



ENGLISH

# MALGORZATA MIRGATAS

THIS IS NOT THE END  
OF THE ROAD

# BONJEFANTEN

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas. Photo: Ina Lekiewicz



## **Introduction**

The work of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas (Zakopane, 1978) is a visual sensation which invites deeper reflection. The colours fly and the scenes are so lively they seem to be moving. The longer you look at them, the more you discover. At the same time, her large-scale textile works carry powerful narratives of self-representation, in which pictures become stories and portraits become icons, with all their inherent meaning. Mirga-Tas is a Polish artist who belongs to the Roma community – a non-territorial nation and the largest and arguably the most discriminated ethnic minority in Europe. Her art reflects the Roma identity from a feminist perspective. Through her works, she opposes the dominant negative and stereotypical of the Roma people, which for centuries has been created almost exclusively by non-Roma. Instead, she offers an intimate and authentic representation of Roma history (and *herstory*) and culture.

Through her art, Mirga-Tas celebrates the Roma community, particularly the important role played in it by women. Family, solidarity and sisterhood are key concepts that weave their way through her works.

Mirga-Tas links the everyday to the historical and the iconic. She is both loving and gentle when depicting her own community, while being critical, political and confrontational of the injustices the Roma people are facing. It is this complexity that lends such power to the works of Mirga-Tas.

Mirga-Tas works with a variety of materials and techniques. She is known mainly for her large-scale textile works, which resemble fabric ‘paintings’, a collage of textiles. Combined with drawings and paintings the collages comprise clothing, sheets, curtains and other household fabrics that she gets or buys from her immediate surroundings. These fabrics become carriers of memory and symbolically transmit stories of everyday life of present-day Roma. Making these enormous works takes a lot of time and is a collective process, involving the help of family members and neighbours (mostly women). Mirga-Tas sews together with a small group of seamstresses that has great expertise. The collective and participatory creative process helps, in turn, to strengthen the bonds between the women.

Mirga-Tas is a rising star of the international art world. Since 2014, she

has given solo exhibitions in Poland. In the following years, her works have been shown at some of the most important contemporary arts venues and events, including at the eleventh Berlin Biennale (2020) and *documenta fifteen* in Kassel (2022). Her international breakthrough came in 2022, with her exhibition *Re-enchanting the World* at the Polish Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale. Since then, she has held solo exhibitions at Göteborgs Konsthall in Gothenburg (2023), the Brücke Museum in Berlin (2023) and the CAAC in Seville (2023). This is the first solo exhibition of Małgorzata Mirga-Tas in the Netherlands.



Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Roziena kiereł a babakie siukar hajtań - Roziena brushes her grandmother's beautiful hair braid*, 2024, textile and acrylic on canvas on wooden stretcher, 163 x 160 cm.  
Photo: Bartek Solik. Courtesy of the artist and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.



Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Basiawiben predale baba - Music for grandmothers*, 2024, textile and acrylic on canvas on wooden stretcher, 160 x 200 cm. Photo: Bartek Solik. Courtesy of the artist and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.

## Home

### room 2.24

For this exhibition, Małgorzata Mirga-Tas entered into close collaboration with Morena Bamberger (Roermond, 1994), a Limburg artist of Sinti origin. Their dialogue resulted in new art – both Bamberger and Mirga-Tas are exhibiting new works in which they respond to and are inspired by one another.

Many of the works describe the daily life of a close-knit community. On the textile 'paintings' by Mirga-Tas, we get an insider's view into the everyday activities of contemporary Dutch Roma. These intimate scenes and portraits are inspired by photos from the own family archive of Morena Bamberger and depict many of her family and friends. In this way, Mirga-Tas thus pays tribute to Bamberger's community and shows how she identifies with them as part of the larger Roma nation.

Home and belonging are also important themes in this room. It is a universal desire that is central to many people's lives. Seen through the transnational character of the Roma and Sinti people, these concepts gain extra meaning and weight. Despite their centuries-old presence in Europe, the Roma still tend to be perceived as unwanted guests who don't belong. Roma identity and culture transcend national borders. At the same time, throughout history many Roma communities had to be on the move, as a response to threats and under pressure to survive. Migration was not always a personal choice. And sometimes, the people do not travel, but the borders shift.

