



Royal Institute for
Cultural Heritage

**Twenty-third Art History Seminar of the Royal Institute for
Cultural Heritage (KIK-IRPA)**

International Conference, Brussels, 12th-13th September 2024

**The Archduchess Isabella (1566-1633)
Artistic Agency between Madrid and the
Southern Netherlands**

Book of Abstracts

Keynote Speaker

Curating Images and Memories The Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia and the Beyond

Luc Duerloo (Universiteit Antwerpen)

In our day and age, the Archdukes Albert and Isabella would be considered a power couple. In her own right, the widowed Infanta continued to exercise considerable influence in the affairs of state. Even though they failed to establish a separate branch ruling the Habsburg Netherlands, they left a long-lasting legacy in the political, the religious and the cultural sphere. The notion that art and architecture played a fundamental role in attaining and maintaining this position of power has become widely accepted.

This paper will consider the goals and mechanisms that steered the use of the arts in the course of their joint reign and during the Infanta's subsequent tenure as governess-general on behalf of King Philip IV. It will explore the strengths and limitations of the image that they projected, the different audiences that it addressed, the dynastic, courtly and visual traditions on which it drew, and the wide array of media that it employed. At its heart stood the politics of memory that succeeded to consolidate Habsburg rule, contractual monarchy and catholic supremacy for generations to come.

Section 1 • The years at the Spanish Court

El aprendizaje de la vida cortesana: Isabel Clara Eugenia de Austria en la Corte de Madrid

Elisa García Prieto (Ministerio de Cultura)

With this proposal we would like to reflect on the formative process of the Infanta Isabella of Austria. Thanks to her skills in the management of government affairs of the Southern Netherlands, she has become one of the most prominent female figures in the Habsburg dynasty. However, for much of her childhood and youth, her destiny seemed to be more closely tied to the Empire through her long-sought and never concluded marriage to Rudolf II. This long wait was furthermore accompanied by a series of circumstances that brought her closer to other potential destinies, including the possibility of succeeding her father Philip II due to the failing health of her male siblings. These facts influenced the way in which her political and humanistic training and her courtly apprenticeship were approached. We understand the formative process of the Infanta as a socialising process in which the Court environment played a key role and where issues such as court patronage are essential to understand how an Infanta should conduct herself at Court. To understand how Isabella lived her long period in Madrid, from 1566 to 1598, we must look at the complex human network that constituted her Household; those men and women who formed her palace servants became necessary agents for the Infanta to acquire skills that were of great use to her in later phases of her life. Finally, it would be interesting to see how those experiences and the links forged in Spain were essential for her activity in the Southern Netherlands.

La formación de una gran mecenas y coleccionista: los años de Isabel Clara Eugenia en la corte española (1566-1599)

Almudena Pérez de Tudela (Patrimonio Nacional)

The high heights reached by the Infanta Isabella in the fields of art collecting and patronage as ruler of the Southern Netherlands cannot be explained without knowing about her formative years at the Spanish court in the shadow of her father, King Philip II. Female role models such as her aunt Princess Juana of Austria and her godmother the 3rd Duchess of Alba, were also decisive in her childhood. The death of the last Spanish queen, Anne of Austria, in 1580, made the Infanta the most important female figure at Court. During her time living in Madrid, she had a close relationship with the most important artists working there, which contributed to the formation of her highly developed artistic taste. As an adult she even advised her exigent father in this field. From a very early age she built up an incipient collection. The distribution of this collection in the different women's spaces, both in the Alcázar of Madrid and in other royal residences, especially in the monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, together with important works of art donated by her father, will be analysed. Isabella maintained a close relationship with her sister, Catherine Micaela, who became Duchess of Savoy in 1585 and with whom she regularly exchanged gifts. After her marriage, Isabella moved her collection from Madrid to Brussels, and she continued a close relationship with Spain. For her artistic enterprises in the Southern Netherlands, she would recall solutions she had seen in her native country, for example, the gardens of Aranjuez when reconstructing Mariemont.

