



Hide painting of Franciscan saint with cross

Date

ca. 1680-1700

Medium

Tanned skin, pigment

Description

Outlines made with hot nail (?) point or scalpel. Colors now transparent dark brown, probably originally had russet and yellow dyes in picture. Smooth shaven monk in cowed habit, knotted cord girdle and sandals (discalced), holds large cross with both arms, so it is against his shoulder. An empty roadway is seen in small window, upper left. Now bare space at left of picture has traces of something, possibly some foliage. This is in the style of well-drawn paintings on tanned skins, classed by deduction as the work of Franciscan missionaries when they needed graphic art in the missions for Indian

converts and could not obtain from Mexico. Hence the materials were makeshift but the understanding of drawing, anatomy, perspective, etc., was obviously academic and often ably expressed. These are tentatively dated as before or after 1680-1700, and probably were not continued during first half of 18th century when a fair amount of oils on canvas seems to have been sent north from Mexico, not later when santos in folk art style were made. (See palimpsest skin, santero style figure overpainted on figure of same type as A5.1954.46, in HSNM collections, as proof that well-drawn skin paintings were older than santero ones.) Identification: May possibly represent St. John of God (San Juan de Dios) as he is in a Franciscan habit, and is reputed to have seen a vision of the Christ Child telling him to "go to Granada where thou shalt bear the Cross"--and when he went there he eventually founded his charity hospital which was the apparent beginning of the maisons de Dieu in Europe. He may also represent San Jan de la Cruz, who was closely associated with St. Teresa in the reforms of Carmelite houses. However, San Juan de la Cruz, dying in 1591, three generations after the Conquest of Mexico, was not canonized until 1726, while San Juan de Dios, died 1550, was canonized in 1690 and so was apt to have been in the minds of the clergy living at about that date, or when it is assumed that these paintings were made. Other possible identification: San Antonio de Padua.

Dimensions

1 m x 58 cm. irregular