

On Romani Contemporaneity: Rethinking the Małgorzata Mirga-Tas Exhibition in Seville

Miguel Ángel Vargas

mavargasrubio@gmail.com

Art Historian and Theatre Director, PhD candidate at Universidad Pablo de Olavide,
Seville, Spain

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1547-5370>

Miguel Ángel Vargas is a scholar and artist proficient in flamenco, theatre, and Romani history, with collaborations extending to esteemed institutions such as Bienal de Flamenco, Central Saint Martins, RomArchive and Washington National Gallery. He is a member of the Barvalipe Academy of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) and a lecturer at the master's programme in Flamenco Research and Analysis at the Universidad Pablo de Olavide. *Vargas* is pursuing a PhD in contemporary history at the same institution.



Abstract

This essay delves into the representation and reclamation of Romani identity and experience in contemporary art, focusing on the work of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, viewed from a Gitano point of view located in the South of Europe. Drawing on historical contexts and artistic movements, the essay examines the evolution of Romani portrayal in European art and the emergence of contemporary Romani art as a form of resistance and self-representation. Through an analysis of Mirga-Tas's artistic practice and its intersection with themes of coloniality, gender, and racialization, the essay explores how her work challenges dominant narratives and fosters a deeper understanding of Romani culture and history. Furthermore, the essay discusses the significance of Mirga-Tas's artistic interventions in reshaping perceptions of Romani identity and contributing to broader conversations about representation, power, and agency in the art world, including the cultural field of flamenco. Through a multidisciplinary approach encompassing art history, sociology, and cultural studies, this essay offers insights into the complexities of Romani contemporary art and its role in challenging entrenched stereotypes and advocating for social justice and recognition.

Keywords

- Contemporary Romani art
- Decolonisation
- Feminist criticism
- Flamenco
- Gitanos
- Minority studies
- Racism

Introduction

In 2023, I was invited by the Centro Andaluz De Arte Contemporáneo (CAAC) to write a text^[1] to serve as an introduction to the work of the Polish Romani artist Małgorzata Mirga-Tas as seen from the Roma-Gitano reality of Seville. The exhibition *Małgorzata Mirga-Tas: Remembranza y resignificación* (Małgorzata Mirga-Tas: Remembrance and resignification) was curated by Juan Antonio Álvarez Reyes and ran from 29 September 2023 to 31 March 2024 in Seville. Located in the heart of this historic city, the exhibition has provided an opportunity to open a debate on Romani self-representation on many different levels. It is the first time that the Andalusian government's official centre for contemporary art has dedicated a monographic exhibition to an artist of Romani origin. This essay is a further exploration of my original thoughts on the exhibition and how it resonates within contemporary Romani arts and culture.

A Deconstruction of the Representation of Romani Women

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Ante la pregunta de Spivak ¿Puede hablar el sujeto subalterno? El poeta responde: ¿pero es que acaso le escuchan? P.S: El subalterno habla pregunten a los siglos</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Mi abuela no ha leído a Marx</i> – Garcés 2018, 35</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">To Spivak's question: Can the subaltern subject speak? The poet answers: but do they even listen to him? PS: The subaltern speaks, ask the centuries.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>My grandmother has not read Marx</i> – Author's own translation</p> |
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The representation of those perceived and described as *Gypsies*^[2] in what we understand today as the history of European art can be divided into three periods. Let us assume that this division is as arbitrary as that of the academies. A first period, which coincides with the first Romani *migration* in Europe, where *Gypsies* are objects of marginal representation, almost a note of colour in the landscape.

1 For the original text, see: "Małgorzata Mirga-Tas: retablo de la contemporaneidad romani. E rromnianqeri zor." Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo. Available online: <http://www.caac.es/programa/FuentesalArenillas/frameMalogorzata.htm>.

