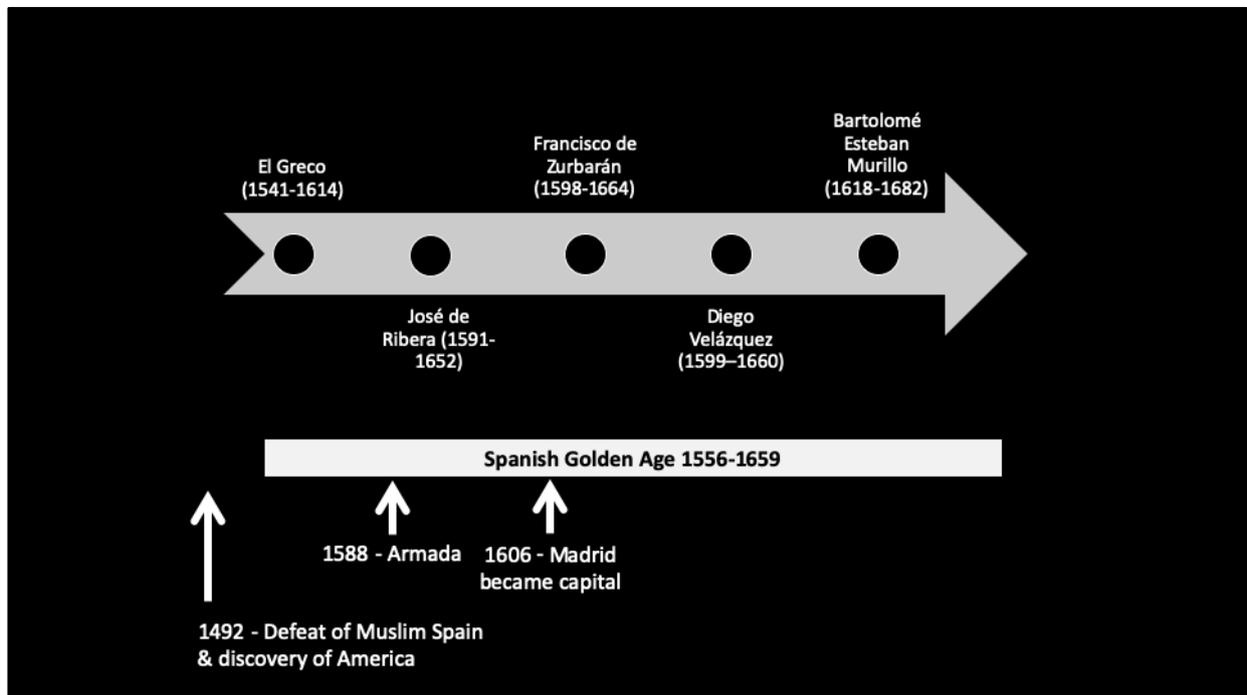


## THE SPANISH GOLDEN AGE 1556-1659

El Greco, Francisco de Zurbarán, José de Ribera,  
Bartolomé Esteban Murillo and Diego Velázquez

- You have probably seen works by these artists individually and you may have been to talks or watched a TV programme describing them. This talk is to put each artists in context and situate them within what is called the ‘Spanish Golden Age’.



- **The Spanish Golden Age (16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, or more narrowly 1556-1659)**
  - The Spanish Golden Age of art and literature was funded by the exploitation of the constant stream of gold and silver from South America. Although this seemed an inexhaustible source of wealth it led to rampant inflation. Spain became the most important power on the Continent and Spanish Habsburg court culture became the model for courts across Europe with its formal severity, icy reserve and strict control of the emotions.
  - Spaniards travelled extensively in Europe and

favoured Flemish artists over Spanish artists so many Flemish artists lived and worked in Spain. Charles I of Spain (V of the Holy Roman Emperor) was born in Flanders (in 1500) and spent more time in his European possessions than in Spain. His son, Philip II (r. 1556-98) travelled widely in Europe with his father before settling down in Madrid in 1561. They and many others visiting Flanders and Italy, such as Castilian wool merchants, became seen in Spain as trend setters whose tastes had been refined by their experiences.

- The defeat of Muslim Spain in 1492, and the discovery of America in the same year, ensured that there would be financial resources to fund literature, architecture, music, sculpture and painting. Philip II was a leading supporter of the arts and during his reign the arts flourished. Philip II was King of England from 1554 to 1558. Following his return to Spain he commissioned El Escorial, the massive palace cum mausoleum (built between 1563-84), about 30 miles north of Madrid and renovated the Real Alcázar ('Royal Fortress') in Madrid to store his large collection of paintings. The building was destroyed by fire in 1734 with 500 paintings and rebuilt as the present Royal Palace of Madrid between 1738 and 1764. Madrid became the capital in 1606 when Philip II

moved his court there from Toledo. Seville remained the largest city economically. The two largest regions were Castile and Aragon which were united in 1469 by the marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand. Other regions such as Catalonia, the Basque lands and Navarra retained their own institutions and privileges.

