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Unidentified artist

(New Granada, Quito School, 18th century)

*The Archangel Michael
Defeating the Devil*

c. 1750

polychromed and partially gilt wood,
silver, imitation emerald gemstones

93 x 64 x 48 cm.;

36 5/8 x 25 1/4 x 18 7/8 in.

Provenance

Private Collection, Spain.

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“Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray” (Revelation 12: 7)

Full-length, free-standing sculpture depicting the Archangel Michael defeating the devil. Winged, standing and in a victorious pose, with his left leg bent at the knee, his right arm raised and brandishing a sword. His wings and plated doublet display varying tones of blue with gold leaf, and the sleeve of his left arm reaches the elbow, decorated with foliage motifs, also blue and gold leaf, on a base of gilt silver to attain a metallic sheen. The cuff of the sleeve is made up of a very thin plate of finely worked gilt copper, imitating lace or gold brocade. He wears a green sash across his chest over his armour and tight to his body, richly decorated with brushed gold leaf, in the form of foliage motifs. He also has a cloak on his right arm, which he wears in an almost casual fashion, fluttering with the movement of the Archangel's arm, thereby transmitting the sense of flying through the air, and lending the work great dynamism and energy. It is red and also decorated with gilt foliage. He wears a skirt to the knees, which also has gilt copper leaf in the form of lace on the lower hem. The same colour, decoration and technique as the aforementioned sleeve. Turquoise Roman sandals with further gilding. With jewels: the armour, sandals and the join between the skirt and the plated doublet. Our anonymous sculptor opted to embellish and heighten the importance of his piece using a range of accessories matching the sort of goldsmith and jewelry work being carried out in the Viceroyalty, such as gold chains, silver filigree accessories and the imitation of precious stones such as emeralds. Between his feet and the flames, in a suffering pose, lies the vanquished devil.

The territories falling under the Viceroyalty of New Granada included latter-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama and Guyana. The entity was established by the Audiencia courts of Santafé, Panama and Quito, and the Captaincy General of Venezuela. Its capital was Santafé.

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The Quito School is the term used to refer to the ensemble of artistic works and artists that came out of the territories under the Real Audiencia (Royal Audience) of Quito, from Pasto and Popayán to the north, to Piura and Cajamarca in the south, during the colonial period (second half of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, and the first quarter of the 19th century) during Spain's rule (1542-1824).

It is also considered a form of artistic production and was one of the most important activities in the Real Audiencia of Quito from an economic point of view.

It is likely that, of all the visual arts practiced in New Granada, sculpture is the one that brought the greatest fame to the Quito School, the latter being one of the most important centres of sculptural production during the American Baroque, and which was unavoidably influenced from the outset by the Spanish works and models that were arriving in the Viceroyalty, as may be appreciated, for instance, in the Andalusian influence in the figure representing the devil, if we compare it with the detail of the devil taken from Juan Martínez Montañés and Juan de Arce's altarpiece from the Church of San Miguel in Jerez (fig. 1).

The works produced then began to take on their own well-defined characteristics over the centuries. Of these, it is worth highlighting a certain Oriental influence with regard to the depiction of faces, with our Archangel Michael's face exhibiting features that are highly reminiscent of those carved in ivory in the Philippines (fig. 2), as well as a proclivity for the classical canon of straight profiles. In certain cases, it is even possible to identify similarities in polychrome between the Orient and America. A taste for the tragic, expressive and emotive, inherent to the Hispanic Baroque, is transformed in the Quito School into delicacy, serenity and moderation, recalling the little Oriental ivory figures that were arriving in America loaded onto Chinese carracks. As in the Philippines, so-called "dress sculptures" were also common throughout the entire colonial territory. With these works the hair could either be carved or not, as natural hair could also be applied, with the head left almost bare and smooth, in order to be able to accommodate the wig. What is, however, out of the ordinary and yet not impossible to imagine, thanks to the amount of hybrid techniques artists in America were skillfully implementing, is the use of a wig in a free-standing, full-length

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sculpture. Few such sculptures are known, and they tend to be much sought-after. Some such are to be found in the National Museum of the Philippines and in other private collections scattered across the American continent. Although they were simpler sculptures, these were precisely the ones arriving in America and being systematically produced in workshops.

