Mengs and Velázquez
The Princess of Naples

POINT OF VIEW #29
17 JANUARY TO 5 OCTOBER 2025

Preface

This year's *Point of View* exhibition focuses on a little girl – Maria Teresa of Bourbon-Two Sicilies – and the artist who painted her in Naples in 1773 – Anton Raphael Mengs. Long hidden away in storage, Mengs's portrait of a princess who had not yet reached her first birthday can now, after recent restoration, be admired with all its extraordinary painterly qualities. This restoration work and the art historical analysis that was undertaken in parallel have revealed Mengs in a new light: to a greater extent than had been known until now, he drew inspiration from Velázquez, who like him had been court painter at Madrid. Equally fresh is the living naturalness that pervades this portrait and reflects an altered perception of childhood in the late eighteenth century. The girl's likeness may also have been intended to serve dynastic interests, since it was shipped to Vienna by the queen of Naples as a present for her mother, Empress Maria Theresa. It is quite possible that Mengs was consciously tapping into Velázquez's infanta portraits, which were held in high regard at the Habsburg court and were associated with certain reminiscences and expectations. And indeed, like one particular Spanish infanta depicted by Velázquez in a bygone age, the pint-sized princess of Naples was one day to become empress consort in Vienna.

We also wish to hereby express our sincere thanks to Steffi Roettgen, unrivalled as an authority on Mengs, for having always been willing to attend to our questions.

Guido Messling & Gudrun Swoboda

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Anton Raphael Mengs, *Maria Teresa of Bourbon–Two Sicilies,
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