

## 5020

William Williams, *Deborah Hall*

Unknown, *Doña Mariana Belsunse y Salasar*

**Dominic Carter:** These two full-length portraits were both painted in the 1760s—the one on the left in colonial Philadelphia and the one on the right in the Spanish colonial city of Lima, Peru.

The paintings display the elite status of the two young women in the same way that European portraits from that era do—with formal gardens in the background, fancy clothing, and elegant poses.

It's hard to see much in the expressions of these two women that can tell us about their personalities. Instead, we're supposed to understand who they are by the symbolic objects surrounding them. In the painting on the left, the rose in Deborah Hall's hand indicates her beauty and perhaps her readiness for marriage; the pet squirrel was a symbol of duty or industriousness. In the painting on the right, Doña Mariana holds a watch as a way of saying that her husband should wait a year before consummating their marriage.

But, curator Barbara Gallati says, there's still a lot about these paintings, and these women, that remains a mystery.

**Barbara Gallati:** We don't know who commissioned the portrait of Doña Mariana. We know that Deborah's father commissioned her portrait, so it's not as if she even had a hand in making up the symbolism that surrounds her. Her father may have imposed it on the artist.

**Dominic Carter:** The furniture beneath the paintings was modeled on the eighteenth-century furniture of Thomas Chippendale in England. The chair's from Philadelphia and the table's from Argentina. The table's not an exact replica of the Chippendale style. The legs are so short because Argentines often sat on the floor.