- There were outstanding Spanish achievements in a wide range of activities including politics, literature, art, sculpture, architecture, theology, humanities, philosophy and law. The Catholic Church and its related monasteries, convents, and abbeys were the wealthiest institutions in the country, and were able to commission a huge supply of paintings to fill the many buildings they owned. This must be set against the brutal reign of the Spanish Inquisition which was formed in 1478. During its reign, many people were burnt in front of crowds in the streets simply for their beliefs. In America tens of millions died within the first hundred years of colonial rule from mistreatment and disease.
- The split in Christianity, known as the Reformation is dated to either the publication of the Ninety-Five Theses by Martin Luther in 1517 or the Edict of Worms in 1521 which banned the teaching of Luther. It was followed by the Counter-Reformation which began with the Council of

Trent (1545–1563) and largely ended with the conclusion of the European wars of religion in 1648. The Counter-Reformation included the expulsion of Protestants, the confiscation of Protestant children in order to bring them up as Catholics, heresy trials and burning at the stake, and the founding of new religious orders. In Spain the mystics were major figures of the Counter-Reformation who wished to restructure the church to renew it spiritually. They attempted to express in words and paintings their experience of a mystical communion with Christ. In addition, the Council of Trent ruled that art was to provide an accurate representation of the Bible and

- *“...every superstition shall be removed ... all lasciviousness be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust... there be nothing seen that is disorderly, or that is unbecomingly or confusedly arranged, nothing that is profane, nothing indecorous, seeing that holiness becometh the house of God.”*
- The Spanish Golden Age ended with the Treaty of the Pyrenees between Philip IV of Spain and Louis XIV of France.
- Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain banned the import of books to try to suppress Protestant ideas however,

by 1800 it had lost its vast empire and was lagged behind other European countries in adopting the new science and technologies that led to the Industrial Revolution.

- **Principal Artists**

- **El Greco (1541-1614)**, “was born in Candia [Cyprus] part of the Republic of Venice. He trained and became a master within that tradition before traveling at age 26 to Venice, as other Greek artists had done. In 1570 he moved to Rome, where he opened a workshop and executed a series of works. During his stay in Italy, El Greco enriched his style with elements of Mannerism and of the Venetian Renaissance taken from a number of great artists of the time, notably Tintoretto. In 1577, he moved to Toledo, Spain, where he lived and worked until his death. In Toledo, El Greco received several major commissions and produced his best-known paintings. El Greco's dramatic and expressionistic style was met with puzzlement by his contemporaries but found appreciation in the 20th century. El Greco is regarded as a precursor of both Expressionism and Cubism, while his personality. El Greco has been characterized by modern scholars as an artist so individual that he belongs to no conventional school.” (Wikipedia)

He is best known for tortuously elongated figures and often fantastic or phantasmagorical pigmentation, marrying Byzantine traditions with those of Western painting.

- **Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664)**, even after Madrid became the capital Seville remained the most important economic centre and it kept Zurbarán and his workshop busy during the 1620s and 30s. After about 1640 his sober and restrained style went out of favour to the softer and more emotional appeal of artists like Murillo. “He is known primarily for his religious paintings depicting monks, nuns, and martyrs, and for his still-lives. Zurbarán gained the nickname "Spanish Caravaggio," owing to the forceful, realistic use of chiaroscuro in which he excelled.” (Wikipedia).
- **Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682)**, succeeded Zurbarán as Seville’s leading artist. His subjects are brought to life by his flair for narrative. “Although he is best known for his religious works, Murillo also produced a considerable number of paintings of contemporary women and children. These lively, realist portraits of flower girls, street urchins, and beggars constitute an extensive and appealing record of the everyday life of his times.” (Wikipedia).
- **José de Ribera (1591-1652)**. Born in Valencia,

Spain, Ribera emigrated to Italy as a young artist in 1606. He spent most of his career in Naples, which was under the control of the Spanish crown, and he influenced many artists back in Spain including Salvator Rosa and Luca Giordano. He is often regarded as the heir to Caravaggio for his dramatic use of light and shadow, and his practice of painting directly from the live model. His works responded to the aims of the Counter Reformation by combining emotional appeal with physical reality and the mysticism of religious experience. In 2018 Dulwich Picture Gallery held *Ribera: Art of Violence*. This was the first UK exhibition dedicated to his painting and it showed his most sensational and shocking work.

- **Diego Velázquez (1599-1660)**, “the leading artist in the court of King Philip IV, and one of the most important painters of the Spanish Golden Age. He was an individualistic artist of the contemporary Baroque period. In addition to numerous renditions of scenes of historical and cultural significance, he painted scores of portraits of the Spanish royal family, other notable European figures, and commoners, culminating in the production of his masterpiece *Las Meninas* (1656)” (Wikipedia).

## References

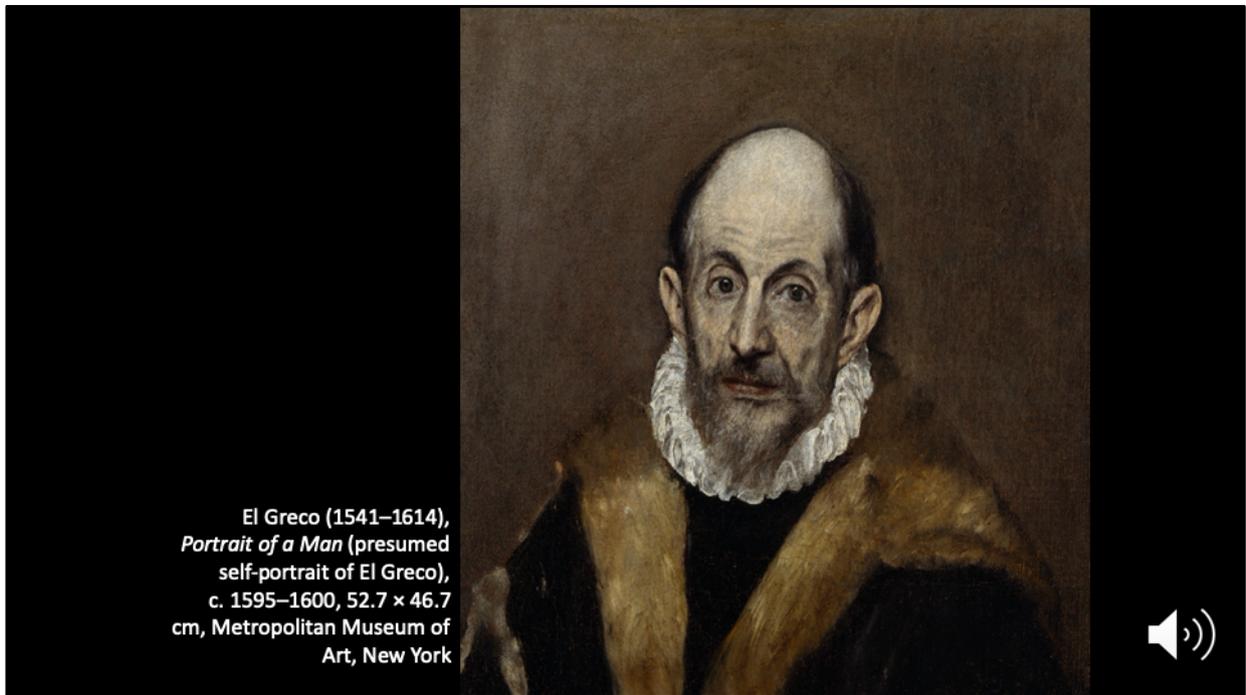
- <http://www.spainthenandnow.com/spanish-art/painting-in-spains-golden-age-overview>

