

In 1581, the city of Antwerp formally rejected the Catholic faith and the rule of the Spanish king, Philip II. That same year, the very first Jesuit missionaries arrived in the newly conquered Philippines, having traveled across the Pacific from Acapulco. These two apparently unrelated events took place at opposite sides of the globe, at the contested borders of the Spanish Catholic empire. Yet the survival of approximately a dozen mid-seventeenth-century ivory statues of a distinctive figure of St. Michael the Archangel (figs. 1, 70, 78, 79, 82, 85, and 86), all carved in Manila but based on an engraving first published in Calvinist Antwerp (fig. 2), offer evidence of how Spanish Flanders and the Philippines were connected, despite their vast geographic separation. The Antwerp print and these Philippine-made ivory sculptures traveled across oceans and continents, carried by missionaries, merchants, diplomats, sailors, and soldiers, indicating the astonishing mobility of people and of artworks in the early modern world.

This is a book about how European artworks came to operate within these global networks of exchange, used as tools for the propagation of Catholic missionary zeal, commercial gain, imperial power, and/or artistic ambition. I examine how different artists and audiences across the globe reimaged these mobile objects via their adaptation and reuse. In particular, I follow the illustrated Jesuit book of Gospel stories, the *Evangelicae historiae imagines* (fig. 3), and a singular iconographic

type of *St. Michael the Archangel* (which I will designate via italics), objects that originated in Antwerp and involved the artist Maerten de Vos (1532–1603) (figs. 2 and 4). Yet these artworks came to be used and remade across the globe: copied by Venetian print publishers, Spanish and Latin American painters, Mughal miniaturists, and Chinese ivory carvers in the Philippines.

In *The First Viral Images*, I analyze the reproductive transmission of artistic designs engendered by the movement of people and things; to do so, I employ virality as a methodological framework. Here I am indebted to the work of Tony D. Sampson, who contends that virality is fundamentally a social phenomenon, rather than a biological one.¹ Today, “going viral” is a commonplace of Internet culture. In this contemporary guise, virality is predominantly used to describe media distribution and consumption rather than an epidemiological event. I argue that virality offers a particularly useful heuristic for thinking about the replicative mobility of the early modern image, providing a critical vocabulary for defining the speed, reach, and adaptations of an image or artwork while allowing for consideration of how artists and patrons, as well as gatekeepers, infrastructures, and social networks, all contributed to this rapid global movement. In using a contemporary term to explain historic phenomena, I am not proposing a teleology whereby print technology neatly prefigures and anticipates today’s Internet culture. But the



Figure 1. Manila artist, *St. Michael the Archangel*, ca. 1630. Ivory with polychromy and gilding. Mexico City, Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. Photo: author.



Figure 2. Hieronymus Wierix, after Maerten de Vos, *St. Michael the Archangel*, 1584. Engraving published by Adriaen Huybrechts and Hieronymus Wierix. London, British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum / Art Resource, New York.



Figure 3. Hieronymus Wierix, after Maerten de Vos, title page, 1593. Engraving from Gerónimo Nadal, S.J., *Evangelicae historiae imagines* (Antwerp: Societas Iesu). Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

concept of virality does produce unique insights into questions raised by the global mobility and reproduction of early modern artworks.

This is not a book about smallpox or the myriad of other diseases brought by Europeans to colonized spaces. In using virality as a conceptual framework, I do not wish to imply that the circulation of European artworks outside Europe is freighted with the material/cultural contamination of Indigenous cultures presumed as inert and fixed.² As used in contemporary media, virality reconfigures the epidemiological notion of passive contagion and recasts it as an active process. Whereas a disease is typically passed on from one unknowing individual to another, viral media requires agency on behalf of individuals and/or collectives—both those who create and those who choose to “pass on” viral content. Online stories, images, and videos have to be liked and shared, as each new recipient chooses whether or not to become a forwarding agent. While epidemic disease is not my focus, I am aware of what Peta Mitchell describes as the epistemological anxiety inherent in any metaphor of contagion, particularly in a book completed during the onslaught of the twenty-first century’s first global pandemic.³ The frisson of contagion inherent in the word “virality,” however, usefully invokes the biopolitical power and use of violence by the Europeans who brought artworks to the Americas, Asia, and Africa in the early modern period.

