



Royal Tableaux Vivants

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Daniel Seghers (1590–1661) and Erasmus Quellinus the Younger (1607–1678), *Flower Garland with the Standing Virgin and Child*, c. 1645–50. Oil on copper, 85.5 x 61.5 cm. Purchase: Wiros Fund. Nationalmuseum, NM 7505.

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Fig. 1 Johannes Jaeger (1832–1908), inventor Georg von Rosen (1843–1923), *Tableau, The Arrival at Wartburg, from Saint Elisabeth*, presented at a soirée at *Musikaliska Akademien*, 1887. Photography, 24.5 x 33.5 cm. Purchase: Frank Bensow Fund. Nationalmuseum, Swedish National Portrait Gallery, NMGrh 5195.

Ballets, plays and masquerade balls

with historical or allegorical themes have been staged at royal courts since the early modern period, with artists creating many elements of these events. Leonardo da Vinci and Inigo Jones, for example, as well as David Klöcker Ehrenstrahl, helped in the organisation of such festivities. Preserved artwork from the 16th century onward is in existence, in the form of costume sketches, scenery and portraits of participants in costume. In the 19th century, *tableaux vivants* gained popularity from the royal court to the citizenry, with no clearly defined border between these and costume parties. At the start of the century, participants often imitated famous artworks, and later the tableaux became more theatrical, both in their choice of subject and their design. Here too, established artists were commissioned for the composition, with contributions from people such as John Everett Millais, Hans Makart and Georg von Rosen.¹

In the mid-19th century, the introduction of photography brought a new medium for art and representation and was also used to document celebrations at the royal court. Reproducibility, combined with improved printing technology, allowed images to be more widely disseminated. They became available as illustrations in journals and albums, but were also sold as individual photographs.² The tableau thus lost its exclusivity, no longer being only for the invitees.³ At the same time, the photo and tableau had a reciprocal influence on each other. Arranged scenes with historical or literary subjects rapidly became popular subjects in photographs; there was also a significant influence from history painting and, to some extent, portraiture.⁴ Oscar Gustav Rejlander and Julia Margaret Cameron are examples of this, as their tableaux were created for the camera and were art works in their own right.

A Swedish example of tableaux that were immortalised through photography comes from the soirées that were held at Musikaliska Akademien (the Academy of Music)

in Stockholm in February 1887. Participants included associates of the royal court and the then Crown Prince Gustaf (V), his consort Victoria and the princes Carl and Oscar. Four scenes with historical narratives were presented: the first two were based on paintings, *Gustav Vasa i Västerås* (Gustav Vasa in Västerås) by Geskel Saloman and *Bellman i Sergels ateljé* (Bellman in Sergel's Studio) by Johan Fredrik Höckert, with both performances arranged by Saloman. These were followed by a Gustavian era comedy, authored by royal secretary Isidor Lundström.

The second section of the soirées was a performance of *Die Legende von der heiligen Elisabeth* by Franz Liszt with a string orchestra, piano, organ and harp, as well as a choir and soloists. For this, history painter Georg von Rosen had created six tableaux vivants: *The Arrival in Wartburg*, *Miracle of the Roses*, *The Departure to the Crusade*, *The Flight from Wartburg*, *Feeding the Poor* and *In the Monastery*. Two photographs, now acquired by the Swedish National Portrait Gallery, show the first and the third scenes (Figs. 1–2).⁵ The tableaux' leading role, Elisabeth of Thuringia, was played by Crown Princess Victoria. Crown Prince Gustaf appeared as the saint's spouse Ludwig, Landgrave of Thuringia.⁶ His brothers, Carl and Oscar, played Elisabeth's first intended spouse, Hermann of Thuringia, and a crusader.

