Introduction

There is nothing remarkable about the exterior of San Juan Bautista de Huarco, a colonial church located in the Quispicanchi Province about twenty miles south-east of the city of Cuzco (fig. 0.1). The white adobe exterior and single bell tower suggest a humble, modest church of negligible significance when compared to the grandiose Spanish-style churches in the cosmopolitan city center. But upon entering this small, single-nave church you are immediately enveloped in a blanket of color that pervades every paintable surface of its interior. To your right is a mural of mutilated bodies writhing in the flames of hell. To your left is a painting of the Last Judgment, replete with a roaring hell mouth swallowing up legions of sinners as the patient faithful await entry into the Heavenly Jerusalem. The mural paintings of this parish church shine even more brilliantly than the reflective surfaces of the mirror-encrusted gilded altarpieces that line the nave (see plate 1). These murals date to 1802 and were painted by the artist Tadeo Escalante, an enigmatic figure in the history of colonial Andean painting. Completed toward the end of nearly three hundred years of Spanish colonial rule, these exuberant images narrate scenes of apocalypse and bodily violence, offering parishioners an ominous message of the dangers that await the unfaithful.

What purpose did this type of imagery serve for a thoroughly Christianized community long after the days of mass conversion and the forcible induction of indigenous Andeans into the Catholic faith during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Were these murals communicating something beyond a purely religious message? What might they be able to reveal about colonial Andean society at the time they were painted? These are the questions that guided me as I began my research into the murals of colonial Peru, which led me on a journey
to identify the pre-Hispanic and early colonial roots of a dynamic visual tradition that furnished the historical conditions for Escalante's 1802 magnum opus. We begin with the end point of our story—which serves as the final chapter of this book—in order to understand the development of a colonial mural tradition whose imagery fulfilled a variety of religious, social, and political agendas.

Hundreds of churches across South America's Andean landscape contain vestiges of mural paintings that filled their interiors with depictions of religious narratives, allegories, and devotional images of saints, Christ, and the Virgin Mary. These paintings often cover the entire space of the church, from floor to ceiling, and spread across the choir, nave, and presbytery. Colonial churches also boasted exterior murals painted along the entryway and balcony, although many have deteriorated due to environmental degradation. An artistic practice with deep historical roots in the Andes, mural painting served as one of the earliest forms of religious artistic expression during the period of Spanish colonialism (1532–1824). Murals painted along the walls of parish churches served as important tools in the evangelization of non-literate Andean peoples. Didactic depictions of key doctrinal images facilitated the transmission of Christianity without recourse to the written word.

Mural painting in urban centers began to lose traction by the late seventeenth century in favor of more expensive church decorations modeled on European examples. Oil paintings circumscribed within ostentatious gilded frames, elegantly carved retablos, and silver and gold-plated altars became valued as the most desirable forms of church decoration. Their very materials connoted wealth and the ability to commission a highly specialized workforce. But in the more impoverished and geographically marginalized rural areas that were home to pueblos de indios (indigenous towns, also known as doctrinas), mural painting served as a favored medium for church adornment well into the nineteenth century. This book investigates the protracted popularity of mural painting in rural Peru and the spectrum of meanings that can be gleaned from these dynamic visual expressions on the walls of churches and chapels throughout the Cuzco region.

Cuzco served as the capital of Tawantinsuyu, the Quechua term for the Inca Empire (ca. 1438–1532), and remained an important center of indigenous artistic and cultural production throughout the colonial and post-Independence periods. The neighboring southern provinces of Quispicanchi, Canas y Canchis (also known as Tinta), and Acomayo are home to some of the most vibrant surviving mural cycles in the southern Andes. The churches of this region constitute the core sample of murals considered in this book, which is organized as a series of case studies spanning the mid-seventeenth to the early nineteenth
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This book does not purport to survey the entire mural tradition of colonial Cuzco, which has already been done in the foundational publications of Pablo Macera, José de Mesa and Teresa Gisbert, and Jorge Flores Ochoa, Elizabeth Kuon Arce, and Roberto Samanez Argumedo. These studies laid critical groundwork for the identification, documentation, and interpretation of colonial murals. Building on the important scholarly advances made by these authors, this book offers in-depth analyses of individual mural programs to gain a better understanding of their embeddedness in Andean society and culture.

The phrase “colonial Andes” refers to the area in and alongside the Andes mountain chain in western South America during the period of Spanish colonial rule. By the fifteenth century the Inca Empire had extended its territory across nearly the entire vertical expanse of the Andes, from the Ecuadorian city of Quito to the Maule River in Chile. This area became subsumed administratively into the Viceroyalty of Peru in 1542, which at its height encompassed all of Spanish-controlled South America. For the purposes of this book, I use the term “colonial Andes” when speaking generally about institutions and cultural practices that affected the region as a whole. Although it is admittedly anachronistic, I employ the term “Peru” as shorthand for the territory encompassed by the modern-day nation. I differentiate use of the term “Cuzco” to refer to the city proper or to the Cuzco diocese, which also included a large swath of rural pueblos de indios.

This book introduces new interpretations and archival documentation of colonial Andean mural paintings, some canonical and others which have never been published, in an effort to lay the groundwork for further scholarship on murals and their place within a broader history of artistic production. The emphasis here on murals located within pueblos de indios distributed throughout the Cuzqueña countryside provides an important counterpoint to art historical narratives focused primarily on urban centers. In so doing, it calls for more nuanced scholarship on the interrelationships between urban and rural artistic practice and even challenges the implicit assumption that artistic innovation flowed from cities into the countryside. In fact, these case studies show us that the process of artistic dissemination and exchange was always multidirectional and idiosyncratic.

This in-depth analysis of select murals also affords the opportunity for future comparative studies. The current scholarship remains regionally specific despite the remarkable similarities that can be found in murals across the Andes. To take one example, murals of the Last Judgment in the churches of the Cuzco (Peru), La Paz (Bolivia), and Parinacota (Chile) regions contain strikingly similar motifs and stylistic features, suggesting a complicated set of networks through which
artistic knowledge disseminated across geographic and bureaucratic boundaries. The case studies presented in this book, though confined to the Cuzco region, can serve as the basis for future research on the flows of artistic exchange along local, regional, and transatlantic circuits.

