

Catalina Swinburn

Arquebusier Angels, 2024

Hand woven investiture from
rescued archive canvas of the

Cusco painting school

170h x 110w cm x 40d cm



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Catalina Swinburn's work seeks to retrieve ancestral rituals and rescue cultural traditions, recognising the potential of woven artworks to express and embody a concern with sacred tradition, identities, and beliefs. In this work **Ángeles Arcabuceros**, Swinburn has rescued forgotten archives of the Cusco painting school, deconstructed them, and through the ritualistic process of weaving, reimagined them.

Transformed through the ritualistic process of weaving, these deconstructed paintings hereby become the fibres of a new canvas, in which the figures are abstracted, relating to the blurred context of their creation. By reweaving the Arquebusier Angels into the contemporary canon, Swinburn seeks to dismantle the aims of colonial ideologies, and re-instill these subjects with a new divine energy.



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By weaving the deconstructed paintings into a winged figure, Swinburn references the form and dimensions of the greatest cycle of Arquebusier Angels, situated in the Church of Calamarca, Bolivia. Parallels can also be drawn between Swinburn's robe-like investitures and the armour which decorates Calamarca's winged warriors, highlighting the sacred origins of her practice.



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The selected paintings depict over 80 of Cusco's Arquebusier Angels, which became popular icons in the Andes across the seventeenth century. These impressive subjects are presented as celestial soldiers, decorated in lace robes, majestic feather wings, and long-barrelled harquebus. Representing heavenly, aristocratic, and militaristic beings all at once, these subjects align with figures from the Incan Pantheon of Gods, making the angels popular icons across indigenous and Hispanic communities of their time.

Most historians consider them indigenous creations, and think that they emerged to christianize ancestral Andean cults associated with the stars and nature, or as christianized images of the Huaminca, the winged soldiers of Viracocha, and as guardian angels of the "Austroandean" Empire in the New World. Representations devised by Jesuit missionaries in the context of the campaigns to extirpate idolatries, to personify the heavenly militia that guarded the temples and indigenous communities of the Andean highlands.



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