

In 1650, a massive earthquake hit Cuzco, the former Inka capital. During the devastating tremors, a statue of a dark-skinned Jesus was paraded around the city. Shortly thereafter, the earthquake ceased. This icon became known as Cristo de los Temblores, and provides a symbol of the distinctiveness of Colonial Peruvian art. Such extreme natural disasters are not unfamiliar to Peru, where survival depends on the ability to withstand earthquakes, high winds, and the destruction caused by El Niño events.

For thousands of years, the indigenous populations of Peru conceptualized and dealt with these natural disasters, fitting them into cosmologies, religion, and rituals. However, the conquest of Peru by the Spanish and the following indoctrination into Catholicism changed these outlooks. From the Spanish perspective, the Peruvian landscape and proclivity for natural disasters were strange and new. Colonists and religious authorities living in Peru sought to conceptualize the natural environment from their own, Catholic perspective, in which these cataclysmic results seemed to explode straight from the Bible. This attempt to understand the environment was captured in paintings from the Viceregal Peru of 1542 to 1821. Like the indigenous cultures before them, the Spanish developed a material culture that took into account the religious understanding of the environment. Apocalyptic images tapped into an environmental reality that the events that really did occur, but also warned the population about the negative consequences of the lack of faith. In this way, the colonial art of Peru was unique in its emphasis on apocalyptic events using images as a way to convert and conceptualize. Although stylistically modeled from European prints and imported paintings, the art of Viceregal Peru reconfigured these types into distinct works that reflect the ideology, background, political landscape, and individuality of the region.

With the claiming of Granada through the defeat of the Moors in 1492 and the subsequent Inquisition, Spanish political ideology centered upon religious and racial purity. The

discovery of the New World was understood as a God-given right to spread Catholicism.

Arriving on the tails of the conquistadors, friars and evangelists entered Peru in groups of twelve, idealistically envisioning their opportunity to save large numbers of heathens. Franciscans, Augustinians, Dominicans, Mercedarians, and later, Jesuits, held millenarian ideas of transforming the peoples of the New World into faithful servants of the Christian God. With utopian models for evangelism, these religious orders saw the varied ecology of Peru, including the lush rainforests of the Amazon, the majestic Andes, and the rich waters of the Pacific Ocean as Paradise.

This idealistic approach was recorded in several instances, suggesting the idea's extensive range. The Chronicles of Columbus describe the indigenous as living in a Garden of Eden. In 1646 in the Peruvian realm, Buenaventura de Salinas y Córdoba espoused the many types of ecosystems in Peru as a microcosm of the world, and heavenly in its landscape. Around this time, Antonio León Pinelo wrote a book proving that the Biblical Garden of Eden was located on the eastern slopes of the Andes.

Within this rhetoric, it follows that the indigenous populations were likened to the innocent inhabitants of Garden of Eden, prior to the Biblical Fall of humanity. The memory of the violent Conquest was replaced by the perception of the Native Americans as meek, gentle, and child-like, needing and even desiring conversion. The colonization of Latin America fell at the height of the Counter Reformation and the revitalization of Catholic fervor. Although the Inquisition was established in the New World, the Council of Trent declared the peoples of the New World exempt from trials and punishment, as they were uninformed pure souls, requiring indoctrination for salvation.

This indoctrination took the form of mass Baptisms, elaborate services, and rigorous education. Literacy was secondary to religious teaching, with art as its primary tool. The

indigenous responded to paintings and sculptures, and friars interpreted this interest as effective replacements of Pre-Hispanic material representations of the spiritual realm. As a result, art production boomed in the Peruvian colonies. Colonial authorities set up art communities and guilds, where native artists copied prints and paintings arriving from Europe. Art production was not without creativity, however, as artists reproducing European images inevitably brought in new compositions, syncretic styles, and iconography with allusions to both Christian and local traditions.

Art schools in Lima, Cuzco, Potosí, and elsewhere churned out paintings that could communicate Catholic themes, but also relate to the specific issues of life in Peru. Reverence for the environment appears in images that figure the Virgin Mary as a mountain, and the location of the Rest on the Flight into Egypt within an Amazonian setting. Flora and fauna from Peru offer familiar settings for Biblical events, providing the illiterate indigenous with a frame of reference for the often confusing Christian ideas and stories.