Murals in colonial churches of the Andes are resolutely religious in content. Indeed, their relevance to evangelization projects and participation in the development of an “Andeanized” expression of Catholicism have received ample attention from scholars. This book, however, focuses on the cultural and political relevance of church murals as visual documents that articulated local histories and social memory through the strategic use of religious iconography. Colonial Andean murals embodied local identities and religiosities, encoding imported European visual sources with subtle reference to Andean cultural practice and communal knowledge. Murals thus communicated culturally specific ways of thinking and seeing through multivalent pictorial dialects. The murals evoked local sensibilities due to their physical rootedness within the architectural focal point of Peru’s pueblos de indios but at the same time were also embedded in complex networks of trade, commerce, and the exchange of ideas between the Andes and Europe. European tools and pigments came into contact with Andean mural painting techniques inherited from the pre-Columbian era, while religious iconography and decorative motifs made their transatlantic and overland journey into the Andes in the form of paintings on canvas, prints, textiles, and books. Above all, this book centers mural paintings as critical forms of visual documentation of Andean life under Spanish colonialism. The murals featured here demonstrate the myriad ways in which artists and viewers represented and envisioned sacredness, thereby carving out a space for the Andes within “universal” histories in which they were never intended to participate.

Scholars have struggled to root out the damaging trope of colonial Latin American artists (and indeed modern and contemporary artists as well) as slavish copyists capable only of provincial approximations of continental styles that arrived in the Americas primarily through the medium of print. Some have pointed to the creativity that Latin American artists exercised in the selection and modification of print sources, while also acknowledging the pervasiveness of copying and imitation in early modern European art. Moreover, as Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cummins have pointed out, the production of the copy in a new colonial context does not signify a simple replication of continental culture. Rather, we must understand the emulation of visual and textual models as a series of historically contingent engagements with foreign media that contributed to the development of new cultural forms.
Despite these advances in the historiography of colonial Latin American art, a print-dominant paradigm has remained central to the study of colonial Andean painting, with the implication that European prints served as the primary if not sole model from which Latin American artists drew in the creation of their compositions. While the importance of prints can hardly be overstated in the colonial Peruvian artistic context, this book also explores other types of media and expressive forms (textiles, liturgical drama, oral histories, literature, and sermons, to name a few) that informed murals of the colonial Andes. As we will see, colonial murals remain indelibly marked by the transformations that ensued with the Spanish invasion and colonization of the Americas, bringing new religions, ideologies, and goods to Andean soil. But the practice of colonial muralism did not emerge out of a vacuum. A consideration of the preconquest visual landscape can help us to discern the specific stylistic and conceptual trajectories of murals in the postconquest world.

Pre-Columbian Antecedents and Questions of Continuity

As an uninterrupted visual tradition for nearly three millennia before the Spanish invasion in 1532, mural painting was by no means a colonial “invention.” Some scholars have identified rock painting as the earliest manifestation of this artistic practice, thereby tracing muralism’s historical lineage back to at least 8000 BC. Duccio Bonavia, a leading scholar on preconquest murals of Peru, describes mural painting more specifically as “the decoration applied to building walls using several specific and specialized techniques.” Following his lead, I define mural painting in this book as the application of painted imagery and ornamentation to a treated wall surface. Rock painting and wall paintings devoid of decoration thus fall outside the scope of this study. While colonial murals have been found in a variety of contexts, from private residences to convents, all of the murals considered here are located in parish churches within a 100-mile radius of the city of Cuzco. These murals are firmly rooted within a colonial milieu. Nevertheless, they are linked to a much broader historical lineage of mural production, whose origins can be traced to the pre-Hispanic cultures of Peru’s north coast.

The earliest surviving mural paintings in pre-Columbian Peru can be found at the recently excavated site of Ventarrón on the north coast, pushing back the date for the earliest wall paintings to around 2000 BC (fig. 0.2). This set off a rich and variegated Andean mural tradition that would endure for the next four centuries. From the polychrome friezes of warriors, deities, and sacrificial scenes
lining the walls of palaces and ceremonial structures of the Moche civilization (ca. 100 BC–AD 800) to the architectural reliefs at the Chimú (ca. 1000–1470) site of Chan Chan, which would have been brightly painted in their heyday, mural painting in the pre-Columbian Andean world served as an important visual tool for disseminating religious and political ideologies within architectonic space. Often drawing from more portable artistic traditions such as ceramic and textile designs, pre-Columbian murals amplified this small-scale imagery into larger-than-life compositions fit for communal spectatorship.

Any claims to a direct stylistic continuity between pre-Columbian and colonial murals in the Andes remain uncorroborated by archaeological or documentary evidence. Unlike the sixteenth-century murals of colonial Mexico, where symbols derived from a pre-Hispanic manuscript painting tradition were incorporated into religious mural cycles within Franciscan and Augustinian mission.
complexes, the murals of colonial Peru possess few direct visual connections to a pre-Columbian painting tradition. To take one example, Nahua speech scrolls (used for depicting sacred speech in the pre-Columbian period) appeared frequently in the paradise garden murals of Malinalco and could have communicated Christian notions of divine song in their new colonial context. Other symbols such as monkeys, as Jeanette Peterson has shown, held more ambivalent meanings that could have been interpreted differently by Spanish friars and Nahua parishioners.

By contrast, the Incas’ preference for abstracted geometric motifs such as stepped crosses, quadripartite schemes, and checkerboard patterning had little utility in the conversion process. These motifs did not lend themselves to an evangelizing strategy of “expedient selection” in the visual translation of Catholic doctrine to indigenous congregations as we see in colonial Mexico. The stubborn opacity of abstract symbols resisted direct application to an evangelizing project that relied on naturalistic figural representation for illustrating Christian narratives and concepts. Moreover, the Spaniards’ inability to “read” Inca visual culture due to its insurmountable stylistic distance from contemporaneous European aesthetics made Inca artistic practice a less likely vehicle for conveying Christian concepts to Andean viewers.