2 *Gypsies*, *tigani*, or *zigeuner* are some of the historically degrading words imposed on Romani populations around the world. The history of each word depends on the different contexts to whose historical evolution it is indebted. When we use the term *Gypsy* in our text, we refer to the construction imposed on Romani bodies and lives as opposed to the term Roma. As Iulius Rostas says: "The imposition of this group identity was accomplished through certain centers of power controlled by non-Roma: the writings of academics, social institutions (especially state institutions), laws and policies targeting the Roma (including repressive measures), censuses, discriminatory, segregationist, and isolationist practices, and discourses and narratives that produce and reinforce a negative image of Roma. In fact, the identity created by non-Roma is reflected by the terms 'Gypsy,' 'Tsigan,' 'cygan,' or 'cigan,' etc., and the strong negative connotations attached to these terms" (Rostas 2019).

A second division can be made when Romani communities were already part of societies, where we see how *Gypsy* figures begin to occupy an archetypal character and even, we could say, take up space for almost individual representation, although without a name, in a double game of attraction and repulsion. A third stage, from the second half of the eighteenth century to the present, is that in which the position of representation of *Gypsies*, and conquered Romani women in particular, occupies a hegemonically obsessive position. Lou Charnon Deutsch would say: “The most common narrative form this Western obsession took was a heterosexual love story construed as unholy, uncontrollable, impractical, sometimes deeply satisfying at the sexual or sensual level, but nearly always fatal” (Charnon-Deutsch 2004, 240). In countries like France, Hungary, Russia, or Spain, the representation of Roma becomes, by contrast, a game of mirrors of quasi-aristocratic essences for a new bourgeoisie. *Gypsy* fashion, with the connivance of the mass media of image reproduction, offers a reactionary narrative that opposes the Enlightenment and allows them to find a space for the projection of their imaginaries. The bodies of Romani women function as a repository of the historical representation of a conflicting blackness, as Meira Goldberg describes in the case of the Spanish Romni: (...) “The Gitana casts her audacious glance backward to Spain and forward into the international arena, simultaneously representing Spain’s Blackness and its Whiteness” (Goldberg 2019, 50).³ A calm, domesticated and controlled Blackness that reproduces its traumatic experience in the space of art and that has filled the imagination of the subalterns with what Yuderkys Espinosa (Campus Polígono Sur 2021) would call *phantasmagorias* (Espinosa 2010) of modernity, which must be questioned, reappropriated, and returned in fair revenge.

From a Corner of Poland

Czarna Góra is a small village in Poland near Hungary and Slovakia, in the Spisz region, a territory located in southern Małopolska near the Tatra Mountains and between the Białka and Dunajec rivers. It is the start and return point for the Mirga family, experienced as a sort of Macondo – or as in my case, the Lebrija-Utrera-Jerez triangle of Spain where I was raised as a Gitano – and where a few Romani families have positioned themselves in front of the world since before 1799 (Mirga-Kruszelnicka and Mirga). A Catholic tradition, a dedication to economic activities of relative independence and mobility throughout the region and diversity (Jews, Hungarians, Slovaks) as a result of the village’s geopolitical position characterize the strength of the local Romani community. It is, however, the twentieth century that marks the traces of contemporary life: first, Nazi domination of this part of Poland, which especially hit the family, and later Soviet domination, with policies of forced settlement and literacy that resulted in the first university generation. These are years of artistic emergence and anthropological and artistic interest in Czarna Góra. Between 1978 and 1979, the Centre for Theatre Practices “Gardzienice” (Gardzienice Institute 2024), directed by Włodzimierz Staniewski, a student

³ Under the Bourbons, both enlightened followers of French mores and *casticistas*, or Spanish traditionalists, saw the Spanish Roma, indomitable, unintegratable, and long associated with the outlaw and outcast life, as emblematic of Otherness. Spain’s identification with this figure, often described euphemistically as a proto-romantic “orientalization,” is in fact a racialized downgrade. With the fandango, “Andalusian por excelencia” and flamenco – that is, Roma – eighteenth-century Spain danced Blackness for Europe (...) (Goldberg 2019, 85–86).

of and collaborator with Jerzy Grotowski, organized trips to Czarna Góra and Szaflary inspired by Romani art, culture, and history, to create theatrical shows with Roma. This mixture is part of the education and life experience of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, which results in an imaginary of commitment, emancipation, and pride in a community.