The purpose of these charity performances was to raise funds for H.M. the Queen's Home for Nurses, *Sophiahemmet*. Queen Sophia had instituted a school for nurses in 1884, inspired by the work of Florence Nightingale, among others. Three years later, in December 1887, the foundation was laid for Sophiahemmet's hospital, school and nursing home in Stockholm. That the chosen music was an oratory to Elisabeth of Thuringia is explained by the saint's close association with charity and medicine, as the patron saint of the sick and for the love of others. Landgravine Elisabeth had founded hospitals in the 1220s, in

Gotha, Wartburg and Marburg. Another likely reason is that Sophia was a descendant of Elisabeth of Thuringia. After the soirées, a folder was published with photos of the Elisabeth tableaux.⁷ This was also sold to raise money for Sophiahemmet.

Court photographer Johannes Jaeger was best known for his cityscapes and interiors, but also worked with other subjects and counted the royal family among his clients.⁸ Georg von Rosen was a natural choice as stage manager and director of the historic tableaux. He was not only an established history painter, but was also employed as a professor and director at the Academy of Fine Arts. Count von Rosen had been made a chamberlain in 1879 and had previously produced portraits of members of the royal family.⁹ He sometimes worked from photographs, such as for a posthumous portrait of Karl XV.¹⁰ The crown prince and his consort were well acquainted with the artist and their social circles overlapped. One example was when von Rosen was commissioned to work on the décor of the Breakfast room at Tullgarn Palace, which was conducted in consultation with Victoria and Gustaf, as well as the ladies and gentlemen of the court.¹¹ It can be supposed that Georg von Rosen contributed to the design of the costumes in the Elisabeth tableaux. In a letter from the autumn of that year, Chamberlain Johan Casimir De la Gardie says that Crown Princess Victoria thanks von Rosen for "the outline sketches sent for the costumes" intended for another performance, to be staged at Tullgarn.¹²

Von Rosen's history painting is dominated by scenes from the Middle Ages and 16th century, although there are no works with direct links to the legend of Saint Elisabeth. During his studies, and during later travels in Germany, Belgium and Italy,¹³ he had the opportunity to study old cities and art collections. Von Rosen's early role models were German and Belgian history painters who preferred to depict dramatic scenes, paying great attention to the detail of settings, costumes and objects. This was



Fig. 2 Johannes Jaeger (1832–1908), inventor Georg von Rosen (1843–1923), *Tableau, The Departure to the Crusade, from Saint Elisabeth*, presented at a soirée at *Musikaliska Akademien*, 1887. Photography, 24.5 x 33.5 cm. Purchase: Frank Bensow Fund. Nationalmuseum, Swedish National Portrait Gallery, NMGrh 5196.

an approach that proved very useful when creating tableaux vivants.

The royal court's interest in historical tableaux ebbed during the 20th century, but did not entirely disappear. One late example is that of Gustaf VI Adolf's seventieth birthday in 1952. Nine of the king's grandchildren performed in a tableau based on Fredrik Westin's painting, *Bernadotteska familjetavlan* (Painting of the Bernadotte Family), 1837.¹⁴ The costumes

and staging carefully followed this display of the first generations of Bernadottes on the Swedish throne.

Films, particularly historical costume dramas, largely took over the subjects of history paintings and tableaux. Staged pictures have lived on in contemporary photography, in other forms and with new content, such as in the work of Cindy Sherman and Yasumasa Morimura.¹⁵

Notes:

1. Sara Stevenson, "Tableaux, Attitudes and Photography", in Sara Stevenson and Helen Bennett, *Van Dyck in Check Trousers. Fancy Dress in Art and Life 1700–1900* (exh.cat.), Scottish National Portrait Gallery – National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh 1978, pp. 45 f., 48, 50; Ines Rödl, "'Zwitterwesen zwischen Mahlerey und Theater'. Vergangenheit in Fotografie und Malerei im 19. Jahrhundert", in *Licht und Leinwand. Fotografie und Malerei im 19. Jahrhundert* (exh.cat.), Germanisches Nationalmuseum Nürnberg – Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Berlin 2019, p. 135.