The widespread use of figural representation in Aztec art rendered it decipherable to Spaniards, who left behind a rich body of literature documenting their admiration for Nahua artists, marveling at their dexterity in featherwork and their uncanny ability to produce perfect “counterfeits” (contrahechas) of nearly any image or object presented to them. Aztec artistic practice, from the perspective of Spanish missionaries and conquistadors, possessed the flaw of being produced in the service of the devil. Yet it was nevertheless recognized for its intrinsic value as an aesthetic system, which was subsequently harnessed in the production of syncretic religious artworks within schools such as the Franciscan-run San José de los Naturales in Mexico City.

Andean aesthetics, in contrast, remained largely illegible to Spanish viewers, who derided Inca mural painting and other forms of representation for their supposed crudeness. Consider, for instance, Bernabé Cobo’s description of the murals at the oracle site of Pachacamac near Lima on the central coast:

In these buildings there were many rooms, chambers, and cells, which were like chapels where the idols were kept and where the priests and attendants lived. Both the walls of these lodgings and the walls of the terraces, as well as the walls of the rest of the edifice that made up this com-
plex, were plastered with earth and paint of several colors, including many fine works for their style, though these works seemed crude [toscas] to us. There were diverse figures of animals, though they were poorly formed like everything else these Indians painted.15

Unlike the commentaries of their peers in New Spain, Spanish chroniclers in the Andes employed a paradigm of crudeness as a means of explaining that which they could not identify or understand. The term tosca (rough, crude) also connotes an art in a primal, raw state awaiting improvement. The artworks’ crudeness bears direct correlation with the perceived shortcomings of indigenous creativity and, by extension, mental capabilities. Cobo attempted to relativize Andean painting traditions by noting that they were “fine works for their style [emphasis added]” but were unacceptable to a Spanish aesthetic sensibility. This inherent distrust of pre-Hispanic painting traditions expressed by ecclesiastical officials like Cobo can help explain the lack of stylistic continuity with murals of the colonial period. Chapter 1 analyzes a variety of ethnohistorical references to pre-Hispanic murals to gain a better sense of the tropes through which Andean art came to be understood within the European conquest and evangelizing literature.

Colonial Andean painting—mural or otherwise—thus bears little resemblance to pre-Hispanic artistic traditions, particularly when compared with the tremendous cross-fertilization of Spanish and Nahua motifs found in Mexican painting traditions of the early colonial period. The majority of surviving Inca murals feature geometric motifs that resemble textile designs, leading some scholars to interpret them as visual symbols of an Inca imperial presence through reference to a clothed body.16 These motifs rarely appear in murals of the colonial period except in the depiction of figures wearing indigenous-style clothing. But even there they have become recalibrated into the representation of clothing on an illusionistic body rather than utilizing the structure itself as the “body” onto which the textiles are painted. In other words, the use of pre-Hispanic motifs in colonial Andean murals involved a double decontextualization in which certain motifs are lifted out of the larger design field from which they derive and subsequently placed into a visual regime of figural representation and naturalism.17 This practice of simulating textile patterns through the technique of mural painting actually resurfaces in the late seventeenth century as a favored technique for decorating the interiors of rural churches throughout the Cuzco area and continues well into the early nineteenth century. These textile-like murals of the colonial period, however, swap out Inca motifs for
European rosette, pomegranate, and rinceaux patterns. Chapter 3 delves into this phenomenon in greater detail, demonstrating the various ways in which the “textile primacy” of the pre-Columbian period became renegotiated and reimagined within a colonial context.18

Despite iconographical differences between pre-Columbian and colonial murals, their structural aspects as large-scale paintings embedded into architectural space remained intact across the colonial divide. While scant examples of Inca murals survive in the Cuzco region due to poor preservation conditions, the few that remain grace the walls of palaces and religious temples. The palace of the Neo-Inca ruler Sayri Tupac (r. 1545–1560) in the town of Yucay in the Urubamba Valley features a mural depicting the mascapaycha, a scarlet fringe worn across the forehead of the Sapa Inca (king).19 The coastal Inca site of Tambo Colorado contains murals depicting tocapi (geometric design schemes) found on the uncu (tunics) of rulers and other elite individuals (see plate 2). These examples exhibit an incontrovertible fusion of sacred architecture with emblems of imperial authority. The walls of both coastal and highland structures showcase self-referential imagery legitimized by the Inca Empire that coalesced into a conflation of image and structure, representation and embodiment.

During the colonial period, churches replace Inca temples and huacas (sacred shrines) as architectural markers of a new imperial order. Like their pre-Columbian analogues, churches offered self-referential imagery legitimized by the Catholic Church in the form of religious murals, whose viewership was also activated through rituals of ceremony and worship. Colonial murals thus commanded a similar recognition of the systems of power that undergirded the depiction of their respective ideological tenets on the walls of the viceroyalty’s most sacred structures.

In addition to their structural similarities as images that legitimize institutional power, colonial Andean murals are also connected to a pre-Hispanic tradition through their materiality. Muralists of the colonial period continued to use tierras de colores (colored earths) and local minerals as pigments. Colonial murals were often treated with the sap from the San Pedro cactus (Trichocereus pachanoi) to give the paintings a glossy finish, like their pre-Hispanic predecessors. A consideration of the manufacture of pre-Columbian murals is indispensable in attaining a more holistic understanding of their colonial manifestations (see chapter 1). Unlike canvas paintings, for which no known precedent existed in the pre-Columbian Andes, mural paintings of the colonial period can be understood best as reformulations of a preexisting medium and visual paradigm. Grounding this study in the pre-Columbian period enables us to
grasp the embeddedness of murals in an Andean context and consciousness more fully, offering a crucial point of departure for interpreting their colonial counterparts.20

The continuities that can be traced at the material level speak more broadly to the preservation of specialized knowledge by indigenous Andeans in the post-conquest era. While we do know the names and identities of some of the muralists discussed in this study, we know far less about the numerous assistants who aided them, other than through their brushstrokes. But we can say with certainty that the case for considering colonial murals an extension of a pre-Columbian tradition becomes stronger when we consider that the majority of the artists who participated in the task of painting images onto the walls of rural Andean churches were of indigenous descent. Hence their level of access to pre-Hispanic techniques and practices may have been much greater than that of Spaniards or criollos (Spaniards born in Latin America). We must also consider the largely indigenous audiences for these murals, who would have been able to draw more salient connections between painted or clothed huacas and the painted walls of the churches that became the new sacred focal points of the Andean landscape.

