



José Aragón
Spanish (1795 – 1862)

Our Lady of Guadalupe (*Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*)
c. 1820-1835
water-based paint, gesso, pine
TM1554

Look: Have the group spend time looking at the artworks in the 19th century art gallery. Then gather the audience in front of the artwork to explore using conversation and questions.

Inform: This is a painting that tells the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe (also known as the Virgin of Guadalupe, Neustra Señora de Guadalupe, or La Morenita). (Throughout the conversation, allow visitors to add what they know about her story.)



Ask: How does the artist use his painting to tell the story? (for example, Like a comic book, he breaks the painting up into scenes of the story.) Who are the characters of the story? (answers *might* include a woman and a man, accept this, and inform about the identities)

Do: Look at the various sections of the painting. What is happening in the scenes? (If not everyone can see the image, describe it for them.)

Explain a portion of the story and symbolism in the image (see below). Religious images like this are used to help the viewer make connections between their life and the story of the image, in a way that inspired and comforted them.

Ask: How does looking at art make you contemplate or think about your own life? (They do not have to share) Remind: Religious art has a purpose as an object of contemplation. A person of faith is comforted by the story surrounding the image.

A Very Abridged Story of Our Lady of Guadalupe:

This 19th Century painting depicts multiple scenes from the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe's apparition before Juan Diego, a Christianized Indigenous man of low social standing, but great faith.

The Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego and spoke to him in the native language Náhuatl, on December 9, 1531. She asked that a shrine be built in her name on the spot where she appeared, Tepeyac Hill, which is now in a suburb of Mexico City. Juan Diego told the bishop about the apparition and request, but the bishop didn't believe Juan Diego and demanded a sign before he would approve construction of the church.

The Virgin reappeared to him and instructed him to collect roses in his *tilmàtli*, a cloak. Juan took the roses to the bishop and when he opened his cloak, dozens of roses fell to the floor, revealing the miraculous image of the Our Lady of Guadalupe imprinted on the inside. (lower right) The basilica was built on Tepeyac Hill. (lower center)

Iconography of Our Lady of Guadalupe:

- The aureole (pronounced o-ree-ol) or **luminous light** signifies her relation to god. The rays of the sun *might* also be recognized by native people as a symbol of the god, Huitzilopochtli (pronounced wee-tsee-loh-poch'-tlee). In this interpretation, she blocks the sun but does not extinguish its power. Yet she is not a god herself as she is seen praying to a god higher than herself.
- She stands on a **crescent moon** held up by an angel. *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).
- The **angel** supporting the Lady *may* a sign of her exalted status, based on the indigenous practice that only kings, queens and other dignitaries would be carried on someone's shoulders. An interpretation of the angle transporting the Lady as a sign that a new age has come.
- Her **cloak** is often represented as blue-green or turquoise. In Christian art, blue is symbolic of eternity and immortality. In Judaism, it was the color of the robe of the high priest. The limbus or gold border is

another sign of nobility. To indigenous people in Mexico City region, this was the color of the gods and royalty. It was also the color of the natural forces of life and fertility.

- The **stars on her blue cloak** are often arranged as they appeared on the winter solstice, the time of her first apparition. Other representations of the stars symbolize heavenliness.
- Blooming **roses** allude to the story of her apparition, when she made roses bloom in December as a miraculous sign to the bishop that doubted her existence.
- *One interpretation* of her **crown** is a representation of one that would be worn by an Aztec princess—likely bright feathers set in gold.

Historical Significance of Our Lady of Guadalupe:

In 1737 she was proclaimed patroness of Mexico City, and in 1746 her patronage was accepted by all the territories of New Spain. A shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe was built in Santa Fe in 1775.

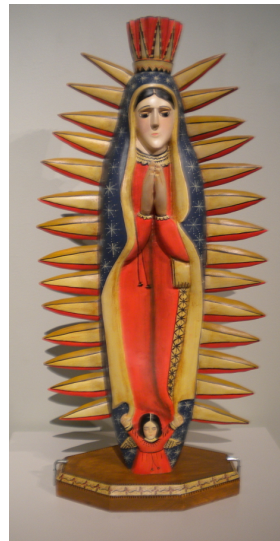
Miguel Hidalgo used her image when he launched his revolt against the Spanish in 1810. Emiliano Zapata also carried a banner with her image when he entered Mexico City in 1914.

Further Reading: William Wroth, [Christian Images in Hispanic New Mexico \(attached\)](#)

Related objects in the exhibition:



Unrecorded Artist
1938
Hand tinted print on
paper
TM 1982.3



Eulogio and Zoraida
Ortega
1989
Wood carving with paint
TM 1996.10