



The Drama of the Portrait: Theater and Visual Culture in Early Modern Spain

Laura R. Bass

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The Drama of the Portrait examines the motif of portraiture in Spanish Golden Age theater, drawing from a wide range of drama and imagery to enrich our understanding of the social functions of portraiture and the importance of the theater as a venue for visual education in the court society of early modern Madrid. Written in an engaging and accessible style, this is a model of interdisciplinary scholarship that deftly interweaves detailed research in Spanish art history and material culture, treatises on painting, and the social history of portraiture with original readings of plays.

The Drama of the Portrait illuminates collaborations among artists whose work crossed boundaries in ways far more complex than traditional scholarship has acknowledged. Dramatists like Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderón de la Barca contributed to a culture of connoisseurship that promoted painters such as Diego Velázquez. Both writers and painters shared in the task of constructing Spain's image of itself. At the same time, they were keenly attuned to the social, political, and economic tensions of their age. The great playwrights and artists of the Spanish Baroque dramatized the crisis points in a society that depended on theater and painting for its own representation but remained deeply ambivalent about both art forms.

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