This was the case of the small Roma settlement in Czarna Góra, where Mirga-Tas grew up and where she still lives today. Located in the Tatra Mountain region in the South of Poland, throughout turbulent centuries the village fell under the jurisdiction of different countries (from Austria-Hungary, to Czechoslovakia and to communist and then democratic Poland). In this context, being at home and maintaining your own culture and way of life becomes a political statement.

Morena Bamberger's work, too, tells of the Sinti community's way of life, and links the everyday to the magical and the spiritual. Her big installation is called *Sonnekaskro Djiephen* (Sinti for *A Life of Gold*). It was commissioned by the Bonnefanten, and was inspired by the work of Mirga-Tas. Like the Polish artist, Bamberger 'paints' with textiles, using motifs that are typical of the Sinti and Roma culture. In the process, the two artists discovered that they were working with many of the same visual elements.

In agreement with and inspired by Mirga-Tas oeuvre, Bamberger made a horse-drawn caravan. This covered wagon and especially the wheel, is to Bamberger a powerful symbol at the heart of the Sinti and Roma culture, referring to constant motion. It alludes to Roma's journey from India to Europe and their history of migration. It is not coincidental that the wheel (Chakra) is depicted at the centre of the Sinti and Roma flag. Bamberger sees the caravan as a chapel; a small sanctuary that pays tribute to the Sinti and Roma culture and way of life. Even if they no longer travel, they keep their traditions close.

Two films are shown on laundry hanging out to dry on the washing line. They are from 2017, when Bamberger was still at the art academy and struggling with her identity as an artist. Bamberger's family had found it hard to accept her choice of profession, leading to a rift. In these films, we see her first tentative attempt at what would later become a full reconciliation with her family. In the first one, she shows her family and the caravan site where she grew up, looking at herself as an artist through the eyes of her family. In the second, Bamberger uses the caravan site as a studio and looks at the Sinti culture through the eyes of an artist.



Małgorzata Mirga-Tas,  
*Portrait of Morena*, 2024,  
textile and acrylic on canvas on  
wooden stretcher, 92 x 80 cm.  
Photo: Bartek Solik. Courtesy  
of the artist and Foksal Gallery  
Foundation, Warsaw.

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Portrait of Lalla Weiss*, 2024, textile and acrylic on canvas on wooden stretcher, 255 x 200 cm. Photo: Bartek Solik. Courtesy of the artist and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.



## Her story

### room 2.25

In her work, Małgorzata Mirga-Tas celebrates and sheds light on all aspects of womanhood, looking back to old iconography, which she gives a new look in order to tell modern stories. The artist describes them as *herstories*: histories told from a female perspective, emphasizing the role of women. By putting women at the heart of these stories, she reinforces their positions.

Mirga-Tas created various triptychs that resemble the altarpieces found in the Bonnefanten's collection of old masters. But instead of enthroned Madonnas, we see 'ordinary' women with their families, who fulfil an exemplary role in their community. Placing them in the altars lends them a touch of saintliness and emphasises

their importance. These altarpieces pay tribute to the gentle yet powerful voices in the community - women whose wisdom, strength, sacrifices and often heroic resilience are mostly invisible, absent from history books. Mirga-Tas elevates them to the status of icons, shedding light on their significance and contributions.

A little 'altar' and accompanying animation in this exhibition are dedicated to Baba Noncia (granny Noncia - the nickname of Andrea Markowska). She was a Polish woman of Roma descent, a heroine who rescued around 50 children from death during World War II. She pulled the children off trains on their way to concentration camps, which stopped off at her village, and arranged addresses for them to go into hiding. This heroic deed was only recognised in the 21st century. The story was considered unimportant for a long time, due to Noncia's origins. Mirga-Tas celebrates her life and heroism and gives her the iconic place in history she deserves.

Similar work by this artist can be found on the first floor of the museum amidst altars from medieval and early modern times.

The big portrait of Lalla Weiss, which Mirga-Tas made especially for this exhibition, is an important example in the series *Herstories*. Weiss (Dieren, 1961) became one of the most prominent Sinti and Roma leaders in the Netherlands. In 1989, she was involved in the foundation of the National Sinti Organisation – from 2005, the National Sinti/Roma Organisation. This entity fought for the recognition of the Sinti and Roma as victims of genocide in World War II. It also aimed to strengthen the ties between the Dutch Sinti and Roma people and Dutch non-Roma, to foster mutual respect and collaboration. For decades, Weiss has been one of the most important Dutch Sinti activists. In this work, Mirga-Tas spotlights this remarkable woman for eternity. She has now been 'painted into' art history.