My use of virality as a conceptual model is intended to tease out the complexities and contingencies of early modern artworks’ movement across the globe, to diagnose and analyze the repeated mimetic encounters engendered by these objects’ mobility.⁴ While indebted to Igor Kopytoff’s anthropological model of the object biography, where one

follows the social lives of an object and its facture, changing uses, and meanings,⁵ this book traces the generation of multiple versions of a singular iconography and/or object (multiple impressions of the *Imagines* or of the related versions of *St. Michael the Archangel*) that simultaneously moved in varying directions. While the idea of an object biography maps onto the plot of human experience—birth, life, death—the viral evokes a different kind of narrative, a social phenomenon that encompasses adaptation and resistance as well as community and individual response.

This framework is brought to bear on the movement and reproduction of two interrelated sets of objects. The first case study centers on Gerónimo Nadal’s *Evangelicae historiae imagines*, an illustrated devotional text published and promoted by the Society of Jesus (fig. 3). In chapter 2, we shall see how the *Imagines* traveled incredible distances in the seventeenth century, when its engravings were copied in European and Latin American churches, at the Mughal and Ethiopian courts, and by Chinese printmakers. Previous scholars have noted this global distribution, but the scale of illustration in the *Imagines* (153 engravings)—and the sheer volume of related copies and their sprawling circulation—makes it near impossible to do more than compile exemplars.⁶ This opening case study illustrates the challenges of writing a global art history, of describing and accounting for such large-scale phenomena, while attending to the specific conditions that allowed these objects to move and to find local purchase.

To address these broader questions, in the remainder of the book, chapters 3 to 5, I track the global transmission of a single design, *St. Michael the Archangel*, executed in painting and print,

which circumnavigated the globe in the span of a human lifetime. My account of the *Evangelicae historiae imagines* will have introduced a number of key figures, sites, networks, and infrastructures crucial to the movement of *St. Michael the Archangel*; the illustrated Jesuit book also demonstrates how virality can be engineered and subsequently employed differently by patrons, artists, and interpreters, topics that also come into play for *St. Michael*. Deliberately narrowing my focus to a particular iconography in these later chapters allows for a sustained analysis of this image's different viral trajectories, cutting across various geopolitical boundaries. De Vos's singular composition of the archangel is distinctive enough to be instantly recognizable, but it also proved highly adaptable to execution in different media and to manipulation in service of various interests across the global Spanish empire: from Antwerp to Spain and New Spain (chapter 3), to the American vice-royalties (chapter 4), and to the Pacific trading outpost of Manila (chapter 5). I reconstruct the ways in which these *St. Michael* artworks moved and multiplied, promoted by powerful actors and agents, copied and referenced by artists, patrons, and viewers with distinct agendas. Within four years, de Vos's 1581 canvas *St. Michael the Archangel* (fig. 4) had crossed battlefields, confessional divides, and the Atlantic Ocean, coming to rest on the high altar of Mexico City's cathedral. In subsequent decades, the engraved version of the same composition, also produced in Antwerp, served as a model for artists across Europe, Latin America, and the Philippines (fig. 2).

I argue for a reassessment of the creative labor underpinning the production of this diverse array of copies, citations, and reproductions. I examine how and why these objects traveled and spurred



Figure 4. Maerten de Vos, *St. Michael the Archangel*, 1581. Oil on canvas. Cuautitlán Cathedral. Photo: author.

imitation, considering how this reproductive mobility changed how artworks came to be seen, used, and valued. In doing so, I demonstrate and contest various theoretical models for the writing of global art history, putting pressure on art-historical notions of copying and agency, as well as context and viewership, in order to examine the ways in which the production, movement and reception of artworks contributed to and challenged ideas of the local and the global.⁷ My aim is to demonstrate how virality exposes new ways of thinking about the infrastructures that enabled the extraordinary movement and reproduction of both the *Evan-gelicae historiae imagines* and the *St. Michael the Archangel* across global geographies, relying on the distributed agency of a network of artists and viewers, images and objects.

Image, Material, Labor

Today we understand something has “gone viral” when an image, video, or text is rapidly shared and repeated over social media. This is predominantly an image-based phenomena; while text may be added or swapped, most memes and other viral content rely on imagery to function.⁸ In this book, I use “the viral image” as a catchall term, comparable to early modern Spanish’s use of the word *imagen* to variously describe prints, paintings, sculpture, and other forms of mobile and material representation.