The Sevillian Gitano Reading of the Brief History of Contemporary Roma Art

Talking about contemporary Romani art today forces us, if we want to understand the anchors from where it starts, to question the imagination of the European avant-garde and its representations of Romani life, their *Gypsy life*. It forces us to observe the presence of French, Hungarian, Spanish, Russian and even Turkish Romani artists in universal exhibitions since the end of the nineteenth century and a constant tension with the colonial-national. It leads us to analyse non-hegemonic embodiments of our public image that are taken as national *representatives*. We even could question the emancipatory Romani imaginaries of the first period of the Soviet Revolution (O’Keeffe 2013), so important for the figure of the artist Helios Gómez and Romani critical discourses. The turning and liberation point, beyond a formal aspect, was the First World Romani Congress in London in 1971, when representational revision crosses the limits of art as spaces of power relations and proclaims one’s own capacity for enunciation and agency. In Hungary, the first exhibition of self-taught Romani artists was held in 1979, organised by the activist Ágnes Daróczi, which paved the way for art projects like *Elhallgatott Holokauszt/Hidden Holocaust* in 2004 (Junghaus 2014). Shortly afterward, in 1985, the French Ministry of Culture hosted the *Premier Mondial d’Art Tzigane* in Paris, the result of a long journey under the impetus of Tony Gatlif, Sandra Jayat, and Gérard Gartner (Barrera López 2022). In 2007, the first *Romani Pavilion*^[4] appeared as a ‘colateral’ activity at the Venice Art Biennale, with Delaine Le Bas’s project *Paradise Lost*. In the 2000s we saw the creation of the first galleries specialising in Romani artists, such as Kai Dikhas in Berlin and Gallery8^[5] in Budapest. These are also the years of the consolidation of some transnational Romani cultural institutions, such as the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) in Berlin, the Institute of Roma Culture of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, or the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno. In 2022, we also were able to attend the *RomaMoma* project at *documenta* in Kassel and the creation of the Helios Gómez Space in the Triana Ceramics Center in Seville, linked to the *Gitano Community Consulate of Seville* project of Factoría Cultural in Polígono Sur.

4 Since continued by ERIAC in 2018 and 2022.

5 Available online: <http://gallery8.org/>.

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas and Memory as Artistic Material

The Self-narratives of Romani Women

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| <p>Tú en una piera y yo en otra. Cuéntame tus alegrías que las mías son mu pocas.</p> <p><i>Noches Gitanas de Lebrija</i> – Inés Bacán 1991, 3:36^[6]</p> | <p>You on a stone and me on another. Tell me your joys because mine are very few.</p> <p><i>Gitano Nights in Lebrija</i> – Author’s own translation</p> |
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Then unexpectedly, *Re-Enchanting the World* (2022), a project by Wojciech Szymański and Joanna Warsza with works by Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, appears at the Polish pavilion at the 59TH Venice Biennale 2022 and puts Czarna Góra at the centre of the world. It is not the first time that a Romani artist has *focused* the gaze of those who scrutinise the lives of those constructed as others. In the words of Romani scholar and activist Ethel Brooks, Małgorzata Mirga-Tas “has built a palace for Roma at the center and crossroads of European history”. A pavilion that is presumed to be trans-European despite *representing* a nation-state of old Europe. A home to challenge an entire construction of centuries.

Małgorzata delves into Renaissance figuration (figure, perspective, focal point) with the aim of reconstructing a genealogy of the image of Roma, discovering, as Mignolo would say in *The Dark Side of the Renaissance*, the constitution of coloniality in the *alphabetical gaze* (Mignolo 1995, 109).^[7] She works on the images of the Palazzo Schifanoia frescoes, from the craft of painting as an art and craft, adding the layers of closeness of the stories of Roma to extract the sumptuousness of centuries from images of power. It plays at a new *figurative representation*, in which Romani bodies and their biographies, in the words of Wojciech Szymański and Joanna Warsza, are in a way more than represented, semi-present, in a kind of “supervised reincarnation” (Mignolo 1995, 140). By throwing materials on the painting, we feel, with another look, *the clean look*, or cleansed look, as José Heredia

6 This is a classical flamenco composition in *soleá* style, and it is sung and remembered as part of family heritage by Gitana singer Inés Bacán (1952), accompanied by her brother Pedro Bacán (Pedro Peña Peña, Lebrija, 1951–1997), a flamenco guitarist and concertist. Romani-Gitano scholar Iván Perriñez would talk on how certain lyrics of *cante gitano flamenco* signal the footprints of colonial trauma (2021, 1–19).