The continued use of ancient materials and techniques in the production of colonial murals also points to a less visible yet equally important aspect of colonial Andean muralism that contributes to its cultural and aesthetic multivalency. As art historians Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn have pointed out, by only privileging the most visibly apparent aspects of hybridity in the arts of colonial Spanish America we inevitably omit those aspects that escape the naked eye.21 Considerations of materiality or the specific historical contexts under which artists worked help to enrich our understanding of the tremendous cultural dynamism of colonial Andean painting. Gabriela Siracusano’s research, for instance, on the significance of pigments has demonstrated how locally defined concepts of color symbolism produced an additional layer of meaning to Andean paintings that otherwise appeared to adhere resolutely to imported European visual models.22 This book, while not exclusively focused on issues of materiality in colonial murals, urges us to scratch beyond the surface of the painted wall to discover the plethora of cultural, social, and political discourses within which they were embedded. In so doing, we can help to dismantle the politics of visibility and invisibility that Dean and Leibsohn have so aptly identified, while also situating murals beyond an internal lineage of image production to explore their inroads into the social worlds that their viewers inhabited.
Beyond the Frame: Murals in Architectonic Space

In much of the current scholarly literature on painting in colonial Peru, murals are often indistinguishable from canvas paintings both in the way they are discussed and in their method of visual presentation. The material and scalar differences between the two media become collapsed in favor of discussions on the internal dynamics of their compositions with respect to iconography, painting styles, or subject matter. This extends into the methodological frameworks employed in the study of colonial Andean painting, whereby the visual similarity between murals and canvas paintings at the surface level becomes the primary justification for their categorical convergence. As a result, murals are often treated as epiphenomena of paintings on canvas rather than as unique artistic expressions in their own right.

Print publications further exploit this artificial conflation through the strategic cropping of photographs of murals within their respective spatial environments into neat squares and rectangles that assign them artificial borders and frames. The limitations of print undoubtedly contribute to the production of false equivalences between canvas and mural paintings. In the absence of a zoom or panoramic function for illustrations within physical books, cropping becomes a necessary tool for the art historian to draw attention to a particular feature in a given painting. Nevertheless, these two practices—one methodological and one technical—contribute to the treatment of muralism as synonymous with paintings on canvas or panel. The danger of this approach is that murals are artificially distilled into flat, uniform images that become removed from their larger spatial contexts.

Methodologically, murals of the colonial Andes have suffered the misfortune of being either completely isolated from or wholly subsumed into other related artistic traditions. The few survey texts that exist on the subject have been instrumental in identifying and documenting church murals throughout highland Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia. They provide readers with access to largely unknown artistic masterpieces in remote regions, where many churches run the risk of severe deterioration due to lack of funds for restoration projects. The survey format, however, precludes ample discussion of the place of muralism within a broader artistic landscape given its medium-specific focus. Architectural surveys, where we might expect to find a discussion of murals, likewise tend to remain mute on the subject. Murals are generally treated as mere decoration rather than as integral to the structural or spatial properties of a building and therefore remain tangential to any kind of architectural analysis. Indeed,
mural paintings lie within the interstices of painting and architecture in their ability to inhabit, delineate, and even dematerialize architectural space.25

In addition to their problematic absorption into an undifferentiated corpus of “painting” or their absence from art historical scholarship altogether, murals are invariably excluded from one of the primary vehicles for the dissemination of research on colonial Andean art to the general public: museums. Several recent blockbuster exhibitions of colonial Latin American art and their associated museum catalogues constitute some of the most important publications in the field.26 These seemingly encyclopedic catalogues offer an illusion of comprehensiveness but invariably omit an entire genre of colonial Latin American visual art, given their obvious emphasis on portable objects in museums and private collections. This is not the fault of the curators and catalogue contributors, of course, but is rather a by-product of the inherent limitations of museums in displaying site-specific work. Mural paintings of the colonial Andes, unlike their counterparts in Renaissance Italy or even twentieth-century Mexico, have thus fallen through the cracks of art historical scholarship despite their ubiquity throughout the South American landscape.

The omissions and conflations found in some of the scholarly literature only hold traction within the confines of the printed page, however. Murals are in no way secondary to the portable works of art located within the churches in which they were painted. Their large scale and exuberant colors immediately draw in the viewer even when large portions have been covered up by canvas paintings and retablos. Mural paintings demand a categorically different type of viewership and bodily interaction than their portable cousins. Their embeddedness within architectural space engenders a distinct viewing and interpretive experience that directly engages the body. Murals require both a kinesthetic reading (understanding an image through bodily movement) and a pictorial one (understanding an image’s compositional and symbolic value).27 These two types of readings could intersect and meld as the viewer transitions from the physical space of the church into the conceptual space carved out by the painted image through the act of viewing. The following chapters thus carefully examine issues of scale, the viewer’s bodily position with respect to a given mural program, and the lines of sight produced from a mural program’s spatial distribution across the interior of the church. Moreover, their site specificity gives way to a contextual understanding of murals as profoundly embedded within the physical and cultural spaces that they occupy; it is precisely because the murals survive today in the same places where they were created that we are able to draw so many local meanings out of them.28

