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Virtuous Women; *Flower Iconography in Female Portraits*  
*During the Seventeenth Century*

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## ABSTRACT

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This study examines the symbolic meaning and iconography of flowers depicted in portraits of women produced during the second half of the seventeenth century. Six paintings of Swedish royal or noble women where different flowers feature as the sole or most prominent symbolic element are analysed through Erwin Panofky's method of iconology. A gender based theoretical approach is used in order to discuss the portraits in relation to topics such as the social expectations of women, female agency and self-image, and the historically desired traits and virtues women were to possess during the relevant time period. The study further traces the artistic development of female portraiture as a genre, from the late Renaissance through the early and high aroque.

**Keywords** - portraiture - 17th century - flower iconography - symbolism - Baroque - gender - Ehrenstrahl - David Beck - Munnichhoven - Mijtens the Elder

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## Introduction

The genre of portraiture has historically been considered less than other categories of art due to its indirect association with copying and imitation. Even though the idea of likeness, or mimesis, is central to any portrayal, all portraits can be said to show a distorted, partial or ideal version of the sitter. In Renaissance art theory, a need for artists to invent creative ways to represent ideal images emerged.<sup>1</sup> This development continued during the seventeenth century, where the concept of identity and social status became intertwined and presented through, not only likeness, but gesture, dress, setting, facial expression and props. These variables differed greatly depending on the gender of the sitter, as the social expectations of what was feminine or masculine was based on rigid gender roles for both sexes. Young girls and women were depicted in pleasing gestures and poses together with different objects that served as symbols that spoke of the woman's youth, her beauty, her grace or her loyalty. These were considered the most important traits she was to possess to be a success by societal standards.<sup>2</sup>

One type of symbolic objects used within portraiture were flowers. The inclusion of different flowers rose in popularity during the sixteenth and seventeenth century with the developing field of botany and corresponding flower illustrations.<sup>3</sup> Different flowers were incorporated into portraits of royal and noble women. These flowers came to signify various desired traits these women wished to possess, or be perceived to possess. As this iconography of flowers is somewhat unknown to modern audiences, the following study will examine and unveil their meaning and what they were meant to signal about the portrayed women.

### Research Aim

This thesis aims to examine the usage and symbolic meaning of flowers in seventeenth century female portraiture among royalty and nobility in Sweden. Through investigating six chosen examples produced between 1649 and 1690, the study hopes to uncover the intended iconography of the depicted flowers in relation to the portrayed sitter. This period is important to examine, as formative changes occurred during the second half of the seventeenth century in the socially accepted ways women were allowed to express themselves, which subsequently affected how women were depicted within portraiture. The time period in question also contains the progression from the early to the high Baroque within art, and because of this, the purpose of this study is further to trace these changes in relation to flower iconography. This analysis hopes to reveal the social functions of the portraits and examine how ideas of gender were constructed through symbolic discourse.

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<sup>1</sup> West, S., *Portraiture*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 12

<sup>2</sup> Sidén, K., *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, Raster, Diss. Uppsala Universitet, Stockholm, 2001, p. 162-63.

<sup>3</sup> Cavalli-Björkman, G., Norrman, J., & Ernstell, M., *Blomsterspråk*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 2007, p. 23.

## Material

The material for this study consists of six portraits produced between 1649 to 1690. This time period is particularly interesting to examine, as it is possible to trace the advancement from the early Baroque, where remnants of Renaissance traditions still exist, to the eruption of the high Baroque. Three portraits from the early baroque and three from the high Baroque have been chosen in order to study this development within portraiture in relation to the usage of flower symbolism in these portraits.

The portraits were chosen because they all portray known women of Swedish royal or noble descent. In these portraits, several different or singular flowers exist as the sole or most prominent symbolic element, while still portrayed in individual ways in each painting. This was decided in order to broaden the spectrum of the analysis to provide more compelling results. Although the portrait of Queen Ulrika Eleonora of Sweden contains no true ‘flower’ but a spruce twig, it is fitting to include since the twig belongs to a plant and is a clear symbolic addition to the portrait.

## State of Research

### *Swedish Portraiture in the Seventeenth Century*

The most extensive publication analysing Swedish portraits from the regency era of Queen Christina of Sweden is Karl Erik Steneberg’s doctoral thesis *Kristinatidens Måleri* from 1955.<sup>4</sup> Steneberg aims to examine portraits produced during Queen Christina's reign and interpret what objects were depicted in these portraits in order to examine what symbols were deemed important at the time and what they represent. He surveys portraits produced by court painters David Beck, Hendrick Munnichhoven and Sebastien Bourdon, while also discussing other genres such as landscape motifs, and the practice of the painters guild contrasted to that of provincial painters. Steneberg has relied on biographic data about the artists, Queen Christina, and other key figures of the Swedish elite such as Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie in order to trace the relationship between patrons, sitter and artists to fully understand the art in its original context. He utilises Erwin Panofsky’s method of iconology together with Cesare Ripa's symbolic encyclopaedia *Iconologia* in order to analyse what objects served as symbols and how they would be understood to audiences at the time.<sup>5</sup>

Steneberg’s scope of painting is substantial, and because of this he analyses his chosen works in varying detail. Thus, there is need for a more in depth study of portraits he only mentions in passing such as the portrait of Queen Christina, and the one of Maria Euphrosyne.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, even though Steneberg identifies what flowers are depicted and

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<sup>4</sup> Steneberg, K. E., *Kristinatidens måleri*, Allhem, Diss. Lund universitet, Malmö, 1955

<sup>5</sup> Steneberg, *Kristinatidens måleri*, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Steneberg, K. E., *Kristinatidens måleri*, pp. 144-45, 169.

their possible symbolic meaning, he does not linger on the implication of this, nor does he draw any overarching conclusions about the symbolic usage of flowers between any portraits. As this is the case, there is ample room to expand the analysis of these paintings with a particular focus on the flowers' intended meaning.

Another publication examining portraiture is Boo von Malmberg's *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden* from 1978: an encyclopaedia over the history and traditions of Swedish portraiture from the middle ages up until the end of the second World War. Von Malmbergs particular task, apart from compiling already established historical research, is to elaborate and expand the knowledge about the active artists during the Vasa age. He examines printed or hand written genealogical historical sources to add as much reliable information as possible. His meticulous work makes it a very useful publication for biographical facts on specific artists and surveys of different periods of Swedish art.<sup>7</sup> However, von Malmberg does not perform his own symbolic interpretation of the artworks he presents, but recounts already established information. Because of this, the same benefits of re-examining and adding more in depth analysis about the relevant paintings as in the case of Steneberg is created by this thesis study.

A more recent publication on Swedish portraiture during the seventeenth century is Karin Sidén's doctoral dissertation from 2001, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*. Sidén examines portraits of children produced between 1560 and 1720 with the purpose of understanding their intended iconography and function. She examines how the children are portrayed, investigating more specifically what poses, roles, attributes, facial gestures or other mannerisms were favoured and the implications of this. Sidén also focuses on how the portraits were received by the patrons, and how ethical and social roles adapted to fit what was deemed proper at the time through notions of 'virtues' and 'lineage'.<sup>8</sup> In particular she examines royal portraits of children, especially early depictions of Queen Christina and the Caroline royal children, tracing the iconography used for their early lives.<sup>9</sup>

### *Women and Portraits*

For further reading on women in portraiture with a gender perspective, the articles in Andrea Pearson's *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe: gender, agency, identity* from 2008 provides useful perspectives on questions about female identity and agency in portraits.<sup>10</sup> Especially relevant for this thesis study is Christiane Hertel's 'Engaging Negation in Hans Holbein the Younger's *Portrait of Christina of Denmark, Duchess of Milan*'. The article

<sup>7</sup> Malmberg, B., von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, Allhem, Malmö, 1978

<sup>8</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, pp. 14, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pp. 59.

<sup>10</sup> Pearson, A., G. (ed.), *Women and portraits in early modern Europe: gender, agency, identity*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2008

examines how the sixteen year old Christina of Denmark was allowed safety in her widowed status, which resulted in more freedom to control her public image through portraiture. Hertel even seems to suggest that this freedom of self representation influenced Holbein the Younger when taking her portrait for King Henry VIII, making her appear as an unattainable widow. Although little is known about the portrait's real influence on the failed marriage negotiations, Hertel's well-argued assertion of a woman taking control and carefully crafting her own public image within the socially accepted boundaries shows the power portraits possess.<sup>11</sup>

'All the Queen's Women: Female Double Portraits at the Caroline Court', by Jennifer L Hallam from the aforementioned publication, similarly deals with women controlling their own representations. Hallam discusses a series of female double portraits commissioned for Anthony van Dyck from early Stuart ladies at the court of King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria. A tradition of female double portraits displaying female traits such as fertility and motherhood was already common, but in the 1630's van Dyck began painting double portraits of women with typical male qualities, namely bravery, intelligence and friendship. These women all belonged to the inner circle of the Queen. Hallam draws the conclusion that by following the Queen's lead, the ladies could negotiate gender identity in their own image and in doing so promote 'manly' traits as part of female virtue.<sup>12</sup>

### **Theoretical Perspective**

The study will utilise a gender based theoretical approach in order to interpret the intended symbolic meaning of the flowers included in the portraits and their relation to the depicted women. In the essay 'How Images got their Gender' by Mary D. Sheriff from *A Companion to Gender History*, 2006, Sheriff makes the important observation that when analysing paintings depicting gendered stereotypes of women, one must understand the specific constraints that ruled women's life and work at the time.<sup>13</sup> As this thesis is concerned with portraits painted during the seventeenth century, the social bounds and obedience norms for women need to be assessed as conditions on which the paintings could exist. Although it is unclear what control the sitters had of their depictions, as the flowers or other symbolic objects could be included as they were deemed appropriate by the artist, one must remember that the social pressure to adhere to femininity would encourage women to be presented in a way that was accepted and accepted by society. The characteristics of this desired femininity can be summed up with terms such as beauty, youth, grace and innocence.<sup>14</sup> Finding these

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<sup>11</sup> Pearson, *Women and portraits in early modern Europe: gender, agency, identity*, pp. 107-137.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp 137-160.

