LA HIJA DEL VIRREY
El mundo femenino novohispano en el siglo XVII

Exhibition texts
Andrés Gutiérrez Usillos

MUSEO DE AMÉRICA
Who are the two women around who this exhibition is built? Why has the young Spanish woman, lavishly dressed, been portrayed alongside a small indigenous woman with a tattooed face? The story of this portrait brings to light the relationships between Hispanic nobility and overseas viceroys in terms of the global movement of people and goods.

The young woman has been identified as Lady María Luisa de Toledo, daughter of the Marquis of Mancera, viceroy of New Spain, and the belongings listed in the inventory of her possessions give us some insight into trade relations, the use of different objects and ways of life, mainly female, at the end of the seventeenth century. Items similar to those included in this inventory of goods and the lives of the two women allow us to show some of the most interesting aspects of their surroundings, from travel and luxury items to the obsession with scents and magical objects.

Through the figure of the small, tattooed indigenous woman, who came from the Chichimeca area (an area of ongoing war), we find ourselves in a world completely unlike its counterpart, with absolutely different codes, traditions and values, as well as contrasting readings and needs.
Lady María Luisa de Toledo with her indigenous companion

Attributed to Antonio Rodríguez, Mexico
Viceroyalty of New Spain, ca. 1670

Oil on canvas

Museo de América, MAM 06537 (on long-term loan from Museo Nacional del Prado)

Lady María Luisa de Toledo y Carreto (1656-1707), portrayed on this canvas, was the only daughter of Sir Antonio Sebastián de Toledo, Marquis of Mancera, who served as viceroy of New Spain from 1664 to 1673. As a result, she lived in Mexico City for part of her childhood and teenage years, where this portrait was completed in 1670.

When girls made the transition from “meninas” to adult noblewomen, at 14 or 15 years old, they were already prepared for marriage. Some began to wear chopines, including this young woman, judging by the proportions of her body.

The painting forms part of the collections confiscated in 1835 from the Madrid convent of Nuestra Señora de la Salutación (Our Lady of Salutation), better known as the “Convento de Constantinopla” (Constantinople Convent), which Lady María Luisa joined in the early 1700s after finding herself ill, widowed and childless.
The West Indies Fleet left from Seville once or twice a year, sailing for Veracruz (New Spain) in April and towards the mainland (Portobelo, Panama or Cartagena, Colombia) in August. The viceroy's trip could last for more than six months after departure from the Court in Madrid, with two long months of sailing to reach Veracruz. It would take three more months to arrive at the capital, Mexico, after a “ritual pilgrimage” during which the viceroy would receive lavish receptions in various locations.

These trips included moving the entire “house”, dozens of servants and attendants, furnishings, packages, trunks and wooden or leather chests. Adding to the discomfort of the journey itself were overwhelming exhaustion, hunger, poor sanitation and a wide range of diseases. On occasion, even death: this befell the marchioness of Mancera, the mother of Lady María Luisa, on her return to Spain, and various other viceroys, regardless of their gender or status.

In general, the journey was made in carriages, although some - primarily the men - also travelled by horse. The detail of the folding screen shows a Spanish couple riding horses during an indigenous festival in New Spain.
View of Seville
Anonymous, around 1600
Oil on canvas
Museo de América, MAM 00016

The main purpose of this painting seems to correspond with the arrival of three galleys, warships propelled by oarsmen -the rabble- used in the Mediterranean. At trumpet and drum, announces the entry of a main character to the city.

The viceroys received the treatment of “Royal House” and therefore, during their stay, the marquises of Mancera had to stay in the Reales Alcázares of Seville. However, the departure of the fleet took place from Sanlúcar de Barrameda, in order to avoid the sand bars of the mouth of the Guadalquivir.

Chests
Viceroyalty of Peru, 17th-18th century
Leather, wood, and iron
Museo de América, MAM 1989/07/02

These lavishly decorated items of furniture formed part of the furnishings of an upper-class household, although occasionally served as containers for travelling. The decoration of these chests not only stood out for their embossed work, but also because of the bright polychromatic colours used.

This model features the outstanding work of a locksmith, notably the keyhole cover made of iron in the shape of an escutcheon with a wide fretwork embellishment.

Creasted birds with curved feathers, seen on one of the chest, are elegant crested tinamou or martínet tinamou (Eudromia elegans) whose habitat is The Pampas.
Chest

Viceroyalty of Peru, 17th - 18th century
Leather, wood, metal, textile and iron
Museo de América, MAM 06537

These painted leather chests with embossed reliefs are typical of the viceregal style of Peru. Crested birds with curved feathers, seen on one of the chests, are elegant crested tinamou or martineta tinamou (Eudromia elegans) whose habitat is The Pampas, suggesting that these chests were made in this southern region. There, large herds of cattle and horses also grazed, whose hides were used to make these objects.

Travel trunks

Spain or American Viceroyalty; and New Spain, 17th-18th centuries
Wood, leather, cane, and where appropriate, sisal rope and wrought iron
Museo de América, MAM 6536 and MAM 06702

Passengers’ luggage had different features, dimensions and contents, depending on the means of each person. This leather trunk, adorned with strips of the same material, is similar to the one described in Doña María Luisa de Toledo’s belongings, a design that remained in use until the 19th century. The other trunk, typical of New Spain, is made of woven wicker with a leather lining and has sisal thread embroidery of flowers, birds and a kind of lion, as well as a lock and key to keep the contents secure.
Folding screen titled the Palace of the Viceroy of Mexico

Viceroyalty of New Spain, circa 1650

Oil on canvas

Museo de América, MAM 00207

The Marquis of Mancera and his family moved into the viceregal palace in Mexico, the façade of which is depicted on this folding screen. The upper floor housed the viceroy and the vicereine’s private—and separate—apartments. A raised platform was at the heart of the women’s indoor life, and was where the vicereine would receive officials. Women would sit on cushions—one or two according to their rank—or on low chairs, while men sat on higher chairs. The platform was also a place for conversing or drinking chocolate with other ladies of the court and ladies-in-waiting, who were there to learn the key aspects and protocols of how to behave at the ceremonious Hispanic court. Much of the building was destroyed by fire in 1692 during an uprising caused by famine: the then viceroy was the brother-in-law of Doña María Luisa de Toledo, Don Gaspar de la Cerda, Count of Galve.
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz

Andrés de Islas. Viceroyalty of New Spain, 1772
Oil on canvas
Museo de América, MAM 00022

One of the ladies-in-waiting who formed part of the entourage of Vicereine Doña Leonor de Carreto (mother of Doña María Luisa), was Doña Juana Ramírez de Asbaje, later known as Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz. In her sonnets she immortalised her admiration of the Vicereine to whom she gave the nickname Laura:

Laura's beauty enamoured heaven,
Who stole her stature's lofty height.
It judged her beauty as too bright
These wretched valleys to enlighten.