## Adjusting the image

### room 2.26

Throughout the ages, the Roma and Sinti have been portrayed almost exclusively by non-Roma in negative and stereotypical ways. The members of this largest and very old ethnic minority in Europe have been regarded as outsiders, exotic 'others' and were therefore viewed with suspicion. This image continues to be the dominant depiction of Roma today.

In the series *Out of Egypt*, Małgorzata Mirga-Tas refers explicitly to the 17th-century print series *Les Bohémiens* by Jacques Callot (1592-1635), who showed the life of the Roma in a biased and negative light. At the time, there was speculation that the Roma, with their 'exotic' clothing, came from Egypt. Callot portrayed them as beggars and swindlers. His etchings became influential in promoting a stigmatizing portrayal of Roma and is characteristic of the entire European iconographic tradition of how Roma are depicted.

Mirga-Tas borrows Callot's compositions. She shows the same themes but instead gives the protagonists a heroic and dignified character. Through this appropriation, she changes the perspective from which the Roma are viewed. It is no longer the case that an artist from outside casts an ignorant and prejudiced glance at the Roma. The people themselves take control of the way they are represented. The act of artistic re-appropriation is a recurrent theme in many works by Mirga-Tas. It serves as a creative strategy of resistance against imposed narratives through the telling of histories (and *herstories*) from the Roma perspective.

This room also presents the first work from the cycle of months *Re-enchanting the World*. You can find more information about this series further on in this exhibition booklet.

Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Out of Egypt*, 2024, textile and acrylic on canvas.  
Photo: Bartek Solik. Courtesy of the artist and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.





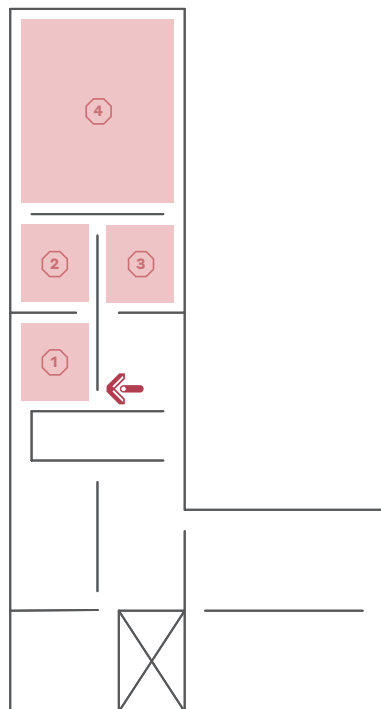
➔ Exhibition starts here

① 2.24

② 2.25

③ 2.26

④ 2.27



Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Phenia (Sisters)*, 2024, patchwork, acrylic paint, wooden frame, 163 x 160 cm. Photo: Bartek Solik. Courtesy of the artist and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.





Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Re-enchanting the World: April, 2022*, textile, acryl, mixed media on wooden stretcher, 462 x 387 cm. Collection Bonnefanten, acquired with support of the VriendenLoterij. Photo: Jacopo Salvi.

## Enchanting the world

### room 2.27

In the magnum opus *Re-enchanting the World* (2022), all the main themes and visual idioms from Mirga-Tas' work come together. The large-scale works were created for the Polish Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale in 2022.

Mirga-Tas was inspired by the frescoes in the Salone dei Mesi (the Hall of the Months) in the Palazzo Schifanoia, in Ferrara. The frescoes, made in the 15th century, portray the twelve months of the year and are each divided into three sections. The upper parts show scenes from Greek mythology. The middle fragments depict the respective signs of the zodiac, each accompanied by three 'decans' – different personality types found within each zodiac sign. And the lower parts show scenes from the daily life of Borso d'Este, the Duke of Ferrara who commissioned the frescoes.

Following the same pattern as the Palazzo Schifanoia frescoes, Mirga-Tas created 12 months, each divided into three segments. Eleven are featured in this exhibition. The upper parts now show scenes from the history of the Roma people – a history which, over the centuries, has been shaped almost exclusively by non-Roma and which is burdened by prejudice and stereotyping. The scenes are a critical response to the series of etchings *Les Bohémiens* by Jacques Callot (1592-1635) – one of the oldest depictions of European Roma. *Re-enchanting the World* was originally part of the series *Out of Egypt* (2021), but grew out to be a standalone series. In this work, Mirga-Tas is thus re-appropriating the portraits of her ancestors, building a counter-narrative by presenting a dignified image of Roma and readjusting the biased (mis)representation of her own people.

