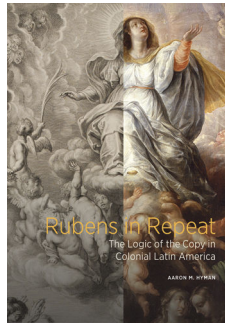


AARON M. HYMAN, *RUBENS IN REPEAT. THE LOGIC OF THE COPY IN COLONIAL LATIN AMERICA*

Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute 2021, 320 pages, 150 color and
12 b/w ill., ISBN 978-1-60606-686-7.



Reviewed by
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This ambitious book opens up new perspectives for exploring the rich artistic production created for sites of Catholic worship in early modern Latin America. The importance of European prints in the Spanish Crown's missionary campaigns in Peru and New Spain has long been recognized, yet the ways in which these large colorful paintings based on prints affected and transformed the colonial space remain largely unexplored. Hyman's primary interest is in how Rubens's religious imagery was staged in specific spatial settings, and his approach is shaped by an apparently contradictory observation: the almost overwhelming presence of Peter Paul Rubens's pictorial "inventions" in the decoration of liturgical spaces in Latin America and, with some exceptions, the conspicuous absence of the artist's name from most written records. With reference to the language of notarial contracts Hyman proposes that it was the interest in the "conforming copy" (p. 13) that lay at the root of the decoration campaigns conducted in Peru and New Spain. But how did these local artists use European prints to craft a colonial artistic identity and canon, based on copying and repetition rather than novelty? It is Hyman's insistence on the images' power to forge connections between new communities of makers and viewers that makes his book such a foundational resource for an art history that is attempting to expand its geographic frame. In the three parts

of the book the potentials of the “conforming copy” are studied in different historical contexts.

Focusing on the city of Cuzco in colonial Peru, the first part considers the “aesthetic of sameness” generated by the large canvases produced by local workshops “conforming” to Rubens’s prints and either displayed in local churches or sent to other Andean towns, including the mining center of Potosí. Copying is presented as an artistic practice that asserted rather than undermined the agency of local artisans and craftsmen specializing in what was ultimately a foreign technology. By the mid-seventeenth century Cuzco had emerged as a new center of painting and the brightly colored canvases with their by then familiar iconographies had become local products that spread the fame of the city’s artists throughout the Andean highlands.¹ The few available notarial records suggest that artists worked either from printed sources or from already existing paintings, skillfully adapting them to other formats and scales. The canvases were not intended as “exact” copies of their painted or printed models, but rather as artworks that displayed a certain “sameness” in their designs, forms, and materials regardless of which artists or workshops created them. For example, the very many versions of Rubens’s *Descent from the Cross* produced by Cuzco’s workshops are all reversed from the prints, thus, although unintentionally, matching the orientation of Rubens’s painting. And several of the equally numerous reiterations of Lucas Vorsterman’s engraving *The Return from Egypt* after Rubens’s painting show swans that are nowhere to be found in the “original” source (pp. 73–77). Hyman argues that repetition and recognition were an intrinsic part of Catholic image theory, which distinguished between sacred prototypes and material images based on them. To better illustrate this point, he cites the third Council of Lima which compared Christian images to royal seals, revered because they derived from the Spanish king; in the same way the esteem in which the sacred images were held was directed at the holy persons depicted. Saint Luke, who according to legend created a portrait closely resembling the Virgin, was cast as an identification figure for the artist who paid close attention to the appearance of his or her model.

While the first part shows how painted copies after Rubens’s inventions converted the Andean highlands into a sacred landscape, the second part engages with repetition as a means to showcase artistic ingenuity and create a new transatlantic canon of the visual arts.² The focus is Mexico City’s Metropolitan Cathedral, undoubt-

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For an intriguing example of the use and appreciation of such multiple images, see also: Evonne Levy, “Mass” Produced Devotional Paintings in the Andes. Mobility, Flexibility, Visual Habitus, in: Christine Göttler and Mia M. Mochizuki (eds.), *The Nomadic Object. The Challenge of World for Early Modern Religious Art*, Intersections 53, Leiden 2018, 271–290.

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On the uses of the term *ingenio* by seventeenth-century authors writing in Spanish including Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Alexander Marr, Raphaële Garrod, José Ramón Marcaida, and Richard J. Oosterhoff (eds.), *logodaedalus. World Histories of Ingenuity in Early Modern Europe*, Pittsburgh, PA 2018, 87–119.

edly the most prestigious religious space in the viceroyalty of New Spain. Hyman begins his discussion with Cristóbal de Villalpando's *Triumph of the Church* of 1686 and Juan Correa's *Assumption of the Virgin* of 1689, two ambitious canvases that both referenced Rubens's works. While Villalpando's *Triumph* combined a variety of graphic sources to produce a new "original" composition, Correa's *Assumption*, with its parsimonious but conspicuous use of citations, set a new benchmark for a masterpiece that would supersede the requirements set out by the city's painters' guild. Both paintings gestured to an audience with a certain fluency in the language of European prints, maybe explicitly challenging their skills in visual discrimination. In a bold self-referential gesture addressed to the expert viewer Correa signed his work next to the figure of John the Evangelist, his namesake, cited from a print after another *Assumption of the Virgin* by Rubens. For Correa, who made an astonishing career as a "maestro pintor" despite being of mixed African and European descent, acts of artistic self-assertion took on particular urgency (p. 148). Villalpando, conversely, frequently used his signatures to claim his place as an "inventor" in a new transatlantic canon defined by the knowledge of European prints.³ Like his contemporary and compatriot, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Villalpando, in revealing his knowledge of European prints, reached out across the Atlantic to engage in a dialogue about art, but unlike the celebrated poet whose works were widely read in Spain itself, the artist's fame remained limited to New Spain.