## EL GRECO (1541-1614)

Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος, *Doménikos Theotokóroulos*



El Greco, or 'The Greek' in Spanish was born Doménikos Theotokóπουλος on 1 October 1541 in Heraklion, Crete. Up to 1204 Crete was part of the Byzantine Empire and when that was dissolved after the Fourth Crusade it was sold to Venice and became the Kingdom of Candia although it remained Greek and a centre of Byzantine art. El Greco trained in Crete and became a master within that Byzantine tradition before traveling at **age 26 to Venice**, as other Greek artists had done.



El Greco (1541–1614), *Portrait of a Man* (presumed self-portrait of El Greco), c. 1595–1600, 52.7 × 46.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

- In 1570, after three years in Venice where he absorbed the Mannerism of the Venetian Renaissance he moved to Rome.
- In Venice, Titian (Tiziano Vecellio, c. 1488/90-1576) was in old age but still the leading artist, Tintoretto (Jacopo Comin, 1518–1594) was 52 and would live another 24 years and Veronese (Paolo Caliari 1528–1588) was 42 and would live another 18 years.

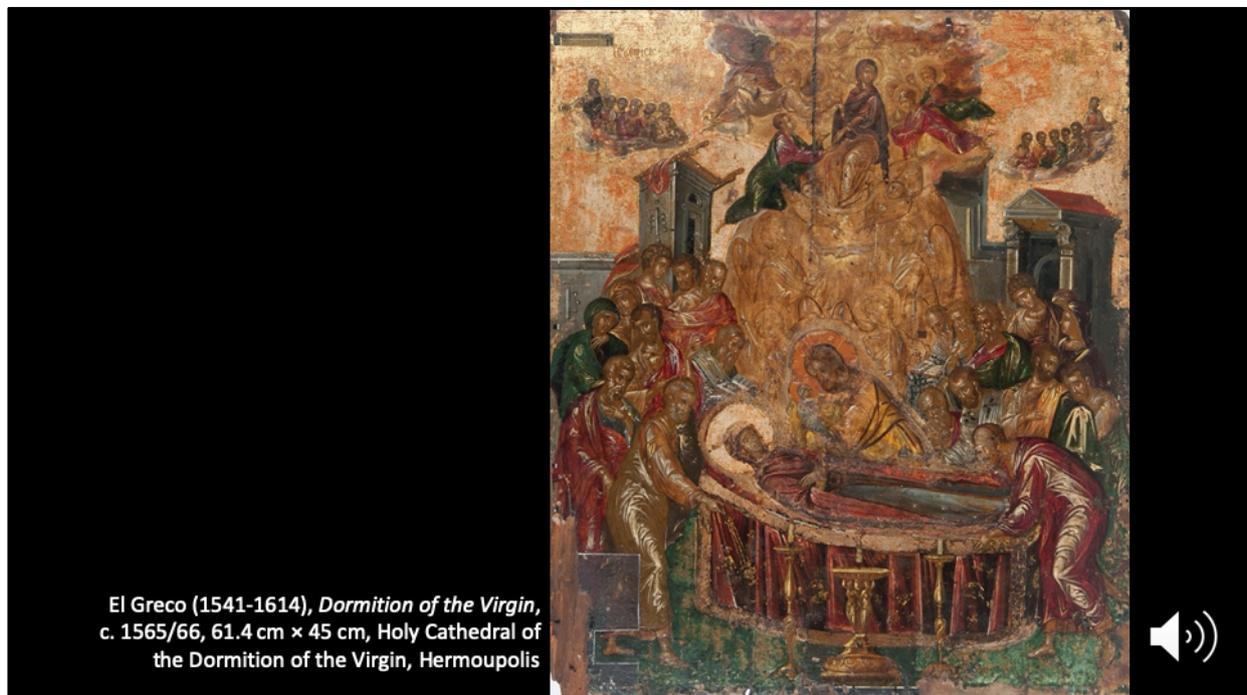
Born: Doménikos Theotokópoulos on 1 October 1541 in Heraklion, Crete

