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Press Release

CaixaForum Barcelona

From 16 November 2018 to 3 March 2019



CaixaForum Barcelona hosts the first exhibition devoted in the Catalan capital to a key figure in universal art, seen in context with some of his contemporaries

VELÁZQUEZ AND THE SPANISH GOLDEN AGE

Through seven masterpieces by Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (Seville, 1599 - Madrid, 1660), this new exhibition, organised jointly by "la Caixa" Foundation and the Prado National Museum, presents this outstanding artist from the Spanish Golden Age in an innovative fashion, proposing a play of comparisons and correlations with some of the Spanish and international painters that Velázquez frequented or whose work he was familiar with. These include such essential figures as Titian, Rubens, Ribera, El Greco, Zurbarán, Murillo, Giordano, Claude Lorrain, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Antonio Moro, Stanzione, Guido Reni and Van Dyck. The 59 works in the show are group by theme in order to highlight the existence of common stylistic interests among artists from different geographic origins, and to illustrate the influences that Velázquez received over the course of his artistic career. By hosting this exhibition, produced as part of a long-standing alliance between the Prado Museum and "la Caixa" Foundation, Barcelona joins in with the programme of activities to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Madrid gallery.

Velázquez and the Golden Age. Organisation: Exhibition jointly organised by the Prado National Museum and "la Caixa" Foundation. **Curator:** Javier Portús Pérez, Senior Curator of Spanish Painting (to 1700) at the Prado National Museum. **Place:** CaixaForum Barcelona (Av. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, 6-8). **Dates:** From 16 November 2018 to 3 March 2019.

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Barcelona, 15 November 2018. Elisa Durán, Deputy General Director of "la Caixa" Banking Foundation; Miguel Falomir, Director of the Prado National Museum; Valentí Farràs, Director of CaixaForum Barcelona; and Javier Portús Pérez, Senior Curator of Spanish Painting (to 1700) at the Prado National Museum, today presented the exhibition project *Velázquez and the Golden Age*.

This is the third exhibition jointly organised by "la Caixa" Foundation and the Prado National Museum to open at CaixaForum Barcelona after *Goya. Light and Shade* and *Captive Beauty. Small Treasures at the Prado Museum*. All three exhibitions were produced within the framework of the strategic alliance established in 2011 aimed at enabling audiences to discover the rich artistic legacy conserved at the Prado Museum.

By producing *Velázquez and the Golden Age*, "la Caixa" Foundation joins in with activities to celebrate the bicentenary of the Prado National Museum. Within this context, the two institutions present the first exhibition ever devoted to Velázquez in the Catalan capital. Exceptionally, seven of Velázquez's greatest masterpieces will be shown together at CaixaForum Barcelona, including some of the artist's most famous creations: *Philip IV*, *Juan Martínez Montañés*, *Aesop*, *The Adoration of the Magi*, *Buffoon with Books*, *Prince Baltasar Carlos in Hunting Dress*, and *Mars*.

Velázquez, one of the Prado Museum's flagship artists, is among those whose works are most frequently requested on loan. Accordingly, some years ago, in order to attend to these requests whilst also maintaining the highest artistic standards in its permanent exhibition rooms, the Madrid museum took the decision that there would never be more than seven works by Velázquez on loan at any one time. Seven is, precisely, the number of his paintings now brought together in this exhibition.

Velázquez and the Golden Age features the largest number of works by this artist ever included in a single exhibition in Barcelona. The show provides a unique opportunity to rediscover Velázquez's painting in the context of works by other great artists of his time, including both his fellow Spaniards (Ribera, Zurbarán and Murillo) and Europeans (Titian, Rubens, Giordano, Claude Lorrain, Jan Brueghel the Elder and Van Dyck). The exhibition is curated by Javier Portús, a leading world authority on Velázquez.



Painting, an international language in the Golden Age

Alongside these seven masterpieces by Velázquez, the exhibition will also feature a further 52 works aimed at tracing the artist's style in context with other outstanding Spanish and international painters. Together, these pieces clearly demonstrate that painting was an international language that knew no borders during the Spanish Golden Age.

The exhibition revolves around the aforementioned seven paintings by Velázquez, which both represent different periods in his artistic career and highlight his thematic versatility. Velázquez would have known many of the other works featured, as most are by artists that he frequented or whose production he was familiar with.

As a result, *Velázquez and the Golden Age* illustrates the many visual and creative stimuli that this artist received over the course of his career, during which he had the opportunity to work at several of the most important centres for art production and collecting in Europe.