In the central parts, Mirga-Tas places the zodiac symbols, but instead of decans she incorporates real-life iconic personalities from the Roma community, mainly Romani women such as Alfreda 'Noncia' Markowska, who rescued Roma and Jewish children from the Holocaust in World War II. In this way, Mirga-Tas gives a key place in (art) history to members of her own community, building a subjective archive of Roma heroes and heroines.

The lower parts contain scenes from the daily life of the artist. Mirga-Tas worked on the panels in co-creation with other women. In the lower fragment of the month *March*, we see them at work, including the artist herself, her mother and her sister. These scenes, which provide a glimpse into the intimacy of everyday activities of contemporary Roma, convey the importance of connection, community and sisterhood.

The months of *March* and *April* are now part of the Bonenfanten collection.

## Decans

The most puzzling element of the frescoes is the central strip. It was attributed to astral deities, as indicated by the zodiac signs. Each of them is accompanied by three figures – representations of decans, according to the division of the ecliptic into 36 units in ancient astronomy (there are three decans for each month). The significance of these depictions was deciphered in the early 20th century by art historian Aby Warburg, who saw them as examples of the centuries-long migration of images across cultures and continents.

In Mirga-Tas' work, the place of the Greek decans is taken by figures from the artist's immediate circle and family, as well as female activists, researchers and artists from the Roma community. The middle strip becomes an archive of Roma history and culture composed of portraits of its heroines. Combining images of real women with magic and astrology turns them into symbolic guardians of fate, goddesses and prophetesses.

*The month of June is not shown in this exhibition.*



*Salone dei Mesi (Hall of the Months),*  
the main hall in the Palazzo  
Schifanoia in Ferrara, Italy.

## Aquarius, January

### MARCIN TAS

The artist's husband.



### DOROTA GERMAŃSKA

The artist's sister.



### KATARZYNA GARAPICH

Visual artist from Krakow. Doctoral candidate at the Słatek School of Fine Art; she lives and works in London.



### ROSA TAIKON en KATARINA TAIKON-LANGHAMMER

Sisters from the Swedish Roma community. Rosa was an actress and goldsmith; Katarina wrote books for children. They worked for the equal rights of Roma women in Sweden.



## Pisces, February

### JAN MIRGA

Polish-Roma teacher and writer, the artist's grandfather. Author of fairy tales and poems, editor of the first Polish-Roma dictionary. Lives in Czarna Góra where, as he says, he is 'building a home with open doors and a waiting chair.'



### MARIA MIRGA

The artist's cousin



### DIJANA PAVLOVIĆ

Italian actress, activist and politician, originating from the Serbian Roma community.



### ELŻBIETA MIRGA-WÓJTOWICZ en KAROLINA MIRGA-DANEK

Cultural animators and researchers of Roma origin, the artist's cousins. They popularize subjects that are key in the culture and history of Polish Roma.



## Aries, March

### ANNA MIRGA-KRUSZELNICKA

Anthropologist, cultural scholar and activist of Roma origin. Curator of the RomArchive – Digital Archive of the Sinti and the Roma.



### JÓZEFA MIRGA

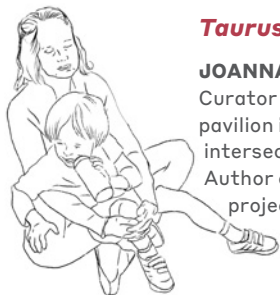
The artist's grandmother from Czarny Dunajec. The artist says about her: 'she ruled the family'.



### ALFREDA NONCIA MARKOWSKA

During the Second World War, she rescued Roma and Jewish children from the Holocaust. First person of Roma nationality to be awarded the Order of the Rebirth of Poland (Polonia Restituta).





### **Taurus, April**

**JOANNA WARSZA and her son LEW**  
Curator of the exhibition of the Polish pavilion in Venice, she works at the intersection of theatre and visual arts. Author of exhibitions and performative projects. Runs the Laura Palmer foundation.