7 Mignolo writes: “How could the *tlatiminime*, routinely contemplating the paintings drawn by the *tlacuilo* and telling stories, exercising at the same time the power of the spoken word, be reconciled with the idea that the true meaning was contained in the silent words of the Sacred Book? Conflicting ideas about speech and writing, about the materiality of reading and writing cultures, is what the process of colonization brought about during the first encounters between Spanish men of letters and *Mexicas* skilled in painting and speaking. The seed was planted for similar interpretations and behaviors during the colonization of other European nations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”

Maya, Romani professor of literature (2000, 20–47)^[8] would say, the life after the life of the images and materials, since his *portraits* dress with clothes from the people portrayed but also with second-hand clothes from India and Bangladesh. The apparent sweetness of colour, the soft texture of the fabric, is a small *trompe l'oeil*. “The needle is something that does not harm another person, but rather repairs it,” Louise Bourgeois told us (Szymański and Warsza 2022, 95).

As an iconographic device or machine of interpellation, Małgorzata updates the past-present of the patrons’ works. There is no break in the fictional timeline of the figurative image as there would be in the Renaissance (imagine a portrait of a slave merchant dressed as a Roman or the Virgin Mary dressed as a Turk), but rather she places her contemporaries and relatives alongside other characters from the past in the hope of affirming the past-present sense of time of the *Gypsies*. The other Romani times. Everyday life and the violence of its rupture.

Thus, by constructing her own figuration of Romanies, she tries to show a body that should not be seen, a time that is not seen but is guessed; an ineffable music of joy and the *lache* (Lee 2010)^[9] of the innocence of the body. There is no pathetic emotion on their faces but rather reflective stillness.

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas’s Anti-racism as a Sweet Rebellious Provocation

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| Maj anglal amenθar | Before us |
| O paj ni tasavòlas | water did not drown, |
| I jag ni xasavòlas | nor fire destroyed |
| I balval ecumidèlas e patren | and the wind kissed the leaves |
| (...) | [...] |
| Maj anglal amenθar | Before us |
| ni limòri | no grave |
| ni kher | nor house |
| <i>Bi kheresqo bi limoresqo</i> | <i>Without a house, without a grave</i> |
| – Djuric 1979 | – Author’s own translation |

8 (...) The clean gaze is not the gaze of intelligence, but it is eminently intelligent. It has more to do with the gift of seeing the other without prejudice. The clean gaze does not see negative archetypes and intelligence has celebrated and continues to celebrate all over the world, especially in Europe, massacres in chains because of the murky tendency to refuse to see people in others. It is not the clear gaze of the speculative intelligence in search of answers to transcendent questions that I perceive when Federico García Lorca declares himself a friend of the Jews in Buenos Aires in 1934, at the height of the rise of Nazism, writes Poet in New York fascinated (from fascination, that gift of looking with interest, comes the exemplary validity of his social, political and aesthetic commitment today) by the pictorial sound of the blacks and sympathizes with the pain of the disinherited always. (...) (Heredia Maya 2000).

9 *Lache* would mean *shame* in Caló, the Spanish-Roma ethnolect. In Romanes *Lazhav*.

Andalusia, Watchtower of Modernity

Let us observe and think, from the Andalusian Center for Contemporary Art (CAAC), how an exhibition by an artist like Małgorzata, with an imaginary that has its roots in the European pictorial tradition but that at the same time also offers new readings about it, can also help us to open difficult debates.

Beyond simple, cumulative, even merely formal readings on a genealogy of the image of Roma in the history of art, as passive objects/models of figurative representation, it is necessary to open the historical record of the racialising gaze on subalternised bodies.