Velázquez remained in Seville, one of the most cosmopolitan cities on the Iberian Peninsula, until 1623. Subsequently, and until his death in 1660, he worked for Philip IV, one of the leading collectors of the day and the head of a monarchy that exercised great influence over some of the most important places on the continent. The works that most influenced Velázquez were by artists well represented in the Royal Collections, such as Titian and Rubens.

Velázquez also travelled twice to Italy, where he saw at first-hand some of the great works of Antiquity, as well as masterpieces from the Italian Renaissance and pieces by some of the most restless artists in Europe among his contemporaries.

Velázquez, an original narrator

The works in the exhibition are organised by theme for a two-fold purpose: to make it easier to understand Velázquez's originality as a narrator by comparing him to artists from different backgrounds; and to break down the barriers between national schools. The seven sections in the exhibition are: Art; Knowledge; Still Life and Everyday Life; Mythology; The Court; Landscape; and



Religion. Grouping the works in thematic sections offers us a glimpse of the stylistic interests shared by artists from different geographic origins.

Besides the seven thematic sections that form the exhibition itself, the project also includes two interesting spaces. These are, firstly, the educational space *Living Painting*, which takes its inspiration from the painterly style of the Golden Age. Here, families will be invited to create their own portrait or still life and to learn about such concepts as composition, the symbolism of objects and the effects of the light. Secondly, visitors will have the chance to discover a room where some of the crates used to transport the works from the Prado Museum are kept. The aim is to highlight the exceptional nature of this project and to enable visitors to learn more about the importance of the transport and security of works in the production of an exhibition.

As usual, the project is completed by a series of parallel activities. These include, particularly, a lecture by the curator and guided tours with coffee and debate for families and schools groups. "la Caixa" Banking Foundation and the Prado National Museum have also jointly produced a catalogue under the direction of the exhibition curator, Javier Portús. This publication contains articles by Miguel Falomir, Gabriele Finaldi, Miguel Morán, Alberto Pancorbo, José Juan Pérez Preciado, Javier Portús, Leticia Ruiz Gómez, Andrés Úbeda de los Cobos and Margarita Vázquez Manassero.

Cooperation for knowledge and dissemination

This exhibition project was developed within the framework of the cooperation agreement signed in September 2015 by Isidro Fainé, President of "la Caixa" Banking Foundation, and José Pedro Pérez Llorca, President of the Royal Board of Trustees of the Prado Museum. The purpose of the agreement was to intensify the cultural action that the two institutions had already been jointly organising for several years.

The partnership between the two institutions began in 2009 with the launch of the educational programme *"la Caixa" – Prado Museum. The Art of Educating*, which enabled young people to enjoy the pleasure of discovering art. Since then, some 370,000 schoolchildren have benefited from this educational initiative.

In 2011, parallel to the development of this pioneering educational programme,



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the two institutions also signed a first cooperation agreement by which "la Caixa", through its Foundation, entered the select group of benefactor institutions of the Prado National Museum. This first agreement enabled the joint organisation of several exhibitions, presented all over Spain, aimed at enabling audiences to discover the rich artistic legacy conserved at the Prado Museum. These shows include: *Goya. Light and Shade*; *Captive Beauty. Small Treasures from the Prado Museum*; *The Nordic Landscape at the Prado*; and *Objects Speak. Collections of the Prado Museum*. More recently, the second cooperation agreement has generated three shows to date: *Goya and the Court of Enlightenment*; *Art and Myth. Gods in the Prado*; and, now, *Velázquez and the Golden Age*.

Finally, the two institutions have worked together since 2016 in organising an annual lecture season devoted to the great masters of painting.



EXHIBITION SECTIONS

1. Art

During the Spanish Golden Age art was increasingly debated. One of the channels of debate were the paintings themselves, through which artists reflected on their activity, defending the image that they wanted to project of themselves and alluding to issues related to the status of art.

Painting and sculpture were controversial, for while their makers and supporters maintained that they were artistic and liberal activities, many others classified them as crafts. In order to increase their prestige, painters emphasised the connections between their art and power, both in the earthly and the religious fields. One of the most ennobling moments at which artists could portray themselves was while they made a portrait of the king, as in the case of sculptor Juan Martínez Montañés. Other arguments that support the nobility and importance of painting and sculpture were their religious utility, and the existence of scenes that established close connections between art and divinity. In Zurbarán's *The Crucified Christ with a Painter*, the figure of Christ turns towards the painter in an act of acknowledgement of the services rendered, and both El Greco's *The Veil of Saint Veronica* and his *God the Father Painting The Immaculate Conception* refer to one of the clichés preferred by artists: the idea that divinity acted as a painter.