Painted by Andrés de Islas, protégé of Miguel Cabrera, this is a posthumous portrait of Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz wearing the habit of the Order of St. Jerome. Her famous “Soneto a la Esperanza” (To Hope) hangs over the top of the bookshelf, the first words of which are:

Green enchantment of every human life,
Mad hope, delirious golden fever,
Convoluted sleep of the sleepless
Where dream and treasure are equally elusive.
The viceroy's palace served as both the administrative epicentre of the immense territory and the family's official residence. Just like the royal court in Spain, this set the pace of protocol as well as the latest trends and tastes in fashion, which the local nobility tried to copy at whatever cost.

Each viceroy also aimed to furnish their palace to their liking with objects, like Asian imports, that also served as markers of social distinction and prestige. Giving that the Manila Galleons only came to New Spain once a year, with some exceptions, products from Asia became luxury items, sought after not only by New Spain's elites, but also fiercely desired by buyers in the Spanish mainland.

The Manila Galleons provided New Spain with all the luxury goods produced in Asia, generically known as “chinos” ("Chinese"). Administratively speaking, the Philippines fell under the governance of the viceroy of New Spain. This folding screen from New Spain featuring Chinese scenes is a product of this profound relationship.
Portable desk

Namban style, Momoyama Period, Japan, 1580-1630

Wood, lacquer, mother-of-pearl and gold and silver powder

Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, CE28748

The collection of Asian furniture that Doña María Luisa de Toledo accumulated was not only sizeable in number – more than thirty desks – but also very diverse. Some featured decorations of golden flowers (makie) and mother-of-pearl inlay on black lacquer (urushi), in other words, corresponding to the namban style, Japanese items produced for export. This desk is an exceptional piece, not only for its large dimensions, but also for its rich decoration, and the fact that there is nothing comparable in any other Spanish collection.
Coffer

Namban style, Momoyama Period, Japan, last quarter of the 16th century

Pine wood, copper, lacquer, and mother-of-pearl

Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, CE18707

With a base of black lacquered wood, decorated with flowers of gold and silver dust and inlay of bluish iridescent mother-of-pearl, this item is also representative of the namban style. In fact, the many different manufacturing centres copied the features that were the highest in demand. These could be Japanese imitations of Korean or Chinese mother-of-pearl chests as in this case; Chinese manufacturers who copied Japanese imari porcelain; or those in New Spain that copied Asian folding screens, porcelain, furniture and lacquerware.
Plate and bowl

Jingdezhen (Jiangxi), China, reign of Emperor Kangxi (1662-1722), Qing dynasty (1644-1911)

Porcelain

Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, CE19065, and CE19072

Hundreds of pieces of Chinese porcelain, similar to these, were part of Doña María Luisa’s belongings. This plate and bowl were part of the cargo recovered from a ship called the Vung Tau that was wrecked in 1690, just off the coast of Vietnam. This shipwrecked vessel from China was full of porcelain produced in the Jingdezhen region (Jiangxi, China) to export to the West. Although there was already a change in style aimed at the new European market of the day, these items are in keeping with more traditional designs.

Jar (tibor)

Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644), China, first half of the 17th century

Porcelain and iron

Museo Arqueológico Nacional, 64070

Made of enameled porcelain and small in size, this jar has an iron lock, indicating that it was used as a container for valuable objects. In China, these were used to store ginger, but in Puebla (Mexico) they began to produce very similarly shaped enameled crockery which they used for chocolate. This jar is decorated with large red and yellow chrysanthemums over a blue-green background. In Chinese porcelain it is classified as famille verte and began to be used during the late Ming dynasty.
Handleless cups

Reign of Emperor Kangxi (1662-1722), Qing dynasty (1644-1912), China

Porcelain

Museo Arqueológico Nacional, 64090, and Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, CE03512

The relationship between New Spain and the Asian world was so close that not only were various homeware styles absorbed and reinterpreted, but they also became elements that were emblematic of the viceroyalty. As such, Asian handleless cups made of porcelain, used for tea ceremonies, were transformed into an essential part of tableware used for drinking chocolate and were exported to Europe with this new use in mind. One of these handleless cups is in the blue and white that was characteristic of the Kangxi reign. The other, also from China, imitates the Japanese imari style which combines red, cobalt blue and gold.
Whisks for chocolate

Mexico, 19th century. Wood and bone
Museo de América, MAM 13417, MAM 13418, MAM 13419, and MAM 13346

Viceroyalty of New Spain
18th Century. Wood
Museo de América, MAM 70918

These 19th century whisks, which have movable rings, were used to break up and beat the chocolate, creating a thick foam. Their size was most likely relative to the size of the chocolateras or chocolate pots with which they were used, since some of them were small and for individual use. Doña María Luisa owned two silver chocolateras, one large and the other small, as well as over five hundred whisks.
Cacao and chocolate-related objects

Copper chocolatiera or chocolate pot and wooden whisk used to beat chocolate, Spain, 19th or 20th century. Cacao pods and seeds, and a wooden box containing chocolate paste. Contemporary Private Collection

Cacao seeds were ground on a stone metate (a grinding stone) that was heated over fire in order to melt the fat or cacao paste; this was then sold in round wooden boxes, as can be seen in 17th-century still-life paintings. In these paintings, other utensils for making home-made drinking chocolate can be seen, such as the whisk or beater, used to break up the chocolate paste in water – milk was only added later on; the chocolate was then heated in another container specifically created for this purpose; the chocolatiera or chocolate pot. Chocolate was not just drunk to enjoy its taste, it was also considered a medicinal remedy for delicate stomachs.
Coconut chocolatero

Viceroyalty of New Granada, 1782-1789

Coconut shell, gold-plated silver

Museo de América, MAM 2017/05/01

Believed to have medicinal properties, for example against strokes, coconut shells were also used to make jicaras or handleless cups for drinking chocolate. The inscription carved on this coconut chocolate cup is: Yll. EX. Sr. / ARZ. V. (Ilustrísimo y Excelentísimo Señor / Arzobispo V) (His Illustrious Excellency Lord / Archbishop V). The combination of objects that symbolise the position of an archbishop (staff, cross, hat and mitre), and those of a viceroy and captain-general (baton and sword), signal the dual positions of the owner of these objects, undoubtedly Antonio Caballero y Góngora, Archbishop of Bogotá and Viceroy of New Granada (1782-89).