<sup>13</sup> Sheriff, D., M., 'How Images got their Gender', Meade, T. A. & Wiesner, M. E. (eds.), *A Companion to Gender History*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Oxford, 2006, p. 155.

<sup>14</sup> Sheriff, 'How Images got their Gender', p. 158.

traits interpreted through symbolic objects in the paintings should be read not as stemming from vanity, but as a form of what self-expression a woman was permitted to engage with at the time.

This notion is examined by Kathleen Nicholson in her article ‘The ideology of feminine ‘virtue’: the vestal virgin in French eighteenth-century allegorical portraiture’ published in *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* edited by Joanna Woodall.<sup>15</sup> Nicholson argues that one of the reasons female allegorical portraits increased drastically between 1700 and 1750 in France, was because women such as Jeanne Antoinette Poisson (1721-1764), also known as Madame de Pompadour and an influential mistress of the king, commissioned a plethora of portraits of herself depicted as various allegorical motifs and took control over their own image and what defined their womanhood. Nicholson states that ‘allegorisation surely provided a positive means of exploring the polymorphous nature of identity’.<sup>16</sup>

Although the portraits examined in this thesis were produced in the second half of the seventeenth century and contain no immediate allegorical connections to popular motifs such as Diana, Flora, Hebe or Venus, there is no doubt that what symbolic elements are placed within the image could serve the same permitted form of self expression for the sitters, although more subtly. This study aims to examine these elements through the lens of the societal expectations of womanhood and the desired female traits placed upon the sitters in the second half of the seventeenth century. This theoretical standpoint will be utilised together with the method of approach, Iconology, to create the foundation for the thesis analysis.

## **Method**

This study will utilise an iconological method as presented by Erwin Panofsky in his *Studies in iconology: humanistic themes in the art of the Renaissance*, first published in 1939.<sup>17</sup> The method is beneficial for analysing works produced during the Renaissance and the Baroque, as it divides the analytical steps into the three distinct concepts of *form*, *subject matter* and *meaning*. By analysing these aspects together, every part of the artwork is considered and a complete interpretation of the work's intrinsic meaning is presented.<sup>18</sup>

Keith Moxey identifies a few difficulties with Panofsky’s method in his text ‘Panofsky’s Concept of ‘Iconology’ and the Problem of Interpretation in the History of Art’ that one must bear in mind when both performing and reading the results of an iconological

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<sup>15</sup> Nicholson, K., ‘The ideology of feminine ‘virtue’: the vestal virgin in French eighteenth-century allegorical portraiture’, Woodall, J., (ed.), *Portraiture: facing the subject*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997 p. 52

<sup>16</sup> Nicholson, ‘The ideology of feminine ‘virtue’: the vestal virgin in French eighteenth-century allegorical portraiture’, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> Panofsky, E., *Studies in iconology: humanistic themes in the art of the Renaissance*, [New ed.], Harper & Row, New York, 1977 [1972]

<sup>18</sup> Panofsky, *Studies in iconology: humanistic themes in the art of the Renaissance*, pp. 5-17.

analysis.<sup>19</sup> The main issue, according to Moxey, is Panofsky's rhetoric when describing the iconographical interpretation together with the phrase 'intrinsic meaning'. He argues that this concept can trick the audience into thinking that the analysis is an eternal truth. "Panofsky's rhetoric seems to imply that the meaning of a work of art is accessible to the historian in the same way regardless of his own position in history and that it is therefore possible for his interpretation to be valid for all time."<sup>20</sup> As this definitive stance could be quite damaging for anyone who utilises the method of iconology, it is safest to acknowledge that this analysis should be seen as an attempt to reconstruct what intrinsic meaning the portraits in question might have had at the time of their production with a specific focus on female gender expression. One must also recognize that this analysis might lack in accuracy due to the limits of historical research and the subconscious bias of the writer.

Finally, to aid the iconographical analysis, a key source will be used to interpret the possible symbolic meaning of the flowers in the chosen portraits. Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, first published in 1593, became a highly regarded guide for artists' all over Europe.<sup>21</sup> The book contains rules, instructions and illustrations demonstrating how to represent personifications of different virtues in the correct manner. According to Steneberg, *Iconologia* was available to Swedish audiences in a French and Dutch version, both from 1644, and thus it is likely that court painters such as Beck and Munnichhoven would have been aware of or taken inspiration from the popular lexicon.<sup>22</sup> Other similar handbooks that will be referenced throughout the analyses are the 1550 Lyons edition of Andrea Alciati's *Emblemata*, Pierio Valeriano Bolzani's 1623 edition of *Hieroglyphica*, and Otto van Veem's 1608 edition of *Amorum Emblemata*.<sup>23</sup>

## Disposition

The thesis study is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter starts with an introduction to the traditions within female portraiture during the Renaissance and the stylistic development that took place with the reign of Queen Christina. The allegorical portrait is explained along with a short introduction to the usage of flowers within this genre of portraits. The next chapter begins with a summarised biography of the two artists David

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<sup>19</sup> Moxey, K., 'Panofsky's Concept of 'Iconology' and the Problem of Interpretation in the History of Art.' *New Literary History*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1986, pp. 265–74.

<sup>20</sup> Moxey, 'Panofsky's Concept of 'Iconology' and the Problem of Interpretation in the History of Art.' p. 269.

<sup>21</sup> Ripa, C., *Iconologia*, (1603), Tea, Milano, 1992

<sup>22</sup> Steneberg, *Kristinatidens måleri*, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> Alciati, A., *Emblemata: Lyons, 1550*, Scolar, Aldershot, 1996[1550], Bolzani, V., Pierio, G., *Hieroglyphica, seu de sacris Aegyptiorum: aliarumque gentium literis commentarii, libris quinquaginta octo digesti. quibus additi sunt duo hieroglyphicorum libri*, P. Frellon, Lyons, 1626, Veem, O, van & Verstegan, R., *Amorum emblemata, figuris æneis incisa studio Othonis Væni Batauo-Lugdunensis. = Emblemes of loue. With verses in Latin, English, and Italian.*, [Typis Henrici Swingenij.] Venalia apud auctorem, Antuerpiæ, 1608.

Beck and Hendrich Munnichhoven. The three earliest portraits of interest are then analysed and interpreted in chronological order.

The beginning of the third chapter describes the characteristics and trends within high Baroque art, followed by a description of the most common features of female portraiture during this time. The chapter continues with biographies of Martin Mijtens the Elder and David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl, before the final three portraits are analysed and interpreted in the same manner as the previous chapter.

Finally, the thesis conclusion consists of a surveying summary of what results can be established from the analysis and in what general symbolic discourse.

### **Delimitations**

The individual stylistic expressions or technique of the different artist's is not something that will be examined in this thesis. As Beck, Munnichhoven, Ehrenstrahl and Mijtens the Elder were appointed court painters in Sweden, their possible artistic contribution will only be mentioned if relevant to the analysis as this study mainly focuses on the symbolic usage of the flowers in relation to the sitter.

Other symbolic elements apart from flowers present within the portrait will be mentioned if deemed important for the final interpretation of the flowers within the image. If the flowers in question are connected to several symbolic interpretations, only the ones relevant for the portrait in question will be discussed as decided by the most plausible interpretation.

The study will not provide any extensive biographical background of the sitters, as that is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, relevant biographical context will be provided when appropriate for the analyses. Similarly, the painting's provenance or questions of the attribution will be discussed if deemed necessary. The length of each analysis is determined by factors such as available biographical material, amount of different flowers within each portrait and relevancy of the symbolic interpretation.

## 1. Flowers and Symbolism in Female Portraiture

Towards the second half of the seventeenth century, beginning with the reign of Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-1689) between 1644 to 1654, a clear shift in what ideals and traits the high society favoured women to possess can be seen when comparing portraits of that time to the century prior. During the Vasa era and the Swedish Renaissance from the early sixteenth century up until 1644, the queens, princesses and noble ladies are depicted in full or half figure from the front or with a very slight turn to one side.<sup>24</sup> Their bodies are stiff and their faces tranquil and expressionless. They often have their hands neatly folded in front, or holding onto their gloves, prayer books or royal regalia. Christian ideals of chastity, worship and servitude were the desired traits of these women and the portraits were made to mirror these qualities which resulted in the serious, sombre portraits.<sup>25</sup>

During the early sixteenth century, portraiture became increasingly popular among the Swedish nobility which resulted in artists exploring new ways to express the desired traits in women. This can be seen in the more relaxed stances, fluid poses and slight movements that began to dominate the genre. The sitter is rarely depicted head on, but normally with a slight turn to the right or left. Determination can be found within these poses, and the women are not just holding a rigid object in their hands as before, but are engaging with said item in a purposeful manner. These ideals came from the Baroque art that developed in other parts of Europe, reaching Sweden through the various mostly north European court painters employed by the regents of this period.<sup>26</sup>

When engaging with portraits of women from the seventeenth century, one must also be aware of the historical context and societal expectations of that time. Women were seen not just as subordinates, but lesser than men. They could not hold any official positions of power, neither military nor official. Daughters inherited less than sons, and their assets were always controlled by a male relative unless they were widowed. Unmarried or not, the woman was always to submit to her male guardianship. To secure an heir, a son to continue the family name, was the noble woman's main purpose.<sup>27</sup> This fixed gender structure allowed for little freedom, which is why it has been argued by art historians such as Kate Nicholson that the rise of allegorical portraiture served as an outlet for women's self expression and could allow them influence over how they were perceived by society.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Malmberg, von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, pp. 22-26.

<sup>25</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, p. 163.

<sup>26</sup> Malmberg, von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, p. 69.

<sup>27</sup> Norrhem, S., *Kvinnor vid maktens sida: 1632-1772*, Nordic Academic Press, Lund, 2007, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholson, 'The ideology of feminine 'virtue': the vestal virgin in French eighteenth-century allegorical portraiture', p. 58.

