

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Unidentified artist
(Viceroyalty of Peru, 17th century)

*Our Lady of the Innocent and
the Destitute*

oil on canvas

108.2 x 86.4 cm.; 42 5/8 x 34 1/8 in.

Provenance

Private Collection.

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The iconography represented in this beautiful canvas corresponds to the image of *Our Lady of the Innocent and the Destitute* (see fig. 1).¹ This advocatio of the Virgin is deeply rooted in the region of Valencia, where it appeared in the 15th century, but is also found in Peru thanks to the promotion of this solemn Marian image carried out by the Count of Lemos, Viceroy of Peru, who promoted the building of a chapel in her name in 1672. What stands out, and what helps frame this image within the mystic repertoire of the Viceroyalty, is that, beyond respecting and reproducing the required attributes of the original icon, it is completed with decorative and compositional elements that are clearly rooted locally, such as gilt work that is iconic of the school of Cuzco and the way in which the details have been treated, without doubt imbuing them with an unmistakably indigenous air.

This image, whose representation evokes and calls on the viewer to practice charity and to take measures that favor those in need, stands as an allegory that is clearly showcased in all the compositional elements intentionally included in this sort of *horror vacui*.

Our Lady, represented in line with 18th century physiognomy, stands full-length in an incorruptible frontal position, holding the Holy Child in her left arm, with clearly indigenous features. Identifiable as a young virgin, her face peers out, white and serene, with large, almond-shaped eyes, slender, stylized nose and petite mouth, from a pearly bonnet that fully surrounds her face, on which rests a golden and embellished crown, rich in jewels and sculptural decorations such as torch holders and grotesques. Curls of long auburn hair cascade down over her right shoulder, contrasting with the brilliance of the silver halo encircling Our Lady, formed by beams of light and stars. Both Our Lady and the Child boast beautiful earrings decorated with hanging pearls. Her robe is slightly bell-shaped, dark brown and richly adorned with a variety of devotional jewelry which would have come from pious donations. Gemstone necklaces, strings of pearls, chains and brooches adorn the top section of her attire. Offerings, crosses, corals and pendants cover the lower half. In amongst the myriad adornments, imploring Holy Innocents emerge at the bottom, as if sheltered by Our Lady's mantle, one at each side of the composition, also with undeniable indigenous features. Dressed only in purity cloths and necklaces, they present bleeding stigmata wounds on their bodies and necks, to mark their slaughter. We can also make out

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Mary's right hand under the cloak, replete with rings and holding a stem of Madonna lilies. Finally, the cloak is decorated in the *brocateria*,² with brilliant gilt work that traces out a sort of plant motif border in parallel and along the hems.

Resting on Our Lady's left arm, the Holy Child appears solemn, with long auburn hair and a bell-shaped cloak similar to his mother's though, in his case, in an orange tone. Also like his mother, though more discreetly, he is depicted with an abundance of decoration. Offerings and chains on his cloak, a festooned cross held in his left hand and his head fully decorated, excessive earrings standing out (identical to those of Our Lady), golden powers and a red diadem adorned with a large flower, through which the author makes the iconography his own by giving the subject an indigenous look.

The image, standing on a plinth, is arranged on a table covered with an elegant white linen cloth and is sheltered under what looks like a canopy made of stiff, orange-colored fabric decorated with trimmings composed of acanthus leaves simulating the *estofado* technique.³

Finally, the last compositional element worth highlighting is the presence of two lit altar candles, an indisputable attribute of the Holy Innocent Martyrs.

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Figure 1. Vicente López, *Our Lady of the Innocent and the Destitute*. Iglesia del Monasterio de Santa Ana de Sagunto, Valencia

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Footnotes

¹ In the seventeenth century, the pictorial representation of religious sculptures arranged on an altar as a *trompe l'oeil* was a highly realistic resource used for the plastic reproduction of certain Marian devotions, including this iconography of the Virgin of the forsaken. See the study by Emilio Aparicio Olmos on this Marian iconography: *Santa María de los Inocentes y Desamparados in its original iconography and its historical precedents*, 1968 and 'La Virgen de los Desamparados en América: trace of the expansion of Valencia agglutinating Valencian emigrants' in *III Congress of Spanish Emigration to Overseas*, Valencia 1965.

² When we speak of *Brocateria* we refer to a painting covered with designs of gold, silver and even other pigments, generally imitating the motifs of the most luxurious garments. Although its moment of greatest expression has been associated with the Cuzco School of the eighteenth century, it is known that its use spread, masterfully, to other surrounding schools in the American territory. See B. Belda Lido, *The Brocetry Technique in the paintings of the Cuzco school*, Final Master's Thesis, Polytechnic University of Valencia, 2013.

³ The *estofado* technique, which appeared for the first time in 15th century Spanish imagery and imported to overseas territories during the first years of the conquest, consists of the imitation of *estofados* and fabrics by applying oil or tempera on a sheet of burnished gold, finally sgraffifying the pursued ornamental motifs. I recommend to all those who want to delve into the techniques of sculptural polychromy to read José Luis Parés Parra's doctoral thesis, *Polychrome sculpture and its technique in Castilla. 16th-17th centuries*, (Faculty of Fine Arts, Complutense University of Madrid, 1998).