

# Małgorzata Mirga-Tas

## SCREEN TEST

FEBRUARY 23 – APRIL 30, 2022

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas is a Romani and Polish artist; a sculptress educated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. However, in her artistic practice she uses neither the traditionally defined medium of sculpture nor equally venerable art of painting. Her textile-based works freely cross clearly defined boundaries of various visual art media and cannot be easily classified as representing only one art practice or technique. They remain a very particular and unique phenomenon on the contemporary art scene in Poland – similarly to the artists herself and her position in the Polish art world. Mirga-Tas is the first – and so far the only – professionally trained Roma female artist in Poland whose work deals with portraying the Roma (especially Romani women), their intimate lives, and every-day reality.

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas' artworks obsessively and compulsively portray the Roma women. They are particularly populated by the women she knows or admires: female members of her own family and women from her home village Czarna Góra in the south of the Małopolska region, as well as female members of the Roma communities from across Europe. The artist often uses fabrics and textiles that might be interpreted as material traces of the women she portrays in her art: the marks of their very tangible presence. Oftentimes, the works she creates are made of fragments of clothing, curtains, and tablecloths that once belonged to the persons that feature in her portraits. In this sense, the works of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas do not only represent but, above all, make the people portrayed by the artist present.

Apart from being deeply personal, the portraits created by the artist are also intentionally political – though not explicitly. The artist deals with two issues that remain important to Roma communities all over the world. The first is the centuries-old absence of self-portraits by the Roma in European visual culture (until the 20th century practically all images of the Roma were made by non-Roma). The second is the proliferation of harmful and stereotypical representations of the Roma based on colonial, ethnographic, and often racist gaze.

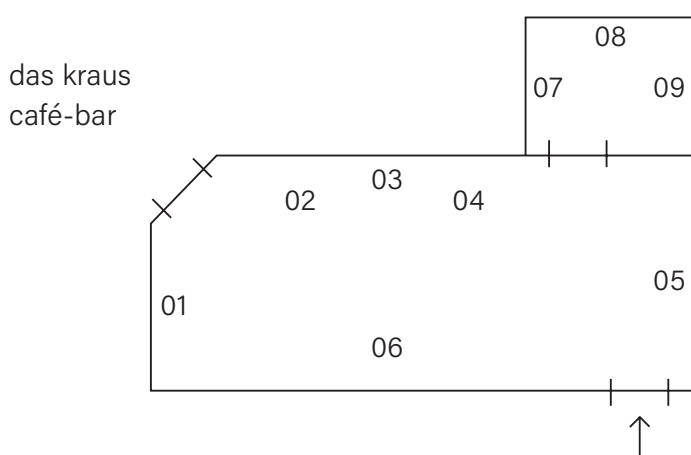
The sheer variety of techniques used by the artist is nothing short of extraordinary. On the one hand, she willingly explores the art of collage, as in the work *Kie Serina* (2017), a painting based on a photograph taken by her uncle Andrzej Mirga in which two women and a man play cards and where parts of the work painted with acrylic paint have been complemented with fabrics and "real" cards. On the other hand, the artist creates spatial and three-dimensional triptychs whose protagonists are her beloved grandmother (*Baba Józka* [2019]) and aunts (*Bibi Helena* [2019] and *Bibi Ibrona* [2019]). These works, clearly inspired by the vernacular and religious artistic tradition of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas' home region, the artist herself calls "little chapels".

Another technique which Mirga-Tas has favoured as a means of self-expression is the large-format and tapestry-like flamboyant textile pieces. This artform is exemplified by two works that the artist has decided to show at the exhibition at Kahán Art Space in Vienna.

A piece entitled *Romnija Siwen* (2021) addresses one of the artist's favorite themes: Roma women engaged in collective sewing. This piece is also a collective portrait: self-portrait of the artist herself (she kneels in the foreground), and that of her mother Grażyna Mirga, as well as her aunt Stanisława Mirga, with whom the artist often works.

However, it is the three-dimensional, openwork, light, and two-sided screens that have become the hallmark of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas's oeuvre. Two of the screens shown in Vienna are from the series *Face Value* (2021), which the artist originally created for her show at the Tartu Art House in Estonia last year. Taking advantage of their two-sidedness, she portrayed persons from two Roma communities: her own whose home is the south of Poland and one based in Estonia, to which she was introduced during her stay in Tartu. Although geographically and socially distant, in Mirga-Tas' works the two communities have been reunited. In this way, the two sides of the screens have become part of a single story: one about the transnational community and heritage of the European Roma.

Wojciech Szymański



The exhibition *Screen Test* will be on view additionally at the Kahan Art Space Budapest from May 5 – June 4, 2022

## Bio

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas (b. Zakopane, 1978) graduated from the Faculty of Sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow (2004). She has participated in several dozen individual and group exhibitions, including the 11th Berlin Biennale (2020), the Art Encounters Biennial in Timișoara (2019, 2021), and the 3rd Autostrada Biennale in Prizren (2021). In 2022, she will represent Poland at the 59th Venice Biennial. She lives and works in Czarna Góra, Poland.

- 01 ROMANIJA SIWEN, 2021
- 02 ROMNIJA FROM THE CYCLE FACE VALUE, 2021
- 03 KIE SERINA, 2017
- 04 ROMANI KALI DAJ, 2018
- 05 ROMNIJA DAŁE ESTNIA FROM THE CYCLE FACE VALUE, 2021
- 06 ROMA ANDAŁE ESTONIA FROM THE CYCLE FACE VALUE, 2021
- 07 BABA JÓZKA, 2019
- 08 BIBI IBRONA, 2019
- 09 BIBI HELENA, 2019