While Internet memes are transmitted via the seemingly disembodied digital language of os and is, in the text that follows, I endeavor to retain a sense of artworks as made and material objects—stacks of prints, paintings on canvas rolled in barrels and shipped overseas, ivory tusks transformed into archangels. Attention to

material facture, especially when coupled with a sometimes scarce textual archive, allows for insight into aspects of artistic labor and creative agency that are too often left unexplored in art-historical scholarship. Today, virality can encourage a suppressed view of aggregate labor. That is, the massive server infrastructure that powers the Internet and enables Facebook likes and Twitter memes is invisible to the majority of Internet users. Cell-phone towers and server farms are hidden, inaccessible, or simply forgotten by most, not to mention the intensive practices of mineral mining and industrial manufacture required to produce digital technology.⁹ This oversight should prime early modern scholars to the stubborn, deceptive invisibility of labor within media infrastructures. The preponderance of early modern artists responsible for the production of the viral image are largely anonymous; often their works are unsigned, and their names unrecorded in archives. Yet their creative efforts powered and shaped the trajectories of viral images like *St. Michael the Archangel*.

Although one could argue for the existence of earlier viral objects, from pilgrims’ badges to porcelain vessels, what marks the moment around 1600, in particular, are the beginnings of systematized economic globalization.¹⁰ Regular transoceanic travel, settler colonialism, Counter-Reformation evangelization, and the global taste for silver all produced a sense of the early modern globe connected by trade, faith, and/or empire. In each of the chapters that follow, I lay out how the viral movement of the *Imagines* and *St. Michael the Archangel* relied upon interlocking and sometimes competing global infrastructures of commerce; missionary purpose; and imperial, regional, and local politics.

Infrastructures and Gatekeepers

Though viral movement may seem contingent in its unfolding, subject to chance, it requires intentional actions, the establishment of various infrastructures that necessitate the involvement of gatekeepers. Indeed, the very first use of “virality” outside of the field of epidemiology was by *PC User Magazine* in 1989 to describe the marketing technique of Macintosh computers.¹¹ Since then, the term has been used to naturalize the ways in which powerful institutions, corporations, and individuals can script, co-opt, and engineer what appears to be spontaneous popularity.

To go viral, an image must be forwarded simultaneously across multiple networks, in an intense, self-perpetuating cycle of reception and replication. Karine Nahon and Jeff Hemsley have described this process as initiated by the complex interaction between networks of contingent social relations and gatekeepers—that is, individuals, corporations, or systems who control access to and promote content.¹² Facebook is perhaps the world’s most powerful social network today, but it is also a gatekeeper, as demonstrated by ongoing political debates over its role as both censor and promoter of content. One of the problems with using a term like “circulation” to describe the movement of early modern artworks is that it downplays the role of individual agents and such structural constraints—objects do not circulate by themselves, and they do not circulate in every direction equally.¹³ Virality, in contrast, is a model that acknowledges the complexities of distributed agency, the unevenness of network infrastructures.

Any analysis of the viral image therefore must begin with the infrastructures, networks, and gatekeepers that could both constrain and

accelerate an image’s reach. Here I use the term “infrastructure” broadly, encompassing physical spaces, transit systems, and the personnel of political, commercial, and religious organizations. These include artists’ workshops (where artworks were made and copied), the apparatus of trade (fairs, markets, overland and overseas shipping routes), and the administration of imperial and religious power (Inquisitorial controls, colonial administrators and missionaries, courts, and churches). *St. Michael the Archangel* and the *Evangelicae historiae imagines* also moved via different and overlapping social networks: those of immigrant communities, devotional orders, and connoisseurs.

In considering the variable velocity and geographic distribution of early modern viral images, one must identify the gatekeepers that facilitated the artwork’s entry into new contexts. The idea of a gatekeeper resonates with the relational dynamics that characterize “entangled” or “crossed” histories, though it is more explicit in acknowledging power differentials.¹⁴ The term is also particularly apt for scholars of colonial art, as in some cases these early modern gatekeepers controlled physical access to markets or artistic models. For instance, the port of Seville in the seventeenth century held the monopoly on all official exports to the Spanish Americas; on the other side of the Atlantic, the viceregal port officials who inspected cargo were empowered to root out illicit visual materials. Gatekeepers could also positively impact the dissemination of a particular image via commissions, gifts, and other acts of exchange or patronage. While the actions of gatekeepers alone do not determine what images go viral, their role is critical. As a gatekeeper, the Jesuit Order was not only the patron and architect of the *Imagines*’s global distribution, but the Society of Jesus was

also crucial to the widespread distribution of the *St. Michael the Archangel*. Despite the fact the Jesuits did not commission the 1584 print, the order commissioned and displayed versions executed in paint and ivory in Latin America and the Philippines. Virality could be useful for individual artists and patrons, Catholic missionaries, as well as corporate and imperial powers.

