

The wedding car of Princess Irene of the Netherlands and Carlos Hugo is led through crowds by guards in Rome, April 1964

Date

1964-1964

Medium

gelatin silver print

Description

Princess Irene Emma Elisabeth of the Netherlands, Princess of Orange-Nassau, Princess of Lippe-Biesterfeld. While studying Spanish in Madrid, Irene met Carlos Hugo, Duke of Parma, eldest son of Carlist pretender to the Spanish throne, Xavier. In the summer of 1963, Princess Irene secretly converted from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism. The first time the public or the Royal Family knew about the conversion was when a photograph appeared on the front page of an Amsterdam newspaper showing the Princess kneeling to receive communion at a Mass in the Roman Catholic Church of the Geronimites (Los Jerónimos) in Madrid. Irene's conversion took place a year before her engagement announcement, but the royal family did not officially announce the news until January 1964. When news leaked out that she was engaged to Prince Carlos Hugo (born 1930), it provoked a Protestant outcry and a constitutional crisis. Although law did not forbid a Catholic to reign over the Netherlands, Protestant succession was traditional, born out of the 16th-century Eighty Years' War with Spain and the assassination of William of Orange by a supporter of Philip II of Spain who believed William had betrayed both the Spanish monarch and the Catholic Church. By the middle of the 20th century religious attitudes had begun to change, but only very slowly. While members of the Roman Catholic Church accounted for approximately 34 percent of the Dutch population, and

Catholic political parties had been in coalition governments since 1918, the high fertility rate of the Catholics was a matter of some concern for all non-Catholics. Amplifying the crisis over a Royal conversion to Catholicism and a marriage without approval of the Dutch States-General, were the still very fresh memories of General Franco's association with fascism. For the second in line to the throne to not merely convert to Roman Catholicism but also to associate with an alleged Franco sympathizer, caused shock and consternation in the Netherlands. When Princess Irene left the Netherlands to join Prince Carlos in Paris after the announcement of their engagement, a threat was telephoned to KLM Royal Dutch Airways by an anonymous caller saying, "you should investigate the plane". The telephone call was construed to be a bomb threat and the airliner was searched, causing more than an hour's delay for the flight. It was the first instance of any threat involving the royal family and their air travel. Queen Juliana attempted to stop the marriage, first by sending a member of her staff to Madrid to persuade the Princess not to go ahead with a marriage that would be a political disaster for the monarchy in the Netherlands. It seemed to work and the Queen went on Dutch radio to tell the citizens that Princess Irene had agreed to cancel her engagement and was returning to the Netherlands. When the airplane arrived at Schiphol Airport, the Princess was not on it, and Queen Juliana and her husband, Prince Bernhard were supplied with a Dutch military plane to go to Spain to retrieve their daughter. However, a message was delivered to the Queen from the Dutch government warning that it would resign en masse if she set foot in Spain. It was suggested that Princess Irene was a pawn of General Francisco Franco who tried to maximize the event to his benefit. Given the ramifications and the fact that a monarch from the House of Orange had never visited Spain, the Queen had no choice but to turn back. Prince Bernhard then traveled to Madrid to meet with his daughter and her fiancé, who both accompanied him back to the Netherlands, where an immediate meeting took place with the couple, the Queen, Prime Minister Marijnen, himself a Roman Catholic, and three top cabinet ministers. When the meeting had ended in the early hours of the morning on Sunday, 9 February 1964, Dutch radio broke its traditional Sabbath day silence to announce that Princess Irene would give up any rights of succession to the throne so she could marry Carlos Hugo. The princess further stated that she did not want the government to create a bill which would grant official consent to her marriage. In an

attempt to gain public favour for her proposed marriage, Princess Irene publicly stated that her marriage was intended to help end religious intolerance. This caused a division in public opinion, as less than 40 percent of the country ruled by the Protestant House of Orange was Roman Catholic. Over the ensuing weeks, things deteriorated further when Pope Paul VI granted an audience requested by the couple in Rome. The Vatican believed the meeting was being held with the consent of the Dutch Royal Family. The Queen at first denied such a meeting had taken place, but it was later verified. Because the constitution prohibits members of the royal family from any involvement in foreign politics, Irene alienated herself from almost every Dutch citizen when a photo appeared in a Dutch paper showing her at a Carlist rally in Spain and she declared that she supported her fiancé's political goals. The Dutch government officially announced that it had no responsibility for either the words or actions of Princess Irene in the future on 10 April 1964. It was done in response to Irene's declaration of joining Carlos Hugo's political campaign to regain the throne of Spain on 8 April 1964. No one from the Dutch Royal family or any Dutch diplomatic representative attended the marriage of Princess Irene and Prince Carlos Hugo in the Borghese Chapel at the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, Italy, on 29 April 1964. There were also no representatives of Spain's Franco government at the ceremony; the couple chose Rome as the site of their nuptials because of its neutrality

Dimensions

Overall: 20.4 x 30.7 cm (8 x 12 1/8 in.)