Bowl

The Philippines, 19th century

Etched gourd

Museo de América, MAM 12328

These types of gourd designs, as well as their decorative motifs, are similar to those which were being made in the Viceroyalties in America. In fact, it is possible that some of the coconuts and gourds that were included in the inventories as coming from the Indies, were actually of Asian origin. This gourd was etched in the Philippines in the 19th century. Other similar items were listed among Doña María Luisa de Toledo’s belongings, and “etched” figures of animals, especially birds, and the use of silver appliqués were highlighted.
In the viceroys’ territories, local production had begun to satisfy the needs of the new Hispanic elite and their demand for luxury goods, adding to those brought from Asia and Europe. In some cases, these were adaptations of traditional indigenous crafts, such as pictures made with feathers, adapted to suit to the new tastes of the elite. In other cases, they attempted to imitate European or Asian objects, adding their own solutions and decorations.

Lady María Luisa de Toledo's personal inventories are, in this sense, an authentic display of the diversity in art in New Spain during the second half of the seventeenth century, especially those related to the domestic belongings, which included many items relating to the female sphere.

Many of these objects, in addition to prestige, provide evidence of new consumption rituals, especially regarding chocolate. In still life pieces, such as this one by Antonio de Pereda, we can see boxes of chocolate paste, jícara (bowls in which hot drinks were served), molinillos (traditional whisks), a chocolatera (hot chocolate container) and serviettes, as well as containers for cold water, lacquered gourds and ceramics, all from New Spain; similar objects are listed in the inventories.
Portable desk

Villa Alta (Oaxaca, Mexico), Viceroyalty of New Spain, 17th century

Cedar wood

Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, CE03124

Some desks, like this one, copied German-style inlay work, although this example combines linaloe wood (Bursera linaeae or copal) and a kind of rosewood (Dalbergia sp.); in addition, the technique of sgraffito was used, and the figures were filled in with a black paste (bitumen). The scenes were inspired by Flemish prints, as can be attested by the clothes and hairstyles of the ladies, and by moralising, mythological stories and scenes of gallantry. In this case, the front depicts the scene of Angelica being freed by Rogelio, from the 10th Chant of "Orlando Furioso" by Ludovico Ariosto; while the side shows a representation of summer.
Sewing box

Puebla, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 17th-18th centuries

Wood, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl

Museo de América, 2000/05/07

Some of the most notable furniture that was common to the sphere of women were items linked to activities considered appropriate to their gender, such as sewing boxes, cushions and dressing tables. In fact, some of them also shared the same shape, structure and materials. In this case, the mother-of-pearl inlay in tortoiseshell offers a very varied iconography, inspired by Chinese-style engravings or by scenes that were also depicted in eastern ceramics. The addition of exotic elephants, oriental dancers, cranes, and phoenixes, among others, expanded the iconographic repertoire of New Spain.

Tortoiseshell coffers

Viceroyalty of New Spain, 17th and 18th centuries

Wood, tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, silver

Museo de América, MAM 6730 and MAM 6732

The abundance of certain raw materials in the viceregal territories led to their repeated use in locally made items. Nacre found in molluscs (such as mother-of-pearl), Hawksbill turtle shell and silver were some of the most frequently used materials. In luxury boxes, silver was not only part of the decorative design, but was also used for the metalwork and for the locks.
Mancerina saucer and handleless cup

Mancerina saucer. Silversmith Juan de Ortega, Madrid (Spain), 1695–1703. Silver.

Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, CE26365

Handleless tea cup, reign of Emperor Kangxi (1662-1722) (Qing Dynasty, 1644-1912), China, Porcelain.

Museo Arqueológico Nacional, 64087

The jícara or handleless cup was complemented with a mancerina, a kind of saucer for holding biscuits, and with a central holder to prevent the chocolate in the cup from spilling. As a matter of fact, the mancerina was named after the Marquis of Mancera – father of Doña María Luisa – who was supposedly its inventor. This mancerina saucer is in the shape of a scallop shell and includes the silversmith’s mark (Juan de Ortega, silversmith to Carlos II), the place where it was made (Madrid), as well as the hallmark (of Matías Vallejo) that was used to ensure that the metal alloy met regulatory standards.

Tray

Viceroyalty of New Spain, second half of the 17th century

Silver filigree

Private Collection

Among Doña María Luisa de Toledo’s inventory of silver, many of the objects accounted for were of filigree work done in Havana or cast in Nicaragua. This involved two different techniques: the first was done using rolled, silver thread, while the second was first moulded in wax and then cast. This item coincides with the description of some of the trays in the inventory of Doña María Luisa’s belongings: “Six silver-filigree trays, unevenly crenelated with feet”.


Tray

Peribán (Mexico), Viceroyalty of New Spain, mid-17th century

Lacquered wood

Museo de América, MAM 06922

As can be seen by the wording in the centre of this item, it belonged to “DOÑA JUANA GOMES CORONA”. At the end of the 17th century, and in particular during the following centuries, it was customary to establish the owner of household possessions by including their name and, sometimes, the object’s intended use. This tray is lacquered with an inlay technique and decorated with medallion that represent ladies surrounded by various decorative elements.

Bowl

The Philippines, 19th century

Etched gourd

Museo de América, MAM 12328

These types of gourd designs, as well as their decorative motifs, are similar to those which were being made in the Viceroyalties in America. In fact, it is possible that some of the coconuts and gourds that were included in the inventories as coming from the Indies, were actually of Asian origin. This gourd was etched in the Philippines in the 19th century. Other similar items were listed among Doña María Luisa de Toledo’s belongings, and “etched” figures of animals, especially birds, and the use of silver appliqués were highlighted.
Drinking water was one of Spanish people’s biggest passions, undoubtedly inherited from the Muslim world. Adding distinct flavours not only satisfied the sense of taste but also the sense of smell. Presented in all types of fountains and vessels of curious shapes and finishes, water pleased the eye and even the ear. The main concern was to prevent stored water from going bad or losing flavour. Certain "practices" were used to avoid this, including boiling loquat in the water, pouring it from a height or putting stones and almonds into it.

One of the most interesting aspects relating to water is its aesthetic appearance. Scenographies of the parties held in palaces and Baroque cities also included the play of water, and of course, the play of light. During the seventeenth century, they included ephemeral, shifting little creations made using creative combinations of this type of aromatic clay from Tonalá.

