BLANTON MUSEUM OF ART

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Blanton Museum Presents *Painted Cloth: Fashion and Ritual in Colonial Latin America*

The Blanton's first major exhibition dedicated to the art and material culture of the Spanish Americas looks at the social roles of everyday and religious clothing.

Austin, TX — May 31, 2022 — The Blanton Museum of Art at The University of Texas at Austin is pleased to present *Painted Cloth: Fashion and Ritual in Colonial Latin America*, an ambitious and timely show that explores the production, meaning, and representation of fabric and garments as they were experienced in civil and religious settings across Latin America during the 1700s. Opening August 14, 2022, *Painted Cloth* will feature over 70 objects produced in five countries from the Blanton's growing collection of art of the Spanish Americas, alongside key loans from distinguished institutions and private collections around the world. The exhibition will remain on view through January 8, 2023.

“With the opening of *Painted Cloth*, we’re thrilled to finally unveil the extraordinary exhibition made possible by our longstanding partnership with the Thoma Foundation, whose investment and belief in the Blanton over the years has strengthened our commitment to the study of art of the Spanish and Portuguese Americas,” said Blanton director Simone Wicha. “Thanks to their support, the work of Rosario I. Granados, the first Marilynn Thoma Associate Curator, Art of the Spanish Americas, has advanced significant scholarship in this still underrepresented era of art history. The elaborate fabrics, fashion, and other richly textured works in this show are not only a feast for the eyes, they also will give our audiences a good look into everyday life during an era of dynamic cultural exchange and show how clothing—then as now—is so intertwined with our identities. Equally beautiful as it is insightful, *Painted Cloth* is sure to inspire conversations about race and colonialism’s complex legacies and offer a greater understanding of this period in Latin America’s history.”

An unquestionable marker of identity, clothing distills complex relationships between race, gender, religion, and class. *Painted Cloth* reflects on the social roles of textiles and their visual representations, emphasizing how aesthetic traditions of Indigenous and European origin wove themselves into civil, religious, and artistic life at a time when the Spanish monarchy imposed their rule in the region.

As the title references, the exhibition foregrounds not only beautifully crafted garments and textiles, but also explores how the practice of depicting textiles in paintings, sculptures, prints, and furnishings created a visual artifice that captured their aesthetic, ritual, and commercial value. This interplay between objects and images courses through five visually striking sections: “Cloth Making,” “Wearing Social Status,” “Dressing the Sacred,” “The Holiness of Cloth,” and “Ritual Garments.”

“Collectively, these groupings address how cloth and their representation in other media articulated narratives of social privilege and survival of cultural traditions, while also highlighting the mixed identity of colonial Latin America,” said Rosario I. Granados, Marilynn Thoma Associate Curator, Art of the Spanish Americas. “Garments are a lens by which we can recognize the many inequalities and societal contradictions that characterized the social fabric of this contested era, which altered the lives of so many Indigenous communities, but also the beauty of the Spanish America’s artistic production and thereby the diverse cultures of its peoples.”

Cloth Making

Painted Cloth begins with the manufacture and artistry of textiles in the 1700s. In the first section, titled "Cloth Making," works underscore how various kinds of European and Indigenous garments were manufactured, emphasizing the role persons of different social status played in the industry. Included are works from the only series of *casta* paintings (a Mexican artistic genre that documents mixed-race couples and their children according to a caste system defined by Spanish elites) to prominently showcase women as integral to the production of textile arts, from spinning and weaving wool to their work as seamstress and tailor's aids. In one example of this series by Mexican painter José Joaquín Magón, a woman makes bobbin lace, a costly material that was commonly imported from Europe and adopted in local attire.

