Print - La Madrilena / Señora Pepa Vargas / Erste National Tanzerin der Königl Theater zu Madrid / Pepa Vargas (facsimile signature)

Object: Print

Place of origin: Berlin (printed and published)

Date: 1840s (published)

Artist/Maker: Off, August (artist)
Off, August (lithographer)
H. Waldow jun (printer)
V. Feundt & Co (publisher)

Materials and Techniques: Lithograph with some tinting

Credit Line: Given by Dame Marie Rambert

Museum number: E.5063-1968

Gallery location: In Storage

Public access description
Josefa Vargas, known as Pepa, was a popular Spanish dancer in the 1840s. ‘Spanish’ solos and group dances were incorporated into many ballets in the 1830s and 1840s, using some authentic steps and movements but more ballet than genuine Spanish. Once native Spanish dancers began to tour Europe, they adopted the ‘Spanish’ costume developed by ballet dancers when they performed the cachucha or bolero. This followed the bell-shape of the 19th century ballet dress, but were distinguishable as 'Spanish' by the deep lace flounces on the skirt and hair dressed with either mantilla or pulled back into a frilled knot. Vargas's dark eyes and colouring suggest Spain, rather than her surprisingly diaphanous dress and ballet slippers. The flower sprays represent tributes thrown by the dancer’s admirers.

Descriptive line
Pepa Vargas in La Madrilena. Lithograph with some tinting by August Off, 1840s.

Physical description
A dancer stands on her right leg, her foot turned upstage, her right leg stretched forward with foot pointe. Her torso is half-turned to her left, with her right arm curved above her head, the hand holding castanets; her head is inclined and turned to look to her right; her right arm holds out her skirt to her front. Her hair is trimmed with a rose at the back. Her low, wide-necked bodice has lace cap sleeves trimmed with pink ribbons and at centre front and waist are pink bows; across the bust is a small modesty bodice. The knee-length skirt is in three tiers, each trimmed with palest yellow lace. On the ground are flower sprays.

Dimensions
Height: 440 mm, Width: 305 mm lower edge

Museum number
E.5063-1968

Object history note
Josefa Vargas, known as Pepa, was a popular Spanish dancer in the 1840s when native Spanish dancers began to tour abroad. The print identifies her as a dancer at the King’s Theatre in Madrid and the title La Madrilena probably refers to her as a native of that city rather than a named solo or ballet. The print is part of the collection of dance prints amassed by Marie Rambert and her husband, Ashley Dukes in the first half of the 20th century. Eventually numbering 145 items, some of which had belonged to the ballerina Anna Pavlova, it was one of the first and most important specialist collections in private hands.
Rambert bought the first print as a wedding present but could not bear to give it away. As the collection grew, it was displayed in the bar of the Mercury Theatre, the headquarters of Ballet Rambert, but in 1968, Rambert gave the collection to the Victoria and Albert Museum; seven duplicates were returned to Rambert, but these are catalogued in Ivor Guest's A Gallery of Romantic Ballet, which was published before the collection came to the V&A. Although often referred to as a collection of Romantic Ballet prints, there are also important engravings of 17th and 18th century performers, as well as lithographs from the later 19th century, by which time the great days of the ballet in London and Paris were over.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O105818/la-madrilena-señora-pepa-vargas-print-off-august/