Died: 7 April 1614 (aged 72) in Toledo, Spain

### **Bio:El Greco (1541-1614, aged 72)**

- **El Greco** (Doménikos Theotokópoulos) was born in Crete, part of the Republic of Venice. He trained and became a master within that tradition before traveling at **age 26 to Venice**, as other Greek artists had done.
- **In 1570 (aged 29) he moved to Rome**, where he opened a workshop and executed a series of works. During his stay in Italy, El Greco enriched his style with elements of Mannerism and of the Venetian Renaissance taken from a number of great artists of the time, notably Tintoretto.
- **In 1577 (aged 35) he moved to Madrid then Toledo, Spain**, where he lived and worked until his death. In Toledo, El Greco received several major commissions and produced his best-known paintings. El Greco's dramatic and expressionistic style was met with puzzlement by his contemporaries but found appreciation in the 20th century. El Greco is regarded as a precursor of both Expressionism and Cubism and he has been characterized by modern scholars as **an artist so individual that he belongs to no conventional school.**" (Wikipedia)
- He is best known for **tortuously elongated figures** and

often fantastic or phantasmagorical pigmentation, marrying Byzantine traditions with those of Western painting. However, despite his individual style, when he lived in Toledo, he was a successful artist who rented palatial rooms in the heart of Toledo and could afford to have musicians play while he painted.



El Greco (1541-1614), *Dormition of the Virgin*, c. 1565/66, 61.4 cm × 45 cm, Holy Cathedral of the Dormition of the Virgin, Hermoupolis

El Greco (1541-1614), *Dormition of the Virgin*, c. 1565/66, 61.4 cm × 45 cm, Holy Cathedral of the Dormition of the Virgin, Hermoupolis, Syros

- El Greco's earliest known work is *Dormition of the Virgin* which he painted in 1565-66 (aged 24/25). This was painted near the end of his period in Crete and it shows how he combined a post-Byzantine style with elements of Italian Mannerism. It contains many elements that were common to the tradition of the orthodox Church in which he was raised.
- The painting was only discovered in 1983 when

curators found his signature (Domenikos Theotokopoulos) below the candelabra in the centre.

- The Dormition of the Mother of God, as it is known, is celebrated by the Eastern Orthodox Church on 15 August. It commemorates the death of Mary and her physical bodily resurrection before being taken to heaven.



El Greco (1541-1614), *The Purification of the Temple*, c. 1570-71, 65.4 x 83.2 cm, National Gallery of Art



El Greco (1541-1614), *The Purification of the Temple*, c. 1600, 41.9 x 52.4 cm, National Gallery



El Greco (1541-1614), *The Purification of the Temple*, c. 1570-71, 65.4 x 83.2 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington

El Greco (1541-1614), *The Purification of the Temple*, c. 1600, 41.9 x 52.4 cm, The Frick Collection

- In 1577 El Greco moved to Toledo, the religious capital of Spain. In Rome he had earned the respect of certain individuals but also faced hostile art critics. During the 1570s the huge monastery-palace of El Escorial was being built by Philip II and he could not find good artists. Titian was dead, and Tintoretto, Veronese and

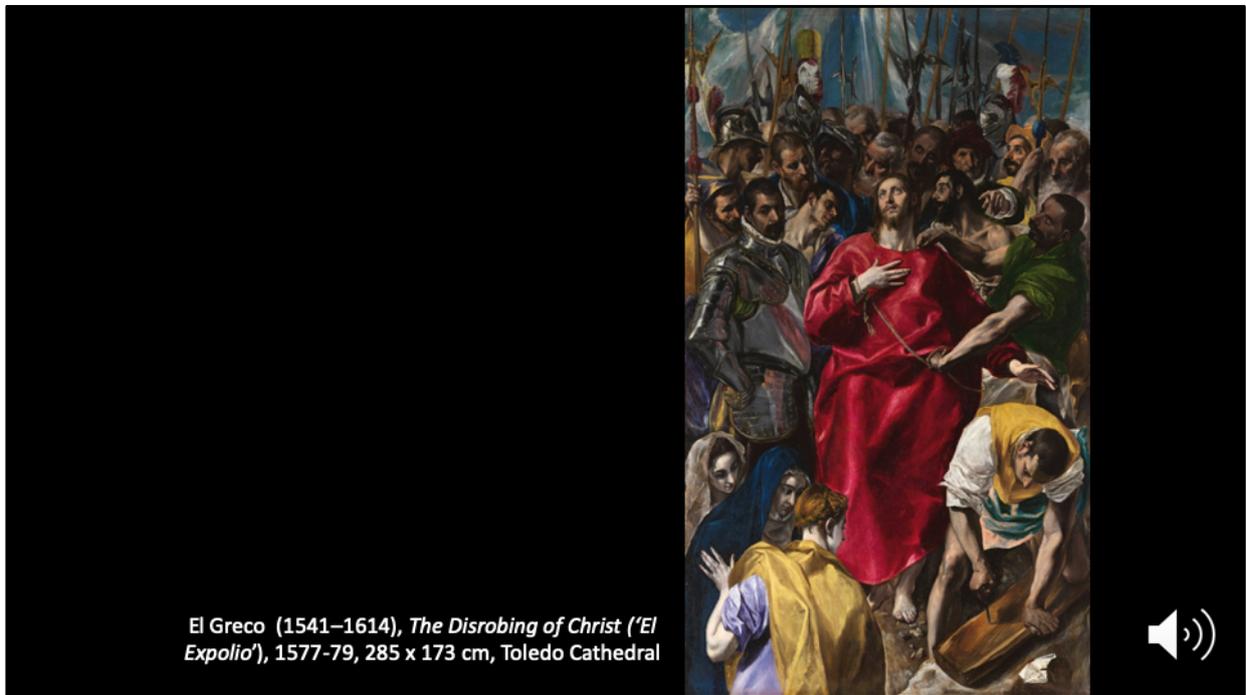
Anthony Mor all refused to go to Spain. Philip had to rely on the lesser talent of Juan Fernández de Navarrete, of whose seriousness and decorum the king approved. However, Fernández died in 1579; the moment should have been ideal for El Greco. He won a large commission in Toledo in the Cathedral, but he did not plan to stay in Toledo as his aim was to work for the king. He did receive two important royal commissions, but the king did not like the works. We don't know why but he might not have liked the inclusion of real people or that El Greco had broken a basic rule of the Counter Reformation, that the style should not interfere with the meaning of the content. Lacking the favour of the king he was obliged to stay in Toledo where he had been received as a great artist.