The Flemishness of the Escorial

Marina Sánchez Montero (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

The introduction of Flemish architecture in Spanish royal sites was promoted by Philip II during the second half of the 16th century. The development of these constructive forms ran parallel to the childhood and youth of Isabel Clara Eugenia. Therefore, the future sovereign of the Netherlands would become familiar with this architectural syntax from her infancy. This process reached its climax with the foundation, in 1563, of the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo del Escorial, of great importance for the infanta's artistic education. This paper, focusing on the study of the Escorial, aims to highlight how the Flemish architectural language of the mid-16th century became representative of the identity of the Habsburg Monarchy. To achieve this, alongside the sources from the 16th century, sources and documentation from the following century, less studied by historiography, will be addressed. Specifically, the studied sources refer to the devastating fire that broke out at the monastery in June, 1671. The fire destroyed the slate-covered roofs of the building, as well as the Prior's Tower with its spire, and the Bell's Tower. The rebuilding led to an intense debate among some architects about whether the building should be reconstructed in the old way (*lo antiguo*), that is, restoring the original Flemish-like roofs, or whether it was better to advocate for a baroque classicist aesthetic innovation, as Gaspar de la Peña, royal works' master, argued. Architectural treatises prior to the monastery fire and the testimonies of the clerics and architects involved in its reconstruction are essential to understand the Flemishness in Spanish architecture and its courtly meaning. The decision to maintain the original appearance of the monastery and the intervention of the regent queen Mariana of Austria in the matter, demonstrate the importance that this architecture had for the monarchy. Ultimately, this paper will attempt to expand on the consideration given to the use of these roofs. Although the taste of Philip II was the key to the introduction of slate and steep roofs in the Spanish royal sites, the sources studied show that their use was not only an aesthetic issue, but rather a

response to the spatial possibilities that these structures offered for the proper functioning of the palace and convent of the Monastery of El Escorial. Archduchess Isabella knew first-hand the usefulness of these architectonic solutions, as she and her ladies-in-waiting depended on the spaces created by these roofs of Flemish origin. It therefore formed part of her courtly and artistic experience during her years in Madrid.

Section 2 • A Sovereign of the Southern Netherlands and her Court (I)

Sous le patronage des archiducs La sculpture à la cour de Bruxelles, des de Nole à du Quesnoy

Géraldine Patigny (Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, KIK-IRPA)

On connaît encore mal l'intérêt qu'ont pu porter les archiducs Albert et Isabelle à la sculpture et si, à l'instar de l'un de leur successeur, l'archiduc Léopold Guillaume (gouverneur des anciens Pays-Bas entre 1647 et 1656), ils avaient un goût plus prononcé pour la sculpture antique ou italienne de la renaissance. C'est néanmoins majoritairement à des sculpteurs établis à Anvers et à Bruxelles, qu'ils commandent des sculptures pour orner les grottes et fontaines des jardins du palais ou encore, les édifices religieux qu'ils subventionnent. L'atelier anversoise des de Nole et celui des du Quesnoy, à Bruxelles, permettront d'illustrer une part du mécénat archiducal envers la sculpture.

L'Infante Isabelle et les tableaux de Theodoor van Loon à Montaignu

Sabine van Sprang (Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium)

The building of the church - now a basilica - of Our Lady of Scherpenheuvel (Montaignu, in French), founded by the Archdukes Albert and Isabella, has been the subject of numerous studies over the last twenty-five years. Our paper focuses on the seven altarpieces painted by Theodoor van Loon. Thanks to the monographic exhibition devoted to the painter at Bozar in 2018, we have reviewed their dating. Contrary to what has often been asserted, the altarpieces for the side chapels were executed during Albert's lifetime; only the painting on the high altar, depicting the *Assumption*, dates from the period of Isabella's regency. Furthermore, the stylistic choices made by Van Loon in these paintings cannot, in our opinion, be reduced to mere fashionable effects but reflect, as is often the case with the artist, the intention with which they were painted. These choices also make it possible to establish clear links between various players at stake in Scherpenheuvel. Finally, certain iconographic details of the painting of the high altar in particular, show that after the death of her husband, Isabella continued to follow very closely not only the construction of the sanctuary but also its interior layout.

