Colonial art reached its peak in initiative and quality in the 17th century. The Colonial artist's role was allied in form and content to that of the ruling power. His work prompted political and religious transformation of the country and he contributed to social unification by promoting obedience to the new and helping to smooth out class differences. Three racial elements affected the character of Colonial Peruvian art: the Spanish, the Inca, and the Mestizo.

Art was introduced in Cusco as a consequence of the influence of Flemish realism, Italian naturalism and a pathetic theme in art lingering from Medieval times. It is interesting to note that European influence travelled throughout the continent but left its strongest and most lasting mark in Cusco and the surrounding area. The Indian gave up his myths, adopting Christianity as his religion, but his art tended to reveal a belief based on superstition rather than faith. Thereby, in Cusco and Upper Peru, a naturalistic art of popular origin, conception, and interpretation developed.

In the 17th century, Cusco excelled in wood sculpture, church furniture design and painting. In painting, costume was more important than anatomy and color dominated line. Saints were given brocaded costumes and angular Indian gestures. Much mysticism was expressed in the religious paintings.

Raised embroideries, archangels with golden wings, angels with guns and elements of the local flora and fauna predominated. In Colonial times, art guilds were formed by the churches as a source of revenue as well as to promote the arts, and therefore, innumerable paintings were produced, many of which are without signature. The quality of some of the anonymous paintings, however, tends at times to far surpass that of the work produced by well known artists of that era.

The Colonial period gave way to the Baroque in the 19th century. Works left by the Cusco school are given the name, "Colonial Antiques ", and their true significance lies in their role in helping to initiate an alliance of the Hispanic and Inca cultures.
Slides:

A. Coronation of the Virgin.

B. San Miguel Archangel; collection of Hilarion Mendivil.

C. Christ of the Earthquake or Lord of the Tremors; Museum of Religious Art, Cusco, Peru.

D. San Blas Pulpit; enlarged detail.

E. San Blas Pulpit; enlarged detail.

F. Virgin and Child.

G. Archangel Rafael.

H. Cathedral Altar, Cusco. The main altar is made of wood and gilded in silver. The exterior is a combination of Indian craftsmanship and Renaissance influence.

I. San Blas Pulpit; work of the Indian woodcarver, Juan Tomás Tuyru Tupac, in the church of San Blas, Cusco.

J. San Blas Pulpit; enlarged detail.

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