Viral images move quickly. In the age of the Internet, something can take off in the course of a few hours via Twitter or Facebook, before making the morning newspaper or the nightly news. But what constituted speed in the seventeenth century? How did artworks travel, and what institutions and individuals assisted in their movement? This was an era when it took two years to reach Beijing from Lisbon, sailing around the Cape of Good Hope and across the Indian Ocean; to go from Seville to Manila meant leaving Spain in July, disembarking in Veracruz, then traveling overland by pack train to Acapulco via Mexico City, before setting off on the one-hundred-day sea voyage to Manila; the returning sea voyage could be twice as long due to unfavorable wind patterns.¹⁵ Despite their length and often-precarious nature, the regularity of these crossings by 1600 ensured the relatively reliable and consistent movement of people and objects across the early modern globe.

In the early modern period, physical distance could delay widespread dissemination. When Francis Xavier was beatified at the end of October 1619 by Pope Paul V in Rome, the Jesuit mission in the Philippines first held festivities to celebrate the elevation of their brother in early 1621.¹⁶ The belated description of this event is recorded in one of the annual letters (*Carta anua* or *Annuae litterae*) written by Jesuit missions each year as a summary

of local news, missionary gains, and practical needs sent back to the order's European administrators. A global network of Spanish colonial bureaucrats filed regular reports and grievances, which were also relayed to the Spanish royal court via regular seaborne and overland transports. The movement of people and goods across the global Spanish empire necessitated the development of a host of related paper mechanisms: inventories, manifests, identity papers, and bills of lading.¹⁷ This flow of information, back and forth across the world's continents and oceans, attempted to collapse the spatial and temporal distance between places like Rome and Beijing.

In this book, I explore how viral reproduction was driven by the physical transportation of artworks and artists via these networks and infrastructures, as well as the local creation of copies and variants. The ivory *St. Michael the Archangel* sculptures made in Manila after the 1584 Antwerp print were sent to Latin America as export products by the mid-seventeenth century, indicating the speed with which this design circumnavigated the globe—within a human lifetime. The Manila galleon trade not only enabled the Antwerp print to reach the Philippines but also allowed for the ivory sculptures made in the archipelago to be sold to Latin American consumers. Virality, as a mode of contagion, attempts to describe both what is transmitted and how it moves and changes.¹⁸ My study thus addresses social and material networks, content and method, image and infrastructure.

Mobility and Meaning

While a viral image has a discoverable point of origin, it often travels far beyond what its original maker(s) could have anticipated. Beyond noting

the movement of an artwork or iconography, I want to consider how meaning shifted via replication. The framework of virality allows for an accounting of the accretive power of the image, the ways in which movement, repetition, and replication can recompose meaning. The authority of the image could intersect with, and be redirected by, competing local interests; while the viral image is continually reconfigured as it moves, it also remains recognizable.

In the case of both the *Images* and *St. Michael the Archangel*, we shall see how designs could be promoted, replicated, repeated, and adapted—but not always in ways that are predictable. Painted, printed, and sculpted versions of *St. Michael the Archangel* crossed commercial blockades, geopolitical lines, and confessional borders, assuming new meanings as they moved. In chapter 3, I explore how the same design of the victorious archangel alternatively was used to signal a willingness for reconversion to the Catholic faith, allegiance to Habsburg imperial goals, and/or the missionary ideals of the Church in New Spain.

This multiplication of variants also meant that the same viewers sometimes could have encountered more than one version of *St. Michael the Archangel* at a time. In chapter 4, I discuss how the burgeoning cult of San Miguel del Milagro in New Spain decoupled the iconography from its painted origin, but the continued presence of the 1581 canvas in Mexico City meant that ambitious patrons and artists could still mobilize references to the earlier de Vos painting, cued to the connoisseurial gaze. In Lima, the Jesuit church housed both a *St. Michael the Archangel* imported from Madrid and a locally produced version containing the portrait of an Indigenous donor, not only visualizing different vectors by which artworks

moved but also staking a claim for Lima's place in the global Spanish empire (see figs. 69 and 59).