In their turn, the paintings by Alonso Cano and Juan Andrés Rizi describe a mind-set in which paintings and sculptures were more than just 'works of art' for, being as they were sacred images, they had almost magical powers.

Diego Velázquez. *Juan Martínez Montañés*, 1635-1636

In view of his enormous prestige, the Andalusian sculptor Juan Martínez Montañés was called to court to model the face of Philip IV, the sculpture to be sent to Florence to serve as the model for an equestrian statue of the king. This work is reflected in Velázquez's painting, which adopts the form of one of the most highly-appreciated examples of the "artist's portrait" genre among the artists themselves: portrayed in relation to monarchs and other powerful people, the type of patrons that bestowed the most personal and collective honour on the art world.

2. Knowledge

Classical Antiquity and Christian tradition played a key role in the intellectual horizon of the Spanish Golden Age, and were consequently the object of pictorial representation. They often gave rise to images that made implicit comparisons between wisdom and poverty, resulting from the growing interest in Neo-Stoicism that spread throughout Europe during the Baroque. Besides revealing some of these intellectual referents, this section allows us to see how pictorial tradition developed through works painted for the same places or depicting similar characters. Velázquez painted *Aesop* for the same hunting pavilion that housed Rubens's *Democritus, the Laughing Philosopher* and was



therefore able to contemplate the earlier composition as he worked. The comparison between the two works shows different narrative sensitivities and Velázquez's interest in clothing classical characters in ordinary contemporary dress. In its turn, the work by the Flemish painter can be likened to the picture of the same theme painted by Ribera at roughly the same time, that explores the dramatic and descriptive possibilities of chiaroscuro. Despite starting from a common basis – the conception of painting in chromatic terms – Rubens, Velázquez and Ribera managed to offer several unique, personal alternatives.

The Spanish Golden Age was also a time of important scientific developments in which experience and accumulative knowledge were highly valued, giving rise to works like those by Jan Brueghel the Elder that presented viewers with small visual encyclopaedias, encouraging them to probe the themes underpinning the paintings.

Diego Velázquez. *Aesop*, c. 1638

The Greek writer Aesop, who lived between the seventh and sixth centuries BC, was famous for his fables, in which animals were the protagonists, reflecting human customs and behaviour. Some of Aesop's themes featured in paintings in the Torre de la Parada hunting lodge, where this painting, rich in allusions to the writer's personal circumstances, is mentioned for the first time. Aesop's poor clothing refers to his origins as a slave and his humble life; the pail of water would be an allusion to the ingenious answer that he gave to his owner, the philosopher Xantus, who consequently freed him. The equipment to his right probably refers to his violent death in Delphos, when the angry local citizens of Delphi hid a goblet in his luggage in order to falsely accuse him of theft.

3. The Still Life and Everyday Life

The still-life was a genre that didn't become fully independent from others until the Golden Age. Before then, numerous references could be found to eatables, containers, raw materials, etc., in historical compositions, but the first paintings devoted entirely to these motifs began to appear around 1600, and in barely a few years the theme had spread throughout Europe. Furthermore, works of extraordinarily quality and refinement were produced from a very early stage, as proved by Jan Brueghel's *Vase of Flowers*. In Spain, Sánchez Cotán made outstanding works in the history of the genre in Europe in the first years of the century, inaugurating one of the most fertile traditions in the history of Spanish painting. Felipe Ramírez's *Still Life with a Cardoon* is a direct reflection of his works and of his compositional system, while the paintings by Van der Hamen, Juan de Espinosa and Tomás Hiepes in this section reveal the changes that the genre would undergo from the decade of 1620 onwards.

The still life also encompasses a range of food-related scenes with different characters, such as Alejandro de Loarte's *The Poultry Vendor*. Two of the main phases in Spanish painting of the Golden Age belong to this thematic field: Murillo's childish themes and the early works by Velázquez, who in paintings such as *The Waterseller of Seville* or *Old*



Woman Frying Eggs proved the array of possibilities the still life offered him to create exceptionally original compositions.

4. Mythology

Mythology, the set of narratives through which Graeco-Roman antiquity articulated its religious system and expressed its vision of the world, offered the painters of the Renaissance a wonderful opportunity to explore new artistic themes. One of these was the nude, artistic form *par excellence* in Western tradition, the place where artists proved the scope of their possibilities. Spanish royal collections abounded in mythological paintings portraying nude figures, most of which had been made by foreign artists and were usually stored in so-called reserved rooms. These private chambers survived until the early nineteenth century, and were a way of protecting the paintings against moral censorship.