The philosopher Andrea Soto (2020, 10)^[10] tells us that although it is true that we live in a society of images, it is no less true that those images are few and they are repeated a lot. This is where we must look and change our focus. In a city like Seville that accumulates images of *Gypsies* in thousands of formats (from postcards to hundreds of thousands of Romani outfits) like the bricks that make up its buildings and avenues – an accumulation of expropriated capital that anonymises in the mass media the unique personality of Romani people, because they are *Gypsies* and they are nothing, they are anything or they are all the same, or they are ours, the flamencos, because they are from here, not like those outsiders – it is wonderful to have the opportunity to say: I had no idea. Breathe in Małgorzata's work and understand, or deal with it: why Seville, the city that once was the Gate to the Americas, from where came all racial legislation to plunder the wealth of *Abya Yala*, all the printing houses for the *Spanish Grammars* of Antonio de Nebrija and the *Don Quixote*^[11] of Cervantes, the paintings of saints, the painters of light and colour, and to where Black African slaves were brought first, and who lived together, and lived badly, with Moors, with *Gypsies*, sons of Allah and daughters of Lilith (Bornay 2020) in the Nova Roma, the New Rome. A story, a different story, that is proposed here is not only about breaking stereotypes and the telling of a neoliberal fantasy of inclusion and diversity. So? What *is* behind these proud Roma? Their defiant look and challenge.

África and her Girls – Towards a Romani Aesthetic as a Way out of Modernity

“Where are our Romani brothers and sisters?” It is a question that we ask when we travel to other latitudes and geographies. Here, Małgorzata transforms into Gosia and makes herself understood with some basic words that in Romanó are the same as in Caló, the Spanish of the Spanish Gitanos. Factoría Cultural, a

10 Author's own translation: "The critique of the excess of images does not begin with Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* or Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*; it goes back to the end of the nineteenth century with the growing concern for the organisation of the sensitive multiplicity of messages. However, I wonder how fruitful criticism is, in terms of giving us tools for the present, if it is only reduced to a denunciation. In fact, we could question whether there is an excess of images. There is undoubtedly a visual excess, but of a hegemony that never ceases to repeat the same images. However, the biggest problem is perhaps all those realities that have no images, that is, that lack the capacity to be imagined."

11 Documents showing the list of books sent from Seville to Abya Yala, or America in the European colonial sense, are common, including both Antonio de Nebrija's dictionaries of Castilian Spanish and novels such as Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. See: "Memoria de los libros que Francisco de Lyra enbia a Indias Tierra Firme en esta flota, en la nao San Juan Baptista, maestre Melchor Fonolosa...." Folio 146. Archivo General de Indias. CONTRATACION, 1162, N.5.

municipal facility in Polígono Sur, opened its doors to her and her team to share a process of listening and memory with África Fernández Montoya,^[12] the dancer África de la Faraona, and her daughters. Begun as a parallel activity to CAAC, it is explained by Małgorzata's need to build networks among Romani women. Their realities are different, but they manage to communicate each other's affection. África takes a picture with her mother, the dancer Pilar Montoya La Faraona, may God preserve her, and her daughters África and Rosario share the photos stored in their cell phones, portraying themselves perpetually. Peripheries of the system unite against the violence of spaces of power: representing oneself, in a simple way, from personal photos as a form of identity negotiation.

The Sacristy of Flamenca Gitanas

Figure 1. *The Sacristy of Gitanas Flamencas*



The Sacristy of Gitanas Flamencas by Małgorzata Mirga-Tas.
Remembrance and Resignification Exhibition,
Centro Andaluz De Arte Contemporáneo, 2023.
Installation view. Photo: Pepe Moron. Copyright: Małgorzata Mirga-Tas.

