



José Dolores López
(1868 – 1937)

Nuestra Señora de la Luz (Our Lady of Light)
1934
White cedar wood
Duff Gallery

Look: Have the group spend time looking at the artworks in the Duff gallery that focuses on art of the 1930s. Then gather the audience in front of the artwork to explore the artwork, using conversation and questions.

Explore: This **bulto** is notably unpainted. Draw the groups attention to the sculptural details and the incised carvings. Ask: **Do you see recurring shapes?** Use the light pointer to indicate the areas they identify.

Ask: **What details of the sculpture do you notice that might suggest that she is emanating light?**

As your audience notices features of the sculpture, Inform:

- Her **crown of light** represents this power was bestowed upon Mary by the Holy Trinity.
- **Outstretched hands** of Our Lady of Light symbolize, in the Catholic faith, an offering to fallen souls. They represent the Mary's ability to rescue the souls of the damned.

Inform: Our Lady of Light's popularity among the Catholic community in the Southwest is likely attributed to the politics of conversion. Because fallen souls could be saved, the Jesuit missionaries promised Native peoples that their soul would be saved if they converted. (*Avoid saying "The Natives."*)

Ask: **What other details do you notice that are carved on the surface?**



Angel: In early representations of *Our Lady of Light*, she is shown rescuing a soul from the flames of hell. In the 18th century, the Church mandated that the fallen soul no longer be shown, and in future depictions, the soul was replaced by an Angel or Archangel.

Plants: Flowers/Roses

Mary's title of the "Mystical Rose" derives from the following biblical passage "I am the Rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys" (2:1)

The rose symbolism was popularized by the structured prayer form of 150 Hail Marys termed a "rosary."



Pomegranate (maybe) – on the lower platform. The image of this fruit was brought to the Southwest by the Spanish. Various symbolic meanings including: fertility, birth, eternal life, and healing

Moon: Depictions of Mary often show her standing on a crescent or half-moon. One interpretation is that this is a reference text from the Book of Revelation; the text describes "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (12:1).



Inform: Between 1933 and 1934, the artist Jose López joined the **Public Works of Art Project** (which preceded the Federal Art Project). These were New Deal government programs that sought to create relief by employing artists and fostering national identity through regional heritage. Responding to the burgeoning art market that was a result of the Toas artist community, López ceased painting his religious sculptures (*bultos*) and began decorating them with ornate, incised patterning and detailed chip carving.

Related artworks in the exhibition:

José Dolores López, *Holy Spirit*, Duff Gallery



Key Terms:

bulto (pronounced bool-toh) is a devotional sculpture
Holy Trinity: In Catholicism, the tripartite God: God the Father, God the Son, Holy Spirit



About the Artist: José Dolores López trained as a farmer and carpenter in the small town of Córdoba, New Mexico. López was descended from a long line of *santeros*. His father was apprentice to Jose Rafael Aragon (artworks seen in the 1840s gallery). His work was recognized by art advocates—such as those with the Spanish Colonial Arts Society in Santa Fe—and was part of a larger American interest in indigenous and Hispanic art produced in the Southwest. López’s sculptures were widely shown, including in an exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, in 1934.

**José Dolores López with
Our Lady of Light, c. 1933**

Sources

<https://www.nga.gov/features/exhibitions/outliers-and-american-vanguard-artist-biographies/jose-dolores-lopez.html>

<http://www.collectorsguide.com/fa/fa115.shtml>

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