While the spatial coordinates of a mural program remain indelibly rooted to a
local context, its content emerges out of complex local, regional, and transcontinental artistic exchanges across the Spanish Empire. The traffic of prints, religious texts, paintings, textiles, tools, pigments, and sacred objects from Spain, Italy, and Flanders as well as within the Viceroyalty of Peru all played a part in the creation of a distinct visual culture that made its way onto the walls of churches across the Andean landscape. The mural paintings under consideration here are characterized by what I call a “static mobility”: they serve as fixed manifestations of the mobile and ephemeral world of prints, artists, ideas, and belief systems that informed their creation. In other words, murals are situated within a local trajectory of artistic practice whose transatlantic roots are made manifest through their appearance and the circumstances of their production.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the itinerant lives of objects and artworks in the early modern world. In particular, the burgeoning fields of early modern global art history and Global Renaissance studies have sought to trace the movement of objects across cultural and geographical boundaries in order to ascertain their continually shifting and unstable meanings within the context of an incipient globalization. Far less attention, however, has been paid to the tensions and generative interactions between objects that move and buildings, monuments, or artworks that do not. By treating the early modern world as one in which materials, people, and objects are in a constant state of flux, we invariably favor mobility over rootedness while simultaneously ignoring the privilege inherent in the ability for objects and people to move freely through space. We must also keep in mind that the circumstances under which people and objects moved varied dramatically in the early modern world: for example, forced migrations in the making of the transatlantic slave trade compared to the elective migration of Spaniards to the New World. This book complicates the arena of artistic production and viewership in a Spanish imperial context by examining the static mobility of murals as physically rooted artworks uniquely poised to receive and disseminate visual knowledge. Their fixity in architectonic space enables us to draw great insight into their local resonance. At the same time, these murals emerge as products of ongoing dialogue with a rapidly expanding globe articulated from an Andean perspective and positionality.

From Quillca to Pintura

From their inception, colonial Andean murals quickly became subsumed into the European practice and discourse of pintura. Extant sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century murals exhibit a preference for illusionistic religious
imagery that resembled the work of Italian émigré artists Mateo Pérez de Alesio, Bernardo Bitti, and Angelino Medoro, all of whom spent time in Seville completing artistic commissions before embarking on their transatlantic voyage to the Americas. These artists brought fresco techniques from their home country to Peruvian soil, training legions of local artists in these artistic practices. Mateo Pérez de Alesio’s expertise in the techniques of both *buon fresco* (fresco on wet plaster) and *fresco secco* (fresco on dry plaster) is most thoroughly documented. He is perhaps best known for his work in the Sistine Chapel depicting *St. Michael and Lucifer Struggle over the Body of Moses*, completed in 1574. He had previously completed a mural cycle at the Palace of the Grand Masters in Valetta, Malta, in 1565, which depicted scenes from the Siege of Malta by the Ottoman Turks. During his time in Seville from 1583 to 1587, Pérez de Alesio painted an important fresco of Saint Christopher at the Seville Cathedral. He produced the mural in the span of about six months, using a technique that was popular in Spain at the time: he painted the mural *al fresco* but added lights and shadows in *secco*. This technique also allowed for the efficient retouching of errors committed in the original painting process. We can trace the continuation of Pérez de Alesio’s mural practice in Lima, where he or one of his disciples painted a series of cupola murals at the Church of La Merced, completed at some point before 1614 (fig. 0.3). They are located in the funerary chapel of Captain Bernardo Villedegas, which is situated directly behind the main altar and presbytery of the main church. The reappearance of these same color palettes, themes, and techniques in the early seventeenth century murals of Cuzco brought by the likes of Pérez de Alesio and others highlights the complex routes of artistic dissemination into the Andean highlands facilitated by local artists.

The classification of Andean murals as *pinturas* or *pinturas en la pared* (wall paintings) in the colonial period suggests an almost complete transformation of pre-Hispanic painting techniques into a new idiom and technical practice. But can we read these murals through other cultural codes? A consideration of the concept of *quilla* can help to flesh out the potential connections between colonial murals and Andean modes of visual and sensory experience. *Quilla* (from the verb *quellcani*), a Quechua neologism, simultaneously means both writing and painting. Domingo de Santo Tomás’s 1560 *Lexicon o vocabulario de la lengua general del Peru* defines *quilla* as book, letter (*carta*), or letter of the alphabet, but defines *quellcani* as “to write,” “to draw,” and “to embroider with colors.” Antonio Ricardo’s 1586 dictionary also includes references to painting as well as sculpting, while Diego González Holguín’s 1608 *Vocabulario* provides secondary definitions of “quilca” that also refer to drawing and painting. González Holguín
defines quellkanacuna as “the instruments of writing or painting,” suggesting a mutual affinity between the two practices that originates from use of the quill and brush. Given the absence of an alphabetic writing system in the Andes prior to the Spanish invasion, the concept of quillca was modified in the colonial period to encompass writing in the European sense of the term. Nevertheless, linking alphabetic writing to quillca’s original association with the practice of etching, painting, or stitching an image onto a surface suggests that writing was conceived within a broader discourse of visual and tactile communication during the colonial period. The quipu, a mnemonic device consisting of knotted strings, involved both looking and touching as a means of extracting its encoded messages. The prevalence of the quipu as a tool of Inca administration and its continued use in the colonial period endowed the terrain of literacy with a sensorial dimension that went far beyond the act of reading alphabetic script on a piece of paper. Even if colonial-period writing “appeared” resolutely Spanish in linguistic form, it inhabited a conceptual space that also granted explicit attention to the material and visual dimensions of knowledge transmission.
As noted, the Spanish-Quechua dictionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveal a general lack of consensus on the precise definition of quillca, which undoubtedly transformed over the course of the sixteenth century as “writing” came to acquire new meanings. One aspect of quillca that remained constant, however, was its association with color. In the Spanish to Quechua section of Domingo de Santo Tomás’s 1560 Lexicon, “bordar con colores” (to embroider with colors) is defined as quillca, while in the Quechua to Spanish section the first definition of quillcani is “pintar o escribir” (to paint or write), and the secondary definition roughly translates as “to style a work with colors.”