These examples destabilize an assumed binary and linear relationship between original and copy, suggesting a more complex set of connections and referents. While this approach is clearly indebted to actor-network theory,¹⁹ I prefer Tim Ingold's metaphoric description of meshwork, an entanglement of trajectories in knots rather than nodes, emphasizing slipperiness and mobility rather than a network's fixed lines of connection.²⁰ As quasi-objects/subjects, artworks generate signification, value, and functions, continually unfolding in new trajectories beyond those ascribed to them singly by individual artists, printmakers, or viewers.²¹ Virality then is about the movement across, through, and between social networks that have a topography: gaps and valleys, shortcuts and dead ends. Art objects could evade and exploit the structures of official patronage and of inquisitorial or mercantile controls. We shall encounter copies of the *Evangelicae historiae imagines* in albums of Mughal miniatures and in devotional woodcuts produced by Chinese artists: evidence of artworks' ability to bypass and traverse divergent networks. Virality is not only synonymous with an artwork's mobility but also defines a series of constitutive acts of reception and replication.²² The viral image is constantly being reworked, rethought, and transformed.

Addressing the Global Early Modern

Since Claire Farago's 1995 *Reframing the Renaissance*, there has been a sustained push in art history (met, in turn, by occasional resistance) to expand the geographic boundaries of studies of the early modern period.²³ What happened to

works of art when they were carried far beyond their places of production? How did the establishment of global supply chains, the imposition of European colonial rule, and the Counter-Reformation zeal for worldwide conversion impact the making and viewing of art? Scholars have proposed a number of theoretical models for writing a global art history of the early modern period. In tracking the movement of a singular design, I test and contest several analytical models that have dominated such art-historical scholarship.

Virality allows for a critical reengagement with a historical fact long recognized in the study of early modern art: namely, that global trade and shifts in artistic technology (most notably print) enabled the faster and broader circulation of stylistic features, motifs, and iconographies, fueling the production of copies in various media across the early modern globe. In reconstituting the viral image, this project aims to move beyond the foundational work of identifying the European printed models for colonial art. While previous scholars have plotted some of the dizzying array of copies after the *Evangelicae historiae imagines* and *St. Michael the Archangel*,²⁴ no one has probed the infrastructures that enabled these copies to be made or placed different variations of this iconography into dialogue with one another. *The First Viral Images* extends recent art-historical work on early modern practices and methods of copying as well as scholarship on how mimicry and repetition function within a colonial context.

The ongoing work of the Project on the Engraved Sources of Spanish Colonial Art, a searchable database to locate and trace iconographic repetitions, remains an important active repository.²⁵ But there is also the critical need to move beyond a view of singular matches, to take

account of why particular prints were copied, where, by whom, and for how long. The pairing of a singular source print and copy resolutely clings to a narrative model that obfuscates the untidy geographic and temporal movement of artworks while also reinforcing the value-laden binary of original and copy. Seeing the *Imagines* and *St. Michael the Archangel* as viral images requires an acknowledgment of aggregate functions of copying, a broader consideration of how multiple copies, in different media, may move through time and space. That is, copies were not just made successively after a sole model but could spawn rhizomatic variants related to other copies, disturbing hierarchical assumptions about a singular presumed original.²⁶

For example, as discussed in the following chapter, the high cost of the *Imagines* means that the volume was unlikely to be freely lent out to artist workshops. Many artworks that cite compositions from the *Imagines* were therefore likely copied from more accessible secondary painted or drawn versions rather than directly from the book's engravings. Similarly, an ivory sculpture after the de Vos archangel in Manila may have been the source for the iconography's popularity in the Manila ivory-carving workshops traced in chapter 5. These are patterns of replication that are difficult to reassemble with certainty, escaping or exceeding attribution to a single source, but that nevertheless shaped iconographic and stylistic conventions for generations.

Long neglected in Renaissance and Baroque art histories centered on singular artists, the production and circulation of copies and multiples in all media has been the subject of renewed art-historical interest. Beyond the recognition of copying's central role in artistic pedagogy, a num-

ber of recent works have brought reinvigorated attention to early modern artistic technologies of replication, from printmaking to bronze casting and papier-mâché.²⁷ Elizabeth Cropper, Maria Loh, Lisa Pon, and Amy Powell have all published foundational studies examining ways that copying and repetition forged and policed early modern artistic identities.²⁸ But where this scholarship addresses art-historical anxieties about the nature of artistic authorship, here I consider how viral phenomena require and rely upon a distributed notion of agency. Rather than interrogating the motivations of a singular artist or patron, I ask how the distribution of creative agency generated meaning. De Vos alone did not facilitate these images' mobility or ensure they would be widely copied; his role as an author here is set in tension with those artists who adopted his design, foregrounding the mechanics of replication and dissemination and the resultant shifts in interpretative possibility.