The commission to Małgorzata lies in taking Francisco Zurbarán's three works for the sacristy of Santa María de las Cuevas^[13] as an excuse to reflect on three lives of Andalusian Romani women marked

12 África Fernández Montoya (b. 1983, Seville) is the daughter of Pilar Montoya La Faraona, one of the daughters of the *bailaor* Antonio Montoya Flores, *El Farruco*, creator of a very personal dance that has left its mark on almost three generations of Gitano artists from Seville. It is from this context of family and professional flamenco experience that Africa has toured many of the best theatres in Europe, Japan, and the United States. As a very young girl, she was a member of the company of the legendary Flamenco Puro, which toured the cities of the United States in the mid-1980s.

13 *La Virgen de las Cuevas* (ca. 1665), *La visita de San Bruno a Urbano II* (ca. 1665), *San Hugo en el refectorio* (ca. 1665). Seville: Museo de Bellas Artes.

by flamenco, directly or tangentially. We are faced with a studio photograph, another one of a live performance, and another of a family celebration. Here, Romani bodies send signals from different moments in history and their stories, whose diverse biographies interrelate with common pains and joys. The mantle of the Virgin of the Caves and the fabrics of the monastic habits and doublets give way to an iconography that crosses into the concepts of flamenco, Gitanos, and Roma.

Juana la Macarrona, Juana Vargas de las Heras

(b. 1970 in Jerez de la Frontera, d. 1947 in Seville)

And why do you leave “the stage”?

– *Because I can't do it anymore, son. I can't work many nights because these legs of mine that have been made of bronze are now made of wire. That Macarrona who spent a week partying, dancing, singing and drinking, went down in history. A ruin, son!*

Juana (La Macarrona) o cuarenta años de baile que desaparecen
[Juana (La Macarrona) or forty years of dance vanishing]

– López Macías or *Galerín* 1926^[14]

Figure 2. *Juana La Macarrona*



Juana La Macarrona by Małgorzata Mirga-Tas.
Remembrance and Resignification Exhibition,
Centro Andaluz De Arte Contemporáneo, 2023.
Installation view. Photo: Pepe Moron. Copyright: Małgorzata Mirga-Tas.

14 Augustin López Macías or *Galerín* (1881–1944), his nickname in the press, was a journalist and publicist active in the first part of the twentieth century. He was very close to flamenco art and Gitanos. His republican political commitment led him to be ‘purged’ by the Franco’s authorities after the Spanish Civil War.

Juana Vargas de las Heras is the paradigm of a precocious Romani artist with an active presence in the Cafés *Cantantes* of Seville, Malaga, Barcelona, and Madrid before arriving in Seville at the age of 16 in the last decades of the nineteenth century, in a moment in which the country witnessed continuous political pronouncements. At the age of 17, she travelled to Paris as part of a company of flamenco artists *Gitanes de Grenade* (although almost none of them were from Granada) to participate in the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889. It is in this context that the Parisian press created for her the epithet of “*Queen of the Gypsies*.” It is interesting, not so much the mythomania about Juana la Macarrona, but to reflect on the construction that was made around her: what others saw (and reflected) on her and what, we dream, she was seeing about herself. The image that serves as the basis for the work is part of a photo book (*Gitans d’Espagne* by Don R. Bonaparte published in 1889) of the members of the company, practically unknown until recently. Juana, very young, poses with the guitar into *barbero style*, smiles listlessly and almost virginally, looking defiantly at the *Frenchman* who portrayed her. It is urgent to reappropriate that joy. It is urgent, therefore, to resignify these images of which they did not have control.

Herminia Borja

(b. 1959, Seville)

Maja aristocrática
de los más elevados salones.

Duquesa democrática
me titulan por mis aficiones.

A pesar de mi abolengo
de modelo tuve que servir.

Sangre chula tengo
aunque en un gran palacio nació.

La maja aristocrática
– *Niña de los Peines* or Pavón Cruz 1936

I am a nice aristocrat
of the most elegant rooms.

Democratic marchioness
they name me for my hobbies.

Despite my ancestry
I served as a model to painters.

And I have cool blood
although in a great palace I was born.

