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### **Review of Ilenia Colón Mendoza and Margaret Ann Zaho, eds., Spanish Royal Patronage 1412–1804: Portraits as Propaganda**

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**Ilenia Colón Mendoza and Margaret Ann Zaho, eds. *Spanish Royal Patronage 1412–1804: Portraits as Propaganda*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018. 178 pp. + 38 ill.**

As outlined in the introduction by the co-editor Ilenia Colón Mendoza, the subtitle of this collection of six essays by art historians gives away its unifying theme: the political dimensions of portraits in a variety of media, although primarily in painting. Most of these portraits responded to Spanish royal patronage, but other patrons included an Aragonese king of Naples, Spanish viceroys of Naples, the Habsburg co-sovereigns of the Netherlands, and various, mostly unknown, patrons in Spanish America. Aside from the first essay on the early fifteenth century and the last one on the late eighteenth, the four central chapters focus on the seventeenth century, specifically on the reigns of Philip III and Philip IV.

Despite this unifying theme, the essays do not share a common approach or argument, and this is the strength of the collection, which suggests a number of conclusions. A first conclusion is about what most authors in this collection describe as an early modern Spanish style of royal portraiture. As is so often the case, it takes a foreign perspective to recognize those key Spanish elements. Ambassadors, visitors, and foreign-born Spanish courtiers were struck by the sobriety of Spanish portraits, which tended to eschew fantastic or otherworldly elements. It was enough to portray the person of the ruler just as they were, since their majesty, authority, and sacrality were taken for granted and therefore required little emphasis. This is especially true of the Spanish Habsburgs, whom we rarely see disguised as Olympian gods or encircled by halos of winged putti. Hence the naturalism of many Spanish royal portraits, which modern viewers may find surprisingly unflattering.

The essays in this collection largely support this view, although they also show there are limits to this generalization. First of all, one should qualify the Spanish character of this style of royal portraiture. The Spanish style was but a variant of an early modern international style, and many works for Spanish monarchs were by foreign artists, such as Titian or Rubens, who painted for rulers in other countries. In contrast, as Lisandra Estevez points out in her essay, Spanish rulers and viceroys patronized few works from the prominent Spanish artist Jusepe de Ribera, who spent most of his career in Naples, even though his “artful naturalism” that “captured likenesses of his subjects” seemed in line with Spanish tastes (123).

A similar problem with trying to identify a Spanish style is evident in the monumental sculptures and commemorative medals of the king of Naples Alfonso V of Aragon (1396–1458), the subject of the first essay by Margaret Ann Zaho, the other co-editor of this collection. Alfonso, who became ruler of the southern

Italian kingdom in 1442, drew on ancient Roman imperial and pagan themes; but as later Spanish monarchs would do, he avoided being represented as a pagan deity or even as a Roman emperor. The large triumphal arch in Naples, more than 40 meters tall, started in 1450 but completed after Alfonso's death, commemorated the Aragonese king's grand entry as conqueror of Naples. Although it is not freestanding, it recalls ancient Roman triumphal archways. Yet Zaho points out the procession and later the arch also had elements drawn from Arthurian legend and Christian attributes. Beyond the prominently displayed coat of arms of the house of Aragon and the Latin inscription on the façade calling Alfonso "King of Spain, Sicily, Italy," there is nothing especially Spanish or Aragonese about it, just as there is relatively little one can identify as uniquely Austrian in the style of the Spanish Habsburgs. Rulers often adopted local customs to cement their authority over a foreign people.

Another conclusion from the very different contributions in this collection suggests that there are multiple approaches to capturing the different facets of majesty and other qualities and attributes of rulers and of their changing aspirations. We are most familiar with expressing majesty through the magnificence of the artwork itself: the vibrant colors or arresting brushwork in painting, the size and expensive materials of sculpture and architecture, etc. The splendor of clothes and jewelry, as well as the use of symbols and references to religious and classical motifs can contribute to a sense of majesty by association with wealth, power, divinity, or antiquity. Yet the opposite was also true, especially for Spanish monarchs known for speaking few words and for the economy of their gestures. Sobriety, whether in their clothes or the setting of a portrait, could also express no less effectively majesty, mystery, or otherworldliness—sometimes more so than obvious signs of magnificence and greatness.

Niria E. Leyva-Gutiérrez demonstrates this in her chapter on Rubens's *Portrait of Isabella Clara Eugenia, Governor of the Netherlands* (ca. 1625). The daughter of Philip II, Isabel lived between 1566 and 1633. Portraits of the Infanta before and after she married in 1599 the Archduke of Austria Albert and became with him co-ruler of the Spanish Netherlands show her as one would expect for a princess of her times: wearing magnificent dresses, jewelry, and fancy hairdresses. One engraving by Rubens and Jan Muller from 1615 reproduced in the book shows Isabel sitting on a throne-like chair, holding an open fan that rests on her lap, looking seriously at the viewer. She wears her hair up, decorated with what looks like a tiara of flowers that gives her head the shape of a pineapple resting on an enormous circular ruff. The image effectively conveys her regal status. One can picture her as the intelligent and able ruler that she was. Yet after the death of Albert in 1621, she gave up her princely appearance for that of a nun. She asked her nephew and new Spanish monarch Philip IV to allow her to retire

to a convent, but instead he ordered her to remain as governor, now ruling alone. Rubens's late painting, made when she was 59, shows her wearing the plain habit of a Poor Clare. The image is in stark contrast to the engraving from a decade earlier. Instead of a fan, she now holds a fold from the long black veil that covers her head; instead of jewelry, she wears a rope around her waist; rather than an elaborate ruff on her neck there is plain white fabric. Without knowing her identity, one would think she is a nun or a saint, not a female ruler, even though the painting brings to mind portraits of widowed princesses and queens, such as Philip IV's second wife Queen Mariana of Austria after she became a widow and regent to her son Charles II. The asceticism in Isabel's portrait conveys what Leyva-Gutiérrez calls a "conspicuous simplicity" intended to project her image as a powerful Catholic female ruler who, as the biblical Deborah, inspired her people to stand against the enemies of the faith (82). In other portraits, her image presented her as a saintly ruler capable of securing prosperity and stability for her subjects at a time of war.