A distributed sense of artistic agency prompts a reassessment of artistic labor. The pressures of geographic and temporal distance are crucial to how viral images oriented themselves in relation to one another, positing an interpretative recalibration of copying as practice. Homi Bhabha used the term "mimicry" to describe a form of colonial copying that repeats rather than represents, potentially threatening as well as reifying authority.²⁹ Here I am interested in how the production of copies allows for multiple local agencies, how viral repetition allows for competing notions of mimicry and emulation and, thus, simultaneous and multiple interpretations. Viral images are active sites of response and creation, repetitions of form and iconography, potentially seen in multiple registers. Ultimately, viral images produce a mimetic excess that reconstitutes and

reshapes both the original and the notion of originality itself, disrupting notions of authorship.³⁰

Art-historical scholarship on the global early modern has primarily focused on corporate and missionary contexts, fixating on the importance of trade networks, missionary goals, or instances of diplomatic gift exchange. In my consideration of how artworks are valued and described in terms of place, I am indebted to the foundational work of Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann as well as scholarship examining Jesuit art and the global mission.³¹ Mia Mochizuki argues that the visual culture of the Jesuit Order was the first to define itself globally, to see mobility and multiplicity as the normative interpretative position.³² Here I expand on this premise, exploring how viral replication allowed for shifts in interpretation and the distribution of creative agency outside of Jesuit networks, how artists working in Lima or Manila recognized and exploited the viral image.

Historians of northern European art, most notably Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Claudia Swan, have also invoked a global frame in recent studies of seventeenth-century Dutch art and the commercial imperialism of the Dutch East and West India Companies.³³ While the seventeenth-century global ambitions of the Dutch have been mined by scholars working in multiple disciplines, the earlier role of Antwerp within the sixteenth-century Spanish empire is comparatively less well explored.³⁴ But this book, too, considers geographies beyond Spanish imperial control, Jesuit patronage, or singular trade routes. *The First Viral Images* describes how the infrastructures of faith, empire, and commerce could intertwine, amplify, and compete with one another.

Several important essays have examined the astonishing mobility of objects in the early mod-

ern world and specifically the role of European prints in processes of transculturation,³⁵ as moving objects that potentially subverted and mis-translated, esteemed, and/or challenged cultural values.³⁶ Aaron Hyman's *Rubens in Repeat: The Logic of the Copy in Colonial Latin America* covers much of the same physical ground as this book, moving from Antwerp prints to related paintings and sculptures made in the Americas, but at a slightly later moment; Hyman's framing of an "aesthetic of sameness" and the "conforming copy" resonates here with what I call the accretive power of the viral image across commercial and spiritual networks.³⁷ In contrast to Hyman's work, my broader interest is in how artworks functioned as part of the emerging and intertwined global infrastructures of Catholicism, commerce, and colonialism—in other words, as agents of globalization.

I propose that the concept of virality in contemporary media offers a more nuanced approach to issues of local agency and identity than hybridity or translation, two of the dominant modes of describing how non-European artworks respond to European models.³⁸ More than fifteen years ago, Dana Leibsohn and Carolyn Dean wrote a formative critique of hybridity as an analytical category,³⁹ yet the term is still regularly used in scholarship on the kinds of art objects (such as ivories carved in the Philippines and paintings made in South America) considered in this book. Serge Gruzinski and Alessandra Russo have utilized the related term of "mestizo," appropriating a colonial word to describe the continual *mélange* of global populations, linguistic and artistic cultures after the violent conquest of the Americas.⁴⁰ But the assumed binary relation inherent in terms like "hybrid" or "mestizo" belies the rich complex-

ity of early modern cross-cultural encounters. It positions both European and Indigenous American identities as a priori and fixed. It also raises the more disturbing query of why is it always a mestizo image that is "untranslatable," caught in a perpetual process of creative tension and movement, whereas European or pre-Columbian artworks are presumed stable in their signification.⁴¹ Virality, like hybridity, is rooted in the biological, but it focuses on transmission rather than parentage—agency rather than presumed identity.