Some of these clays, found in New Spain, can be seen in the canvas depicting the "still life with servant". On the tray that the young man carries, a silver cup of cocoa, together with ceramics, crockery and porcelain can be seen, of the type found in luxury inventories at that time. Lady María Luisa de Toledo also had hundreds of ceramics of the same American origins.
Water fountain
Guadalajara, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 17th century
Ceramic
Museo de América, MAM 04232, MAM 04194, MAM 04664, MAM 04316, MAM 04309, and MAM 04688

Some of the pottery from New Spain, such as those from the Countess of Oñate's collection – now held in the Museo de América – are sections of larger ensembles. This fountain includes a reservoir for water and a lid below which are various shallow bowls decorated with perforated masks where water flowed from their mouths in a sequential display of waterfalls. Its use must have been decorative, although it is likely that it scented the air and perhaps water was taken from the lower bowl to drink, or it was taken directly from the water jets.

Pitcher, tumblers and cup
Guadalajara de Indias, Viceroyalty of New Spain, second half of the 17th century and beginning of the 18th century
Ceramic
Museo de América, MAM 04095, MAM 04418, MAM 04777, and MAM 04429

Drinking chocolate was associated with drinking cold water. As a matter of fact, it is one of the customs that Madame D'Aulnoy recounted in 1679, "We were given extremely cold water....it is an established custom here that, after drinking chocolate, very cold water must be drunk." These clay tumblers were very suitable for drinking water, whose flavour was enhanced or masked, but they were not suitable for drinking wine from.
Tumblers and basin

Portugal? Second half of the 17th century

Ceramic without slip

Museo de América, MAM 04692, MAM 04553, and MAM 04342

Taste is not only an individual sense, it is also cultural and so, for the Hispanics of the day – and for ladies in particular – the taste and smell of clay appears to have been incredibly delicious and fascinating. Although it was aromatised with ambergris or civet, other Europeans still found it disgusting. They did not just drink the flavoured water, but also ingested the very clay used to make these tumblers. These tumblers were not fired, but dried so they would soften when wet; the clay was pinched into a thread, swirled around in the liquid inside and eaten like a sweet.

Pot or jar

Natá (Panama), Viceroyalty of New Spain, second half of the 17th century

Ceramic

Museo de América, MAM 04869

Like other inventories of the day, as can be seen by those of Doña María Luisa de Toledo and of the Countess of Oñate, it was usual to find a diverse range of pottery. In addition to the abundance of items from Guadalajara de Indias, other objects were from Guatilán, Guarache, Chile, Natá (Panama), and from various pottery workshops in Portugal and Spain. The embossed decoration, the type of neck and edge, the painting in the form of gold lace trim, suggest that this pot was produced in Natá, Panama.
Still Life with Grapes, Apples and Plums
Juan de Espinosa, circa 1630
Oil on canvas
Museo Nacional del Prado, P000702

Bottles and jar
Guadalajara, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 17th century. Ceramic
Museo de América, MAM 04623, MAM 04086, and MAM 04038

Still lifes at that time tended to include red pottery vessels next to seasonal fruit. In fact, Doña María Luisa even left a still-life painting of nuts and items of pottery in her will. However, it was more common to depict pottery with autumn grapes, as at that time of year it was still hot and so said items were used to perfume and humidify the air but, above all, to keep water cool. The porous surface of these pottery vessels allowed the surface to transpire and the evaporation kept the contents cool.
Ceramic jars

Natá (Panama), 17th century, and Guadalajara (Mexico), Viceroyalty of New Spain, 17th and 18th centuries

Ceramic

Museo de América, MAM 04893, MAM 04907, MAM 04905, and MAM 04894

These were perhaps used in the homes of aristocrats for storing cold water, in addition to serving as large air fresheners and humidifiers in their grand rooms, and as items of prestige for those who owned them. On one of them is a phrase and a female figure with painted wings representing the deity Pheme: SING YOUR IMMORTAL [PHEME], JUAN PÉREZ DE GUZMÁN. Its features coincide with items made in Natá and must therefore refer to Juan Pérez de Guzmán y Gonzaga, President of the Real Audiencia of Panama, famous for his fight against pirates. It is possible that the other red jar is of the same origin, while the two large polychromatic jars, decorated with birds and two-headed eagles, are typical of Guadalajara de Indias (Mexico).
Jar with lid

Guadalajara de Indias, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 17th century

Ceramic

Museo de América, MAM 04635, MAM 04268, MAM 04176, and MAM 04287

These types of pottery items humidified the air, and exotic fragrances lent an atmosphere to domestic spaces. In addition, they perfumed the water they held, acting as more than mere containers of liquids, since they were like catalysts for the senses that could lead to deep feelings. The taste for “scented pottery” was all the rage in southern Europe: In Portugal, Spain and Italy, and especially at viceregal courts and grand palatial homes, where these items – such as these objects that formed part of table centrepieces at banquets – became luxurious status symbols.
The Catholic religion permeated each and every one of the aspects of daily life. The possessions that decorated homes not only included pictures and sculptures depicting Biblical stories or images of saints, but also included jewellery containing relics, crosses and images of virgins and saints that came in the form of pendants or medallions, for the symbolic devotion and protection of their wearers.

Those with the means to do so had a space devoted to worship, such as a chapel, in their homes. There, a priest gave a private service to the family. These spaces had all the necessary accoutrements, including everything from the silver canopy, wine decanters and chalice or crosses to the priest's vestments.

Among Lady María Luisa's possessions, apart from the main chapel, there was also a mobile devotional space, a mahogany piece of furniture upholstered with colourful satin, with a ledge, doors and a dais. This surely would have been found in her bedroom, and which possibly held an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The main images from both spaces accompanied her to her retirement at the convent.
The Immaculate Conception

Francisco de Herrera "el Mozo"
(Madrid, Spain), circa 1670
Oil on canvas
Museo Nacional del Prado, MNP008250

During the last quarter of the 17th century, this canvas took pride of place in Doña María Luisa’s main family chapel. It was documented in the 19th century in the convent of Constantinople [in Madrid, but no longer standing] where this lady took the veil in 1706. It was part of her belongings, together with her portrait and other artworks.

Spain was passionate about theological debate, being a staunch advocate of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception claiming that birth free of original sin meant that Mary was clearly the Mother of God.