- In 1585 he hired an assistant and set up a workshop in Toledo.
- The Purification of the Temple is a subject that occupied El Greco through his life and he produced many versions. This is one of his earliest versions followed by one of his latest. There is also a version in the National Gallery.
- “In the time of Christ, the porch of the Temple in Jerusalem accommodated a market for buying sacrificial animals and changing money. Christ drove out the traders, saying, **'It is written "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you make it a den of**

**thieves.'** (Matthew 20). This episode is known as the Purification of the Temple. The picture is dominated by the figure of Christ, poised to unleash his whip. On the **left are the traders** and on the **right are the Apostles**. In the 16th century the subject of the Purification of the Temple was used as a **symbol of the Church's need to cleanse itself both through the condemnation of heresy and through internal reform**. The reliefs in the background allude to the themes of punishment and deliverance. On the **left Adam and Eve's expulsion** from Paradise prefigures the Purification of the Temple, and on the right, the **Sacrifice of Isaac prefigures Christ's death as the source of redemption.**" (National Gallery)

### **References**

<https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.43723.html>



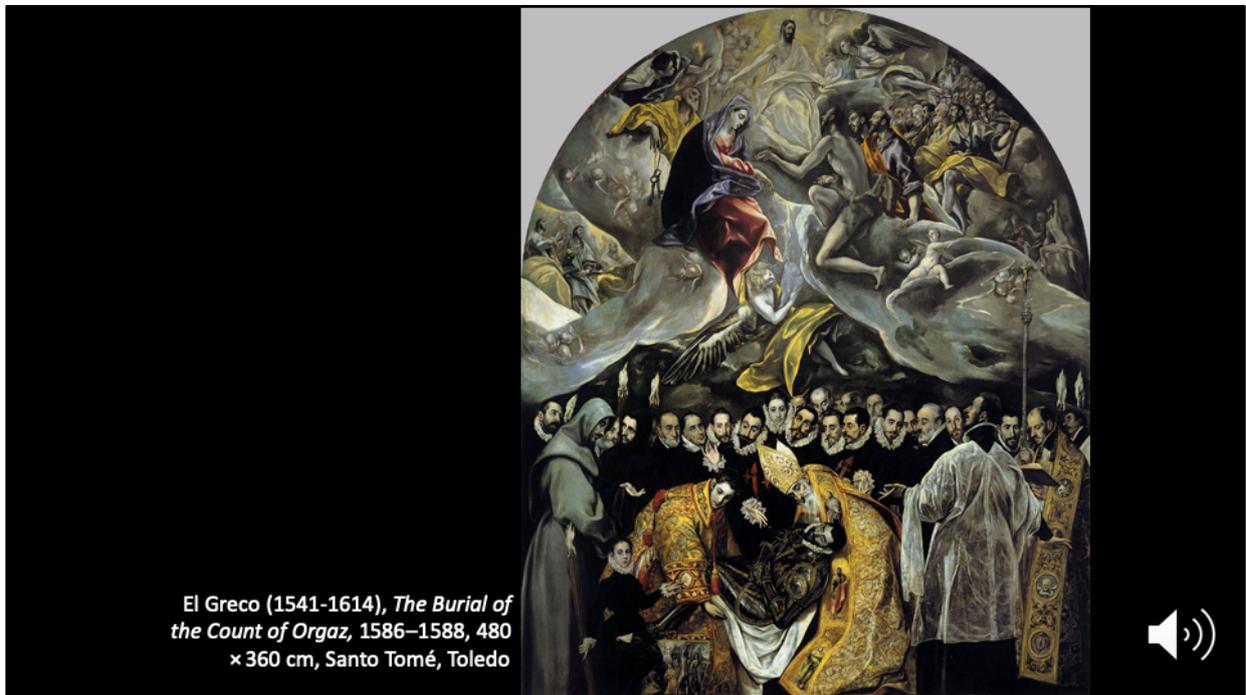
El Greco (1541–1614), *The Disrobing of Christ ('El Expolio')*, 1577-79, 285 x 173 cm, Toledo Cathedral

El Greco (1541–1614), *The Disrobing of Christ ('El Expolio')*, 1577-79, 285 x 173 cm, Toledo Cathedral

- *The Disrobing of Christ (El Expolio)*, Sacristy of **Toledo Cathedral**, is **one of his most famous altarpieces**. El Greco's altarpieces are renowned for their dynamic compositions and **startling innovations**. In 1577 El Greco was commissioned to make an altarpiece for the sacristy of the Toledo Cathedral. He produced this large canvas, which still hangs in the sacristy today. In Spanish it is called *El Expolio*.
- It shows the drama of the poignant moment,

mentioned in the apocryphal **Gospel of Nicodemus**, when Christ stands on Calvary, also known as Golgotha, whilst his cross is being prepared for his Crucifixion and the **scarlet robe** that he has already been dressed in, is **about to be ripped off**.

