There is a decorative perimeter border, then a plain border with gold leaf diamond motifs, and a frame with pearly beading and edging motifs, concluding each of the doors. The drawers once again present a central vase from which phytomorphic elements are seen to emerge, in broad and voluptuous scroll and counter-scroll patterns, framed by the border of the upper doors. Above the vases our eye is drawn to an iron fitting, shaped like a fleuron, among the foliate volutes of two little iron handles. In each of the panels of the lower doors we observe a central flower with four petals, out of which a complex pattern emerges, made up of grotesques of carved gilt foliage and scrollwork. The middle of the beautiful molding on the upper section has another vase as its central motif, with a series of foliage and bunches of grapes extending out to the left and right. The sides of the cupboard repeat the motifs of the front, with variations, with one prominent feature being a panel from the upper section in the middle of which there is a motif with scallop shells and grotesques around it. The middle presents a similar motif to the drawers on the front, and the lower section features an exuberant vase with a round base

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and gadroon and diamond tip ornamentation. The decorative border and beaded edging motifs are repeated as in the rest of the cupboard.

On opening the armoire, one encounters a truly exceptional, one-off decorative composition. The upper section features shelves or ledges, the edges of which are decorated with carved grotesques, as is the underside of the top of the piece, made up of a central flower with foliage, scrollwork and leaf motifs emerging from it. The lower section features a drawer which is hidden by the lower doors, and only visible on opening the cupboard. In the middle it presents a scrollwork motif featuring curves and counter-curves emphasizing the scroll motif, in the area where the drawer handles are.

Particular mention should go to the paintings from the Diego Quispe Tito workshop that are to be found on the insides of the upper and lower doors. The influence of the master is clear in these beautiful scenes where the saints depicted are framed by the typical landscapes he tended to recreate in his works, replete with birds of attractive plumage from the Andean rain forests and surroundings, as well as local trees and flowers.² The saints depicted belong to the Franciscan Order, three of which are pictured with halos. They boast long flowing hair and beards, are bare-footed and dressed in Franciscan habits, made up of flannel robes secured at the waist by corded rope belts with three knots, from which hang the decenary rosaries and books the Doctors of the Church used to carry with them. Two of them also feature crucifixes. One might imagine that these were scenes from the life of St. Francis, judging by the austerity of the attire and the self-imposed seclusion for meditation and the adoration of God, although they do not have the signs of the stigmata that would be expected in that case.

The ascetic and mystical characteristics of St. Francis and his Order were emphasized by a new iconography that was introduced in the 16th century, particularly in Spain, and which spread quickly. In around 1700 there were 454 Franciscan monasteries in Latin America, with some 3,600 members of the Order.

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Diego Quispe Tito (1611–1681), *Saint Jerome*, oil on canvas.
Monastery of Santa Catalina, Peru

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Footnotes

¹ S. Bomchil and V. Carreño, *El Mueble Colonial de las Américas y su Circunstancia Histórica*, Buenos Aires 1987, pp. 437- 442.

² For further information on the life of the painter Diego Quispe Tito and his workshop, see C. Pastor de la Torre, 'La Conquista y la Escuela Pictórica del Cuzco', in C. Pastor de la Torre & E. Tord, *Perú: Fe y Arte en el Virreinato*, Cordoba 1999, p. 62.