The Viceroy’s daughter

The female world in New Spain during seventeenth Century

Temporary exhibition
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MUSEO DE AMÉRICA
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OPENING TIMES
Tuesday to Saturday
from 09:30 to 15:00
Thursdays
Open from 09:30 to 19:00
Sundays and holidays
from 10:00 to 15:00
The Museum is closed on
Mondays

HOW TO GET TO THE MUSEUM
Bus numbers
1,2,16,44,46,61,82,83,113,132,
133 and Circular
Metro
Line 3 and 6 Station Moncloa
(Isaac Peral Exit)
Line 7 Station Islas Filipinas
(Gaztambide Exit)
Free parking every weekend

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The female world in New Spain during seventeenth Century
This temporary exhibition comes from the analysis of a canvas which depicts two women: a lavishly dressed lady and an indigenous woman of small stature with her face completely tattooed. The piece was recovered during the confiscation of the goods (1835) of the convent of Nuestra Señora de la Salutación in Madrid, together with other artworks that also belonged to Lady María Luisa de Toledo y Carreto, who joined the convent as a black veiled choir nun in her final years. Lady María Luisa, daughter of the marquis of Mancera, Antonio Sebastián de Toledo, viceroy of New Spain between 1664 and 1673, spent her childhood and teenage years in Mexico, where she acquired a rich array of belongings. Items similar to those that she left behind have been selected to contextualise her surroundings.

The painting, dated from 1670, lets us give an account of the overlapping and contrasting worlds in America under the vice-regency - the Hispanic and the indigenous - with a female perspective, demonstrating relationships of power and conflict, but also emotional attachment and a symbolic weight that hint at the portrait’s origins and circumstances. The detailed description of the objects in their inventories lets us not only gain an idea of the nature of Lady María Luisa’s bountiful belongings, many of which came from Asia or America, but also of the family’s way of life, worries and preoccupations, allowing us to approach a better understanding of a long-lost Baroque world.
A difficult journey

Travelling between the royal courts of Madrid and Mexico City meant various months of travel in gruelling conditions, even for the viceroys, who made the journey with dozens of servants, bags, packing cases and luggage of all types.

Asian luxury at the viceroy’s court

The arrival to Mexico meant the start of a new era for the court; as representatives of the Spanish monarchy, luxury and ostentation, the demonstration of power, protocol and social connections became elements essential for the court’s operation. The Asian objects, which arrived with the Manila Galleons, were a fundamental part of this paraphernalia.

Portable desk in namban style. Japan, 1580-1630. Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas
The splendour of art from New Spain

Other objects were reinterpreted on New Spanish soil, creating new forms and decorations that bear witness to the fusion of different cultures. Marquetry furniture from Villa Alta, tortoiseshell sewing boxes, lacquered trays from Peribán, ceramics and pottery from Guadalajara, silverware, and similar items were status symbols for the new elite.

The constant presence of water

Water was a ubiquitous presence in urban settings. Not only were there public fountains in cities, fountains were recreated as centrepieces using ceramics from Guadalajara. Lidded jars with a base were also made from specific types of clay intended to be decorative or give scent and flavour to the water they contained.
5 An obsession with flavours and scents. A magical universe for the senses

During the Baroque period, a fascination with the senses arose, especially smell: aromatic substances such as civet, ambergris, and copal suggest the use of pomanders, burners, censers and perfumers. But there was also great interest in the magical and mythological universe, in which people used cups made from rhinoceros’ horn, mother-of-pearl shells, bezoar stones, elk hooves, talismans, etc.

6 Areas dedicated to worship

Lady María Luisa’s family oratory was presided over by a depiction of the Immaculate Conception by Herrera el Mozo, which she brought with her when she retired to the convent. She also left behind a portable oratory, where we suppose an inlaid mother-of-pearl Virgin of Guadalupe hung. They are spaces dedicated to private worship, in this case with objects that were the personal property of the lady herself.
We discover the indigenous universe, parallel and equidistant from its Hispanic counterpart, through the figure of the small woman, whose tattoos suggest she came from the Chichimeca area. In pre-Hispanic America, representations of different people were common, and often had religious significance.

Indigenous furnishings: simple, light and practical

The possessions of indigenous people were limited and simple in comparison to those of the Spanish lady. They do reflect the exploitation of the environment along with a multifunctional practicality, while at the same time showing a fundamental association with symbolic power and gender roles. The bow is a masculine item that expresses the relationship with the border garrisons, the various forms of indigenous slavery and the fight against the frontier and garrison soldiers.
The final section is an invitation to reflect on the purpose of the image through period representations of “barbaric Indians”, wild Indians or Chichimecas in casta paintings. The stereotypes that formed around indigenous Americans meant they were placed in an imagined space: nudity symbolised barbarity, weapons served to indicate a violent nature, long hair represented the lack of culture or civilization, and feathers located them in an exotic and primitive world.

The tour will end where it began, in front of the canvas depicting the Chichimeca woman and the Spanish lady. The second reading will provide a counterpoint to the first in an attempt to understand the presence of this woman at the Mexican court, and to find the final meaning of this surprising portrait.