

Caspicara: The Great Sculptor from Quito, Ecuador

Organization of American States and the Museum of Modern Art of Latin America
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Little information is known about this most famous of Ecuadorian sculptors, Manuel Chili – Caspicara. His nickname Capicara means ‘expert in wood carving.’ We do know that he was born in Quito, Ecuador in the second half of the 18th century. He was profoundly influenced by his teacher, Don Bernardo de Legarda, who was highly respected for his free flowing garments on his sculpture, the meekness of express and the balance in use of color. Caspicara began working at an early age and became the leading sculptor of his time. Caspicara was a very religious man. He started each day with devotions and ended each evening reciting prayers. He was very humble and his primary wish was to please God.

He lived possibly into the 19th century and was a very prolific artist; his output has been compared to Michelangelo in magnitude. He carved miniature figures as well as life sized ones. His miniatures were done in a single piece while his life sized figures were dressed with magnificent capes and tunics. This apparel is an example of the floral decoration material that was common for the day. Caspicara achieved fame in his lifetime. He was recognized for perfect technique, correct anatomy, and magnificent facial expression in his figures.

References

Proaño, Fray Augustin Moreno. *Caspicara: Quito, Ecuador*. Ediciones Paralelo Cero, Quito, Ecuador.

Images

Note Some of these sculptures are not signed by Caspicara. They are attributed to him because of similar characteristics in the treatment of form and polychrome and carving.

Risen Christ. Wood, 52 cm. (Private Collection, Quito) Caspicara reveals the triumph of Christ over death in this small figure, preserved in Quito. It shows the wound in the hands and feet and side of Jesus. Noteworthy is the beautiful, peaceful expression.

Risen Christ. Wood, 29 cm. (Private Collection, Quito) Another smaller figure of the *Risen Christ*. Caspicara’s knowledge of anatomy is evident in all his sculptures. Notice the rubies in the wounds of Jesus.

Eve with the forbidden apple gesturing to the Almighty God. Wood, polychrome, 22 cm. (Central Bank of Ecuador) The texture of the skin is masterful along with the artist’s genius for accurate anatomical rendering.

Adam and Eve. Wood, polychrome, 40 and 39 cm, respectively. (Private Collection) The delicate features of the faces and wonderful appreciation of the human body are portrayed here as the story is told of the first human couple.

Baby Jesus of Santa Rosa. Wood, polychrome, 25 cm. (Museum of Colonial Art, Quito) Tender and delicate rendition of the newborn savior demonstrating a deep love and respect and faith in God, as seen in all Caspicara's religious sculptures.

St. Francis. Wood, 2.1 m. (Cantuña Chapel, Quito) This sculpture shows the intense pain and supreme joy as St. Francis has just received the stigmata of the passion of Christ on his hands, feet, and side. This demonstration of ecstasy and pain in one sculpture shows the genius of Caspicara.

Detail of St. Francis's face.

St. Teresa of Avila. Wood, 70 cm (Monastery of Carmen Alto, Quito) St. Teresa of Jesus Cepeda y Ahumada is related to a Quito family. The work of this beloved saint can be seen throughout the area. Caspicara's statue captures the admiration of the community as he portrays her beautiful resplendent face.

St. Francisco de Paula. Wood, 36.5 cm. (Private Collection, Quito)

Crucifixion scene. This image is the Bleeding Sheet representing the moment Jesus Christ is received into the arms of the Virgin Mary. The body is fluid. Mary appears to offer up the sacrifice of her son, her eyes raised up and her hand gesturing towards the heavens. Christ's eyes are veiled by death. John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene look down in dismay.

Crucifixion scene. Caspicara has mastered anatomical detail. The loin cloth and rope further reveal the sculptor's genius.

Detail of Above. Caspicara was concerned with minute anatomical detail.

Detail from another Crucifixion scene showing the anatomy of the body with head and hair flowing to the right side.

Crucifixion Group. This group reveals Caspicara's carving and finishing technique. Again Caspicara carves Christ's head tilting to the right shoulder. The execution of the loin cloth reveals Caspicara's workmanship.

Jesus Christ. The humble ecstasy of the figure is shown in this statue plus the instruments of Christ's pain surrounding the figure.

Infant Jesus. Reclining infant is an example of Caspicara's realism. Another fine example of his feeling for flesh tones.

Archangel St. Raphael. Pictured holding his traditional symbols, the fish and the pilgrim's staff.

St. Francis of Assisi. Shows his angelic, sensitive face. Caspicara's statue conveys his admiration and love for the Saint who was called the Christ of the Middle Ages.

St. Joachim. The statue is part of candlestick figures.

The Sorrowing Mary. This statue shows the masterful technique in carving and finishing a statue.

The Immaculate Mary. Without question, this work is handled with great supremacy. It resides in the Basilica of San Francisco.

Crucifixion. A delicate statue of Christ on the Cross. Caspicara's figure exemplifies detailed knowledge of anatomy, rendered flesh tones, and fluid loin cloth.

The Virgin and St. Joseph adoring the newborn Jesus.

Mary. Kneeling by the infant in a maternal pose.

St. John the Evangelist.

Female Figure. One of Caspicara's secular statues of a female with nubile torso and heavy, strong arms and legs.

Female Figure. A nubile figure showing beautiful flesh tones.

St. John the Evangelist. A typical statue showing the preservation of Caspicara's work.

St. Francis of Assisi. The favorite saint of Caspicara. It is said St. Francis was a man who had a heart of a lily, the soul of a cherub, and a celestial tongue.