### *Allegory and Portraiture*

In Europe during the Seventeenth century, allegorical portraits became the new favoured genre within portraiture for women. The sitter is portrayed as their chosen subject, usually goddesses from Greek and Roman mythology and becomes by association perceived to radiate the same virtues connected to that figure. Diana, goddess of the hunt and a symbol of chastity was one of the most popular subjects, while personifications of Venus, Hebe or Caritas were also common.<sup>29</sup> Also popular, was to be portrayed as more general personifications such as Flora, a Virgin vestal or an array of different Muses.<sup>30</sup> Various objects such as fruits, animals, clothing pieces, candles and books were included in these portraits to signal various traits of the sitter: a small dog for loyalty, or a prayer book to show piousness. Most of the iconological language used in painting at this time had its roots in antique literature such as *The Metamorphoses* by Ovid or came from the Bible, from which a web of symbols had been developed starting in the Middle ages.<sup>31</sup>

### *Flowers in Allegorical Portraiture*

Different flowers served as symbolic objects to signal various traits and virtues within allegorical portraits. Most of their symbolism during the Renaissance and Baroque era came from old traditions in the Roman empire, but also from the resurgence in the cultural interest in flowers that happened in the early middle ages. The ancient flower iconography was adapted and re-interpreted for new purposes within christianity. This is best exemplified by how the rose, a symbol for Venus and earthly love, came to symbolise the Virgin as *rosa sine spina* – a rose without a thorn.<sup>32</sup> Both of these connotations, along with other symbolic interpretations of the rose, could be utilised within the same portrait. Thus a rose within a portrait of a young girl could simultaneously stand for both her beauty and her purity.

Many of the most popular flowers at the time, such as roses, lilies, irises, hyacinths and tulips, had several established interpretations and their symbolic meaning depended on the specific context of the portrait.<sup>33</sup> Youth, purity, love, beauty, devotion and innocence were all crucial female virtues, and one or several different flowers were connected symbolically to each one. A tulip could be included as a symbol of devotion if held by a young girl, while a wilting tulip included in a portrait of a widow would stand for death.<sup>34</sup> If included in a

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<sup>29</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, p. 162.

<sup>30</sup> Nicholson, 'The ideology of feminine 'virtue': the vestal virgin in French eighteenth-century allegorical portraiture', p. 56.

<sup>31</sup> Steneberg, *Kristinatidens måleri*, p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Drysdall, D. L. & Hourihane, C., (eds.), *The Routledge companion to medieval iconography*, Routledge, London, 2017, p. 459.

<sup>33</sup> Fisher, C., *Flowers of the Renaissance*, J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2011, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Campbell, E., *Tulip symbolism in the seventeenth-century Dutch emblem book*, MA diss., Utrecht University, 2019, p. 39 and Cavalli-Björkman, G., Norrman, J., & Ernstell, M., *Blomsterspråk*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 2007, p.71.

painting of a man, the tulip was considered to indicate his position of power.<sup>35</sup> Flowers were, in this way, easy and readily available objects that could portray several qualities desired in women and were favoured because flowers are visually pleasing to look at. When examining the iconography of flowers in portraits of noble women from the seventeenth century, one must also consider the surrounding context of the sitter, as the interpretation of the flower can vary greatly depending on these contextual details.

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<sup>35</sup> Cavalli-Björkman, Norrman & Ernstell, *Blomsterspråk*, p. 94.

## 2. Portraits of the Early Baroque (1649-1654)

### The Painters: David Beck and Hendrick Munnichhoven

Solely international artists were employed at court during Queen Christina's short reign. These artists typically travelled through Europe, taking employment at different courts for varying amounts of time before moving on after being sought elsewhere. They often reached their position by being recommended by a noble patron for whom they had produced several accomplished commissions.<sup>36</sup> The dutchman David Beck (1621-1656), had trained in London as a pupil under Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). He was employed as court painter in Sweden between 1647-51, and again joined Queen Christina in Rome after her abdication.<sup>37</sup> Beck's formal training took place in his hometown Delft, where the genre of portraiture was blossoming under his first teacher Michiel van Mierevelt (1566-1641).<sup>38</sup> This early period undoubtedly contributed to Beck's skill as a portraitist, since his manner of painting is considered to contain traces of both van Dyck and van Mierevelt. His style has also been likened more to the French Baroque rather than the traditional Rembrandt school of portraits.<sup>39</sup>

During his time at the Swedish court Beck produced a plethora of portraits of not only the Queen herself, but of important Swedish and foreign men in her circle.<sup>40</sup> He is most known for his many portraits of the queen, all depicting her facing right from the viewer's point of view. Sadly, few of Beck's original works of Queen Christina remain, but since his work was copied by other painters employed at the court, his production can be accurately surveyed.<sup>41</sup> The most well known, an original from 1650 now at the Nationalmuseum, depicts the queen in a somewhat archaic setting dressed in white satin.<sup>42</sup> Steneberg has identified a plethora of symbolic objects within the portrait, such as the three elements of air, fire and water. The core message, according to Steneberg's interpretation, is Queen Christina personified as the divine influence on all elements, taking the position of the ever-living fire.<sup>43</sup> This portrait can be seen as a testament to Beck's dedication to symbolism in order to connect the sitter with flattering attributes and allegories suitable for a regent.

Hendrick Munnichhoven (16??-1664) came to Sweden through his employment under Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie (1622-1686), whom he met in Prague in 1648. His early life as an artist in the Netherlands is uncertain, but he is thought to be a Hendrick Munnekus who was active in Utrecht's painters guild between 1627 to 1643. After doing several works for de

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<sup>36</sup> Holkers, M., *Den svenska målarkonstens historia*, Bonnier fakta, Stockholm, 2016, p. 55.

<sup>37</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *David Beck*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/19098>, (26/4 2022)

<sup>38</sup> Steneberg, *Kristinatidens måleri*, p. 129.

<sup>39</sup> Malmberg, von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, pp. 69.

<sup>40</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *David Beck*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/19098>, (26/4 2022)

<sup>41</sup> Malmberg, von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, pp. 69.

<sup>42</sup> *Drottning Kristina*, David Beck, 1650, oil on canvas, 110 x 92 cm, Inventory nr. NM 308, Nationalmuseum

<sup>43</sup> Steneberg, *Kristinatidens måleri*, p. 142.

la Gardie, Munnichhoven arrived in Stockholm in 1650 and started his service at Queen Christina's court. He was tasked with taking several copies after both Beck and Bourdon, presumably because more portraits were needed of Queen Christina to be given as gifts or sent abroad for representational purposes. Munnichhoven also took several portraiture commissions of his own, and although no signed paintings exist, his style is so distinct that his oeuvre has been recreated with the help of archival sources.<sup>44</sup>

Munnichhovens most famous original work is the double portrait of Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie and his wife, Maria Euphrosyne (1625-1687) from 1653.<sup>45</sup> The portrait is an excellent example of the Dutch school of portraiture, with its soft, complementary colours and realistic characterization of the sitters. The composition is reminiscent of a long European tradition of depicting husband and wife which was first found in Jan van Eyck's Arnolfini portrait from 1434. Symbolic elements are a frequent feature in his works, and flowers are included in almost all of his portraits of female sitters.<sup>46</sup> In the following parts of this chapter, the flower iconography in two of Munnichhoven's, and one of Beck's portraits will be studied and contextualised in relation to the individual sitter.

### **Maria Euphrosyne, from Young Maiden to Fruitful Wife**

Princess Maria Euphrosyne of Pfalz-Zweibrücken was the fifth daughter of Katarina of Sweden (1584-1638) and John Casimir, Count Palatine of Zweibrücken-Kleeburg (1589-1652). Her brother, Charles X Gustavus (1622-1660), would become King of Sweden after Queen Christina's abdication in 1654. On the 7th of March 1647, she married Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie at the Royal Palace in Stockholm.<sup>47</sup>

Munnichhoven's portrait of Maria Euphrosyne (Fig. 1.) shows the young woman in half-figure in front of a nondescript black and muddy ochre coloured background. She is slightly turned towards a small table on her left side. The composition echoes the preceding Renaissance portraiture, where the subject stands in front of a nondescript background, often next to a table. She is facing the viewer, with heavy lidded eyes that lazily gaze straight ahead. Her mouth is closed with a slight upwards turn at the corners, engaging with the viewer in contrast to the stoic, void expressions from the Vasa era. The table beside her is covered in red cloth and a basket containing lilies, roses and carnations, is the only object present. A rose is held delicately in her hands in line with her hips.

While the composition, pose and setting are highly similar to the portraiture of the Renaissance, a slight advancement in style can be found. The hands holding the rose suggests

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<sup>44</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *Henrik Munnichhoven*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/8543>, (28/4 2022)

<sup>45</sup> See Fig. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Roosval, J., Lilja, G. & Andersson, K., (eds.), *Svenskt konstnärslexikon: tiotusen svenska konstnärers liv och verk*, Allhem, Malmö, 1952-1967, Vol IV, p. 150.

<sup>47</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *Maria Euphrosyne De la Gardie*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/17383>, (13/4 2022)

determination, rather than the more passive holding of a glove or prayer book the preceding period favoured. Her expression engages the audience, and her pose is purposeful if not yet dynamic. She is dressed in a gown made of rich orange satin-like fabric, with an intricate flower-pattern lace trim in black and a rich orange. According to Steneberg, her dress is the fashionable style for the period, and he suggests that the portrait could be a possible copy of one of the portraits delivered by Munnichhoven to De la Gardie in 1649. He further suggests that the copy was produced *after* Munnichhoven by court painter Jacob Heinrich Elfbas (1600-1664) because of the advanced figure and structure of Maria Euphrosyne's hands.<sup>48</sup> This question of attribution will be discussed momentarily.

### *The Virtues of a Bride-to-be*

As the basket of flowers is the only other element in the painting apart from Maria Euphrosyne herself, their inclusion in the portrait is thought to be deliberate. The symbolic meaning of these flowers can be divided into two areas of importance – the meaning of the basket containing lilies, roses and carnations, and the meaning of the gesture and position of Maria Euphrosyne's hands in which she holds the singular rose.

