

COLNAGHI

LEONARDO FLORES

(Bolivian, mid to late 17th century)

THE VIRGIN CONSOLATRIX OR OUR LADY OF CONSOLATION ('Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle'), c. 1680-1710

Oil on canvas

240 x 220 cm.; 94 1/2 x 86 5/8 in.

Provenance

Originally part of a series of paintings in the Iglesia de la Asunción, Puerto Acosta, Bolivia (removed from the church by 1956);

Gaston Adler, São Paolo, Brazil;

Acquired from the above by Dr. Wolfgang Bernhardt, Baden-Baden, Germany, in 1976.

Literature

J. de Mesa and T. Gisbert, *Holguín y la pintura virreinal en Bolivia*, La Paz 1956, p. 82, reproduced fig. 98.

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Leonardo Flores was an Indigenous or mestizo painter active in the Collao region of the Viceroyalty of Peru (present-day Bolivia) during the mid to late 17th century, working primarily between 1680 and 1690. Although little is known about his personal biography, his artistic importance is firmly established through the monumental cycles he produced for doctrinal parishes surrounding Lake Titicaca and the city of La Paz. Chief among these is the cycle created for the Iglesia de la Asunción, Puerto Acosta, Bolivia, of which the present painting once formed a part, and where three further works from the series are still preserved in situ. Flores emerged during a period when the Catholic Church was intensifying its evangelising mission in Indigenous territories, deploying painting as a tool of instruction and spiritual persuasion. Patronised by Bishop Juan Queipo de Llano y Valdés, he became one of the most significant exponents of the mestizo Baroque.

Flores worked with a sophisticated knowledge of European engravings, theological treatises, and illustrated biblical compendia. Catholic orders active in the Americas, including Jesuits, Franciscans, and Mercedarians, brought printed works from Antwerp, Seville, and Rome, featuring engravings by artists such as Rubens, Martin de Vos, Cornelis Visscher, and Hieronymus Wierix. The present painting is directly based on a print by Wierix, demonstrating Flores' active and informed engagement with European devotional imagery. While derived from a European model, the composition is reimagined through a distinctly Andean sensibility: the Madonna's mantle is rendered with lavish ornamental textile patterning, and stylised floral motifs are integrated into the scene, reflecting a visual language that, in Flores' wider œuvre, often incorporates indigenous plant forms, sacred landscape references, and markers of local identity. The result is a painting that moves beyond its European prototype to operate within an Andean devotional framework.

At the centre of the composition, the Virgin and Child are seated upon a cloud. The Virgin wears a white mantle decorated with ornamental hexagons, edged with gold lace and a hem trimmed with pearls. She gazes tenderly at the Christ child, who sits on her lap and nurses at her right breast. The Christ child, dressed in a long-sleeved red tunic, looks directly at the viewer, touches his mother's hand gently, and extends his left foot toward the observer. An orange-golden background surrounds the Queen of Heaven, before which her radiant white halo glows. Around the Virgin float four angelic musicians symbolising the heavenly choir. To her right, a blue-clad angel with red wings plays a harp; opposite him, an angel in a pink tunic with green wings plays the violin. Above hover two more angels with multicoloured wings: one strumming a mandolin, the other singing from an open hymnal. These angels occupy the spaces between four circular medallions linked by a rosary, which together frame the Virgin and Child.

COLNAGHI

Each circular medallion bears a Latin inscription and depicts a perilous scene in which believers turn to the Virgin in prayer. The first medallion, upper left, depicts a battle between two mounted armies, encircled by a white band inscribed, between stylised floral motifs: 'VICTORIA MILITIAE' (Victory of the Army). The upper right medallion shows a ship caught in a stormy sea, inscribed 'NAVIGANTIUM SOLAMEN' (Solace of Sailors). The lower left medallion portrays military leaders before a camp, 'CASTRORUM FORTITUDO' (Strength of the Camp), while the lower right shows a burning building observed by figures with raised hands, inscribed 'ADVERSORUM PROPUGNACULUM' (Fortress Against the Enemy). Together, these four scenes embody the varied circumstances in which the Virgin offers protection and comfort. This upper section, comprising roughly three-quarters of the painting, is bordered below by a garland of flowers and leaves. Beneath it runs a horizontal register featuring, at each side, a spherical vase filled with four large roses. Between these floral motifs lies an elongated oval cartouche depicting a church interior, with the Virgin and Child on the left, before whom six worshippers kneel in adoration.

The composition derives from the engraving 'Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle' ('To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears') by Hieronymus Wierix (1553-1619) (fig. 1). Wierix produced a series of devotional prints dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the 'Salve Regina' series, of which this engraving formed a part. Three further paintings by Flores based on compositions from the 'Salve Regina' series by Wierix are still preserved in situ at the Iglesia de la Asunción: *The Virgin Queen*, *The Virgin Mediatrix* and *The Virgin Victrix* (figs. 2, 3 and 4). The title of the present work, 'Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle', quotes the central supplication of the *Salve Regina*, one of the four Marian antiphons of the Roman rite, traditionally sung at Compline from Trinity Sunday until Advent. Its lament frames the Virgin as intercessor for humanity's suffering and exile. In 17th century devotional culture, this invocation assumed particular resonance in the Americas, where the Virgin Mary's compassion was emphasised as a source of solace for converts and communities enduring hardship. As already mentioned, Flores adapted the composition slightly to suit Andean taste. He introduced two flower vases in the lower register, divided the pictorial zones with a floral garland, and adorned the Latin inscription bands around the medallions with colourful blossoms, while enriching the rosary with additional decorative elements. The Virgin's plain robe in Wierix's print becomes, in Flores' hand, a sumptuous mantle embroidered and bordered with gold and pearls. The small monochrome engraving, scarcely 14 centimetres in height, is transformed into a richly coloured oil painting over 2 metres tall. Additionally, the figures of the Virgin and Child appear far more animated: the mother's loving smile and tender gesture toward her son contrast with the print's formality, reflecting Flores' intent to elicit affective devotion from an Andean audience.



Fig. 1. Hieronymous Wierix, *The Virgin Consolatrix*, part of the *Salve Regina* series of engravings, plate 4 of 7, 136 x 84 mm., British Museum, London
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1859-0709-3179

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Fig. 2. Leonardo Flores, *The Virgin Queen* (Salve Regina Mater Misericordiae), Iglesia de la Asunción, Puerto Acosta, Bolivia

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Fig. 3. Leonardo Flores, *The Virgin Mediatrix* (*Et Iesum benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exilium ostende*), Iglesia de la Asunción, Puerto Acosta, Bolivia



Fig. 4. Leonardo Flores, *The Virgin Victrix* (O clemens, o dulcis, o pia, Virgo Maria), Iglesia de la Asunción, Puerto Acosta, Bolivia

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COLNAGHI
London

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL
UNITED KINGDOM
MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM
+44 (0)20 7491 7408
contact@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI
Madrid

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.
28004 MADRID
MONDAY TO FRIDAY
BY APPOINTMENT
spain@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI
New York

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065
USA
MONDAY TO FRIDAY
10AM-6PM
+1 (917) 388-3825
newyork@colnaghi.com

COLNAGHI
Brussels

RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30
1000 BRUXELLES
BELGIUM
BY APPOINTMENT ONLY
brussels@colnaghi.com