The cultural exchange between the New World, Spain and the Orient was a fluid one, with major cargos of coins and valuable local products such as spices and other items including feather mosaics, fabrics, ceramic, jewelry, gold smithery (fig. 3), sculptures, canvases and gemstones transported across the vast oceans. Some were merchandise intended for profit, but it was also necessary to transport religious iconographic elements in order to be able to evangelize and spread the word of God among the people, including carved works depicting divine subjects and liturgical items such as crosses, altars, chalices and monstrances.

Documentation exists recording artists who set sail for the Viceroyalty from the earliest days of the conquest and during the following centuries. One of the main exponents and founders of the Cusco School was Bernardo Bitti (1548–1610), who arrived in Lima from Italy in 1575, bringing Mannerist notions to America, and who as well as painting was also a sculptor. Other artists to subsequently arrive in Lima included Pedro de Noguera (*c.* 1580 – *c.* 1660) from Andalusia, Gaspar de la Cueva (1587 - after 1640) from Seville and Gaspar de Ginés (active *c.* 1630).

One sculptor arriving in Santa Fe de Bogotá having worked in Andalusia was Pedro Laboria (1700 – 1770), going on to undertake works for the churches of Santo Domingo and San Francisco, the Cathedral of Bogotá and the Cathedral of Tunja. And then there was Ignacio García de Ascucha (1580-1629), a joiner, carver and sculptor born in Gijón, who set out from Toledo and arrived in Bogotá, fleeing from his father-in-law, whose reprisals he feared having abandoned his daughter, María Quiñones, on the night after their wedding.

In this sculpture, we can appreciate one of the shared characteristics of the Quito School, which is the implementation of the technique of carnation, or face colouring, adopted from

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Castilian tradition and used in the era of Berruguete and Juni. Sculptors and workshops from the Quito School opted for brilliant polychrome, lending a more natural appearance to the skin on the faces of their sculptures. Once carved and perfectly sanded down, a workshop artisan would then go on to cover the wood with several layers of plaster and glue. After each layer was applied, it was polished painstakingly until a completely smooth finish was attained. Next, several extremely fluid coats of colour were applied, with each coat being transparent, allowing for the optimal optical blend of superimposed colours. Work would start with the colours used for shadow (blue, green, ochre), followed by the lighter shades (white, pink, yellow), and finally the highlighting colors (orange and red for the cheeks, children's knees and elbows, and dark blue, green and violet for Christ's wounds and bruises, or for the shading of stubble in beardless men.

The most important sculptors from the Quito School, in chronological order, were as follows: Diego de Robles (d. 1594), originally from Toledo, who arrived in New Granada in 1584, and who carried out the sculpted image of *Our Lady of Guadalupe* in Guápulo, and then *Our Lady of Oyacachi* and a *Baptism of Christ* in the church of San Francisco.

Going forward a century, to the Quito of the 1620-1680 period, we now come across a great sculptor known by the name Padre Carlos, for whom we have no contemporary documentary records. The first time his name appears is in an inscription of the *St. Luke the Evangelist* (from the chapel in Cantuña, according to which the piece was executed by P. Carlos in 1668 and was renovated by Bernardo de Legarda in 1762, the latter being considered the great maestro of Quito religious imagery from the first half of the 18th century.) One of this sculptor's most iconographic works is the *Virgin of Quito*, also known as the *Virgin of the Apocalypse*. In Quito School sculpture it is common to find metals and gilt silver used to generate greater brilliance, especially in the Marian iconography of said sculptor (fig. 4). One extremely important characteristic that we should bear in mind when turning to our Archangel Michael is precisely the artist's use of this technique, as mentioned earlier, in the skirt and sleeve of the left arm.

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The person continuing De Legarda's legacy was Manuel Chili "Caspicara", an artist of indigenous origin and probably born in Quito in around 1723, with specialists tending to date his death to 1796. Faithful to the golden age norms of Baroque religious imagery, he cultivated religious motifs, both in wood and marble. Another of his maestros was the aforementioned Diego de Robles.

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Figure 1. Juan Martínez Montañés and José de Arce, San Miguel altarpiece (detail). Iglesia de San Miguel, Jerez (Spain)



Figure 2. Hispanic-Filipino Ivory Head auctioned in 2019 at Leon Gallery, Manila

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Figure 3. Andean workshop, *Mermaid*, c. 1600. Shrine of Nuestra Señora de las Nieves, Santa Cruz de La Palma



Figure 4. Bernardo de Legarda (Quito 1700-1773), *Virgin of Quito*. Primate Cathedral of Quito