I’m an aristocratic *maja*
– Author’s own translation

Herminia Borja is a singer who dances freely, a mother, a grandmother, and a resident of Seville’s Polígono Sur, one of the poorest neighbourhoods in all of Spain. She was born in the midst of Franco’s regime, shortly after the disappearance of the Spanish colonial Protectorate of Morocco. Her presence in the local flamenco scene dates back to the 1980s from when, after her divorce, she made her childhood dream come true. She tells of her childhood as that of a good girl who, even though she was aware of her family poverty, fulfilled what her family and the state expected of her. Her musical references not only contemplate those of the history, familial or hegemonic, of the flamenco genre, but she also dared to embody in her singing and in her body what was coming to her from the other side of the Atlantic. She admires Aretha Franklin, Tina Turner, and Black evangelical music. She has no formal academic or

Figure 3. *Herminia Borja*



Herminia Borja by Małgorzata Mirga-Tas. Remembrance and Resignification Exhibition, Centro Andaluz De Arte Contemporáneo, 2023. Installation view. Photo: Pepe Moron. Copyright: Małgorzata Mirga-Tas.

musical training, but she is heir to an artistic tradition that allows her to have a job: singing from the trench of the Sevillian night, where a divorced single Romani woman who is never alone is a heroine struggling against drunks. The overwhelming personality of her art and her wise presence on stage and at home make her a matriarch who conjures, with a kind of Romani and flamenco feminism, the dark fate of the instability of work in partying. Photographer Aitor Lara portrayed her in the tribute he received from his neighbourhood on 21 June 2023 in a double portrait: one tension, the other listening.

Manuela Carrasco Jiménez and **Catalina Rubio Carrasco**

(b. 28 May 1926, d. 13 Feb 2012)

(b. 1952, Jerez de la Frontera)

| | |
|---|--|
| Los tiempos han cambiado. | The time has changed. |
| ¿Qué te parece ahora el mundo, Manuela? | What does the world look like to you now, Manuela? |
| – ¿Que cómo me parece? | What do I think? |
| Muy feo... | The world is ugly. |
| <i>Más fuerte cantaba yo</i> | <i>I sang louder</i> |
| – Firmino and Sánchez 2011 | – Author's own translation |

Figure 4. *Manuela Carrasco and Catalina Rubio*



Manuela Carrasco and Catalina Rubio by Małgorzata Mirga-Tas.
Remembrance and Resignification Exhibition, Centro Andaluz De Arte Contemporáneo, 2023.
Installation view. Photo: Pepe Moron. Copyright: Małgorzata Mirga-Tas.

Manuela Carrasco Jiménez, a blonde Roma with blue eyes, was a grandmother, mother, sister and, in her own way, also a businesswoman from Jerez who, without knowing how to read or write, was able to raise

12 children. She maintained a social position above that of her brothers as a result of her marriage to her husband, a son of the successful Jerez bourgeoisie after the coup d'état and subsequent Spanish Civil War. Manuela was born into a family of Gitano fieldworkers who laboured in the farmhouses between Jerez and Lebrija, shortly before the 1929 Ibero-American Exhibition in Seville, which she saw as a child, since, in one of the poorest moments of her childhood, Manuela, together with her sister Juana, lived in Seville supported by an aunt who danced at the Exhibition Casino in the flamenco ensemble of *La Malena y sus Gitanas*. After the civil war, she lived through years of abuse and contempt until the father of her first children decided to formalize the relationship, after which more children would come. In this family portrait she is accompanied by her daughter Cati, and in it we must guess the continuous identity negotiations of a lady who had to hide part of her identity through bourgeois clothing and who attends the social events of her non-Romani family. His sister Juana fell on the wrong side of life, his sister Curra was active in communism, and his brother Manuel, the artist Manolito Jero, sang to the American soldiers at the Rota Naval Base. She understood love as surrender until, once her husband died, she clung to life, her flamenco and Romani memory: “May she wait for me many years.”

Epilogue

Expressing oneself from a place of poverty and uncertainty differs greatly from the comfort of an office: it is the tale of a Romani artist from Lebrija, envisioning conversations about Romani art, reaching out to an ethereal and enigmatic audience. They believe that they understand it even before laying eyes upon it.

5 March 2024
House without number
Calle Residencia de estudiantes
Polígono Sur
Spain, Seville

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