Section 3 • A Sovereign of the Southern Netherlands and her Court (II)

Isabella and Rubens

María Cruz de Carlos Varona (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

In the mid-1620s, the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia de Austria, governess of the Southern Netherlands, commissioned Peter Paul Rubens to design a series of tapestries of the Triumph of the Eucharist. The tapestries constitute a dynamic triumphal procession based on the victory processions of the Roman emperors,

although this time the central motif is the Holy Sacrament, the principal mystery of the Roman Catholic faith. The series, comprising twenty tapestries woven in the best Brussels workshops, was gifted by the Infanta to the Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales in Madrid, a place very much attached to her affective and dynastic memory. The creative process involved an intense work for Rubens and his workshop resulting in the creation of works appropriated to the different stages of its completion: *bozzetti*, sketches in oil on small panels for the preliminary compositions; *modelli*, which compositions are closer to the definitive images seen in the tapestries, but are inverted; and, finally, the cartoons which are eight times larger than the *bozzetti* of the first phase. The Triumph of the Eucharist was one of the most important commissions ever undertaken by Rubens and is comparable in artistic ambition to his series on the life of Marie de Medici, queen of France. It is a splendid demonstration of the quality of the art produced in the dominions of Isabel Clara Eugenia, as well as an affirmation of the piety of the Infanta and consciousness of her Habsburg dynastic identity.

Le mécénat d'Isabella dans l'art du vitrail

Isabelle Lecocq (Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, KIK-IRPA)

Isabella of Austria (1566-1633), daughter of King Philip II of Spain, sovereign (1559-1621) and then governess of the Spanish Netherlands (1621-1633), is renowned for her patronage and her active involvement in the artistic production of her time. The presentation will examine the relationship between Isabella of Austria and the art of stained glass, highlighting her role as a patron of the arts and the importance of stained glass in the dynastic affirmation and expression of power and faith at the Habsburg court.

Section 4 • A Court without Sovereign: Governess of the Southern Netherlands

L'humble tante veuve

Isabelle Claire Eugénie, tertiaire franciscaine, par Antoon Van Dyck

Cécile Vincent-Cassy (CY Cergy Paris Université / UMR Héritages)

Nombreux sont les spécialistes qui ont mis en valeur le lien qu'a tissé Isabelle Claire Eugénie entre œuvre de sainteté et œuvre politique. La publication en 2023 du catalogue raisonné des œuvres de Van Dyck conservées au musée du Louvre par Blaise Ducos (<https://livres.louvre.fr/vandyck/>) est l'occasion d'examiner cette question à nouveaux frais, à travers l'étude du portrait d'Isabelle Claire Eugénie daté de 1628-1629, dont on souhaiterait ici préciser la nature paradoxale travaillée par le peintre. Ce tableau de la gouverneuse des Pays-Bas espagnols a été peint par Antoon Van Dyck à Bruxelles, et diffusé dans les cours européennes dans une suite de répliques dont la chronologie pourra être discutée. La fille aînée de Philippe II s'y est fait représenter avec l'habit de tertiaire franciscaine — un statut distinct de celui de nonne — qu'avant elle sa lointaine ancêtre Élisabeth de Portugal, infante d'Aragon (1271-1336) avait revêtu à la mort du roi Denis 1er. Or, quand elle passa commande de ce tableau à Van Dyck au moment où elle en faisait son peintre, elle lui confia la réinterprétation d'une première image d'elle façonnée par Rubens en 1625. Ce premier portrait reprenait lui-même la *vera effigies* de son illustre prédécesseure Élisabeth de Portugal, canonisée en 1625 à la demande du roi d'Espagne et du Portugal — l'union des deux Couronnes est comprise entre 1580 et 1640. Malgré l'apport de la fiche rédigée par Blaise Ducos, nous ne saurions souscrire à la formule dans laquelle il affirme que Van Dyck, procéda « bien à une simplification (une incompréhension ?) de la disposition et du port de l'habit ». L'habit de tertiaire était celui que revêtaient ses parents de la branche espagnole des Habsbourg sur leur lit de mort. Isabelle Claire Eugénie avait choisi pour sa part de le porter de son vivant, comme une humble veuve, à la mort de son