The global mobility and reception of early modern European artworks, in particular prints, has often been described with linguistic metaphors: as an act of ongoing cultural translation⁴² or the imposition of a *koiné* or common language.⁴³ I am resistant to a linguistic model in part because translation was a tool of colonialism; recent scholarship has highlighted the key role of the southern Netherlands as a center for the production of textual translations within the Spanish empire.⁴⁴ In addition, art objects traveled in many cases because they were often seen as requiring little or no logocentric translation—Franciscan missionaries to New Spain and Jesuit brothers in China both used images to ease instruction in Christian concepts. But the legibility and potential misunderstanding of artworks remained of paramount concern to missionaries.

The desire to see printed images as akin to texts, as images that want to be read, has suppressed a more nuanced consideration of early modern prints' material and embodied use. For images were, in many cases, not only meant to be seen, read, and interpreted as works in and of themselves, but they were also produced to be copied and transformed. The mobility and copying of artworks required infrastructures: technologi-

cal, interpretative, and material practices that exceed the textual metaphor of translation. The linguistic model suppresses such concerns.⁴⁵ The viral framework, in contrast, emphasizes the replicative potential of embodied movement across the early modern globe.

Trajectories

The First Viral Images is a global art history of a few select designs, tracing particular geographic arcs via related artworks made in multiple media. The *Imagines* and the painted and printed *St. Michael the Archangel* were all produced in Antwerp, and so that city is the book's starting point. We then follow the artistic trading networks that radiated outward from the city to the Iberian Peninsula, to New Spain, and to the Philippines. In its detailed reconstruction of the various adaptations of the *St. Michael the Archangel* design, the book considers what happens when a design is taken up in new places and adapted in new media for diverse audiences. These reconstitutions and reinterpretations happened within and far outside Antwerp, in ways that de Vos and the designs' subsequent gatekeepers hoped for, as well as in ways they could not have foreseen.

Antwerp was a contested node within (and at times outside of) the Spanish empire. A crucial trading and banking center as well as export art market, the city was where multiple gatekeepers and vectors of viral movement came together. But the city also sided with the Protestant rebellion against Spanish rule. The book's second chapter, "Fixing the Line," introduces the city's artistic reputation and existing commercial infrastructures via the Society of Jesus's surprising decision to publish the *Evangelicae historiae*

imagines in the formerly Calvinist city, shortly after its reconquest by Spain. The drawn-out production history of Gerónimo Nadal's illustrated collection of Gospel narratives for Jesuit teaching, and its subsequent runaway global success, demonstrates how the Jesuits sought to reverse engineer the viral image by tapping into Antwerp's existing infrastructures. The making and the reception of the *Imagines* situates the city as a central node of this book, a starting point for the movement of artistic capital.

In addition to establishing a number of key individuals, institutions, and gatekeepers encountered in the rest of the volume, chapter 2 also foregrounds the pragmatic flexibility of the Counter-Reformation Church. The Church was, of course, concerned with the religious beliefs of those who made devotional artworks intended as tools of conversion. However, religious patrons often also desired artworks of the highest quality; religious art could function as a type of luxury good, traded and valued like a commercial product. The Catholic world depended on the ubiquity of religious art, a surfeit of images and objects to distinguish the true faith from its competitors.

Unusually, the design for *St. Michael the Archangel* can be pulled out and recognized from the overwhelming visual abundance of Counter-Reformation art, and the remainder of the book focuses on the tracking of this particular image across the globe. The distinctiveness of the component parts of this design—the outstretched open hand, the curly hair, the martyr's palm, the elaborate costume, and the characteristic swirling masses of drapery—made the composition uniquely recognizable, even when it was executed at different scales, in diverse media, across vast geographies. Chapters 3 through 5 follow the vari-

ous trajectories of this image's movement, tracking the design from Antwerp to Spain, then to New Spain and Peru, then to Manila, and finally back again to Latin America and Europe.

In chapter 3, "Conquering and Forgetting," I reconstruct the initial routes of the *St. Michael the Archangel* design. Although only a few years separate the two works, de Vos's painted and printed versions of *St. Michael the Archangel* were made for dramatically different purposes. De Vos was an artist particularly well suited to exploit the shifting religious and political circumstances of Antwerp in the 1580s; the potent iconography of the unarmed archangel proved alternately amenable to policies of judicial forgetfulness, colonial conversion, and the Spanish imperial project. These painted and printed images of *St. Michael the Archangel* proved adaptable to a number of different Counter-Reformation contexts on either side of the Atlantic, spurring new iterations of the design across courtly and commercial networks, confessional and geographic boundaries.