- In the foreground **a man drills a hole** in the cross, in preparation for the nailing. **Three women look on**; probably the three Marys. Jesus looks up to heaven with a serene expression, seemingly unimpressed by the surrounding crowd. Behind him **two men argue** about who should get the robe while a third man already tries to take it off.
- The artist used colour in a smart way to create a balanced composition. The red of the robe immediately catches the eye. It forms a triangle with the yellowish brown of the woman and the man with the drill.
- A small copy of this painting by El Greco, 55.7 x 34.7 cm, is in Upton House, Warwickshire (near Branbury, National Trust). The full-size version is the one in Toledo Cathedral. The Upton House version was owned by the French Romantic painter, Eugène Delacroix, amongst others, before entering Walter Samuel, 2nd Viscount Bearsted's collection at Upton House and given to the National Trust in 1948.



El Greco (1541-1614), *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1586–1588, 480 × 360 cm, Santo Tomé, Toledo



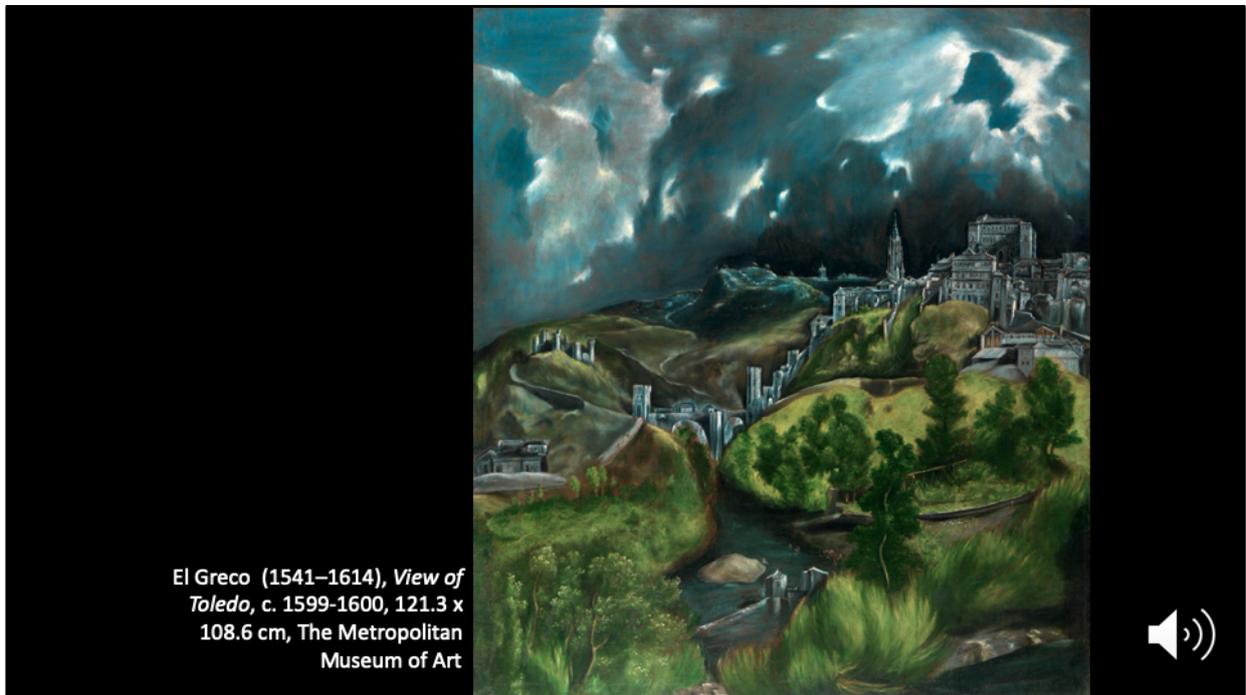
El Greco (1541-1614), *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1586–1588, 480 × 360 cm, Santo Tomé, Toledo

- On 12 March 1586 he obtained the commission for *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* now **his best-known work**, illustrates a popular local legend. An exceptionally large painting, it is clearly divided into two zones: the heavenly above and the terrestrial below, brought together compositionally.
- In 1312, Don Gonzalo Ruiz de Toledo, Señor of the town of Orgaz, died (his family later received the title

of Count, by which he is generally and posthumously known). He was a descendant of a family which produced the last ruling dynasty of the Byzantine Empire. He was pious and a philanthropist, who, among other charitable acts, left a sum of money for the enlargement and adornment of the church of Santo Tomé (El Greco's parish church), where he wanted to be buried. According to the legend, at the time the Count was buried, Saint Stephen and Saint Augustine descended in person from the heavens and buried him by their own hands in front of those present. The event is depicted in the painting, with every detail of the work's subject described in the contract signed between Greco and the Church. El Greco introduced some elements which "modernized" the legend by showing a 16th century funeral procession, updating the clothing of the saints and adding well-known people from the Toledo of his time. This was in accordance with the Counter Reformation as it made the veneration of saints clearer.

- The painting juxtaposes the upper heavenly world with the lower earthly world. There is a figure helping Orgaz ascend through the opening into heaven where there is a triangular composition of **Christ clothed in white, the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist**. They are surrounded by apostles, Biblical figures (including Moses, Noah and David) **as well as Philip II (although he was still alive)**. The **young boy on the left is El**

**Greco's son and his handkerchief has the artist's signature and the date 1578, the year of the boy's birth. El Greco can be seen directly above the raised hand of a knight.**



El Greco (1541–1614), *View of Toledo*, c. 1599-1600, 121.3 x 108.6 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