Beginning with the singular flowers, the rose is one of the most well known symbols of eternal love and beauty. Ripa connects the rose to Venustá, the personification of beauty.<sup>49</sup> In Christian iconography, the rose, especially a white one, is a symbol for the Virgin Mary and thus the inclusion of a white rose can symbolise virginity and maidenhood.<sup>50</sup> The lily has similar symbolic connotations from Christianity signifying chastity, purity and love. Lilies were also used to represent royalty, as the fleur-de-lis became the signum for French kings in the Middle ages.<sup>51</sup> Ripa mentions lilies in relation to Bellezza, the feminine Beauty, since lilies possess the qualities of being white, soft and firm, something also desired in female beauty. He references lilies once again as a symbol for Pudicitia, where it is used to signal modesty and virginity.<sup>52</sup> As for carnations, they were often included in betrothal portraits in the Renaissance, while red carnations would often be portrayed in images of Madonna and child as a symbol for Incarnation. Their latin name 'dianthus' means 'flower of God', and the English 'carnation' might have been derived from 'coronation', since the flowers were usually used in the middle ages as garlands for ceremonial occasions.<sup>53</sup>

The other important symbolic element is the single white rose in her hands. White roses specifically were used to represent purity, and since Maria Euphrosyne holds the flower rather delicately in her hands in line with her hips and cervix, the rose implies her pureness

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<sup>48</sup> Steneberg, *Kristinatidens måleri*, p. 169.

<sup>49</sup> Ripa, *Iconologia*, p. 455.

<sup>50</sup> Biedermann, H., *Symbollexikonet*, Forum, Stockholm, 1991, p. 341

<sup>51</sup> Biedermann, *Symbollexikonet*, pp. 257-58

<sup>52</sup> Ripa, *Iconologia*, pp. 38-39, 369-70.

<sup>53</sup> Drysdall, & Hourihane, *The Routledge companion to medieval iconography*, p. 459.

and virginity.<sup>54</sup> The most clear symbolic reading of the flowers thus reveals the painting to be a betrothal portrait where the roses, lilies and carnations are included to reflect Maria Euphrosyne's beauty, her purity and fertility. These traits were traditionally included in betrothal portraits of young ladies intended for their groom to be. Most portraits of young women or girls were at the time produced as a result of marriage negotiations between families, where portraits of the bride and groom could solidify the engagement without the two ever having met.<sup>55</sup> These portraits were filled with elements that symbolised the two most important virtues for unmarried women, chastity and innocence.<sup>56</sup>

### *The Iconography of a Fruitful Wife*

There is one aspect of this interpretation that is problematic and needs to be discussed. If Stenebergs 1649 dating is correct, Maria Euphrosyne would have already been married a few years at the time the original portrait was produced. Her first child, Gustaf Adolf De la Gardie (1647-1695) was born in December the year of her wedding.<sup>57</sup> Because of this, Steneberg, who does not linger on the symbolic interpretation of the portrait, might be wrong in dating the painting to 1649. As the current portrait is a copy with dubious attribution, perhaps the original was produced sometime between Maria Euphrosyne and De la Gardies engagement in 1645 and their marriage in 1647.<sup>58</sup> This theory would explain the flowers' clear intended symbolism of love, beauty, and above all, purity.

Steneberg dates the portrait to 1649 for two reasons. Firstly, Maria Euphrosyne's age and dress prove that the portrait was produced before the only confirmed original Munnichhoven painted of the couple was done: a double portrait of Maria Euphrosyne and her husband, from 1653. Secondly, documented accounts of Munnichhoven having delivered portraits of Maria Euphrosyne on the 5th of October 1649 and the 27th of January 1652, suggests that the former date is a more likely delivery date for her portrait.<sup>59</sup> As it is not specified what portraits of Maria Euphrosyne were delivered, there is no sure proof of Stenebergs theory.

The probability of the portrait of Maria Euphrosyne being a betrothal portrait, or at least a portrait taken before her marriage, is strengthened when compared to the aforementioned double portrait with her husband from 1653 (Fig. 2.). The symbolic elements in this painting have another, very clear narrative function as established by Steneberg, and since this portrait is confirmed to have been produced by Munnichhoven, it serves as a good

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 459.

<sup>55</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, p 118.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 162.

<sup>57</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *Gustaf Adolf De la Gardie*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/17376>, (14/4 2022)

<sup>58</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *Maria Euphrosine De la Gardie*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/17383>, (14/4 2022)

<sup>59</sup> Steneberg, *Kristinatidens måleri*, p. 169.

indication that both sitters and artist were well aware of the benefits of utilising symbolic elements. In the portrait of husband and wife, three symbolic components speak of the portrait's intended message. The rosebush behind De la Gardie is meant to symbolise the love between husband and wife. Behind Maria Euphrosyne, Munnichhoven has placed columbines, a plant that was used at the time to increase the female libido and cure infertility. Perhaps the most revealing detail about the portrait's intended message is the seed pod of a ripe farm bean Maria Euphrosyne holds in her right hand. This is meant to symbolise pregnancy and motherhood.<sup>60</sup> The message of the painting is thus to show the union between the two families and through symbols of love, fertility and pregnancy, secure the next generation that will carry on the family name.

### *Evidence of a New Attribution?*

Comparing these two portrayals of Maria Euphrosyne show that their intended symbolic meaning differs greatly. While one is a double portrait made to celebrate a married couple's union and to bring luck and fertility, the roses, lilies and carnations indicate that the portrait was painted before Maria Eufrosyne entered her marriage. It is therefore probable that the portrait was done as a betrothal portrait to showcase that Maria Euphrosyne possessed the desired virtues of purity and innocence. Naturally, it is also possible that De la Gardie had Munnichhoven portray his wife early in their marriage and he thus used common flowers connected with these flattering qualities, and the portrait belonged to those delivered in 1649. As Munnichhoven first met De la Gardie in 1648, it seems unlikely that he could have produced the portrait while the couple were engaged. However, it is possible that the portrait is a copy of Elfbas, and wrongly attributed to Munnichhoven. As Elfbas first came to Sweden in 1622 employed by Maria Euphrosyne's father, it is possible that he painted her portrait just before or during her engagement in 1645-47.<sup>61</sup> To confirm or deny this theory, further research is needed. It can however be concluded that the three kinds of flowers, roses, carnations and lilies included in the portrait of Maria Euphrosyne served to inform audiences of her beauty, loveliness, purity and innocence and simultaneously subtly reference her royal birth. All common virtues for betrothal portraits of women at the time.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Principal Virtue of Queen Christina**

The Skokloster portrait of Queen Christina (Fig. 3.) is, according to Steneberg, a copy of David Beck's third type of portrait of the Queen. This third type is recognized by Christina having a shorter middle part and more dense, firm locks or hair.<sup>63</sup> Other components of the composition are typical of Beck's other portraits of the Queen such as depicting her in

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. pp. 167-69.

<sup>61</sup> Holkers, *Den svenska målarkonstens historia*, p. 50.

<sup>62</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, p. 170.

<sup>63</sup> Steneberg, *Kristinatidens måleri*, pp. 144-45.

standing half-figure, in semi-profile turned to the right while her face is turned towards the viewer. A development in composition and style within portraiture can be seen when studying Christina's profiled pose. The angle and slight forward tilt of her upper body gives the illusion of walking, as if she is confidently pacing the room. Although questions of actual likeness are hard to ascertain, her facial features align with Beck's other portraits. She has the same typical robust nose, sloping jawline and full lips.<sup>64</sup> She gazes outwards with watchful, serious eyes, her mouth closed resulting in an expression of superiority. Beck has placed her in a quite simple yet effective setting. Behind her, crimson draperies hang heavy, and to her right is the edge of a window. Outside, the sun is setting behind a cloud-heavy sky. The addition of the window and cloudy skies add definition to the mood in the portrait, which is further accentuated by her watchful expression. The deep red of the draperies produces a striking contrast to Christina's black dress accentuated with a white collar and sleeves, making her the centre of attention. The setting is still neutral, but a clear dynamic change compared to the earlier, anonymous backgrounds of the Vasa Renaissance portraiture.

Queen Christina's pose and gesture is, similarly to her face, something Beck recycles in many of his depictions of the Queen. In the Skokloster portrait, her left hand is delicately placed pointing towards her chest, while the right gracefully holds out a branch from an orange tree with green, slender leaves and small, white flowers. This left hand pointing towards herself recurs in other portraits from the same year, such as one found at Biby manor.<sup>65</sup> The pointing gesture is one of power, according to Ripa's description of *Dominio* in *Iconologia*. Pointing towards oneself is also described under *Querela à Dio* to indicate innocence and integrity.<sup>66</sup> This is symbolism fit for any powerful regent, but the message is developed further with the inclusion of the citrus twig, the single prop in the portrait.

### *A Tale of Golden Apples*

In Italy and other parts of Europe during the Renaissance, crowns of roses were replaced with orange blossoms to be worn by both the bride and groom during wedding ceremonies.<sup>67</sup> As such, they came to represent marriage and love. This is not the intended message for this representation of Queen Christina, since she decided while young to never marry. Her announcement greatly upset Parliament, however, Queen Christina solved this issue, not without protest, by appointing her cousin Karl Gustav (1622-1660) as her heir.<sup>68</sup>

A more plausible intended message of the orange blossom is not easily identified, but Steneberg uncovers another meaning when studying Beck's previously mentioned portrait of Queen Christina now at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. In this portrait, the queen wears a

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 134.

<sup>65</sup> Portrait of *Drottning Kristina*, David Beck (after), 17??, Private collection

<sup>66</sup> Ripa, *Iconologia*, pp. 107, 373.

<sup>67</sup> Goody, J., *The culture of flowers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 158, 167.

<sup>68</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *Kristina*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/11773>, (2/5 2022)

small arrangement of flowers in her hair. One of the identified flowers is the same citrus *sinensis*, the sweet orange blossom. Steneberg references the Hesperides from Greek mythology, earth nymphs who guarded a garden with three golden apple trees – a wedding gift to Hera. ‘Golden apples’ in this context refer to the Greek and Latin names for oranges. The golden apples were stolen by Heracles, although the tale of how he secures the apples varies. In one version, Heracles slays the dragon Ladon who also guards the apples and then steals them.<sup>69</sup> In the 1626 edition of Pierio Valeriano Bolzani’s (1447-1558) *Hieroglyphica*, a lexicon of Renaissance symbols similar to that of Ripa’s *Iconologia*, this event was interpreted as Heracles conquering wisdom and knowledge, as the golden apples were considered to grant humans immortality.<sup>70</sup> This interpretation is akin to Ripa’s, which under *Virtù Heroica* likens Heracles three golden apples with the three most important virtues of a hero, namely temperance in anger, greed and moderation of pleasures.<sup>71</sup> From this interpretation, the orange blossom twig in Queen Christina’s hand can be seen as a symbol of wisdom and virtue.