In chapter 4, "Local Mediators in Latin America," I explore how specific local contexts could shape the reproduction and interpretation of *St. Michael the Archangel* in the Spanish Americas, muddying a linear model of artistic response. In seventeenth-century New Spain, the design could be seen in relation to the in situ 1581 painting of *St. Michael the Archangel* (fig. 4), but the iconography also undergirds depictions of the local miracle of San Miguel de Milagro. In Lima, a version of the design was used to commemorate the social standing and faith of an Indigenous female patron via her shared aesthetic appreciation for a design well known in the viceroyalty of Peru. Moving and multiplying across the Americas, *St. Michael the Archangel* generated new rhizomatic networks of

relation that enabled the design to function differently wherever it landed.

The final chapter, "Silver and Souls in Manila," follows the *St. Michael the Archangel* engraving across the Pacific to the Spanish outpost at Manila, where unconverted Chinese immigrants modeled ivory carvings on the de Vos print for devotional use and commercial gain. In Manila, the distinction between local and global ceases to function since these works were made for consumption both near and far, drawing on material, technical, and iconographic sources inside and outside of Spanish control. There the design was entirely materially reconfigured and yet remains recognizable. Here the course of *St. Michael the Archangel*'s viral spread bends back upon itself, as these carvers produced ivory archangels for export back to Latin America and Europe, utilizing the same infrastructures that first brought the print from Antwerp to Manila.

In each chapter, virality helps to elucidate the interstices between individual agencies; shifting and interwoven social meshworks; and the economic, political, and religious infrastructures inherent in the proliferation of colonial copies. The broad dissemination and adaptation of *St. Michael the Archangel* was precisely the kind of movement that motivated the Jesuits to pursue the publication of the *Evangelicae historiae imagines* in Antwerp. Yet I maintain that the *Imagines* prints and *St. Michael the Archangel*, as viral images, could simultaneously serve multiple agents within and outside of the Spanish imperial orbit, each with their own aims in forwarding, copying, altering, and sharing the design, transforming its context and interpretative possibilities. As I reconstruct how this design moved across the early modern world, I probe the different reso-

nances of *St. Michael the Archangel* within these distinct local contexts, analyzing how the accretion and repetition of the iconography produced its own momentum.

The artworks considered in this book are often those found at the edges of the discipline of art history: devotional prints, illustrated books, painted copies, and unsigned decorative art objects. But I argue that close attention to these unfashionable objects sheds light not only on how early modern artworks worked to impose hegemonic and epistemic conformity but also how they could serve competing local purposes as they moved across the globe. The book's conclusion addresses the epistemological and ontological operations of these mobile artworks in making visible the operations of early modern globalization.⁴⁶

The First Viral Images aims to be more than a history of artworks moving from Antwerp outward, a reinscription of the colonial enterprise in historical narrative. Antwerp was itself a contested periphery of Spanish imperial power when the 1584 engraved *St. Michael the Archangel* was published as a local plea for Habsburg clemency. The printmakers recognized that the engraving could travel far beyond the besieged city, at least partly anticipating the print's global mobility and reinterpretation. The movement of the *Images* and *St. Michael the Archangel* around the globe were not exceptional events but increasingly normal occurrences in the early modern period.⁴⁷ The mobility of early modern artworks (not just of European prints but also, for example, of porcelain from Jingdezhen and chintz produced in

South Asia) engendered conceptual, material, and economic dialogues everywhere these moving objects landed.

While recognizing the necessity of such interventions, there have also been salient critiques of the Eurocentric production of much of global early modern scholarship emerging from predictable "centers" of art-historical writing—namely, well-endowed Anglo-Atlantic institutions.⁴⁸ It would be irresponsible and unethical to pretend that this book could have been written without the resources afforded by my tenured position at an American research institution, with the attendant privileges of research fellowships, teaching releases, and travel funding. My own selection of objects produced in Antwerp as this book's central case studies evidences my training as an art historian of northern Europe; in writing about Mexico City, Lima, or Manila, I have relied and built upon the considerable foundation and expertise of scholars often living and working in these places.

I have written this book, therefore, with my past and future students in mind as a model of art-historical writing rooted not in monographic, material, or geographic coherence but as an exploration of early modern mobility and mimetic encounter. Viral images contributed to the project of globalization via the imposition of modes of visibility and aesthetic values, but they can also be idiosyncratic in their reproduction, keyed to specific audiences outside of dominant networks. To see and to study the viral image, one must simultaneously zoom out—to shipping routes, inquisitorial constraints, immigration patterns—and slow down and look closely, attending to individual objects.