The interlacing of foreign materials and traditions with local practices is also present in a set of silk swatches from Mexico. Sent with official reports to the King of Spain, these rare fabric samples show the production of block-print patterns inspired by textiles from India that signal the presence of highly skilled silk weavers in the New Spanish (Mexican) capital. The Cuzqueña painting *Virgen de los Sastres* [*Virgin of Tailors*] gives evidence that tailors, many of whom were of mixed-race descent, produced liturgical vestments made from imported European silks and brocades—examples of which are seen in the last section of the exhibition.

Many of the works in this section also address how Indigenous and Christian notions of the sacred were combined. Christian missionaries in the Andes popularized iconography that linked spiritual devotion with the labor involved in manufacturing cloth, circulating paintings that depicted the Virgin Mary or Holy Family undertaking artistic or industrious activities. By depicting Mary embroidering and spinning, the two paintings *La Casa de Nazareth* [*The House of Nazareth*] and *La Virgen niña hilando* [*The Child Mary Spinning*] make a connection between Christianity and the Indigenous cultures' regard for the sacred nature of textiles.

Wearing Social Status

The second and largest section of the exhibition, titled “Wearing Social Status,” explores how fashion codes determined social interactions and collective identities in terms of gender, race, and class. This is particularly visible in Mexican *casta* paintings and a unique series of Peruvian *mestizaje* paintings, on view in the U.S. for the first time, as well as in commissioned portraits—an increasingly popular genre in this period. Since few garments from the era have survived, such paintings, although ripe with artifices, serve as an invaluable source for the study of fashion and its social significance.

One of the most memorable features of this section is the pairing of painted garments in portraits with actual garments. Paintings of well-dressed Latin American sitters by Miguel Cabrera, one of the most celebrated and prolific artists of the period, demonstrate a desired social prestige, as evident in the great attention paid to the subject’s dress. These costly dresses and elegant three-piece suits are in dialogue with similar European costumes, illustrating the influence of global trade as well as French fashion.

Clothing is also relevant in the portraits Indigenous elite commissioned to assert noble ancestry. The figure in *Inca Noblewoman*, notably dressed in an intricate *anuca*, or women’s dress, resembles the first queen of the Inca dynasty, Mama Occllo. Such motifs and codes of dress establish the sitter’s connection to Inca royalty and, as the inscription makes clear, her status as the first Christian Inca woman. In conversation with this portrait is a late 17th-century camelid wool *anacu* embroidered with mermaids, Inca queens, and traditional Andean geometric patterns, accompanied by a silver fastening pin known as a *ttipqui* or *tupo* incised with the imperial double-headed eagle. These artifacts offer examples of fusing Incan and European motifs to negotiate identity in a colonial environment.

Dressing the Sacred

The exhibition's third section, "Dressing the Sacred," exemplifies how religious material culture enhanced the experience of the holy for all social sectors. The use of fine materials in sacred objects amplified an object's visual appearance, and with it, its sacred aura, thereby facilitating conversion and enhancing devotional practice. This is particularly true of the fabrics placed on *imágenes de vestir*, or "dress images." These simple wooden structures were explicitly made to be clothed in rich fabrics, like the satin mantle on view, embroidered in gold and silver threads for a statue of the Virgin Mary.

In other instances, real fabrics were imitated by modeled silver, as in an example of a devotional sculpture from Guatemala, a practice that continues in the Central American country today. Fabrication of reality was likewise achieved by replicating golden embroideries and brocade fabrics using *estofado,* a technique that involves applying gold leaf to wooden surfaces. In two paintings from the so-called Cusco School, respectively depicting St. Lawrence and St. Jerome, gilded details emphasize the richness of saintly garments.

Brimming with golden *brocades,* the large painting *Nuestra Señora de Belén con un donante* [*Our Lady of Bethlehem with a Donor*] bookends this section. The work, a brilliant example of a *verdadero retrato*, or "true portrait," depicts the 16th-century cult statue of Our Lady of Bethlehem of Cusco placed on a processional platform. Displayed in a dimly lit gallery that alludes to the painting's original display, viewers can get a sense of the effect such objects were intended to evoke.

