



Barniz de Pasto Coffer

Pasto, Colombia, 17th century

Lacquered Wood

16.5cm high, 22.3cm wide, 11.5cm deep

Stock no.: A5025

This wooden lacquer coffer is of rectangular form with a domed lid, it is densely decorated throughout with fantastic animals and foliage on a black ground with border of circle and cross pattern. The green and yellow tones of the motifs are outlined in white and stand out against the dark background. The glossy, water-resistance surface is achieved through applying mopa mopa resin, a lacquer material typical of the Pasto area, onto the coffer surface.

This coffer is typical of Pasto region (now part of Colombia) production in the colonial period. Mopa mopa is a translucent pale green natural resin produced using mopa mopa tree native to the tropical rain forests of southwest Colombia. Mopa mopa resin was used as a decorative technique for indigenous objects before the arrival of the Spanish in the Americas. From about 1600, this native lacquer technique became popular for creating objects of European type, in imitation of the appearance of Asian lacquer. The decorative schemes of Barniz de Pasto objects usually employ mixes of indigenous and European motifs, and even luxury Asian textiles. Due to their combination of cultural motifs from three continents, they were described as "some of the first works of a globalized world" (Jorge F. Rivas).

Comparative materials Victoria & Albert Museum (W.5-2015) and the Hispanic Society of America (LS2067)

Further reading:

Carr, Dennis. *Made in the Americas: The New World Discovers Asia*. 1st ed. Boston: MFA Publications, 2015.