The presence in this section of works by Titian, Rubens and Velázquez attracts attention to the three main names that enable us to speak of royal collections in terms of international tradition: Rubens learnt from Titian, and Velázquez's style is inspired by the knowledge of the works by the two of them. All three artists are connected by a similar conception of painting as matter in which colour is more important than line.

Most of the pictures in this section were genuinely courtly products, because of their origin, their fate or because they reveal step by step the emergence of a pictorial tradition in the Spanish court.

Diego Velázquez. *Mars*, c. 1638

Mars is the god of war and, as such, is usually portrayed as powerful and victorious. However, in this work Velázquez gives further proof of his love of paradox, and Mars is seen in a lazy pose, a melancholy expression on his face, seated on a comfortable bed, perhaps the scene of his trysts with Venus. Velázquez probably painted *Mars* for the Torre de la Parada, a hunting lodge in the outskirts of Madrid, for which he also portrayed *Aesop*, another work on show in this exhibition. In this male nude, the artist uses a freer technique, seeking to blur the limits between body and surroundings in order to convey a greater sensation of life. Formally, the painting has been related to classical sculptures like the *Ares Ludovisi* and some of Michelangelo's statues.



5. The Court

The court was the stage on which Velázquez's career unfolded between 1623 and his death in 1660, and as a result the adjective most often used to define his art and his biography is 'courtly'. His work in the court is fundamental in order to understand important aspects of his art that distinguish it from that of his Spanish colleagues: his customary dedication to portraiture, his incursions into the field of mythology, and the scant presence of mythological works. These thematic options are related to the kind of expectations generated by painting in the court. This section displays some of the motifs related to the genre, such as royal portraits, the representation of jesters, and historical and allegorical paintings.

The court was one of the main backdrops for the forging of a pictorial tradition in Spain during the seventeenth century. The accumulation of paintings from diverse origins, and the need that different courtly artists had to adjust their work to the expectations of that environment gradually created an international chain of Flemish, Italian and Spanish artists inspired by the works they discovered upon their arrival in Madrid. Velázquez wasn't oblivious to this, and had to adapt his portraits to courtly uses. Indeed, his art in general cannot be understood without bearing royal collections in mind, which are especially rich in Venetian painting of the Renaissance and in seventeenth-century Flemish works.

Diego Velázquez. *Philip IV*, c. 1623 (reworked c. 1628)

In 1623, Velázquez went to court and entered the service of King Philip IV, who was then eighteen years old. A few months later, he painted this portrait, which he retouched in around 1628, altering the positioning of the legs, reducing the fullness of the cape and, above all, adjusting Philip's age. In a court where, to legitimise his authority, the king imposed austerity and control in contrast to the squandering and corruption associated with the reign of Philip III, Velázquez constructs an image that reflects these values, with great economy of means and by stressing the responsibilities of the monarch through symbols alluding to his bureaucratic duties (the paper or memorandum), his defence of the kingdom (the sword) and the administration of justice (the desk and the top hat).

Diego Velázquez. *Buffoon with Books* c. 1640

One of the most extraordinary components of Velázquez's *oeuvre* is his gallery of buffoons, or jesters, and dwarves, which appear in about a dozen of his canvases. While his portraits of the royal family and the nobility were the result of a compromise between the model's expectations and the artist's interests, when it came to these buffoons Velázquez could act with complete technical and compositional freedom. This we see clearly in *Buffoon with Books*, in which one of the palace dwarves poses with an open book, its large size underlining the small



stature of the model. In the background is Mount Maliciosa, in the Sierra de Guadarrama. The precise depiction of this scene is evidence of Velázquez's pioneering interest in the natural landscape. Until recently, the character portrayed in this painting had been erroneously identified as "El Primo" ("the cousin").

6. Landscape

Landscape has been a pictorial genre for quite some time, and nobody is surprised by the fact that an artist should choose to depict the natural world just as it is. However, the process that led to this situation was slow and for many years landscape was conceived as a mere setting for stories. The age of Velázquez was a key moment in the redefinition of landscape, and the artist himself occupied an important place in this history. Around 1630, French and Italian artists active in Rome were making landscape the leitmotif of their painting. The most remarkable of these was Claude Lorrain, whose experiences with nature were filtered through artistic rules, giving rise to a landscape 'constructed' in classicist terms that acts as a backdrop to religious or historical scenes. The most important alternative to this conception was posed by Velázquez, who took the concept of 'painting from life' to the realm of 'painting from nature', creating pioneering works in which landscape is the chief motif and requires no accompanying narrative. This love for exact, truthful representation of nature is revealed in the backgrounds of some of his portraits, such as the one of *Prince Baltasar Carlos on Horseback*, depicted in a perfectly recognisable setting made up of valleys and mountains, but also of light and air.