Created in 1744, two pendant paintings on copper by Nicolás Enriquez, depicting an *Assumption of the Virgin* and an *Adoration of the Magi*, assert the contributions of the local elite artists to the world of art. Enriquez took as his point of reference the two canvases by Juan Rodríguez Juárez for the altar of the "Chapel of the Kings" in the apse, the most prestigious and most sumptuous space in the Cathedral, that with its royal theme was meant to strengthen the power of the Spanish king and his representative, the viceroy. The effect of the structure with its dizzying gilded frame must have been overwhelming. Hyman's interest, however, is in Juárez's *Assumption* or, rather, citations of both Rubens's prints and their local painted and carved renditions. Made to be viewed from close up, in a gallery or private collection, Enriquez's two copper paintings continued and amplified this multi-layered, intricate play with motifs of different origins which would have been recognized by skilled experts—and which also demands attentive scrutiny from the reader of this book. The author argues that they might have served as luxurious collectibles and thus been intended as gifts for the new viceroy arriving from Spain who would certainly have understood the paintings' associations with the *altar de los reyes* as the sacred epicenter of his power. To understand fully the works' even more important responses to an emerging colonial canon of painting the

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See also Aaron M. Hyman, *Crossing the Line. Cristóbal de Villalpando and the Surplus of Script*, in: *Art History* 45, 2022, 308–341.

viceroys would, however, have needed a well-versed local expert and connoisseur such as the artist himself, an argument that I believe Hyman makes convincingly.

Religious practice is given special weight in part three, which analyses “transformational copies” (p. 213), that is to say partial copies that were reconfigured in new contexts within the transatlantic network of Franciscan communities. At the center is one of Rubens’s rare thesis prints, the *Austroseraphic Heavens* (*Austroseraphicum Coelum*) with its curious motif presenting Saint Francis as the “Seraphic Atlas” (“Seraphicus Atlas”), carrying, however, not one but three spheres on his shoulders, on the highest of which the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception appears. In a beautiful oil sketch Rubens framed the composition with the knotted rope belt of the Franciscans as if to mark out the heavens under which the seraphic order lived its missionary vocation.⁴ While there is no information about the specific occasion of the theological debate for which the print was made, the many adaptations of Rubens’s Seraphic Atlas carrying his heavy burden in Latin America testify to the broad adaptability of this figural motif, that certainly also prompted a range of exegetical responses. Hyman traces the multiple metamorphoses of Rubens’s graphic invention in different media, materials, forms, and structures. Perhaps most interestingly, the Seraphic Atlas was also turned into a three-dimensional artifact, namely a pedestal used to reinforce the impact of two different miracle-working statues of the Virgin whose very special powers were themselves circulated through prints. In the long process of reception across time and geographical space Rubens’s figure, which was originally intended to incite intellectual theological debate, was thus transformed into a cult image, a movement which was undoubtedly also facilitated by its striking appearance and its openness to a myriad of interpretations, whether suggested in a rhetorical exercise or visualized in material form.

Carefully researched, lucidly conceived, and confidently written, this book leads its readers to the scattered, still little-known artworks in Latin America and the spaces and environments which they shaped into places of new artistic and religious experiences. Rather than exploring artworks made with local technologies, Hyman moves to center stage the reception in Latin America of prints after the religious works of an artist who was, in late seventeenth-century Europe, seen as an exemplary painter who had excelled in the use of color. Throughout the book Hyman cautions us not to draw easy parallels between colonial and European traditions, but rather acknowledge the alternative values and ambitions that defy attempts to include these painted “conforming” copies in a Europe-centered narrative of the history of art. He shows how

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This motif was abandoned in the engraving by Paulus Pontius. For a recent reference, see Jeremy Wood, “In meiner Anwesenheit ausgeführt”. Rubens’ *Modelli* als Stichvorlagen, in: Hans Jakob Meier, *Die Kunst der Interpretation. Rubens und die Druckgraphik*, Berlin/Munich 2020, 46–79, at 79.

Rubens's inventions became absorbed into a new colonial canon that valued repetition as "invention", while at the same time exploring the transformational potential of the "conforming" copy, its power to generate new visual configurations and thus articulate alternate forms of artishood. Both for the richness of its visual material and its rigorous and insightful methodological approach this is an important book, for scholars of both Latin American and European art. It encourages us to critically engage with artistic possibilities originating in different logics of copying and repetition and to be attentive to the multiple and dynamically shifting meanings of terms such as invention and ingenuity in diverse geographical and cultural contexts. Last but not least *Rubens in Repeat* is beautifully produced, and the publisher's attention to a fine layout and the consistent high quality of the illustrations makes it a pleasure to read.