2. At a famous British fancy dress ball, *The Devonshire House Ball*, organised to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, James Lafayette set up a temporary photo studio at the party – a high quality predecessor of contemporary party photographs. Some participants had portraits made in costume on other occasions, in other photo studios. A selection of 286 photogravures, by Walker & Boutall, were published in the *Devonshire House Fancy Dress Album*, see the website of the National Portrait Gallery (London): <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/set/515/Devonshire+House+Fancy+Dress+Ball+Album>, (accessed 13 March 2020). See also Helen Bennett, "The Royal Family", Sara Stevenson and Helen Bennett, *Van Dyck in Check Trousers. Fancy Dress in Art and Life 1700–1900* (exh.cat.), Scottish National Portrait Gallery – National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Edinburgh 1978, p. 73; Terence Pepper, *High Society. Photographs 1897–1914*, (exh.cat.), National Portrait Gallery, London 1998, pp. 16–25.

3. Rödl 2019, p. 142.

4. Stevenson 1978, p. 63. For the mutual influence of painting and photography, see for example *Tableaux Vivants. Lebende Bilder und Attitüden in Fotografie, Film und Video*, (exh. cat.), Sabine Folie and Michael Glasmeier (eds.), Kunsthalle Wien, Wien 2002; Bettina Brandl-Risi, *BilderSzenen. Tableaux Vivants zwischen bildender Kunst, Theater und Literatur im 19. Jahrhundert*, Rombacher Wissenschaften Reihe Scenae Band 15, Freiburg im Breisgau – Berlin – Wien 2013; Rödl 2019, pp. 132–151.

5. I am indebted to Kerstin Hagsgård, Curator at the Royal Collections, for helping me to identify the scenes in Jaeger's photographs.

6. This was not the only occasion on which the crown prince and crown princess were photographed in historical costumes. The Bernadotte Library has a portrait by photographer Gösta Florman, in which Gustaf plays the role of Gustav II Adolf. Also Victoria is depicted in 17th-century-style fancy dress in a contemporaneous double portrait. See Magnus Olausson and Eva-Lena Karlsson, *Kungar i svart och vitt* (exh.cat.), Swedish National Portrait Gallery, Gripsholm Castle, in collaboration with the Bernadotte Library and the Royal Collections, Stockholm 2006, pp. 34f. ill.; Margit Fjellman, *Victoria. Sveriges drottning*, Stockholm 1980, p. 47 ill.

7. *Minne af de under beskydd och medverkan af D.D. K.K. H.H. Kronprinsen och Kronprinsessan anordnade soiréer till förmån för H. M. Drottningens Hem för sjuksköterskor Februari 1887. Legenden om den Heliga Elisabeth. Sex taflor komponerade till lefvande bilder af Grefve Georg von Rosen. Fotograferade efter naturen af Johannes Jaeger K. Hof-fotograf. Säljes till förmån för Hemmet för Sjuksköterskor*, Stockholm 1887. For a variety of practical reasons, including the light, tableaux

vivants were not photographed as they took place, but on another occasion. Rödl 2019, p. 136.

8. Rolf Söderberg and Pär Rittsel, *Den svenska fotografins historia 1840–1940*, Stockholm 1983, pp. 58–63.

9. Karl XV (1873, privately owned), Oscar II (1875, Konung Oscar II:s stiftelse), Crown Prince Gustaf (V) (1883, owned by Queen Victoria in 1919) and his son Gustaf (VI) Adolf (1885, owned by Queen Victoria in 1919). Erik Wettergren, *Georg von Rosens konst*, Sveriges Allmänna Konstförenings publikation XXVII, Stockholm 1919, pp. 37 f., 92 f. ill., 107 ill., 147, 149, 157, 159 f., nos. 81, 88, 120, 130.

10. Olausson & Karlsson 2006, p. 30.

11. Fjellman 1980, p. 70.

12. The Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Stockholm, Georg von Rosen's letters, letter from Johan Casimir De la Gardie to Georg von Rosen, Tullgarn 19 Oct. 1887.

13. Wettergren 1919, pp. 11f., 15, 22, 31, 41.

14. Westin's painting Nationalmuseum, Swedish National Portrait Gallery, inv.no. NMGrh 1706.

15. For contemporary artists who work with staged tableaux, see for example Folie and Glasmeier 2002.