

MASTERPIECE  
MINUTE



Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute with Doc Brown on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Michael Brown, Curator of European Art at The San Diego Museum of Art. Drop in every Friday at 10am to pick up a new mini talk led by SDMA curators and guests spotlighting works of art from the Museum's collection.

Today's discussion centers around two remarkable women, the Venezuelan-American artist Marisol, and her subject, Matoaka of Virginia, the Native American woman better known as Pocahontas.

[Music]

Born Maria Sol Escobar in Paris to Venezuelan parents, Marisol was a truly international figure

in the postwar New York art scene. Known primarily as a sculptor of oversized figures in stone and wood, Marisol explored critical approaches to mimicry, appropriation, and feminist theory.

Though closely associated with Andy Warhol—she was in two of his films—and the Pop Art movement, Marisol avoided calling herself a Pop artist. In fact, she often skewered the chauvinism of the movement and the art world in general, which resulted in critics marginalizing her work until very recently.

Produced in the bicentennial year of 1976, Marisol's color lithograph presents an apt alter ego. Marisol appropriated the only surviving lifetime image of Matoaka, a print made by



Simon de Passe made in England during her visit to the royal court in London in 1616. An impression of this engraving is also in our collection, which you can find on the SDMA website under accession number 1990.76.

While the exact cause is not known—whether tuberculosis, poisoning, or the epidemic known locally as the “bloody flux”—Matoaka died quite suddenly before she could return to Virginia, leaving behind a young son.

Marisol lost her own mother to suicide at age 11, choosing to cease speaking altogether for many years, often moving about penitentially on her bare knees.

Marisol has made several important changes to

the original. Matoaka's baptism and marriage to tobacco entrepreneur John Rolfe is mentioned in the inscription, and she is depicted as a woman of color, holding a plumed pen signifying her literacy. The marriage appears to have been strategic—in part, at least—as it brought a brief period of peace to Matoaka's people.

Marisol, like Frida Kahlo, was profoundly interested in PreColumbian art.

We see this reflected in the Matoaka's garments. Fashionable and courtly in de Passe's engraving, her costume is still identifiably European in the image by Marisol. Ingeniously, she has rendered the collar, lapels, and some surrounding areas

in imitation of plumería, the indigenous Mesoamerican featherwork technique that was reserved for ritual garments until the Spanish conquistadors brought examples to Europe. Plumería became highly sought after as a luxury commodity. The parallel with John Rolfe's importation of the sacred cured tobacco leaf to England was clearly not lost on Marisol.

This has been Doc Brown with Masterpiece Minute. Thanks for joining us here on Virtual SDMA—see you next Friday!

BALBOA PARK  
THE SAN DIEGO  
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*MATONKS as Rebecca daughter of THE MIGHTY PRINCE*