époux l'archiduc Albert d'Autriche en 1621. Elle arborait avec lui le deuil de son statut de souveraine des Pays-Bas, mais aussi le renoncement, suprême, à celui de religieuse franciscaine. Ce nouveau portrait, comme nous l'expliquerons, signait l'humilité paradoxale de celle qui restait au bord de l'état religieux, dévoilant son intériorité véritable dans un portrait sous le rideau.

Following the image of *infanta* Isabella Clara Eugenia The influence of the *infanta*'s example in the government of the Spanish and Austrian Netherlands (17th-18th centuries)

Rocío Martínez López (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

The shadow of *infanta* Isabella Clara Eugenia of Austria was long and influenced the government of the Spanish Netherlands during the second half of the seventeenth century, as well as the way emperor Charles VI and his sister, Maria Elizabeth of Austria, designed those territories' government at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Her example and the conditions associated to the government and sovereignty she shared with her husband was continuously mentioned by different members of the Habsburg family who desired to link themselves to the territories she once ruled. How far did the shadow of Isabella Clara Eugenia reached after her death and which parts of her government, court, position and artistic influence did the ones who wished to follow her footsteps want to imitate? In which way did they try to use her image to legitimate their power, as well as the palaces, court celebrations or even art collections connected to her, looking to be perceived as the successors of the admired Habsburg ruler? In this paper, I will explore the way in which Isabella Clara Eugenia's example was politically used by those relatives who wanted, or got, the position of governors of the Spanish and, later, the Austrian Netherlands, and how they modelled their courts, ceremonies, artworks and patronages after the image of the famous *infanta* and her successful rule. I will focus especially on two examples. The first one will be the government of elector Maximilian II Emanuel of Bavaria, who was named governor of the Spanish Netherlands in 1691, when he was married to Charles II of Spain's heiress, archduchess Maria Antonia of Austria. We will explore how the example of Isabella Clara Eugenia was used to give the archduchess a special treatment by Madrid's court and distinguished her from the rest of the female members of the Habsburg dynasty. Also, we will analyse how the elector, who wanted to obtain the Spanish Netherlands for himself, used the example of the court of archduke Albert and *infanta* Isabella Clara Eugenia to reinforce his power within these territories and to try to make decisions that only belonged to the monarch, without his approval. The second one will be devoted to the figure of archduchess Maria Elizabeth of Austria, sister of emperor Charles VI and governor of the Austrian Netherlands from 1725 to her death in 1741. Charles VI and Maria Elizabeth specifically chose to follow the example of *infanta* Isabella Clara Eugenia to reinforce the emperor's power in the Austrian Netherlands after the War of Spanish Succession. Using Isabella's image as a direct example, she tried to imitate the *infanta*'s court, patronages, ceremonies, artworks, specific decorations and ways to relate to the territories' subjects, adapting them, when necessary, to the new realities of the eighteenth century. The adaptations made by Maria Elizabeth were crucial for the rest of the imperial sovereignty of the Austrian Netherlands, where women had a central role to play in its government until the end of the eighteenth century, following the footsteps, image and the memory, of *infanta* Isabella Clara Eugenia of Austria.