Virgin of Guadalupe

Anonymous. Viceroyalty of New Spain, late seventeenth century, before 1695
Enconchado, oil on panel and mother-of-pearl
Museo de América, MAM 00163

It is possible that Doña María Luisa’s altar from her portable chapel had the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe presiding over it. In fact, a small painting was listed among the assets expropriated from the convent of Constantinople in Madrid, where Doña María Luisa had spent her last days, but no such artwork was left in her will. This iconography is very common, especially for people who had lived in Mexico. In this case, a depiction of the so-called “First Sanctuary” can be seen at the feet of the Virgin; this was built prior to the construction of the Old Basilica where work began in 1695, and so therefore it must be dated prior to that year.
Featherwork paintings

St. Francis Xavier and St. Ignatius of Loyola

Anonymous. Michoacán (Mexico), Viceroyalty of New Spain, 17th century

Feathers and bark paper on copper

Museo de América, MAM 12332, and MAM 12335

This type of featherwork must have been common among the belongings of 17th-century Spanish nobles who maintained direct links with New Spain, although few examples have survived. Various pairs were found among Doña María Luisa’s belongings, probably similar in style, format and technique:

“Two identical rosewood frames of two thirds in height and in them Saint Joseph and Saint Anthony of Padua, done in feathers both with glass [and worth] one hundred and twenty reales.”

These two small paintings from the Museum of America depict two saints, St. Francis Xavier and St. Ignatius of Loyola, related to the founding of the Society of Jesus, and the evangelisation of Asia in the 16th century.
Altar front

Viceroyalty of Peru, 18th century

Cotton, cane and featherwork

Museo de América, MAM 12346

Featherwork items created in the Indies were among the artisanal artworks exported to Europe. This is an altar front, probably made in Peru in the 18th century, decorated with flowers intertwined with foliage and includes the IHS monogram. This symbol suggests that the object was made to be used at one of the Society of Jesus’s churches but, since this order was expelled from the American territories in 1767, this piece most likely dates back to before that year.
Some of the strongest preoccupations of the time can be deduced through the objects and elements found among Lady María Luisa de Toledo’s possessions. Without doubt, two of those were related to health, scented substances and symbolic or magic objects. Both reflect the fear of disease, understood to be caused by bad air or the sinister glare of the evil eye.

The range of scented substances that were listed are, once again, a complete catalogue that includes many of the various animal and plant substances produced in different territories of America or Asia. These substances, often exorbitantly expensive, were used in family and secret recipes to make scented pastilles and vinegars, as well as sweets and recipes flavoured with these same aromas.

During the Baroque period, there seems to have been a special interest in captivating all the senses, with the sense of smell being one of the most central. In the painting which forms part of The Five Senses series, painted by Brueghel and Rubens, different elements relating to the sense of smell are represented: these include animals like the African civet, which produces civet musk, flowers used to produce distilled essences, and incense burners, braziers and fragrance diffusers.
Rhinoceros horn cup

China, 17th century

Rhinoceros horn, gilded silver

Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, CE 25469

Another example of globalisation during the 17th century is this type of cup made from the horn of a rhinoceros. These were crafted in China, but when they passed through Mexico or upon arrival at their European destination, they were adorned with silver or gold embellishments. In China, rhinoceros horn was valued for its supposedly magical properties and symbolism related to abundance, fortune and longevity, but in Europe it was used to detect the presence of poison.

Bowl and saucer with bezoar stone

Gold-plated silver

Mexico, third quarter of the 17th century

Museo de Valladolid, Inv. no. 10325

Bezoar stones are hard masses that form in the stomachs of certain herbivores, and were also used to detect and avoid poisoning. Furthermore, it was also believed that they helped to prevent depression and epilepsy, and were used as a stimulant or narcotic. In general, these stones were surrounded by rings or set in latticed spheres of either silver or gold. Using chains of the same metal they were immersed in the content of a glass to check for poison. In other cases, such as this, silversmiths in New Spain would set the stone in the bottom of silver cups or bowls, the bezoar being held in place by figures of snakes, monkeys or birds.
Etched nautilus shell

China. Late 17th century
Nautilus shell
Museo de América, MAM 12389

Mother-of-pearl shells were a favourite object to have as a personal belonging, above all in one’s collection of exotica. Silver or gold feet were added to convert them to ceremonial cups, as incense boats, or simply as adornments and items of prestige. Most of these came from China already etched, and mainly from the port of Guangzhou. They could also be purchased in Mexico, as can be confirmed by the Viceroy’s daughter’s documentation which listed thirty-one items such as this.

The great beast’s hoof

Elk hoof (Alces alces)
Museo de Farmacia Hispana, UCM. MFH 1692

These extremities of “the great beast” were used to treat certain illnesses such as epilepsy, cramp, and heart conditions. As “magical” objects, they were ingested in powder form or applied topically. They were obtained from elk or moose (Alces alces), whose habitats are found in Nordic forests. Lowland tapir (Tapirus sp.) from tropical forests were also referred to the same name (anta), and their hooves were sold and used for the same purpose. Doña Maria Luisa had three whole “hooves” from the great beast “to adorn”, without doubt gifts that were never finished.
Projecting lantern, burner or hand warmer

China, 18th century

Gold-plated copper

Museo de Valladolid, Inv. no. 915

Curious spherical objects, similar to this, were used as hand warmers and/or as containers for herbs, or as pomanders or perfume pots in which aromatic substances were burned. Those without rings from which to hang chains were perhaps used as hand warmers, while the others served to project shadows when they were rolled. Although the ember or flame was inside the small burner itself, a hinged hoop mechanism ensured that the heat source always remained in a vertical position.
Talismans and bells

Talismans. Spain, first half of the 17th century. Quartz and gold
Museo Lázaro Galdiano, Inv. no. 3267

Talismans. Santiago de Compostela, Spain. First half of the 17th century, historicist adornment. Jet, seed pearls, emerald and enamelled gold
Silver bell. León, Spain, 1790. Silver
Museo del Traje, Centro de Investigación del Patrimonio Etnológico, CE021353, and CE010110

The belongings of this aristocratic lady include a series of objects that, undoubtedly, fall into the category of symbolic protection, such as four talismans: one is made of jet, one of quartz, and two of coral; bells; a “dolphin”; and mermaids, etc. These, along with badger claws, quartz pacifiers and other objects, were attached to children’s belts to ward off the evil eye and protect them from evil spirits.
Centrepiece

Santiago de Chile, Viceroyalty of Peru, first half of the 18th century

Ceramic

Museo de América, MAM 12925

With a clearly decorative function as a centrepiece, the upper section is a bowl with a domed lid that had an additional use, perhaps as a perfumer or as a salt cellar. It was crafted by nuns of the Santa Clara convent in Santiago de Chile, and acquired during the Ruiz and Pavón Botanical Expedition (1777-1788). The main figure on this item is a mermaid whose image is linked to protection and strength, thus enhancing its “magical” ability to protect against unhealthy air that could contaminate and cause people to become sick.
Perfumer