### *Symbolism Fit for a Queen*

Although this ancient symbolism of the orange blossom is something that has been obscured with time, it certainly was fitting of Beck to include it in these two portraits of the Queen. Christina was the last daughter and only surviving child of King Gustavus II Adolphus (1594-1632), who died on the battlefield when she was just 6 years old. After the King’s death, a regency council was formed and tasked with handling the royal affairs and see to the young princess’s education. Since her father had specifically asked that she would receive a male upbringing, Christina was taught male sports such as fencing, to hunt and ride horses. She was educated in classical subjects such as philosophy, theology, astronomy and mathematics in addition to her official duties as a regent. She spoke an assortment of languages, such as French, German, Italian, Latin and was proficient in Greek, Hebrew and Arabic.<sup>72</sup> All this was to prepare her for the task of ruling the country as a woman. Very few young noble women at this time were granted such an education. No institutions at which girls could receive a formal education existed, they were instead instructed at home during their whole upbringing. They were taught to read, write, perform simple mathematics, embroider and sketch. Emphasis was also put on their temperament. They were to be modest, dutiful, and pleasing, and above all obey their fathers and future husbands.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. *Hesperides*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 24 Oct. 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hesperides-Greek-mythology>. (2/5 2022)

<sup>70</sup> Steneberg, *Kristinatidens måleri*, pp.139-40.

<sup>71</sup> Ripa, *Iconologia*, pp. 473-74.

<sup>72</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *Kristina*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/11773>, (2/5 2022)

<sup>73</sup> Norrhem, *Kvinnor vid maktens sida: 1632-1772*, p. 58-59.

This contrast in education and upbringing makes it apparent that the normally valued traits of beauty and innocence were not fitting when portraying the strong-willed Queen. She did not wish to marry and would abdicate only four years after Beck's portrait, convert to catholicism and live the rest of her life in Rome.<sup>74</sup> Most of the symbolism in Beck's many portraits of the queen alludes to her royal status, rather than any other general female trait. Because of this, the twig of orange blossom appears particularly deliberate, as a subtle praise of Christina's wisdom and knowledge. Something that set her apart from other women in contemporary society and most likely a trait she valued in herself as her dedication to science and knowledge prevailed in her adult life. She invited a plethora of educated men to her court, and wrote letters to several scientists experts in topics such as botany, history, literature, politics, and philosophy. Her dedication to knowledge was undoubtedly a major part of her identity, and she was an enthusiastic patron of the arts in addition to her interest in science. As such, it is clear that the choice to include the orange blossom was made to signal Queen Christina's highly regarded wisdom and knowledge, paramount qualities for a female sovereign at the time.

### **Beata Elisabeth von Königsmarck: Obscured Eroticism in a Depiction of Purity**

Beata Elisabeth von Königsmarck (1637-1723) married her husband Pontus Fredrik De la Gardie (1630-1692) in 1655 when she was eighteen years old. They had gotten engaged a few years earlier during which De la Gardie was away travelling in Europe to finish his education. Several letters sent between the two during these travels reveal their fondness for and attachment to each other.<sup>75</sup> Munnichhovens portrait of Beata Elisabeth (Fig. 4.) is considered to have been taken a year before her marriage. She is depicted outside, next to a low stone wall in half figure facing left. Next to the wall grows a wide rose bush, with pinkish roses. Her right hand is extended, about to pick one of the flowers off the bush. Her left hand holds a small bouquet of already picked roses. This portrait of the young Beata Elisabeth is evidence of the evolution of which gestures and poses were seen as most fitting when portraying women. She is not merely standing in her portrait as her Renaissance counterparts, but walking in a garden occupied with picking roses. This movement hints at the crucial Baroque idea that women should be depicted in action to properly showcase the ideal and refined body language. The stormy sky filled with monumental clouds and the wind blowing through Beata Elisabeth's shawl are representative of the Baroque art's obsession with theatrics and drama.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *Kristina*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/11773>, (2/5 2022)

<sup>75</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *Pontus Fredrik De la Gardie*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/17385>, (3/5 2022)

<sup>76</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, pp. 162-63.

### *The Multifold Symbolic Implications of a Rose*

The general symbolism of roses has already been established under the portrait of Maria Euphrosyne, and the same connotation of love, beauty and purity can be applied to Beata Elisabeth's portrait. However, the rose has several symbolic interpretations which are utilised by Munnichhoven in this portrait of the young countess. Ripa mentions the rose as a symbol for *Vita brevis*, the brevity of life, who is recognized by her young appearance and a bouquet of roses in her hand.<sup>77</sup> The rose is used to emphasise everything beautiful eventually wilting and dying, a reminder of the transience of life. Beata Elisabeth's act of picking the roses suggests that her confirmed beauty and youth will eventually fade. From her own perspective, this portrait is likely a testament to her youth and beauty, before she enters her marriage and the next phase of her adult life. This interpretation is fitting, as Steneberg believes that this portrait is likely a betrothal portrait meant for her husband. There are several other symbolic elements within this image that confirms Steneberg's speculation, such as her white dress being a symbol of innocence and purity. The ring that adorns her left ring finger also indicates that this is indeed a betrothal portrait, perhaps sent by De la Gardie from his travels as a token of his love.

Another layer to the symbolism of roses is created by the setting. The low stone wall containing the roses alludes to medieval representations of the Garden of Eden, the earthly paradise. As these gardens were enclosed spaces, called the *hortus conclusus* in Christian iconography, they served as an analogy for the Virgin Mary. Rose hedges were a common feature in these paintings, with white roses included for purity.<sup>78</sup> Pink roses appear in depictions of the Virgin to symbolise maternal love.<sup>79</sup> Munnichhoven can in this way represent Beata Elisabeth's purity and virginity by likening her to the Virgin using the garden as a backdrop.

Steneberg has presented a further interpretation of the symbolic meaning in Beata Elisabeth's picking of the rose as an action of eroticism. He cites the 1924 edition of the Dutch dictionary *Woordenboek der nederlandsche taal*, but provides little other information to confirm this statement.<sup>80</sup> Nonetheless, Otto van Veem's poems and illustrations over emblems of love in *Amorum Emblemata* first published in 1608, prove that the act of picking roses was an established iconography during the seventeenth century. Under the title 'No pleasure without payne' Amor can be seen picking a rose from a bush. However, the accompanying poem compares the rose with its thorns to the bittersweetness of love, without any erotic content.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ripa, *Iconologia*, pp. 475-76.

<sup>78</sup> Drysdall, & Hourihane, *The Routledge companion to medieval iconography*, p. 460.

<sup>79</sup> Fisher, *Flowers of the Renaissance*, p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> Steneberg, *Kristinatidens måleri*, pp. 171, 230n47.

<sup>81</sup> Veem, van & Versteegan, *Amorum emblemata, figuris æneis incisa studio Othonis Væni Batauo-Lugdunensis. = Emblemes of loue. With verses in Latin, English, and Italian.*, pp. 160-61.

Erotic implications mixed in with virtues of purity and innocence can be found during the second half of the seventeenth century in portraits of male or female sitters dressed as shepherds or shepheresses. Similarly, the popular allegorical portraits of Diana, protector of modesty and chastity, often conveyed a sensuality in their sitters. This erotic dimension came from the notion of how a woman disguised as Diana protected her virginity with her bow and arrow from the unwanted worship of men. Flowers as guises for womanhood were even common in portraits of young girls, where apple trees and cherry blossoms were used to symbolise their future fertility.<sup>82</sup>

The betrothal portrait served to mark a noble woman's transformation from girl to woman, or from maiden to wife.<sup>83</sup> Beata Elisabeth's portrait was meant as a gift to her future husband and needed to elevate her virtues as well as subtly entice him. However, this implication had to be discreet to be accepted, as purity was seen as the most important virtue for young brides-to-be.<sup>84</sup> This secrecy is a further symbolic interpretation of the rose, from the Latin expression *sub rosa* or the silence of the rose. This expression originated in ancient mythology as Cupid gave a rose to Harpocrates, god of silence, to prevent him from speaking of Venus' sexual liaisons.<sup>85</sup> The roses Beata Elisabeth has picked are not just a flattering prop for her to hold, nor is their only purpose to signal a simple expression of love and beauty. Instead, they serve as a multi-layered sign of purity and innocence, with hidden promises of sensual implications and a flirtatious, secretive nature.

### *The Comfort of Wealth*

Beata Elisabeth was the daughter of Hans Christoph von Königsmarck (1605-1663), who had a successful military career during the Thirty Years' War. He had acquired great wealth from war treasures, securing his daughter's inheritance and thus her future.<sup>86</sup> This put Beata Elisabeth in an unusual position at the time, since she did not need to rely on her husband to provide for her. She oversaw her own fortune, without interference from her husband. In 1661, she acquired the estate Skarhult and managed the household by herself. In the 1690's after the Swedish nobility had faced financial hardship, Skarhult was the only estate kept by the family as De la Gardie's other estates had been repossessed by the crown. Due to her financial position, Beata Elisabeth could enter her married life as the subordinate to her husband and manage the household as was expected of her sex while still not being

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<sup>82</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, pp 166-67, 170-71.

<sup>83</sup> Brown, C., *Liksom en herdinna: litterära teman i svenska kvinnoporträtt under 1700-talet*, Carlsson, Diss. Uppsala : Uppsala universitet, Stockholm, 2012, p. 44.

<sup>84</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, p. 170.

