

PICK ME at BPA Space - Exhibition text by Robert Bergmann.

English Version

Framed in gold and dangling in silver ropes, are the paintings of the Infanta Margarita Teresa by Diego Velázquez at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. The hall closes around the paintings like a second frame. They stand between stucco and a guard rail peppered with information panels. In the painting "Timeline", which shows the hanging in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the whole figure of Margarita Teresa seems to break out of the frame with the increasing age. Her bent neck is a soft protest against the structures representing her. The Spanish court had Diego Velázquez make the three paintings of the Infanta at intervals of about three years. They were sent to Vienna to keep Margarita Teresa's future husband, Emperor Leopold I, who was also her cousin, interested before the long-planned marriage. The Habsburg marriage policy ensured the necessary protection of the empire through the strategic marriages of its own treaties to the important monarchies of the European states. Binding possible opponents to one's own family through close kinship was the most effective instrument of power and a better weapon than any military conflict. "The painted image in 17th century Spain was a tool mightier than the sword in terms of securing the reign's legacy,"¹ as Sofia Mascate herself puts it.

A completely different space than that of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, in which Infanta Margarita Teresa is staged, is shown in the painting "Growing Stale (As Mina)". A certain kinship with the painting "Las Meninas" can be seen. The painting by Velázquez gives a glimpse into his studio. Just as in "Las Meninas", the depiction here becomes very complicated. We no longer know what we are dealing with. This painting of Diego Velázquez was not commissioned by the court and, as such, has a complex relationship with the representative image that otherwise fell within the purview of the court painter in the 17th century. The depiction of the studio by the painter's supposedly own free will provides a glimpse on production conditions. This context, however, is authorised by an absent center, as described by Foucault in his text on the painting. The representation of power is organised differently and is by no means repressed. The center of the painting is not the image of Margarita Teresa nor the painter painting her, everything depends on the mirror in the center of the background. The reflection shows the royal couple, and although they

¹ Sofia Mascate, COURT PAINTER'S STORY, 2022

are present only as a reflection, they order the whole painting. The spatial absence of the king within the frame positions his power as an imaginary connection in the center of the painting. The representation of the monarch is all the more powerful when he does not have to stand in the room himself. "For the function of that reflection is to draw into the interior of the picture what is intimately foreign to it: the gaze which has organised it (...) just as the king appears in the depths of the looking- glass precisely because he does not belong to the picture"². The representation of the studio situation, like the hanging of the three portraits that Sofia Mascate appropriates, are by no means an indulgence in princess glamour, but are infused with power, and as such they show no place free of power and interest.

In another image, "Pick me, King Charles Spaniel," the King Charles' spaniel is seduced by the sausage hairs of Margarita Teresa. The kinked posture of the princess, what seemed to be a rebellious gesture against her framing, becomes a seductive curtsy. The title refers to the contemporary term "Pick me Girl," which is also the title of the exhibition. The term "Pick me", which originated on social media platforms, seems to perform this theme for the present. The term refers to women who use supposedly manipulative practices to attract the attention of the opposite sex. In particular, their own insecurity is used and deployed in order to profitably use their own helplessness in a heteronormative construct. The other side is granted a supposedly dominant position and protector role. This notion is thus part of a system that restricts women to being chosen. Here, a hegemonic masculinity is revealed that is based on the standardisation and insecurity of the body marked as different. On the other hand, a critique of this staging, and that primarily from the male side, could in turn contribute to denying women autonomy in this process. For it is difficult to say where self-determination begins or ends within heteronomy. Probably, this space cannot be defined as clearly delimited either. As is so often the case, the transitions are fluid.

The image of the Infanta constructs a drift or transfer that relates demarcated spaces to one another. Here it becomes clear that women must repeatedly enter spaces that seek to form their subjectivity in a way that marks their bodies, while passing off other bodies (especially male bodies) as unmarked and given. However, unmarked bodies do not exist, even if certain spaces attempt to give that appearance. Timothy Morton gives the apt example here: "the strange Phenomenon whereby some people with posh voices say, „I

² Michael Foucault, *The order of things*, S.15. Vintage; Reissue Edition, (29. März 1994)

don't have an accent.“ - with a posh voice.,³ It is here that we get to a foundation of class as well as patriarchal power. Social space is organised in a particular arrangement, the objects in it are structured in ways that result in certain bodies or subjects disappearing, being exploited or normalised. Power always structures public and private space in ways that support this dominance. The princess becomes a power-securing object in the game of royalty.

³ Timothy Morton, Rachel Rose, S.151. Walther König, Köln (2021)