Diego Velázquez, *Prince Baltasar Carlos in Hunting Dress*, 1634-1635

Born to Philip IV and Elizabeth of Bourbon in 1629 Baltasar Carlos was crown prince until his untimely death in 1646. Here he is portrayed as a prince, with military insignia and a serene, inexpressive demeanour on his face. This portrait was commissioned for the Salón de Reinos (Hall of Realms) in the Buen Retiro Palace, where it was installed between the prince's parents over one door. This location explains some of the painting's formal characteristics, particularly the distorted anatomy of the horse, since it was to be viewed from below. The work is a masterpiece in the history of landscape painting: the boy stands amid a real scene, and several landmarks can be clearly identified: Mount Maliciosa, Mount Cabeza de Hierro, the Sierra de Hoyo, the upper river basin of the Manzanares and so on.

7. Religion

The main theme explored by Spanish painters of the Golden Age was religion, which accounts for over 80% of works by Ribera, Zurbarán, El Greco and Murillo. The last section of the exhibition is dedicated to this subject matter, and comprises eleven works, a small figure in comparison with the number of religious paintings circulating in



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seventeenth-century Spain, yet balanced in comparison with those found in the courts where Velázquez pursued most of his career.

The selection seeks to emphasise the ties between Spanish and foreign painting. Caravaggist interest in chiaroscuro and realism was shared by Velázquez, Maíno, Ribera and Stanzione; the paintings by Guido Reni and Zurbarán reveal a similar compositional technique; the figures of St Francis depicted by Gentileschi and Van Dyck were characterised by a similar system of emotions and pathos; while the pictures by Murillo and Rubens similarly appeal to concerns such as tenderness and domestic intimacy. Yet despite these common features that describe similar aesthetic horizons and a comparable religious and emotional system, each of these great masters managed to create an original and unmistakable style, as evinced by all the works in this section.

Diego Velázquez, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1619

This is one of the finest religious paintings from Velázquez's Seville period, a work of monumental forms, its subject immediately recognisable, in contrast with the narrative complexity found in other compositions. The characters are probably portraits of the artist's family and, indeed, the eldest king has been identified as his father-in-law, Francisco Pacheco. This use of real characters was not unusual within the religious context of the Counter-Reformation, when the Catholic Church sought to spread the faith by making the sacred mysteries more comprehensible.



ACTIVITIES PARALLEL TO THE EXHIBITION

LECTURE BY THE CURATOR

Velázquez and the Golden Age

Wednesday, December 12, at 7 pm

Javier Portús, Senior Curator of Spanish Painting (to 1700) at the Prado National Museum

GUIDED TOUR

See times

TOUR WITH COFFEE-DEBATE

Every Wednesday at 4.30 pm

FAMILIA

+ 5 FAMILY AND EDUCATIONAL SPACE

Living Painting

Taking inspiration from the painterly style of the Golden Age, families can choose the type of work they want to recreate: an individual portrait, a group portrait or a still life. Objects, costume articles and other props will be available, enabling them to create live versions of portrait or still life paintings, experimenting with composition, the symbolism of objects and the effects of the light.

+ 8 GUIDED TOUR FOR FAMILIES

A Painter at the Court

This family activity revolves around the discovery of Velázquez's art from the perspective of the court. Using Velázquez's paintings as the guiding thread, and assisted by a variety of dynamics and materials, we discover the spaces, customs and leading figures in palace life and art 300 years ago.

EduCaixa

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Monday to Friday, times by arrangement

Registration: 931 847 142 or caixaforumbcn@marmacultura.net

DRAMATISED TOURS: Levels: from 3rd year primary and ESO compulsory secondary education

GUIDED TOURS: Levels: ESO compulsory secondary education, baccalaureate and vocational training



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CaixaForum Barcelona

Av. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, 6-8

08038 Barcelona

Tel.: 934 768 600

Times

From Monday to Sunday, from 10 am to 8 pm

December 24 and 31 and January 5,
from 10 am to 6 pm

Closed: December 25 and January 1
and 6

"la Caixa" Foundation Information Service

Tel.: 900 223 040

Monday to Sunday, from 9 am to 8 pm

Prices

Admission free for "la Caixa" customers
Visitors other than "la Caixa"

customers: 5 euros (includes admission
to all exhibitions)

Admission free for minors under 16
years

Ticket sales

CaixaForum ticket office and

www.CaixaForum.es

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