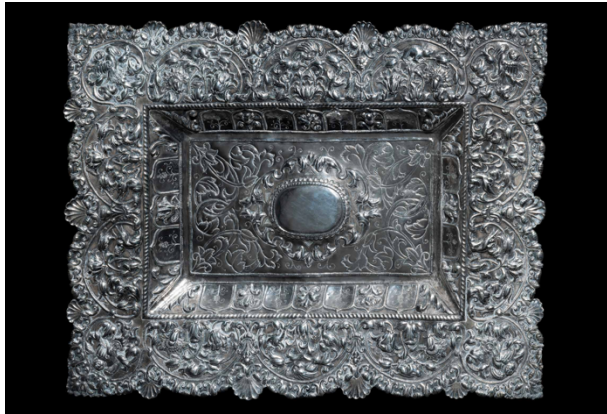


# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Unidentified artist

(Viceroyalty of Peru, mid-18th century)

## *Tray*

silver in own colour, cast, beaten, chased  
and engraved

inscribed: *MACICAO*

36 x 27 cm.; 14 1/8 x 10 5/8 in.

weight: 880 grams

---

Provenance

Private Collection.

---

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



---

LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

This tray is rectangular and trough-shaped. The inside bottom presents *sgraffito* low-relief ornamentation made up of scrollwork and interlinking plant elements arranged around a raised oval-shaped central medallion like a cartouche, bearing the inscription MACICAO. The central oval is flat, and shaped like a cabochon, surrounded by beaded edging with a frame made up of volutes and plant and geometrical motifs. The sides of the trough are set at an angle, and these are made up of gadroons, or sunken concave shapes presenting alternating motifs featuring floral buds and vines with bunches of grapes that have been engraved, and *sgraffito* work applied, with ogee corners. These shapes are framed by thin tubular cords culminating in pointed arches towards the top. The corners present elongated sunken concave profiles decorated with curly palmettes. The outer surface of the tray is broad and flat, presenting highly elaborate and sumptuous ornamentation. The relief work lends great volume, highlighting the importance of the decoration against a flat base of plain silver, where some of the sections feature pointed decorations with plant elements. The style is robust, and the rhythm is overwhelming, with a great profusion of flowers and buds, where one can make out exuberant sunflowers laden with seeds, and the sinuous flowers of Andean climbing plants.

The edges of the surface of the tray are undulating, with three curves on the longer sides and two on the shorter ones, while the corners feature pointed ogee segments. The insides of each of the fourteen compartmented spaces on the outer surface of the tray feature a broad range of motifs, from strange birds perched on exuberant flowering branches, from which we see hybrid creatures emerge, or various mammals that could be viscachas with defiant looks on their faces, covered in impressive fur, to floral buds and leaves, in between which thin intertwining and interlinking cords are seen to wind their way, thereby serving to differentiate the different spaces featuring these fantastical motifs. The central reserves of the longer sides contain birds and hybrid creatures, flanked by mammals.

The spaces at the corners present a delightful and typically Andean motif, namely “leaf ” or “foliage” angels, with their wings unfurled, rounded eyes and characteristically stylized haircuts, their heads slightly tilting and looking up towards the heavens while their entire

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

bodies are covered with fine *sgraffito* work evoking delicate and subtle foliage. These figures are flanked by voluptuous floral motifs. The decoration, in contrast to the central section, is extremely dynamic, with solid winding stems and petals distributed across the entire surface in a typically horror vacui style. The shorter sides are decorated with two semi-circles containing an exuberance of flower buds and foliage from which we see birds' heads emerge, with abundant plumage, and the heads of fantastical animals with tapering beaks, thereby populating the work with strange hybrid creatures. These are repeated in the central section of the longer sides, under and to the sides of the birds located above them, perched on branches.

A border runs along the entire outer edge of the tray, made up of varying decorative elements, prominent among which is the sunken scallop shell in the corners generated by the meeting of the curved edges. A thick braided cord separates the flat outer surface from the sloping sides of the trough, thereby heightening the rich decoration of said surface, with the aforementioned plant motifs, angelic figures, varying animals, mammals, birds and hybrid creatures of peerless extravagance.

Our beautiful tray is a typical example of Andean silverwork, combining European motifs such as the hybrid creatures of Medieval bestiaries and Renaissance grotesques with elements of an indigenous nature, such as the "leaf man", the sunflowers laden down with seeds and the diverse and varied flora so characteristic of the Altiplano region. It was common for silverwork to include elements originating from the Andean animal kingdom, such as viscachas, tarucas, birds and squirrels in fantastical scenes, alongside floral elements such as pomegranate flowers and sunflowers, bunches of grapes and fantastical creatures, with "green man" or "leaf man", "leaf woman" and "leaf angel",<sup>1</sup> motifs we find in our exceptional tray, as we have already mentioned. This combination of European and local indigenous motifs is an example of the cultural syncretism taking place in the arts throughout the Andean region.

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

These trays could serve civil or religious purposes. The iconography of our tray would suggest a civil use, as evidenced by the wide range of animals and birds, and the presence of secular motifs.

Silver was so abundant in Peru and its surroundings that the precious metal was used to make many everyday items. The workshops of Lima, Arequipa, Cuzco and Potosí turned out a wide variety of objects using this noble metal that would normally be made in other, cheaper, materials, such as pewter, bronze, ceramics, tin or copper. Braziers, kettles, mate and infusion sets, cups, candlestick holders and trays were made out of silver for the thriving and prosperous colonial society enriched through the mining business and trade. Their houses emanated a luxury and opulence that astonished foreign visitors. Many of these extravagances could be observed in houses of the Altiplano region or in Lima and Cuzco, where such luxurious silver and gold items were also joined by materials and objects originating from Europe and Asia, such as lavish silks, lace, furnishings and the fantastic pieces of furniture featuring mother-of-pearl, ivory and tortoiseshell inlay from the Oriental colonies, which arrived in Acapulco, Mexico, courtesy of the Manila galleon trade route.

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

---

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more on the motif of the “leaf man” and other elements from the Andean visual lexicon, see C. Esteras Martin, ‘Viceroyalty of Peru: Acculturation and Innovation in Peruvian Silverwork’, in E. Phipps et al., *The Colonial Andes: Tapestries and Silverwork, 1530–1830*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 2004, pp. 58–71.