The naturalism of Rubens's painting recalls other royal portraits that observers described as making the monarch appear to be present, eliciting signs of respect from the viewer, such as bowing or kneeling. However, William Ambler's essay on court portraits in the reign of Philip III shows that lack of naturalism could also produce desirable effects in viewers. He points to two paintings by Juan Pantoja de la Cruz of the Duke of Lerma (1602) and Philip III (1606), which portray them in nearly identical poses and wearing almost identical armors rendered with great detail and naturalism, conveyed through shadows and reflections of light. In contrast, the face of the king seems bathed in soft, uniform light that creates no shadows, making it look not natural but flat, rendering the monarch, in Sarah Schroth's words, as an "icon of serene authority" (49). Such an image seems consistent with Philip III's emphasis on restricting his presence to a small circle of courtiers with the aim of enhancing his mystery, and ultimately, his majesty.

It is helpful to remember that the emphasis on the sacrality of monarchy was only one aspect of the identity the Spanish Habsburgs wanted to project in their kingdoms and abroad. Monarchs were also husbands and parents, conquerors and hunters, and portraits reflect all these facets of their identities. Not all religious paintings are serene icons. Drama can just as well promote the religious beliefs and aspirations of monarchs. Jennifer Olson-Rudenko makes such a case in her interpretation of Francisco de Zurbarán's *The Surrender of Seville to King Ferdinand III of Castile and León with Saint Peter Nolasco, 1248*, completed in 1629. Commissioned by the Mercedarians of Seville for one of their cloisters, this was only one of a series of twenty-two scenes to commemorate the life of the founder of their order, Peter Nolasco, and to promote his beatification, which happened one month after Zurbarán signed the contract for the paintings in

August 1628. Olson-Rudenko describes the theatrical elements in the painting, such as the dress and the poses of the surrendering Muslim officials who offer the key to the city to the Christian conqueror—a scene that did not actually take place. Whether the portraits of Ferdinand and the three knights accompanying him were in fact those of Philip III, Lerma, and other courtiers is debatable; but there is no denying that drama was compatible with the promotion of Spanish monarchs as defenders of the faith. Olson-Rudenko compares Zurbarán's painting with Velázquez's no less theatrical *The Surrender of Breda* (1634–35), commissioned by Philip IV, a lover of theater and actors, with one of whom he fathered the soldier and viceroy Don Juan José of Austria (whose equestrian portrait by Jusepe de Ribera is discussed in Estevez's essay). The combination of faith and drama are evident in *autos sacramentales*, central to early modern Spanish Catholic festivities, which in turn remind us of the Christian roots of European theater.

Both theatricality and the absence of naturalism are true of the “imaginary portraits” from the Viceroyalty of Perú in the eighteenth century discussed by Emily A. Engel in the last chapter of this collection. The theatrical use of curtains in portraits of Charles IV was hardly exclusive of the Bourbon dynasty. Engel describes the power of Spanish monarchs in their faraway American territories as relying on theatricality. Spanish Bourbon kings were actors wearing the mask of their character—a mask that did not have to look anything like their true visage. American artists unable to see the Spanish ruler could simply imagine them with no loss to royal authority. They sometimes rendered one Spanish monarch with looks taken from the portrait of another monarch regardless of whether they shared a resemblance. The unknown artist of a portrait of Ferdinand VII from around 1810 rendered him in schematic, even cartoonish, features. The viewer learns this is the portrait of the king because of the accompanying symbols—the crown and the scepter—and the bottom text announcing: “Ferdinandus VII Hispaniarum et Indiarum Rex....” These are royal portraits essentially because their title says so: “this is the king” (Plate 7). I was reminded of René Magritte's mischievous *La trahison des images* (*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*) (1929), which called into question basic assumptions about painting's ability to represent. Magritte's enigmatic work alerts us to the artificiality of representation in royal portraits, which depend on symbols and words to convey the authority of the person represented.

Finally, most of the essays address another important aspect of portraits highlighted in the book's subtitle: propaganda. Although the reception of works of art in the early modern period is especially difficult to document, the occasional examples cited are valuable. They remind us that, despite the common elements recurring in the portraits of Spanish monarchs, viceroys, and royal ministers, there is not a single way to interpret their political meaning or significance. The “terrifying gaze” of a monarch intended to impress an ambassador or a courtier

would not only have been inappropriate for the image of a very young ruler or a wedding portrait, but it might convey immobility of ideas, dourness, and inapproachability at a time when the crown needed to reform or to secure broader support from its subjects. In the rare occasion when a contemporary source reveals a response to a portrait, one may discover that something in a painting has been misinterpreted, such as the person's identity, as happened with some of the portraits described by Ambler, when Philip III was confused with his father Philip II or with Lerma. That confusion may have been partly intentional for political reasons, to show continuity in the dynasty or the role of the royal favorite in the government of the monarchy, but may not have been welcome when Philip III sought to distance himself from both of them for no less political reasons. What is absolutely clear is the great interest Spanish monarchs, governors, viceroys, both men and women in power, had in projecting their images. They did so in coins and medals, rarely in sculpture, but above all through prints, some of which were based on paintings few would have seen at the court, but which transferred to paper could reach subjects across the world. This is yet another reason to pay close attention to royal portraits.

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