<sup>85</sup> Fisher, *Flowers of the Renaissance*, p. 22 and Merriam-Webster, Dictionary, *Sub-rosa*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sub-rosa>. (10/5 2022)

<sup>86</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *Hans Christoff Königsmarck*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/11942>, (5/5 2022)

completley dependent on her husband for her quality of life. Her role would be central for the family's welfare and development.<sup>87</sup> The portrait of the seventeen year old countess with its stormy weather and thorny bushes containing promises of beauty, innocence and youth with secret erotic implication was a hopeful debut into her adult life.

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<sup>87</sup> Norrhem, *Kvinnor vid maktens sida: 1632-1772*, pp. 30.

### 3. The High Baroque's Obsession with Symbolism (1675-1690)

After Queen Christina's abdication in 1654, she left the throne to her cousin Charles X Gustavus. With this succession of the crown, a new era begins within Swedish art and portraiture, a combination of extravagance and charged emotions that can be considered staples of the high Baroque. The end of Christina's reign is also the end of the domination of the north European Baroque, which gave way during the later parts of the seventeenth century to a more international style.<sup>88</sup> After Charles X Gustavus's sudden death in 1660, his widow Queen Hedwig Eleonora of Holstein-Gottorp (1636-1715) served as regent until their young son, Charles XI (1655-1697) came of age.<sup>89</sup>

Hedwig Eleonora became one of the most frequent commissioners of art throughout the whole century, an interest her son would inherit. The vast quantities of artworks featuring forceful brushstrokes, bright colours, exaggerated forms, and dramatic compositions which were created for her palaces is an embodiment of Baroque ideals. Above all, symbolism and allegory are considered pivotal components of the paintings' very nature.<sup>90</sup> Especially favoured were allusions to antiquity and literature, particularly pastoral poetry.<sup>91</sup> Allegorical portraits still dominated the genre because of this enrapturement with symbolism. The symbolic language that developed in Europe during this time was sometimes so enigmatic that parts of it have been lost or are hard to interpret today.<sup>92</sup> Iconological handbooks such as Ripa's *Iconologia* or Bolzani's *Hieroglyphica* were well established, but artists with heavy productions would also print descriptions of their most important works to explain the many layered symbolic representations within their paintings.<sup>93</sup> The aesthetic programs of the time were compiled and spread through Europe, enforcing these striking Baroque ideals of depth, fluidity and symbolism.<sup>94</sup>

#### *Female Representations During the High Baroque*

The Baroque development within art that took place during the seventeenth century reached its full potential towards the end of the century. The female portraits during this time are a stark contrast to the Renaissance portraits mentioned previously. Movement, action and curves that accentuate the female form ruled the poses and gestures, while the favoured settings were either outside in lavish gardens or inside monumental royal halls. Older women

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<sup>88</sup> Holkers, *Den svenska målarkonstens historia*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>89</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, Dahlgren, S., *Hedvig Eleonora*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/12760>

<sup>90</sup> Holkers, *Den svenska målarkonstens historia*, pp. 45, 61.

<sup>91</sup> Ehrenstrahl, David Klöcker, *David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl: Nationalmuseum, 1976*, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, 1976, p. 24, and Holkers, *Den svenska målarkonstens historia*, p. 63.

<sup>92</sup> Holkers, *Den svenska målarkonstens historia*, p. 67.

<sup>93</sup> *David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl: Nationalmuseum, 1976*, p. 61.

<sup>94</sup> Malmberg, von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, p. 81.

were depicted as mature and honourable, while young ladies were portrayed as youthful and beautiful. Their dresses were of heavy, luxurious fabrics and richly decorated according to the fashion of the time, unless portrayed in specific allegories that instead called for archaic robes in line with renditions of antiquity. Necklines were usually low across the shoulders, and thin shawls fluttering in the wind created further movement within the frame.<sup>95</sup> The desired female virtues were represented with more elaborate symbolic props and imagery. Women are portrayed playing instruments, petting dogs, reading, walking lambs on leashes in gardens, splashing water from a fountain, strolling or leasuring in turbulent landscapes and holding or picking flowers. The iconography of colours had been established during the middle ages, but gained more importance and new interpretations during the Baroque era.<sup>96</sup> All these components make for female portraits with a plethora of symbolic indications of their beauty, grace, innocence, purity, married status and other virtues.

### **The Painters: Martin Mijtens the Elder and David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl**

A new generation of court painters arrived in Sweden around the time of Charles X Gustavus' death, and thus became employed under the Queen Regent Hedwig Eleonora. Martin Mijtens the Elder (1648-1736) came from a prominent Dutch family of painters, and after having trained under his father in Haag, he became a pupil under the influential portraitist Caspar Netscher (1636-1684). After working for the painters guild in Haag for ten years, Mijtens arrived in Sweden in 1677 and quickly gained a reputation amongst the nobility for his intimate portraits with exemplary Dutch execution.<sup>97</sup> He took great notice of the sitters' individuality and was sensitive to their personal wishes, something that was appreciated by the elite. Mijten's portraits of women were airy and lively, with flowers the most common object to portray female qualities. He mostly painted his portraits sitting half-figure with oval frames, although there are exceptions.<sup>98</sup>

An excellent example of Mijten's understanding of symbolism within portraiture is his allegorical depiction of Anna Maria Ehrenstrahl (1666-1729).<sup>99</sup> She was the daughter of David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl (1628-1689), and trained under her father to become the first known female artist in Sweden. Mijtens has portrayed her as *Pictura*, the personification of painting and the genius of art. She sits leaning against a desk within a classical milieu arranged as a painter's studio, with a canvas on an easel behind her. In one hand, Mijtens has placed her palette and brushes, while the other is raised to her mouth in a gesture of silence.

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<sup>95</sup> Malmberg, von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, p. 82.

<sup>96</sup> Drysdall & Hourihane, *The Routledge companion to medieval iconography*, pp. 437-448 and Malmberg, von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, p. 82

<sup>97</sup> Malmberg von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>98</sup> Riksarkivet, *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, Martinus (Martin) Mijtens*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/9349> (11/05 2022)

<sup>99</sup> *Allegorical portrait of Anna Maria Ehrenstrahl*, Martin Mijtens the Elder, oil on canvas, 222.5 x 179.5 cm, Inventory Nr. NMGrh 4127, Nationalmuseum.

This gesture symbolises how a painting does not convey its message in words but with images. Her left breast is exposed, which represents artistic inspiration. Other attributes of art are included in the portrait, such as the two statues *Venus* and *The Grinder*. This flattering image of the young artist is considered one of Mijtens best, showcasing his skill in balancing the composition with the light illuminating Anna Maria. As such, it is no surprise that he was considered the only worthy rival to her father.<sup>100</sup>

David Klöcker was born in Hamburg but did his formal training as an artist in Amsterdam under the Dutch golden age portraitist Juriaen Jacobsze (1624-1685). He quickly became skilled in portraying naturalistic landscapes and Baroque architecture.<sup>101</sup> After having met and been commissioned portraits by Count Carl Gustaf Wrangel (1613-1676) in Pommern 1651 he gained connections to enter the Swedish market. The following year he arrived in Sweden and was employed by the widowed Queen Maria Eleonora (1599-1655) to paint portraits of her court ladies. After this, Ehrenstrahl was sent to further his education and study art in Italy, where he learnt to master the Italian Baroque style. He also stayed in Paris and London on his way back to Sweden, completing his education as an international artist of the finest degree.<sup>102</sup> Back in Sweden, he was appointed court painter at Queen Hedwig Eleonora's court, and the demand for his art rose rapidly soon after his arrival. Ehrenstrahl's production was extensive as he was active for almost 40 years, during which he painted countless portraits, allegories, animals and landscapes for the crown and the nobility. In 1674 he was knighted under the name Ehrenstrahl, a proof of the royal appreciation for his services.<sup>103</sup>

Ehrenstrahl's personification of Fidelitas, fidelity, is a testament to his ability to encapsulate the emotions, symbolism and dramatics of the Baroque.<sup>104</sup> He has portrayed her as a beautiful woman sitting by ancient ruins, with looming grey clouds in the sky. She is dressed in bright orange, with fiery red robes draped around her. A bellowing wind is wildly tugging on the fabric. By her side is a small dog, looking up at her. In her hand she holds a golden key and sigill. These three attributes are accurate to Ripa's description of the subject, indicating that Ehrenstrahl was well aware and abided by the iconological program typical for the Baroque.<sup>105</sup> The composition with the column on the left is balanced well with Fidelity's slightly S-curved body and the red fabric blowing up towards the sky on the right hand side. Ehrenstrahl's painting proves that a simple concept can be rendered intriguing when correctly

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<sup>100</sup> Malmberg, von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, pp. 83, 90, 92 and Holkers, *Den svenska målarkonstens historia*, p. 67.

<sup>101</sup> Holkers, *Den svenska målarkonstens historia*, p. 63.

<sup>102</sup> Malmberg, von, *Svensk porträttkonst under fem århundraden*, p. 83.

<sup>103</sup> Holkers, *Den svenska målarkonstens historia*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>104</sup> *Fidelitas*, David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl, 1678, oil on canvas, 146 x 121 cm, Inventory Nr. NMGrh 1315, Nationalmuseum.

<sup>105</sup> Ripa, *Iconologia*, pp. 128-29.

mastered. The following parts of this chapter will analyse the flower iconography in one of Ehrenstrahl and two of Mijten's female portraits.

### **Columbines or Laurel Crowns, an Inquiry of Magdalena Stenbock's Self-Perception**

Martin Mijtens the Elder's portrait of Magdalena Stenbock (1649-1727) (Fig. 5.) is dated to around 1675, when the countess was 26 years of age. She had married the widower Council President Bengt Oxienstierna (1623-1702) in 1667 after his previous wife's death. The couple had fifteen children of their own and eighteen in total as Oxienstierna had three from his previous marriage.<sup>106</sup> Mijtens has placed Magdalena in half figure in a forest landscape, yet a heavy, red curtain obscures the upper parts of the painting. This curtain is framed around Magdalena and gives the illusion that she exists in an intimate, separate space. She's not yet outside, but not inside either, as the curtain is the only apparent division within the image. In the left corner, a plant with small, white flowers and pointed petals grows. Magdalena wears a light blue gown with a tight bodice and low-cut neckline. In her left hand, a sheer white shawl is delicately held. A gust of wind has grabbed the fabric, wrapping it around her body and arm. Several flowers are gathered haphazardly in her skirt, held together with her right hand. Her pose and outheld skirt makes it hard to determine if she is sitting or standing.