Natural disasters fit perfectly within the picturing of Peru as a Biblical setting. Frequently mentioned in the Book of Revelations, dramatic earthquakes in Peru applied directly to the Counter-Reformation rhetoric that emphasized the importance of this Biblical prophecy. Apocalyptic images became remarkably prevalent in Peru, and new compositions emerged that combined religious ideology with the reality of disaster.

One notable image arising in Colonial Peru was that of the armed angel. Portraits of angels dressed in upper class European garb and wielding firearms are found throughout Peru. Modeled after the Flemish military manual illustrated by Jacob de Gheyn, the androgynous angels handle their guns in the manner of proper colonial soldiers, while maintaining ironically peaceful expressions.

Identified on the top left corner of the canvas with Hebrew names including Uriel, Aspiel, and Raphael, these angels are culled from the apocryphal Book of Enoch. This text, no longer included in modern Bibles, describes the destruction of the mundane world by seven angels associated with celestial bodies, including stars, wind, and rain. Adopted by the Counter-Reformation, these angels also tapped into the animistic belief systems of the indigenous, who anthropomorphized ephemeral matters.

While the native Peruvians could comprehend the armed angels, they were an iconographically new type that was simultaneously comforting and intimidating. The youthful angels looking tenderly at their weapons do not appear capable of instigating destruction. However, attired in elaborate colonial dress, these angels are aligned with the Spanish. Their familiarity with firearms, objects of extreme and unfathomable power, adds an element of fear and respect that local deities could not assume. With physical, economic, and spiritual power, armed angels exemplified the Spanish authority's ability to either protect or annihilate.

Representations of armed angels transformed the ambiguity of apocalypse into something corporeal. Although the indigenous were exempt from the Inquisition, they were not exempt from apocalyptic events, real or Biblical. Paintings taught a valuable lesson about the necessity of conversion into the faith they described. The story that accompanied them spoke of the type of destruction that was all too real, and a complex meaning that could effectively instruct the importance of conversion. With the ideological overhaul of colonization, images of apocalypse operated as both threats and explanations.

The prophecy told by the Book of Revelations described worldly annihilation by earthquakes, floods, high winds, and blasts of fire. Images of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse performing these acts reached the indigenous peoples, who found the Spanish Calvary particularly frightening. Paintings depicting saints slaying dragons were also common,

as such mythical beasts fit within some local Peruvian cosmologies. A uniquely Peruvian composition includes the Virgin Mary fighting a dragon. Mary herself was conceptualized as the ultimate mother figure, and tapped into the Inka earth deity, Pachamama. As a provider and protector, Mary vanquishes the dragon in this painting, saving her people from the physical harm of the evil spirits. From the European perspective, depictions of dragons, snakes, and other frightening beasts represented the evil of deities other than the Christian God. While the metaphors in these paintings were difficult for the indigenous to conceptualize, their pictorial renditions were effective.

Paintings demonstrated ideology by tapping into real fears and providing a solution. Although causing physical harm, the effects of mass destruction would be mediated by belief in the loving God and practice in the tenets of Christianity. The oral accompaniment of these images revealed that the Christian God with the capability and desire to protect the indigenous from eternal damnation. Cristo de los Temblores, a manifestation of Jesus found only in Peru, specifically addressed the issue of earthquakes. The story of his miracle became part of the Peruvian oral tradition, replacing Inka deities who performed similar functions.

Images of apocalypse frame the indigenous as innocents, not as sinners, assuming that the viewing public would be convinced to convert. From the political standpoint the Spanish did not want the indigenous to die. As sources of labor and tribute, the local Peruvian populations were invaluable to the Spanish. Although conversion was a major goal of colonization, political and economic control were the desired ends of maintaining order of the local populations. Religion provided a tool to inculcate the natives into the European power structure led by an unseen, all powerful king. With belief in the Christian God, the converted could conceptualize the Spanish political decrees, and work within the European system.

As the Spanish encountered the unique natural environment of Peru, the Bible was the only frame of reference for the novelty of the situation. Not only were these images effective teaching tools, but they gave the Spanish a sense of understanding and controlling their new environment. With these images, the Spanish showed how they controlled the people and the environment.