

**MARISOL (MARISOL ESCOBAR)**

Venezuelan-American, born Paris, France, 1930, died New York, NY, 2016

*Pocahontas*, 1976

Color lithograph on paper, 26 x 19 5/8 inches

Gift of Paul S. D'Amato, LS 1985.3.8

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From the archives of American history, Marisol extricates the portrait of the legendary Native American woman popularly known as Pocahontas (ca. 1596–1617). In addition to written accounts from colonial times, which narrate her mythical role interceding between the Powhatan Algonquian people and English settlers in the Virginia region, Pocahontas was the subject of a 1616 engraving by Dutch printmaker Simon van de Passe (1595–1647). Marisol recreated this image in 1976, the year of the US Bicentennial, in a moment when national allegories were ripe for new critical readings. That same year, her fellow Pop artist and collaborator Andy Warhol made a series of portraits of Oglala Lakota activist Russell Means. Marisol, with her artist-immigrant's keen eye for the visual codes that mark an individual's social status, identity, and class, strips away the image of the "civilized Indian" that the engraving serves to promote, making the Indigenous woman resurface. We read "Matoaks as Rebecka," her Christian name, in the biographical sketch the artist has handwritten at the bottom of the image, decisively re-inscribing information from the engraving, which sought to transform Pocahontas's heritage into a royal genealogy in an apparent seamless patriarchal line.

Working on a black background, Marisol applies color, highlighting the constraining aspect of the European attire over the dark-skinned woman with penetrating melancholic eyes—features distinctly different from Simon van de Passe's engraving and not unlike Marisol's own. The jewelry and the rich brocade of her costume in the 1616 source image are gone; the feather fan and the starched and intricate lace collar remain, an aggressive contrast of white over black closing in on the woman's face rather than playing up any attribute of femininity. Looking into the historical past and melding it with her own experience, Marisol explores the tension between assimilation, cultural preservation, and resistance.

—Alejandra Uslenghi

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