Diego González Holguín defines quellccani as “write[,] draw[,] paint.” Galen Brokaw thus concludes that “quilca may have referred both metonymically to specific media employing visual conventions of color and to a more general notion or principle of semiosis and aesthetics.” This conception of the term enables us to place mural painting within a rubric of visual communication that marries color with aesthetics as a means of transmitting knowledge.

Other Quechua terms for describing the art of painting can be found in early colonial dictionaries and narratives. For example, in his discussion of the ordenanzas (ordinances) established for different professions by the penultimate Inca ruler Atahualpa, the indigenous chronicler Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala makes reference to “artisans, painters, who paint on walls and on quero [a wooden drinking vessel] and on mate [a dried gourd], called cusco [painter], limpec [varnisher, lacquer painter].” The terms cusco and limpec (likely misspelled and referring to limpec) and their variants were often employed interchangeably as a means of referring to the application of color to a surface. González Holguín places the terms cuzuni and limpini together in the same entry, defining them as “to tint something, or add color [labrar de colores], or varnish.” While the terms quillca, cusco, and limpec generally refer to the act of adorning a surface with paint or some other material, richay refers to the actual image applied to a surface. Richay, defined by Santo Tomás as “color, or figure,” by González Holguín as “color, or to make any thing, face, image, or figure,” and by Diego de Torres Rubio as “face, image,” constitutes the subject of the image or design produced by the quillcamayoc, translated as either “writer” or “painter.” Notable here is the consistent reference to corporeality or likeness: each of the definitions mentions a figure or face. Given the relative absence of figural representation in Inca visual culture, this suggests that the definition corresponded to the early colonial context in which European systems of representation began to transform Andean artistic practice.

Returning to Guaman Poma de Ayala’s passage, note that muralists, quero
painters, and mate painters are all classified under the same category of cuscoc and llimpec. These categories also likely reveal the ways in which artistic workshops were organized in the pre-Columbian period and their potential reverberations well into the colonial era. While European classificatory schemas would normally separate mural paintings, gourd paintings, and painted vessels into dichotomies of painting and the decorative arts, in an Andean context the act of applying pigments to a surface constituted a category unto itself. Certain motifs easily crossed surfaces in the Inca period: for instance, the chakana (stepped cross motif) can be found in stone carvings, textiles, keros (ritual wooden drinking vessels), and wall paintings alike. This continued to hold true in the colonial period. The colonial murals under consideration in this book show evidence of textile designs, ceramic motifs, and iconography gleaned from prints and canvas paintings. They also urge us to think more broadly about how Andean visual systems, encapsulated in the terminology discussed above, added interpretive texture to the concept of pintura during the colonial period. A consideration of the various Quechua terms utilized to describe artistic practice, some neologisms and others with significant continuities with a pre-Hispanic usage, enables us to broaden our understanding of how the art-making process was organized and conceptualized in the Andes.

While the majority of the archival documentation that I have consulted reverts to Spanish-language terminology for describing colonial murals, these other terms can nevertheless help us to place colonial murals within a spectrum of overlapping aesthetic discourses in which quillca, pintura, richay, imagen, cuscoc, and llimpec can each reveal a different aspect of the images. Cuscoc and llimpec, for instance, can help us to elucidate the resonances between murals and other types of portable artistic media, while richay conveys the act of granting bodily form onto a surface. Perhaps most central to the argument of this book, an application of the concept of quillca to murals can allow us to identify them as sites of visual learning whose compositions hover at the interface of art and writing. The mural paintings discussed here engaged in acts of visual code switching that relied on viewers’ fluency in reading both Christian iconography and the subtle references to local places and concepts with which they were infused.

The notion of quillca not only exposes the material and visual dimensions of writing, but also locates the marking of all surfaces within the domain of knowledge. Mural painting adhered both to newly introduced European discourses about illusionistic painted surfaces and to Andean notions of the marked surface as a vehicle for transmitting knowledge. In this respect, colonial murals fundamentally reroute the course of Andean and European mural painting alike. As
Alessandra Russo aptly states, “With the Spanish conquest, pre-Hispanic art was transformed forever. But on American land, European art also became something other than itself.” And these transformations occurred not only at the surface level but on an epistemological level as well. Their reclassification into pinturas en la pared does not necessarily signify a seamless transition from one aesthetic state of being to another with the rupture of the conquest but one in which the residues of each category retain legibility in this new pictorial dialect. The principal function of religious murals was indeed to transmit doctrinal knowledge to indigenous parishioners through didactic imagery. This practice did not originate in colonial Latin America but had been codified in European religious texts since the Second Council of Nicea in the sixth century, which established the ability of images to instruct the illiterate in the tenets of Christianity, insofar as they understood that the images are mere representations of divinity and not constitutive of it.

In their capacity as visual embodiments of Christian knowledge otherwise accessible only through texts or oral transmission, colonial murals would seem to correspond neatly to both the evangelizing imperatives of Peru’s ecclesiastical authorities and the multifaceted concept of quillca. But as the following chapters show, religious murals were often replete with other forms of knowledge encoded in their spatial layout, in the use of local iconography, and in references to collective memory. Murals do not signify a simple translation of the notion of quillca to the religious information transmitted to viewers via a marked surface. Instead, a much more complicated picture emerges in which painted walls could also communicate alternative messages grounded in local knowledge, predicated on the spectators’ ability to read images in a variety of ways. Priests advocated for one particular type of visual literacy in the Andes: the ability to interpret religious iconography as a stand-in for that which could not be seen. Through pictorial illusionism, mural painting held the ability to give form to hitherto unknown spaces, concepts, and individuals as a means of indoctrinating indigenous people into a religion that could now be fully visualized. I would argue, however, that the conceptual richness of these murals lies in their ability to articulate a variety of ideas and concepts due to the prevalence of Andean ways of seeing, perceiving, and sensing the sacred that existed alongside and came into contact with imported European ones. We can imagine the murals considered here as continuously vacillating between pintura and quillca not in terms of any kind of literal linguistic designation but in light of their rootedness in both systems of visual practice and perception. As the following case studies reveal, muralists capitalized on the ability of their audience to read images with a sharp-
ened eye that searched not only for religious instruction but engaged in visual contemplations on the tensions between the universalizing aims of Catholicism and the particularities of culture and place with which their viewers contended.