New Kingdom of Granada, Viceroyalty of Peru, 1600-1622

Latticed silver
Museo de América, MAM 1988/06/11

It seems that producing heady smells was something of an obsession at that time. This perfumer is similar to a larger one that was owned by Doña María Luisa: It was referred to as a perfumer and was made of silver, had four clawed feet, two handles, and a tall latticed lid in which to burn the perfuming substances. However, this item on display formed part of the personal belongings of one of the passengers on the Nuestra Señora de Atocha galleon, shipwrecked in 1622 off the coast of Florida, on its return trip to Spain.
Containers called “chestnuts”

Guadalajara de Indias, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 17th century

Ceramic

Museo de América, MAM 1987/03/09, and MAM 1987/03/10

Helping to combat the suffocating heat of the summer, “chestnuts” were small containers carried by ladies when they strolled through gardens or were outdoors. Dampened or perfumed handkerchiefs were placed inside so the ladies could cool themselves and avoid any unpleasant smells in their surroundings. Doña María Luisa de Toledo owned more than twenty chestnut bottles from Guadalajara, similar to the ones on display.
Ceramic boxes

Guadalajara, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 17th-18th centuries. Polychromed ceramic
Museo de América, MAM 04520-21, and Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas 04/16

Santiago de Chile, Viceroyalty of Peru, first half of the 18th century. Gilded and polychromed ceramic
Museo de América, MAM 12923

Small boxes were exhibited as “jewellery displays”, together with other miniature items made of silver or exotic materials. These examples are from two of the main ceramic manufacturers of viceregal America: Guadalajara de Indias (Mexico) and Santiago de Chile. Made in the first half of the 18th century, this gilded chest was made by the nuns of the convent of the Order of St. Claire located in the capital of Chile and it was acquired by the French botanist Joseph Dombey during the Ruiz and Pavón Botanical Expedition (1777–1788).
Pair of gloves

England, circa 1630

Leather, linen, silk, metal

Museo del Traje, Centro de Investigación
del Patrimonio Etnológico, CE095515

Gloves were a sign of prestige and status, like this lavishly decorated pair made for a gentleman, and produced in England. During the Baroque era, “amber” or “frangipane” gloves came into fashion and were used as diplomatic gifts between royal courts and palaces all around Europe. Doña María Luisa left almost forty pairs; these had an added usefulness as they protected her the hands, helping to withstand a rather malodorous environment. In order to make the gloves, leather was soaked in a balsam that included ambergris, civet and other aromatic substances.
Three pomanders

Viceroyalty of New Spain, possibly 18th century. Fruit seed, enamel and gold-plated silver.

Viceroyalty of Peru, 17th century. Enamel, silver and gold plated.

Milan (Italy) (Hispanic Monarchy). Second half of the 16th century. Agate, enamelled gold.

Museo Lázaro Galdiano, Inv. no. 4231, 4069 and 00912

These small pomanders served as containers for aromatic perfumes. In the past they were known as amber apples. On one of them, the name of the owner (DELVISA) “De Luisa” can still be made out. The other, made of agate and in the shape of an urn, is very similar to one that Doña Maria Luisa de Toledo possessed, described as “another agate pomander with three chains and a golden lid”. In addition to this one, Doña María Luisa left several silver pomanders in the form of pineapples with lids shaped like flowers.
Breast jewel

Madrid, circa 1680

Gold, enamel, diamonds

Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, CE28757

Breast brooches – like the one displayed – were large jewels that were worn on the breast. Made of coloured enamelled gold, this item has one hundred and seventy bezel-set and partially covered diamonds. This brooch reflects one of the most frequent features in jewellery of this period; the inclusion of moving parts, en tremblant flowers and butterflies, which, joined to the base by wires or springs, quivered as the wearer walked.

Breast ornament

Spain, 1670-1680

Gold, pearls, seed pearls

Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, CE01561

In the second half of the 17th century, jewellery worn on the breast became fashionable to highlight women's low necklines. These were often bows or crowns complemented by circular sections, called rosettes, which could be worn together or separately. These pieces would evolve into the enormous breastplates that, in the 18th century, would cover a large part of a woman's torso. Pearls were widely used in jewellery, especially between the 1660s and 1670s, as can be seen in the portrait of Doña María Luisa de Toledo.
Mermaid

Mallorca (Spain), late 17th century or first half of the 18th century

Gold, enamel and pearls

Museo Arqueológico Nacional, 1928/43/1

Among the objects that are of a magical nature, this brooch, in the form of a mermaid, stands out. The one that was listed in the inventory of the viceroy’s daughter included eighty-nine diamonds. Popular belief was that the image of a mermaid was endowed with protective attributes. While combing one’s hair, the mermaid could combat the evil eye by returning its own gaze back upon itself in a mirror. In this case, the presence of the dove in this pendant could have a moralising significance, superimposing Christian iconography (The Holy Spirit) on a pagan one (the mermaid).

Doublet

Europe, circa 1660

Gros de Naples silk. Silk, linen, whalebone, metal

Museo del Traje, Centro de Investigación del Patrimonio Etnológico, CE095516

In the portrait, Doña María Luisa de Toledo is dressed in a style characteristic of the early 1670s. In addition to the voluminous skirt with its petticoat, and the huge sleeves, what stands out is the fitted bodice which highlights the slender figure of the young woman. This bodice is similar, leaving the shoulders and neck exposed. Its structure, which is rather rigid, flattens the chest and shapes the waist and figure. Lead plates and jerkins were produced for this purpose, and in this case a “bodice corset” was made, fusing the bodice and the corset together.
We do not know the story of the indigenous woman who accompanies Lady María Luisa de Toledo in the portrait. However, judging by her tattoos, she likely came from the Chichimeca area. She was certainly from the kingdom of Nuevo León and, as evidenced by this portrait, arrived at the Court of New Spain. There she lived in the viceroy's palace with Lady Maria Luisa, who must have considered her close enough to be portrayed next to her.

Within the Hapsburg court it was common to have unusual people present as company or entertainment for nobles, princes and monarchs. However, in the pre-Hispanic world, people who were out of the ordinary were given very special designations as intermediaries with the gods, as they had been chosen or touched by the gods.