### **ANGÉLA KÓCZÉ**

Roma sociologist and anthropologist from Hungary. Curator and researcher specializing in critical Roma studies.



### **VĚRA BÍLÁ**

Czech singer of Roma origin.

### **Gemini, May**

**ANTONI TAS**  
The artist's son.



### **KRYSTYNA GIL**

Activist, survivor of the Roma Holocaust, born in Szczurowa. After the war, she worked for Polish Roma rights and remembrance of the Roma and Sinti Holocaust.



### **CEIJA STOJKA**

Austrian artist, painter and writer of Roma origin. In 1992, she became the spokesperson for the recognition of the Roma and Sinti genocide. One of the squares in Vienna bears her name.



### **Leo, July**

**IGNACY TAS**  
The artist's son.



### **BOGUMIŁA DELIMATA**

Painter and dancer from the Bergitka Roma group, comes from a family with musical traditions. Carries out performative projects in the flamenco tradition.



### **GRAŻYNA MIRGA**

The artist's mother.



### **Virgo, August**

**KAROLINA KWIATKOWSKA**  
Cultural scholar and educator from Białystok. She organizes educational aid for Roma children in Radom.



### **ADELA GŁOWACKA**

Social activist, member of Romano Waść (Helping Hand) association which deals with Roma identity protection.



### **PAPUSZA**

Poet from the Polska Roma group. After the war, she settled in the Recovered Territories. Her poems, written in Romani, were translated into Polish by Jerzy Ficowski and published since 1950.





### **Libra, September**

#### **EDYTA, MAGDALENA en SYLWIA JAŠKOWIAK**

Polish activists of Roma origin. Magdalena Jaškowiak works with the Harangos Roma Educational Association, which aims to popularize knowledge of Roma history and culture.

#### **SORAYA POST**

Swedish politician with Roma roots. In 2014, she became a member of the European Parliament; she works for the elimination of Roma discrimination in Europe.



#### **TÍMEA JUNGHAUS**

Initiator and curator of the first Roma pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2007. Director of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAN) in Berlin.



### **Scorpio, Oktober**

#### **MAŁGORZATA BROŃSKA en HALINA BEDNARZ**

Seamstresses from Podhale, co-created the fabrics presented in this work with Małgorzata Mirga-Tas.



#### **TERESA MIRGA**

Roma poet, singer, guitarist, and composer from Czarna Góra in Spisz. Founder and leader of the Roma band Kałe Bała (Black Hair).



#### **JOANNA TALEWICZ-KWIATKOWSKA**

Polish cultural anthropologist, works at the Jagiellonian University and the International Centre for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust, focusing on Roma Holocaust studies.

### **Sagittarius, November**

#### **ADAM BARTOSZ**

Polish ethnographer and Roma scholar. In 1980-2012, director of the District Museum in Tarnów. The first permanent exhibition on Roma history and culture in the world was created on his initiative.



#### **ABY WARBURG**

German art historian, theoretician and cultural scholar, dealt with ancient and Renaissance culture studies. He was the first to interpret the frescoes at Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara.



#### **ETHEL C. BROOKS**

American researcher of Roma origin, Professor at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Conducts post-colonial studies in reference to Roma communities. Member of research institutions studying Roma culture and history in Europe and the United States.



#### **NICOLETTA BITU**

Romanian activist of Roma origin. President of the Democratic Federation of Roma from Romania and member of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture.



## Capricorn, December

### ANDRZEJ MIRGA

Ethnographer and photographer, the artist's uncle. He was one of the first Roma to document the culture of his community.



### EMÍLIA RIGOVÁ

Slovak visual artist of Roma origin. She is a member of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture.



### MIHAELA DRĂGAN

Roma actress and performer from Romania.



### DELAINE LE BAS

Roma visual artist from the United Kingdom.

Drawings by Małgorzata Mirga-Tas. Courtesy of Zacheta - National Gallery of Art.

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Right: Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Józefa with Son*, 2024, textile and acrylic on canvas on wooden stretcher, 70 x 55 cm. Photo: Bartek Solik. Courtesy of the artist and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.



# **Małgorzata Mirga-Tas: This is not the end of the road**

08.06.2024 – 16.02.2025

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Cover image: Małgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Out of Egypt*, 2024, textile and acrylic on canvas, 300 x 225 cm. Photo: Bartek Solik. Courtesy of the artist and Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw.

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