The Problems of Palimpsest

The mural programs that we encounter today are often the product of several hundred years of retouching, repainting, and conservation enacted by both colonial artists and modern-day conservators. The task of periodizing the messy palimpsest of colonial mural paintings into any kind of systematic sequence hovers at the precipice of impossibility. The purpose of this book is not to offer a scientific reconstruction of each mural painting under consideration—a task that would require close collaboration among historians, art historians and restorers in order to obtain an accurate record of the sequence of artistic interventions undertaken on a given church throughout its 400-odd year history. Throughout this book I take great care to highlight the process of restoration as well as areas that have been substantially repainted in each mural program based on consultation of available conservation reports. Nevertheless, an in-depth consideration of the various phases of each mural and the areas that have been retouched in colonial or in modern times remains beyond the scope of this book.

In some cases, it is impossible even to date certain murals precisely. Muralists often go unnamed, and their masterpieces rarely receive mention in church inventories (see chapter 1). Stylistic evidence enables us to estimate the date of a mural program within a range of about fifty to seventy-five years. But given the absence of secure archival data that provide the dates and artists’ names for many of the murals discussed in this book, we must rely on educated guesses and conservative estimates, with the awareness that these dates are tentative until corroborated by further documentary or scientific evidence.

While these issues certainly present hindrances to an art historical analysis of colonial Andean murals, we can also see the reality of palimpsest as a material analogue to the fragmented histories from which the murals come. The multilayered, idiosyncratic means by which these murals interface with a contemporary public stand as a testament both to their longevity and to the complicated routes along which colonial histories intervene in the present moment. Our encounters with the past, whether through a historic monument or a work of art housed in a museum, are mediated by multiple layers of interpersonal, economic, and institutional exchanges made possible by the work’s existence and persistence into the present moment. The murals examined here, however, make visible all of the
“in betweens” that stitch together a series of moments to connect the enormous temporal gulf that separates us from the colonial past.

For instance, at the church of Andahuaylillas (discussed at length in chapter 2) nineteenth-century murals line the walls of the presbytery that imitate the subject matter of the church’s nave murals from the 1620s (see figs. 0.4 and 0.5). These post-Independence iterations of a mid-colonial artwork introduce a new color palette and a stylistic flair that brings the past into dynamic dialogue with its own contemporary moment. They also facilitate a temporal-spatial synergy whereby visitors move through time as they pass through the space of the church, from the entrance and nave covered in seventeenth-century murals into the nineteenth century at the altar. The presbytery murals attempt to establish visual continuity with the nave images while also responding to the vicissitudes of nineteenth-century visual practice. In their own time, they mediated the viewers’ encounter with the past by emulating earlier visual models found within the very same church. With the help of a team of world-class restorers from both Peru and abroad working under the auspices of the World Monuments Fund, these murals have been brought back to their former luster and vividness. In the twenty-first century we stand at the triangulation of colonial, post-Independence, and contemporary histories whose vestiges and points of intersection can literally be traced along the walls of the church.

Because of their multitemporal nature, the application of European stylistic
Introduction

classifying and periodizing colonial Andean murals becomes a nearly futile task. The overreliance on European stylistic categories in the existing scholarly literature forces Andean mural traditions into a set of terms and practices that do not adequately represent their pictorial characteristics or the historical contexts within which they were conceived. It also imposes a Eurocentric model onto colonial Andean image production that evaluates it on the basis of its conformity to continental traditions, regardless of whether contemporary muralists were aware of or even concerned with them. Terms such as “mestizo baroque” and “Andean baroque” have succeeded in breaking down the nationalistic boundaries that pervaded European art history and providing a cultural relativism that posits the existence of a multiplicity of Renaissances and Baroques. But their temporal implications remain intact; there is no escaping the teleological hegemony embedded in this terminology, which implies that European art “came first.” By breaking away from this arguably inhibiting and deterministic vocabulary to describe colonial artistic production, we can focus more on the trajectories that Andean mural painting took in its own right, with a closer attention to the changing historical contexts that guided these transformations.

Murals of the colonial Andes underwent enormous stylistic and iconographical shifts throughout nearly three hundred years of colonial rule. But despite

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**Figure 0.5** Murals in the presbytery of the Church of San Pedro de Andahuaylillas, nineteenth century. © Raúl Montero.
Map 0.1 Cornell University Library Map Collection, map of southern Peru with locations of the churches discussed in the book (scale: 1:3,500,000). The inset features the provinces that make up the Department of Cuzco (scale: 1:2,000,000). Generated by Boris Michev and Martin Ziech, using ArcView GIS 10 [GIS software].
their wide-ranging differences, we can see that they retained intimate and brilliantly conceived connections to their respective sociohistorical environments. Whether through iconography and its infinite manipulations, the spatialization of mural imagery, or the strategic use of ambiguous allegorical imagery to reflect both religious and contemporary concerns, artists sought to make murals culturally meaningful and relevant to local congregations. The mere act of artistic improvisation, however slight, could signify much larger acts of self-determination. The case studies offered in the following chapters illuminate these shifts and the myriad cultural and historical forces behind them with greater specificity. By reorienting our understanding of murals as social documents equipped to communicate ideas about religion, local society, and their interrelationships, we can move away from current models that merely categorize them into European stylistic lineages that tend to obscure their material and iconographical hybridity. In so doing, we can appreciate the immense capacities of mural paintings to function in multiple spheres of human experience: as religious primers, theatrical backdrops, architectonic avatars, or visual chambers of collective memory.