The colonial social structure - and even that of today - is built around vertical and horizontal axes, determined by gender, origin, ethnicity, skin colour, religion, proximity to a specific physical model, and even sexual orientation. Being a woman and native, born in the border territory between nomadic groups, she would have been closer to marginality; however, in this case, it was her distinct stature that made it possible for her to reach the Court.
Presidio soldier's leather armour and shield

Viceroyalty of New Spain, 1757

Leather, suede, pigments

Museo del Ejército, Toledo. MUE-43090 and MUE-43525

The soldados de cuera “leather-jacket soldiers” that manned the presidios (or forts) were in charge of controlling the border areas. This leather garment – which evolved from the doublet worn under breastplate armour – kept the soldiers warm and offered protection. This thick, leather shield, of Arab origin, was a very useful form of defence and, just like the leather jacket, also provided protection against arrows. Both provide evidence of adaptations that were carried out in order to fight the indigenous Chichimecas.

Soldier from Monterrey (California)

José Cardero, Malaspina Expedition, 1789-1794

Quill drawing on laid paper

Museo de América, MAM 02285

Several draughtsmen accompanied Alejandro Malaspina’s 1789-1794 expedition. One of them, José Cardero, drew this image of a presidio soldier in the area of Monterrey (California). It clearly shows his uniform, consisting of a wide-brimmed hat, a dark shirt that matched his trousers, and over it the cuera or leather jacket, that was long and sleeveless, and decorated along the edge. Over time, this garment was gradually shortened, eventually becoming a fitted waistcoat that, by the 19th century, was only waist length.
Don Diego de Vargas Zapata
Luján Ponce de León

Anonymous (Spain), first quarter of the 18th century
Oil on canvas

Chapel St. Isidore’s “Stable”. Real, Muy Ilustre y Primitiva Congregación de San Isidro de Naturales de Madrid

The area on the northern border followed a line of presidios (military garrisons) or forts that tried to contain the advances or attacks from the indigenous Chichimeca tribes or “barbarians”. This portrait depicts Don Diego de Vargas Luján Zapata Ponce de León (1643–1704), appointed Captain-General and Governor of New Mexico in 1690. He is known as the “peacemaker” as he was able to “persuade” the pueblo Indians to put an end to their uprising in 1692.
The Chichimeca area is an immense territory in northern present-day Mexico and the southern USA, populated by myriad groups with different languages and customs. Many of them shared the same way of life as nomadic hunter-gatherers. Women, in a sphere of knowledge parallel to that of men, had an essential role beyond raising children that included harvesting and handling their surroundings, processing and preserving food and tanning leather.

From roughly the sixteenth century, the Spaniards considered this territory an "active war zone" because the uprisings were constant. Although the enslavement of natives was nominally forbidden, it existed in other hidden forms. One of these was the temporary "deposit" imposed upon these Chichimeca groups which, in the name of acculturation, placed women and children into the service of Creole families.

The hostilities continued throughout the eighteenth century, as can be seen in this image by Tomás Suría. Here, during the Malaspina expedition, a mounted soldier from a military garrison charges a group of natives armed with bows and arrows and several women.
Floridian Queen of North America

Viero, Theodorum. Italy, 1783

Print on paper
Museo de América, MAM 00393

The nomadic natives who inhabited the region of Nuevo León, north-east of today’s Mexican border, were related to peoples from territories farther north, such as southern Texas or Florida, territories that were much larger at that time. This print depicts the “Queen” of Florida (Timucua tribe), and is similar to drawings done by John White between 1585 and 1593. Among the Timucua, tattoos were not only distinctive to a certain group, but denoted a differentiation in status and, apparently, were only used by the chief and his wife or wives.

Bags containing pigments

Atacama, Chiu-Chiu (Chile), 600–1450 A.D.

Bags with rods: leather, clay, wood.
Museo de América, MAM 70206, MAM 14900, MAM 70205, MAM 14822, and MAM 70204

Several leather bags were unearthed from the archaeological excavations carried out in the Atacama Desert during the Expedition of the Pacific (1862-1866); these probably contained pigments for adorning the body or perhaps some hallucinogenic substances. The wooden rod may have been used as a “brush” to paint facial or body designs. Unlike tattoos, in this case the designs could be of different colours and vary on each occasion.
Female and male figures

Ameca-Etzatlán style, Jalisco (Mexico), 200 B.C.- 500 A.D., and Tumaco-Tolita (Colombia-Ecuador), 500 B.C.- 500 A.D.

Ceramic

Museo de América, MAM 1991/11/42, and MAM 1981/04/062

The realistic representation of some pre-Hispanic figures allows for an approximate diagnosis of certain deformations and diseases, beyond what was stereotyped. The female figure, with tattoos on her chin, has an extremely deformed spine and severe macrocephaly. It could be a case of mucopolysaccharidosis, a genetic disease also known as "gorgoylism" or "Hurler's syndrome" that causes furthermore, poor vision, impaired speech, and intellectual disability. Traits, perhaps, that were believed to be a consequence of the close relationship or contact that these individuals had with the spiritual or divine world, hence their presence in burials.
Kero (ceremonial goblet) and cylindrical cup

Inca (Peru, 1532-1600), and Classical Maya (Petén, Guatemala, 600-900)

Wood, pigments, lacquer; polychromed ceramic

Museo de América, MAM 07511, and MAM 1991/11/06

In painted scenes or in ceramic figures of different pre-Columbian societies, such as the Inca or the Mayan, it is common to see figures of individuals who were small in stature or dwarf; they were more than just people who provided company or entertainment and must have also fulfilled important positions as officials or dignitaries at court. The abundant number of representations of these people among the funerary figurines on the island of Jaina – also of Mayan culture – has been interpreted, not so much as a reflection of their percentage of the actual population, but on the esteem in which they were held as companions for the deceased on their journey to the underworld.

Huipil

Maya Kaqchikel (Guatemala)
1970-1980

Cotton fabric

Museo de América, MAM 11391

Unfortunately, there are very few surviving examples of indigenous clothing from the viceregal period. We only know a few details about huipils from paintings, most of them from the second half of the 18th century in particular. In the portrait, a woman of small stature wears a huipil, to which puffed sleeves have been added, as well as lace on the lower edge to make this garment more Spanish, and perhaps would have been made by the woman herself.

This example is a contemporary mayan huipil used in religious ceremonies.
Meco Indians, Barbarians
Anonymous, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 1780-1790
Oil on canvas
Museo de América, MAM 00047

Apache Indians
Anonymous, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 1775-1800
Oil on copper
Museo de América, MAM 00065

Meco Indians
Miguel Cabrera, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 1763
Oil on canvas
Museo de América, MAM 00013

During the 18th century, especially throughout the second half, the genre of casta paintings was consolidated. Unlike the “acculturated” indigenous people, the Chichimecas are represented half-naked, with long hair and weapons in their hands — bows and arrows — to signify how uncivilised they were. Furthermore, it does not seem to be a coincidence that the arrangement of the figures was inspired by Flemish prints depicting Adam and Eve fleeing after committing the Original Sin, just before their expulsion from Paradise.