Holiness of Cloth

The fourth section, "Holiness of Cloth," illuminates how the actual depiction of fabric was central to images that were believed to be of miraculous nature. Cloth could provide material substance to help elucidate abstract notions of the divine, as in examples from the Cusco School of painting, which introduced Andean renditions of Catholic subjects.

The painting *Virgen del Carmen salvando a las almas del Purgatorio* [*Virgin of Carmel Saving Souls in Purgatory*] depicts the Virgin Mary with an open cloak—a familiar iconography across the Spanish Americas that symbolized protection. In a disparate work that renders the iconographic *Presentation of the Virgin Mary at the Temple*, tunics and mantles are gilded with *brocateado*, elaborate gold-brocade decoration, a technique characteristic of the Indigenous artistic production of Cusco.

In some cases, cloth becomes the divine itself, such as in Mexican painter José de Alzibar's two works, united and on display together for the first time in history. The first, a representation of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the national patron of Mexico, depicts the cloak of an Indigenous man where the sacred image was thought to have been miraculously imprinted. The second, *La Verónica*, depicts the Veil of Veronica, one of the most recognizable images in which cloth is represented as a vehicle for the holy.

Ritual Garments

The final section of the exhibition, "Ritual Garments," focuses on the use of fabric in church interiors and ritual ceremonies as well as in the formation of clerical identities. Since much of the material used was extraordinarily delicate, prone to damage and decay, paintings of the era help reconstruct an understanding of the use of cloth.

The hierarchical position of Catholic clergy could be recognized by distinct, standardized liturgical clothing. A small glass painting from Bolivia details the repertoire of garments and accessories worn by priests, bishops, cardinals, and the pope, whereby the particular use of colors functioned as a key signifier of rank. In the case of the *chasuble*, the outermost vestment worn during the celebration of the Eucharist, four seasonal colors were used to represent the passage of time in the liturgical calendar. Although the chasuble was worn by the lowest rank of priest, the artifact on view from Mexico is crafted in fancy silks and embroidered with silken threads covered in silver and gold.

In the context of the Catholic church, the altar is an important ritual site; in the Spanish Americas it was lavishly decorated, as visual depictions like *Misa frente al Cristo de los Temblores* [*Masses before Christ of the Earthquakes*] convey. Like many works that depicted ideal Masses, this painting was created for a private home and painted from the view of a churchgoer to direct focus to the fine textiles and silverware covering the altar. On occasion, a less costly "painted cloth" instead decorated the altar—

exemplified by a canvas altar cloth with floral designs that mimic actual textiles. In contrast, a Guatemalan processional banner created entirely from silver emphasizes the use of even valuable materials to imitate cloth and create visual artifice.

"*Painted Cloth* rejoices in the artifice of the visual arts to uncover the complexities of human nature," concluded Granados. "Together, I hope these stunning artworks and artifacts encourage reflection on values of the past and shed new light on the factors that have shaped contemporary Latin American experience."

Painted Cloth includes works from the Blanton's collection, including from the recently acquired Huber Collection, and loans from: Benson Latin American Collection, The University of Texas at Austin; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; Carl & Marilynn Thoma Collection, Chicago and Santa Fe, NM; Colección Andrés Blaisten, Mexico City; Colección Barbosa Stern, Lima; Denver Art Museum; Hispanic Society of America, New York; Museo Franz Mayer, Mexico City; Museo de Arte de Lima; Museo Pedro de Osma, Lima; Museo de América, Madrid; Museo Nacional de Antropología, Madrid; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; San Antonio Museum of Art; Witte Museum, San Antonio.

A bespoke catalogue for the exhibition, edited by Granados, will be published by The University of Texas Press in July and is available for pre-order. It features essays by Granados, Ana Paulina Gámez Martínez, Julia K McHugh, Ricardo Kusunoki Rodríguez, Patricia Díaz Cayeros, and Maya Stanfield-Mazzi.