Overview of the Book

This book examines murals from the churches located in the towns of Anda-huaylillas (1620s), Urcos (early seventeenth century), Checacupe (mid- to late seventeenth century), Oropesa (late seventeenth century), Pitumarca (late eighteenth century), Ocongate (late eighteenth century), and Huaro (1802) (map 0.1). The Cuzco region boasts dozens of surviving mural cycles found in diocesan churches as well as those of religious orders distributed throughout the thirteen provinces that make up the Department of Cuzco. I have carefully selected a sample of well-preserved murals that evenly span the 200-year expanse that this book covers. When taken together, they tell a rich story of the transformation of an artistic medium that originated as a tool of evangelization and culminated into an instrument of social critique. But in all of their permutations throughout the course of the colonial era, they remained resolutely embedded in the local fabric of their respective communities. The selection of murals affords a nuanced understanding of the ways that the medium changed over the course of the colonial period while also allowing for in-depth analysis of murals that have received cursory (if any) scholarly attention.

Chapter 1 surveys the development of mural painting in the Andes, from the pre-Columbian period to the early nineteenth century. Drawing from secondary
art historical and anthropological literature, archaeological remains, and colonial descriptions of Inca murals, it tracks the broad stylistic and iconographical transformations that murals underwent during this extended period. This chapter supplements the visual record with archival evidence of murals referenced in account books and church inventories. This multimodal approach offers alternative avenues for reconstructing histories of Andean muralism in the face of fragmentary and incomplete documentary evidence.

Chapter 2 focuses on the entrance wall mural of the Church of San Pedro Apóstol de Andahuaylillas, which features the wide and narrow roads to heaven and hell. It offers new interpretations of the mural based on consultation of seventeenth-century religious manuals for priests, the Netherlandish print on which it is based, and a Spanish auto sacramental (one-act allegorical play). A close examination of the life and writings of Juan Pérez Bocanegra, the parish priest installed at Andahuaylillas at the time when the murals were executed, allows us to draw significant associations between the entrance wall mural and the contemporaneous concerns of ecclesiastical officials in Peru. This interdisciplinary exploration reveals the symbolic complexity of colonial Andean murals and their potential to communicate different messages depending on the viewer’s subject position and cultural vocabulary. Examination of the mural’s subtle compositional adjustments and iconographical departures from its source print opens up new pathways of interpretation that reveal its embeddedness in the religious, theatrical, and cultural life of mid-colonial Cuzco.

While chapter 2 provides a focused analysis of one specific mural, chapter 3 takes a comparative look at one particular mural technique (the “textile mural”) that proliferated across the Cuzco region and beyond during the late seventeenth century in tandem with the appointment of Manuel de Mollinedo y Angulo as bishop of Cuzco in the aftermath of the devastating 1650 earthquake that nearly leveled the entire city. During Mollinedo’s tenure from 1673 to 1699, he embarked on a major reconnaissance and reconstruction campaign to help restore destroyed churches to their former glory. The textile murals produced under Mollinedo’s aegis provided a decorative backdrop for canvas paintings and retablos, serving a primarily decorative function to imitate the appearance of sumptuous velvets, silks, and damasks hanging from the walls. The practice of adorning structures and sacred shrines with fine cloths has great historical depth in the Andes. Indeed, textile murals have a firm presence in the pre-Columbian world, with compelling examples of painted chullpas (funerary towers) bearing tocapi designs. Muralists of the colonial period transformed churches into intimate spaces through analogy to the
human body. These permanent architectonic bodies were ritually draped and clothed in ways that recall pre-Columbian Inca practices of adorning shrines with textile offerings while also corresponding with Catholic notions of the church as the body of Christ.

Chapter 4 looks at the transformation of one genre of religious imagery over time: Christ’s baptism. It delves into the world of early modern print culture in order to place Andean murals depicting the baptism of Christ within a larger network of circulating imagery. This chapter also considers the ways in which muralists grounded these compositions within local geographies through the conflation of the Jordan River with local lakes of origin (pacarinas). The chapter begins with analysis of the church of Urcos, where the indigenous muralist Diego Cusi Guaman fashioned his seventeenth-century composition from both a European print and a canvas painting of the same subject by Luis de Riaño at the church of Andahuaylillas. This chapter also examines a series of similar murals executed at the churches of Catca and Ocongate and culminates in a discussion of a late-eighteenth-century mural of Christ’s baptism at the church of Pitumarca. It considers the shifting visual toolkit that artists utilized over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to recenter biblical stories within Andean landscapes through the use of color, symbolism, and compositional organization. These subtle visual maneuvers, in turn, held resonant symbolic implications, as Christ’s baptism became increasingly calibrated with Andean origin stories during a period of widespread societal unrest in the years leading up to the Tupac Amaru Rebellion (1780–1783).

Chapter 5 focuses on depictions of political violence in a late colonial mural program at the church of San Juan Bautista de Huaro completed by the artist Tadeo Escalante in 1802. The chapter uses Escalante’s murals as a case study through which to understand the transformation of Cuzco’s artistic and devotional landscape in the aftermath of the Tupac Amaru Rebellion, the largest and most violent anticolonial uprising in the history of colonial Latin America. This chapter explores the strategic deployment of an eschatological imaginary in visual and written discourse by both insurgents and loyalists alike as a means of couching the rebellion’s moral transgressions within an apocalyptic framework. It examines the role of churches as sites of counterindoctrination during Tupac Amaru’s campaigns and thus questions the objectives that they were expected to fulfill in the years immediately following the rebellion amid a tattered ecclesiastical infrastructure and a deeply divided society. A new social climate of censorship and repression required artists to devise new ways to depict political violence through the repurposing of religious iconography to convey new mean-
ings. This chapter looks at Escalante’s murals in light of the complex historical conditions with which his work intersected.

Through these case studies, this book highlights mural painting as a flexible medium for articulating active visual responses to religious and cultural ideologies imposed on colonial Andean societies. It interrogates Spanish colonial policies from a “bottom up” approach through a consideration of how artists modified Christian iconography for local purposes, and, in turn, how indigenous communities received and interpreted these modifications. As I hope to show, murals of the colonial Andes urge us to expand our research parameters and work across disciplines to see these images not merely as decoration or as tools of evangelization but as visual archives that reveal the complex ways in which artists and viewers negotiated a conceptual space in the world of the Andes, the Spanish Empire, and beyond.