The 18th-century text by Father Francisco Javier Alegre describes a scene of the Acazece tribe similar as represented one in this casta painting:

“Whenever the women walk, they always carry a load in a large wicker basket made from calabash, but it is narrow at the bottom and wide at the top...,; and if they have any children, they are in there asleep swaddled in a blanket, often two of them. Parrots and macaws are carried on the edges of the baskets, because they are very keen to breed them, and they often pluck them to decorate themselves with the feathers.”
Casta painting
Luis de Mena, Viceroyalty of New Spain, circa 1750
Oil on canvas
Museo de América, MAM 00026

The first scene of this casta painting is very significant because it represents a reversal of the usual gender role in paintings of couples; it is the woman who is Spanish and the man who is indigenous. Furthermore, it is of an indigenous Chichimeca in which all the characteristic features are represented (bow, nudity and feathers because he is shown as primitive, wild, bellicose, etc). Although these kinds of couples must have been usual, it would be “impossible” in the way it has been represented here as both show their own cultural traits in an idyllic coexistence that was never achieved.
The body of the individual carries meanings and, when it is represented, these meanings become clear. Many of the elements that make up the image of the indigenous Chichimeca were also used in the iconography of America, showing the image of "barbarism" or "savagery": nudity, feathers, bows and arrows, and so on. Casta, or caste, painting included these groups of indigenous people, although it did not focus excessively on them; placing them in "the margins", on the border of "civilization".

According to the schematic reproduced in casta paintings, the Chichimecas were not included in the social pyramid, they were marginalized, forming part of the strange "others". Therefore, they are the only ones in the series in which the couple belong to the same "caste" and are not depicted in a "domestic" or "urban" context, but in a natural setting.

The image conveyed in the eighteenth century about these natives does not respond to a representation of nature, but to an image much closer to that of an idealized dichotomy. On one hand, they were assimilated into the concept of the "noble savage", a philosophical concept developed primarily during that century; on the other hand, they represented a marginal vision where many aspects of violence and barbarism came into play.
Indigenous Warrior from Monterrey (California)

Tomás Suría. Malaspina Expedition, 1789-1794

Sepia watercolour on laid paper

Museo de América, MAM 02283

This watercolour, painted by Tomás Suría, was also done during the Malaspina Expedition in the same region of Monterrey. In this case, it is a full-length image of an indigenous man wearing a headdress, loincloth and with a quiver, his bow tensed, ready to shoot an arrow. The women – adorned with necklaces – are sitting in the background and wear grass skirts and cloaks that appear to be made of the same material. Conical huts made of wood and grass can also be seen in the drawing.
Indigenous weapons

Quiver and arrows.

Great Plains. 18th century

Otter skin, hide, sinew, paint, wood, feather and metal

Museo de América, MAM 02072, MAM 01733, MAM 01740, MAM 01742 and MAM 0177

Animal skin is light in weight, as were easily obtainable materials such as feathers and plant fibres. Similar bags that held arrows – used by the Chichimeca – were carried on one’s back, attached to a belt or put on horses, and used for both hunting and warfare. The length of the Chichimeca bow was shortened after the introduction of the horse, to make it easier to use while riding.
Feather headdress
Amazonian culture (Colombia), 19th century
Feathers, plant fibre, cotton, and beetle elytra [forewings]
Museo de América, MAM 13073
Flamboyant, light, colourful and soft, birds’ feathers were some of the easiest materials to obtain. Their use was so common throughout almost all indigenous America that the very iconography of the continent is, in fact, represented by headdresses made of these materials. As can be seen in casta paintings, the Chichimecas used headdresses similar to this one from Colombia: Women are shown with domesticated macaws, carried in their arms or with the birds perched on the edge of their baskets.

Basket
Kayapo (Brazil), 20th century
Plant fibre, cotton
Museo de América, MAM 2013/01/07
Utensils, especially those used by nomadic communities like many of the Chichimeca tribes, were practical, multifunctional, light, and easily replaceable or repairable. One of the few typical possessions of this kind that they had were baskets or cacaxtles, always carried by women on their backs. Baskets were important with regard to gender, and even during initiation rites the choice of basket determined the female social gender of the individual. This basket, called a kayapo, is from the tributaries of the Xingu River (Brazil), although most basket shapes are similar.
The text that accompanies these paintings indicates that this is a “Drawing of Chichimecas. Native to the Parral region”, from the southern part of the state of Chihuahua, in New Biscay. In these two portraits tattooed lines, characteristic of each gender can be discerned; markings that would be made shortly after being born. The clear contrast between the tension of the male figure, inspired by Hendrick ter Brugghen’s “A Man playing a Lute”, and the sweetness of the motherly female figure with a child, reflects the duality surrounding the opinions Europeans had of indigenous peoples.
Indigenous Wedding and Indigenous Burial

Juan Rodríguez Juárez (attributed to), Viceroyalty of New Spain, circa 1720

Oil on canvas

Museo de América, MAM 2002/01/01 and MAM 2002/01/02

Regarding the integration of tribes believed to be “barbarian” into the colonial system, it was considered essential as a first step to recognise who the “friendly Indians” were, and to do so a proposition was made to discontinue the classification of their identifying traits. One of which, undoubtedly, was having long hair. This in turn led to the balcarrotas style, consisting of two long locks of hair, a fringe and shaved head, as can be seen in these paintings. Interestingly, these first attempts at acculturation did not have an impact on the tattoos which would allow friendly and enemy groups to be distinguished from each other given that these were the differentiating marks that were looked for.
The tattooed, indigenous Chichimeca dwarf woman

How did this Chichimeca woman come to be at the Mexican Court? We suppose that from the tattoos on her face and hands she belonged to a tribe from the border in the north. It is very likely that she was enslaved – like many Chichimecas – or, at least became part of the “Indian deposit”, a form of temporary slavery. Due to her size, she would have been given as a gift to the new viceroy to become part of the viceregal court, something which happened quite frequently. We also assume that she was entrusted to accompany Doña María Luisa who was then a child, giving rise to a level of affection and a sense of trust between them, which would also explain why she was portrayed beside her.

Both worlds converge in this intriguing portrait; the Hispanic and the indigenous. It is an exceptional work that acknowledges the indigenous Chichimeca world, the relationships between these people and the Spaniards, life at the viceregal court, the world of women and, last but not least, to show the in-depth relationships that were established between the continents at such an early date, and which is precisely the aim of this temporary exhibition.