#### *The Flowers of Devotion*

Although the array of flowers crowding her skirt are disordered, several red carnations and at least one pinkish rose are recognizable. Furthermore, several small, white flowers can be seen, and they appear to be the same that grow on the ground beside Magdalena. These are most likely white columbines, due to the small star-shaped flowers growing in clusters low to the ground. Columbines are native to Europe and were cultivated in several species and hybrids for their beautiful flowers which come in a plethora of colours.<sup>107</sup> They are one of the most frequently illustrated flowers in late medieval manuscripts, and blue or violet columbines were associated with melancholy and sorrow, as the colour blue was the colour of mourning.<sup>108</sup> As the Virgin Mary, whose mantle is always blue, had lost her own son, columbines became one of the many flowers associated with her. White columbines were unusual during early Christianity, however they occur in a tapestry from the late fifteenth century and could possibly be a symbol for the purity of the Virgin. Columbines got their name from the Latin *Columba*, meaning dove, as their flowers were thought to resemble the bird, and could therefore also be a symbol for spirituality and faith.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Norrhem, *Kvinnor vid maktens sida: 1632-1772*, p. 75.

<sup>107</sup> Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. *Columbine*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 18 Apr. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/plant/columbine-plant>, (13/5 2022)

<sup>108</sup> Drysdall & Hourihane, *The Routledge companion to medieval iconography*, pp. 457, 459.

<sup>109</sup> Fisher, *Flowers of the Renaissance*, pp. 57, 60.

Similarly to the columbines, the red carnations are probably also included as a symbol of faith, as carnations have been included in a wide array of Christian iconography. They were used in paintings to symbolise the Incarnation of Christ, the human flesh and blood, and in images of the Virgin and child. Carnations were also thought to symbolise the nails used in the crucifixion.<sup>110</sup> As mentioned under the portrait of Maria Eufrosyne, carnations could also serve as a symbol of marriage or betrothal. As Magdalena had been married for some years when Mijtens took her portrait, this symbolic implication is not likely to have been Mijtens intent. Instead, it is Magdalenas religious devotion that seems the most likely symbolic message of the paintings. This is strengthened by the inclusion of the rose, as it could reference the Virgin and the love between mother and child.<sup>111</sup> These three flowers are all connected with faith, pioussness, innocence and devotion, which were considered fitting virtues for the young mother.

#### *A Conventional Image and a Personalised Portrait*

Both Stenbock and Oxienstierna came from powerful and influential noble families, making their marriage a beneficial alliance. The countess was especially interested in politics, and is said to have influenced her husband's actions and opinions within his official position. She hosted political salons and card games where she discussed different political matters with invited guests of interest, mostly foreign ambassadors, and was involved with multiple political schemes. Because of this political involvement, Magdalena was considered a cunning woman, wiser than her husband and too wise for her sex.<sup>112</sup> This description of Magdalena as a mature, self-assured political agent is an interesting contrast to Mijtens portrait of her with flowers in her lap symbolising her faith. Therefore it is important to stress the conventions within female portraiture at the time, especially in relation to Mijtens own preference of having his female subjects engaged in an activity or portrayed with flowers.<sup>113</sup> If the portrait was painted in 1675, it would have been produced two years before Mijtens arrived in Sweden and still relatively early in his career. As he very seldom dated his portraits, the exact year of production is hard to determine. However, Magdalena's hairstyle with the small, individually coiled curls are typical of late 1670's fashion.<sup>114</sup> It is quite possible that Mijtens took Magdalena's portrait either before or directly after having arrived in Sweden and, unaccustomed to the preferences of the Swedish nobility, chose to portray Magdalena with her freshly picked flowers not because of any deep religious devotion of hers

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<sup>110</sup> Fisher, *Flowers of the Renaissance*, p. 65.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>112</sup> Norrhem, *Kvinnor vid maktens sida: 1632-1772*, pp. 73-76.

<sup>113</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, Holmquist, M. B., *Martinus (Martin) Mijtens*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/9349>

<sup>114</sup> Malmberg, B., von, *Martin Mijtens d.ä.: en konstnär från Sveriges storhetstid*, Allhem, Stockholm, 1961, pp. 14, 20, 37.

but simply because it was custom to do so. Thus, he included the most common flowers at the time, not for any specific symbolic meaning.

This explanation is especially intriguing when comparing Mijtens portrait of the young Magdalena to another he produced of her in 1698 (Fig. 6.), when the duchess was 49 years old. In this oval portrait, Magdalena is seen from the waist up. She wears an intricate gown with a blue mantle draped around her shoulders. She gazes knowingly outwards at the audience, her mouth subtly curved in a slightly amused smile, her overall facial expression poised and confident. She wears her hair in an elaborate updo, interwoven with jewels and laurel leaves. This depiction is a more appropriate portrayal of the politically skilled and intelligent woman Magdalena had become. The laurel leaf, or crown was used in ancient Greece as a symbol of victory, fame and success. Ripa mentions laurel crowns in connection to Vittoria, victory and Amor di Virtù, virtuous love. They are also mentioned as attributes of Academia and Conversatione, two very fitting qualities for Magdalena due to her political endeavours.<sup>115</sup> Perhaps this second, more mature portrait of Magdalena was a result of Mijtens becoming more confident with his clientele, displaying his sensitivity in following the sitter's personal wishes and thus a result of Magdalena's own self-image. By contrast, Mijtens' first portrait of the young mother followed the more general gendered convention of portraying her in nature picking flowers related to faith, purity and motherly love.

### **Ulrika Eleonora of Sweden: A Portrayal of a Mother's Hopeful Love**

The Danish Princess Ulrika Eleonora (1656-1693) and Charles XI of Sweden were married in May 1680. Their first child, Hedwig Sophia (1681-1708) was born the following year and her brother, successor to the throne Charles XII (1682-1718) was born a year later.<sup>116</sup> Ulrika Eleonora was a devoted mother involved with her children as she oversaw their early childhood. She has been described as a sensible, intelligent and kind woman with many virtuous qualities she was determined to pass on to her children.<sup>117</sup> Ehrenstrahl's portrait of the Queen (Fig. 7.) was taken a few years into their marriage. She sits facing outwards in a nondescript room surrounded by dark draperies. The darkness is contrasted by Ulrika Eleonora's bright yellow satin dress with a low neckline and the azure mantle draped around her shoulders and over one thigh. On her left, a tall window reveals a setting sun over a tree-lined avenue. Statues and fountains can be seen along the pathway leading towards a palace in the distance. Ulrika Eleonora's left hand is resting against a covered armrest, her fingers outstretched and relaxed. Her right hand is placed on her thigh, holding a small spruce

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<sup>115</sup> Ripa, *Iconologia*, pp. 4, 16, 482, 494.

<sup>116</sup> Berg, P. G. & Stålberg, W., (eds.), *Anteckningar om svenska qvinnor*, P. G. Berg, Stockholm, 1864-1866, pp. 178, 390-91.

<sup>117</sup> Riksarkivet, Svenskt biografiskt lexikon, *Karl XII*, <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/sbl/artikel/12357> (16/5 2022)

twig. Her gaze is turned noncommittally against the audience, with her mouth closed in a knowing expression.

### *The Iconography of Artemis - Protector of Women*

This portrait is one of Ehrenstrahl's many portraits of Ulrika Eleonora, and at first glance it may seem an ordinary, yet intimate depiction of the queen. However, the surrounding biographical context reveals this portrait as a picture of hope in tragedy, all because of the small spruce twig in her hand. In Greek mythology, Artemis was the goddess of chastity and childbirth, and it was believed she could help with fertility or ensure safety in childbirth. As she was considered a protector of women, and goddess of nature, animals, plants and trees, Artemis, or her Roman equivalent Diana, was a popular allegory to apply to young women.<sup>118</sup> The spruce tree became connected with Artemis as 'the tree of birth', a symbol for growth and pregnancy. Evergreen trees, since they do not shed their greenery in winter, were used in other ancient civilizations as symbols for eternal life.<sup>119</sup> This connection to life, birth and offspring persisted during the sixteenth century, as evident in Andrea Alciato's 1550 edition of *Emblemata* in which the spruce tree is described as "a symbol of the man who dies without progeny."<sup>120</sup> In Ehrenstrahl's portrait of Ulrika Eleonora, the spruce serves as an amulet to secure luck in childbirth, as she was pregnant with her sixth child, Karl Gustav (1686-1687) at the time.<sup>121</sup>

### *Tragedy, Memory and Love*

Ulrika Eleonora's health was steadily declining throughout her short life. Her health was not helped by her many miscarriages and difficult childbirths.<sup>122</sup> Therefore it was paramount that every pregnancy was as comfortable as possible to assure its success. During the seventeenth century, as many as four out of ten children did not survive infancy, and around 5% of women died in childbirth. The great risk of child bearing on both woman and child was something that affected most families no matter their status or wealth.<sup>123</sup> The couple had lost their two young sons Gustav (1683-1685) and Ulrik (1684-1685) the previous year, as well as a son born in September 1685, who passed away within two weeks of birth.<sup>124</sup> When considering such tragedy, Ehrenstrahl's inclusion of the spruce twig in an otherwise ordinary

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<sup>118</sup> Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. *Artemis*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 20 May. 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Artemis-Greek-goddess>. (16/5 2022)

<sup>119</sup> Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. *Christmas tree*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 4 Jun. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/plant/Christmas-tree>. (16/5 2022)

<sup>120</sup> Alciati, *Emblemata: Lyons, 1550*, p. 217.

<sup>121</sup> De Kungliga Slotten, Regentlängd, *Ulrika Eleonora av Danmark*, <https://www.kungligaslotten.se/regentlangd/ulrika-eleonora-av-danmark.html> (17/5 2022)

<sup>122</sup> Lundh-Eriksson, N., *Hedvig Eleonora*, Wahlström & Widstrand, Stockholm, 1947, pp. 168, 170-72.