Painted Cloth: Fashion and Ritual in Colonial Latin America is organized by the Blanton Museum of Art.

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Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this exhibition do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Public Programs
Casta by Salvage Vanguard Theater
October 20, 22, 23, 27, 29, & 30 | 2 p.m. CT

During the run of *Painted Cloth*, Austin's experimental Salvage Vanguard Theater will perform *Casta*, a multi-lingual performance featuring music, puppetry, and dance. Adrienne Dawes' MAP Fund and National Endowment for the Arts grant-winning performance piece is inspired by the Mexican 18th-century genre of *casta* paintings. Performances will take place in the Blanton's Rapoport Atrium and are included with admission.

Symposium: *The Fabric of the Spanish Americas*

Friday, October 21, 2022 | 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m. CT (via Zoom)

Organized in tandem with *Painted Cloth*, this symposium will bring together scholars from Colombia, Mexico, the U.K., and the U.S. to further explore the social role of textile arts in colonial Latin America. The keynote will be delivered by Dr. Elena Phipps and speakers include historians Tamara J. Walker and Meha Priyadarshini and fashion historian James Middleton. The round table discussion will feature art historians Laura Beltrán-Rubio, Martha Sandoval, and Leslie Todd.

Distinguished Visiting Speakers in the Art of the Spanish Americas series:
Preserving 18th-Century Textiles
Thursday, September 22, 2022 | 5:00 p.m. CT (via Zoom)

With Laura Garcia-Vedrenne (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) and Mónica Solórzano Gonzales (Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, Lima)

Indigenous Textiles Today
Thursday, November 3, 2022 | 5:00 p.m. CT (via Zoom)

With Nilda Callanaupa Alvarez (Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco, Peru) and fashion designer Alberto López Gómez (K'uxul Pok')

More details and information on public programs will be made available at blantonmuseum.org/events.

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About the Blanton Museum of Art
Founded in 1963, the Blanton Museum of Art holds the largest public collection in Central Texas with more than 21,000 objects. Recognized as the home of Ellsworth Kelly's *Austin*, its major collecting areas are modern and contemporary U.S. and Latin American art, Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings, and prints and drawings. The Blanton offers thought-provoking, visually arresting, and personally moving encounters with art.

Image Captions:
Nuestra Señora de Belén con un donante [*Our Lady of Bethlehem with a Donor*], Cusco, 18th century, oil with gold leaf on canvas, 105 1/4 x 73 x 2 1/2 in., Collection of the Carl & Marilynn Thoma Foundation

José Joaquín Magón, *De Español, y Castiza, torna á Español*, Puebla, Mexico, circa 1770, oil on canvas, 35 13/16 × 45 1/4 in., Museo Nacional de Antropología, Madrid (Photo: Javier Rodríguez Barrera)

(Left) Miguel Cabrera, *Doña María de la Luz Padilla y Gómez de Cervantes*, circa 1760, oil on canvas, 43 x 33 in., Brooklyn Museum, Museum Collection Fund and Dick S. Ramsay Fund; (Right) Woman's dress and petticoat (*robe à la française*), England, circa 1770, silk plain weave (*faille*) with metallic thread supplementary-weft patterning and metallic thread bobbin lace, *robe à la française* center back length 52 5/8 in.; petticoat center back length 33 5/8 in., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Costume Council Fund (photo: © Museum Associates/LACMA)

Inmaculada Concepción [*Immaculate Conception*], Guatemala, circa 1740–1780, silver and oil on wood, 34 × 12 3/4 × 6 1/4 in., Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, 2019

Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, Cusco, 18th century, oil and gold on canvas, 37 13/16 × 51 1/2 in., Collection of Carl & Marilynn Thoma

Altar frontal, Cusco, circa 1780–1800, oil on canvas, 38 × 77 15/16 in., Museo de Arte de Lima, Donation in memory of Jorge Benavides de la Quintan