

U of T sole Canadian venue for South American art exhibit Paintings focus on Catholicism

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by Maureen Smith

A stellar exhibit of 17th- to 19th-century Latin American painting makes its only Canadian stop at the University of Toronto Art Centre from Sept. 4 to Dec. 9.

The Virgin, Saints and Angels: South American Paintings 1600-1825 from the Thoma Collection is one of the first North American exhibitions to focus exclusively on the visual tradition of the Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru. The viceroyalty comprised present day Bolivia, Columbia, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay, Panama and parts of Argentina and Chile.

The 55 paintings on display offer enduring evidence of how one religion, Catholicism, was lived and experienced by the many peoples of South America. The exhibition, mounted in partnership with U of T's Latin American studies program, will be accompanied by a wealth of programming, including four public lectures, an interdisciplinary symposium and a gallery tour.

"As the home of lively and engaged intellectual debate, the university is an ideal venue in which the public can experience and study these little-known paintings at first hand," said Niamh O'Laoghaire, director of the U of T Art Centre.

The exhibition is organized around three primary themes. Culture transfer explores the interaction of the Spanish and the indigenous peoples of South America. Conversion details the process of conversion to Catholicism, while devotional images reveal the extraordinary ways in which the belief systems of the Spanish and the South Americans resulted in strikingly original images.

For historian Kenneth Mills, director of Latin American studies, the exhibition promises "multiple opportunities for 21st-century viewers to enter into thought worlds that surrounded the cult of the saints in modern times, to contemplate a Catholic Christianity that was not only visual but highly participatory."

The works in the exhibit belong to Marilyn and Carl Thoma of Illinois and the exhibition was organized by the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University. The U of T Art Centre is open Tuesdays through Fridays from noon to 5 p.m. and Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m.

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