<sup>123</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, pp. 215-228.

<sup>124</sup> Lundh-Eriksson, *Hedvig Eleonora*, pp. 168-172, and De Kungliga Slotten, Regentlängd, *Ulrika Eleonora av Danmark*, <https://www.kungligaslotten.se/regentlangd/ulrika-eleonora-av-danmark.html> (17/5 2022)

portrait of royalty bears a hopeful symbolic meaning. He uses the ancient Artemis-iconography to assure that the growing life will be safe. In this way, Ulrika Eleonora appeals to the goddess that both she and the child will be protected by her divinity. The hardships for Queen Ulrika Eleonora and her King sadly continued, as Karl-Gustav only survived seven weeks.

Deceased children were mourned greatly by their loved ones and it became common practice during the seventeenth century to have their portraits taken post mortem as a means for surviving family members to remember and grieve.<sup>125</sup> The great loss of the royal couple became a common feature in Ehrenstrahl's future family portraits, and especially in portraits of Ulrika Eleonora. As her great love for her children was considered one of her primary virtues, it was often celebrated within royal ceremonies and feasts during the 1680's. This image of the devoted mother was further established in portraits taken after her four sons' deaths. In a portrait from 1689 (Fig. 8.), Ehrenstrahl depicted Ulrika Eleonora together with her three surviving children. Young Charles, who would have been seven, stands tall next to his seated mother with his hand placed on her lap. On Ulrika Eleonora's opposite side, Hedwig Sophia is gently holding the youngest sibling and final royal child Ulrika Eleonora the younger (1688-1741). Ulrika Eleonora sits proudly between her children with her arms around the three. The composition is reminiscent of Caritas, the personification of Charity and Christian love, who is always portrayed as a mother with three or more children beside her and in her lap.<sup>126</sup> Up in the sky on the left side of the painting, Ehrenstrahl has added four small cherubs. They are embracing each other as they ascend upwards towards the sun. Naturally, they represent Ulrika Eleonora's lost sons on their path to heaven. In this manner, all her children are represented within the portrait aptly named *Ulrika Eleonora the Elder with her alive and dead children*. Due to the number of portraits similar to this example, it can easily be deduced that the Queen felt deep sorrow over the loss of her children and that these depictions must have brought comfort to the grieving mother.<sup>127</sup> Queen Ulrika Eleonora herself passed away at only 36 years of age from an unknown sickness in 1693, and was remembered for her charitable and kind nature.<sup>128</sup> Ehrenstrahl's portrait of the young mother holding a spruce twig provides an intimate look into the hope and well-wishes she sought to ensure her new child would have a safe and healthy birth.

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<sup>125</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, pp. 215-228.

<sup>126</sup> Ripa, *Iconologia*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>127</sup> See the chapter 'Sorgemanifestationerna kring prinsarna Ulrik, Gustav, Fredrik och Karl Gustav' in Sidén,, pp. 229-251.

<sup>128</sup> Lundh-Eriksson, *Hedvig Eleonora*, pp. 172-74.

### **Catharina Charlotta Oxenstierna Complimented with a Rose**

Catharina Charlotta Oxenstierna (1672 – 1727) was one of Magdalena Stenbock and Bengt Oxenstiernas many daughters. Her portrait (Fig. 9.) was taken by Mitjens around 1690 when she would have been 18 years old. She is seen walking in nature in three-quarter length facing left, wearing a deep golden orange dress with full, round sleeves. A sizable bush of wild roses grows on her left. The background foliage is not especially detailed, and consistently shifts between muted grey and blue-green tones. This choice of colour is complementary to the rich orange to Catharina Charlotta's dress and her warm skin tone. Her left hand is holding the skirt of her dress, while her right is outstretched, clasped around a brimming pink rose. Her face is turned towards the audience, her expression calm as she is about to pick the flower. Considering the composition, it is possible that Mijtens was inspired to some degree by the portrait of Beata Elisabeth von Köningsmarck, painted nearly forty years earlier by Munnichhoven. Mijtens has placed Catharina Charlotta's body in a similar fashion, both women are facing left with their right hand outstretched to pick the rose. Even the ladies' facial expressions are similar, calm and neutral. The similarities end there however, as Mijtens' portrait does not contain the same symbolic depth as Munnichhoven's.

#### *A Simple yet Effective Composition*

In the portrait of Catharina Charlotta, only one of the roses is prominent, while the rest are hidden behind leaves and branches within the bush. The rose, as previously mentioned, serves as a symbol of beauty, youth and love, appropriate attributes for the young woman. The symbolic interpretation of rose picking found in *Amorum Emblemata* representing both the sweetness and pain love brings can further be applied to Catharina Charlotta's portrait.<sup>129</sup> The single pink rose can additionally be interpreted as the Christian description of the Virgin as *rosa sine spina*, a rose without a thorn, indicating Catharina Charlotta's purity and virginity.<sup>130</sup> This uncomplicated yet popular usage of the rose is an example of a more simplistic trend within portraiture that arose towards the end of the seventeenth century. The trend resulted in more formal portraits of women or girls with few symbolic objects or attributes. It was also common during this period to portray women walking in nature, carrying fruits or flowers.<sup>131</sup> While the rose is meant to bear its usual connotation of youth, beauty and love as attributes of Catharina Charlotta, it is also a good example of Mijtens stylistic choice to let faces and hands dominate his portraits, while less important elements are toned down.<sup>132</sup> This explains the anonymous background scenery and the bush with its' singular rose. The purpose of the composition is to display Catharina Charlotta's beauty,

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<sup>129</sup> See note 80.

<sup>130</sup> Drysdall. & Hourihane, *The Routledge companion to medieval iconography*, p. 459.

<sup>131</sup> Sidén, *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, p. 175.

<sup>132</sup> Malmberg, B., von (ed.), *Gripsholm: ett slott och dess konstkatter : en konstbok från Nationalmuseum*, Ehlin, Stockholm, 1956, p. 72.

while the rose bush is constructed by Mijtens to properly convey her graceful features and form. Her pose, gesture and dress were considered the accurate manner to portray young girls between 1650-1720.<sup>133</sup> It is possible that the intent of this portrait was to entice potential suitors into marriage, as the style and iconography aligns with that of betrothal portraits. However, Catharina Charlotta never married, and due to the lack of biographical sources, it is unknown if she was ever engaged.<sup>134</sup> What can be determined is that the portrait marks her coming of age, and the blossoming rose serves as a suitable analogy for this.

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<sup>133</sup> Sidén, K., *Den ideala barndomen: studier i det stormaktstida barnporträttets ikonografi och funktion*, Raster, Diss. Uppsala Universitet, Stockholm, 2001. P. 176.

<sup>134</sup> Elgenstierna, G., (ed.), *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, Norstedt, Stockholm, 1925-1936, Vol 5 Lind af Hageby-von Porten, Nyupplaga, Sveriges Släktforskarförbund, Stockholm 1998, p.604-05.

## Conclusion

This thesis study set out to examine the usage and symbolic meaning of flowers in portraits of royal and noble women during the seventeenth century. Apart from examining the flower iconography and its intended meaning in relation to the sitter, the purpose of the analysis was to reveal the portraits' social functions and examine how ideas of gender were constructed through symbolic discourse. The study furthermore aimed to trace the artistic development within portraiture from the late Renaissance to the early and high Baroque. The six portraits dating from 1649 to 1690 have been analysed by a method of Iconology and seen through a gender based perspective, allowing for a few final key observations.

A change in the preferred manner in which the women are depicted can be observed when comparing the portraits. The earliest portrait in the study contains elements of the Renaissance tradition with its serious, formal portraits with nondescript interior background and sombre colours. However, the slight turn of the body's profile indicates the emergence of the Baroque. Depictions in profile start to become more prominent in the early Baroque, and bodies are more relaxed. As the high Baroque evolves, the noble female subjects are frequently pictured outside. Movement becomes a key aspect of the composition. This motion is either in the form of a walking or flower picking subject, or of billowing shawls or draperies. The weather is often stormy and turbulent, with monumental, grey clouds looming in the distance. Both of the two royal portraits portray their subjects by a window. One is seated, most likely as a way to recognize and accentuate her status. Towards the very end of the century, the last portrait captures a new emerging trend where emphasis is given to the individuality of the sitter with fewer symbolic elements and elaborate compositions.

The types of flowers included in the different portraits stay consistent throughout the period, with roses being the most frequently featured. Carnations similarly occur more than once. Both of these flowers have a long tradition of symbolism with a multitude of different interpretations. The most likely interpretation of flowers rich in iconography is dependent on the biographical context surrounding the sitter, based on variables such as age, marital status, wealth and family heritage. The most prevalent virtues connected with the flowers are youth, purity, beauty and love. Other common traits are devotion, innocence, fertility or allusions to the sitter's heritage or maternal qualities. These traits occur in almost all portraits, with the exception of the two regents. The study found that the orange blossom was used as a symbol for knowledge because the sitter did not adhere to any typically female expectations due to her role as regent. Meanwhile, the iconography of the spruce was not directly attached to any of the sitter's qualities, but rather the child she was carrying at the time.

When considering all six portraits, it becomes clear what conventional ideas of gender roles and femininity were enforced and emphasised within portraiture of the social elite

during the seventeenth century. Flower iconography was utilised to attach qualities of love, beauty, youth, virginity, devotion and innocence especially to young, unmarried women. For married women, devotion and allusions to motherly love are most prominent. Flowers and their iconography stem from long traditions and by examining their usage and the sitter, the portraits' intended message can be revealed. This thesis study has provided further insight about Swedish portraiture of noble and royal women, and how flower symbolism was utilised during the second half of the seventeenth century within Baroque art.

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Image courtesy - Erik Cornelius, Nationalmuseum, CC BY-SA 4.0,  
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Image courtesy - Wikimedia CC

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\*This photograph was taken from a colour image printed in *Svenskt konstnärlexikon* and the left edge is cut off.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Roosval, J., Lilja, G. & Andersson, K., (eds.), *Svenskt konstnärlexikon: tiotusen svenska konstnärers liv och verk*, Allhem, Malmö, 1952-1967, vol. III, p. 125.