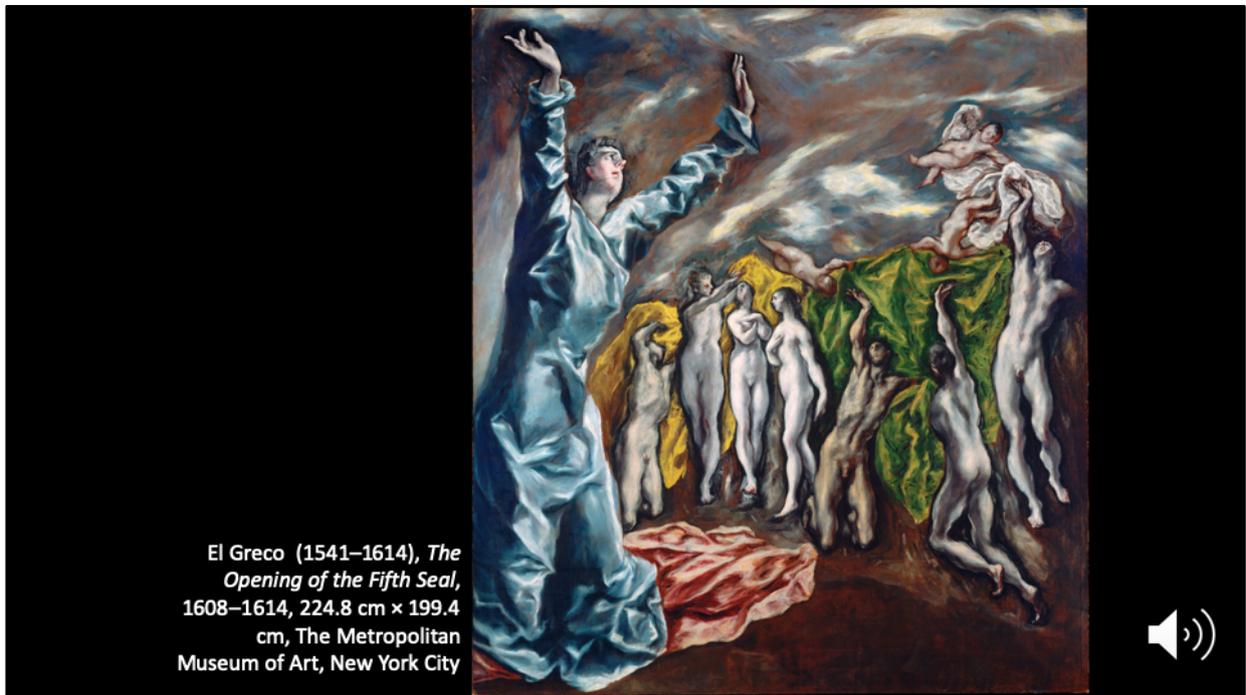
El Greco (1541–1614), *View of Toledo*, c. 1599-1600, 121.3 x 108.6 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

- “In this, his greatest surviving landscape, El Greco portrays the city he lived and worked in for most of his life. The painting belongs to the tradition of emblematic city views, rather than a faithful documentary description. The view of the eastern section of Toledo from the north would have excluded the cathedral, which the artist therefore imaginatively moved to the left of the Alcázar (the royal palace). Other buildings represented in the painting include the

ancient Alcántara Bridge, and on the other side of the river Tagus, the Castle of San Servando.” (The Met)

- Religious dictates based on the **Council of Trent** (which ended in 1563), **banned the landscape** as a suitable subject for painting. Although the church was his primary patron, the artist broke with that convention, and because of this, *View of Toledo* has been called the first Spanish landscape. More impressively, **cityscapes never existed anywhere in the sixteenth century**. El Greco may literally have invented the genre.
- El Greco is not painting a topographically accurate landscape as he has moved the location of several buildings. Instead he invokes a mood through the unnatural moody, stormy sky and the buildings that seem to flow or crawl across a vivid countryside. Toledo is presented as a place of excitement, a place of change and a place confronting a forthcoming apocalypse.
- **The decade 1597 to 1607** was a period of intense activity for El Greco. During these years he received several major commissions, and his workshop created pictorial and sculptural ensembles for a variety of religious institutions. Among his major commissions of this period were three altars for the Chapel of San José in Toledo (1597–1599); three paintings (1596–1600) for the Colegio de Doña María de Aragon, an

Augustinian monastery in Madrid, and the high altar, four lateral altars, and the painting St. Ildefonso for the Capilla Mayor of the Hospital de la Caridad (Hospital of Charity) at Illescas (1603–1605). The minutes of the commission of *The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* (1607–1613), which were composed by the personnel of the municipality, describe El Greco as **"one of the greatest men in both this kingdom and outside it"**.



El Greco (1541–1614), *The Opening of the Fifth Seal*, 1608–1614, 224.8 cm × 199.4 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

El Greco (1541–1614), *The Opening of the Fifth Seal*, 1608–1614, 224.8 cm × 199.4 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

- *The Opening of the Fifth Seal* (or *The Fifth Seal of the Apocalypse* or *The Vision of Saint John*) was painted in the **last years of El Greco's life** for a side-altar of the church of Saint John the Baptist outside the walls of Toledo. **Before 1908 El Greco's painting was referred to as *Profane Love***. There were doubts about the title and it was changed to *The Opening of the Fifth Seal*. The Metropolitan Museum, where the painting is kept, comments: "**the picture is unfinished and much**

**damaged and abraded.”**

- The subject is taken from the Book of Revelation (6:9–11), where the souls of persecuted martyrs cry out to God for justice upon their persecutors on Earth. The ecstatic figure of **St. John dominates the canvas**, while behind him naked souls writhe in a **chaotic storm of emotion** as they are handed down **white robes of salvation from Heaven**.
- The picture has been cut down and some think the bottom section represents profane love while the lost upper part divine love.
- It was owned by the prime Minister of Spain who had it ‘restored’ in 1880. They trimmed at least 175 cm from the top leaving John the Evangelist pointing nowhere. On the Prime Minister’s death it was sold to the artist Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945) who revived interest in El Greco and presented it to artists, such as Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), as a ‘precursor of modernism’.



Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)*, 243.9 cm × 233.7 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York



El Greco (1541-1614), *The Opening of the Fifth Seal*, 1608-1614, 224.8 cm × 199.4 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City



El Greco (1541-1614), *The Opening of the Fifth Seal*, 1608-1614, 224.8 cm × 199.4 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)* (*The Young Ladies of Avignon*, originally titled *The Brothel of Avignon*), 243.9 cm × 233.7 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

- It has been suggested that the *Opening of the Fifth Seal* served as an inspiration for the early Cubist works of Pablo Picasso, especially *Les Femmes d'Alger*, which mirrors the expressionistic angularity of the

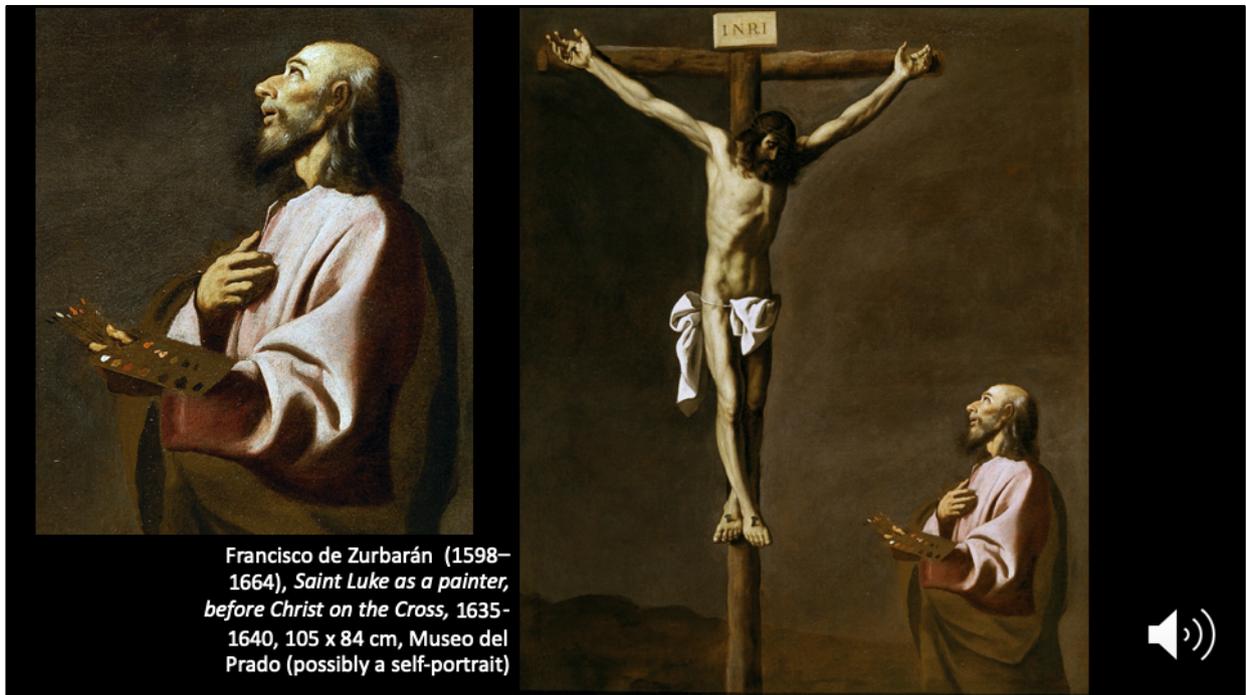
painting. When Picasso was working on *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)*, he visited his friend **Zuloaga** in his studio in Paris and studied El Greco's *Opening of the Fifth Seal*. The relation between *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)* and the *Opening of the Fifth Seal* was pinpointed in the early 1980s, when the stylistic similarities and the relationship between the motifs of both works were analysed.

- One opinion is that the clothed figure in the left part of the painting and the naked figures to the right showed the contradiction between profane and divine love. This may have been the original inspiration of Picasso who in a preliminary drawing of the *Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)* depicted a medical student holding a skull or a book and entering a room where there is a sailor among nude women.
- One critic suggests that El Greco showed Picasso how to harness the spiritual energy of a great religious artist to his own demonic ends (J. Richardson, *Picasso's Apocalyptic Whorehouse*, p. 46). According to Richardson, Picasso followed this apocalyptic vision his whole life.

## FRANCISCO DE ZURBARÁN (1598-1664)



**Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664)**, “He is known primarily for his religious paintings depicting monks, nuns, and martyrs, and for his still-lives. Zurbarán gained the nickname "Spanish Caravaggio," owing to the forceful, realistic use of chiaroscuro in which he excelled.” (Wikipedia).



Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664), *Saint Luke as a painter, before Christ on the Cross*, 1635–1640, 105 x 84 cm, Museo del Prado (possibly a self-portrait)

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664), *Saint Luke as a painter, before Christ on the Cross*, 1635–1640, 105 x 84 cm, Museo del Prado  
Possibly a self-portrait

Bio: Zurbarán

- **Francisco de Zurbarán** was born in the west of Spain in 1598 to a haberdasher. He showed artistic skills early on and was sent to Seville as an apprentice to an artist. He married three times, in 1617, 1625 and 1644. His first two wives died in childbirth and his second and third wives were wealthy widows.

- **In 1626** (28) he received his first major commission when he was 28 when he agreed to produce 21 paintings in eight months for a Dominican monastery in Seville. Fourteen of the paintings depict the life of Saint Dominic and the others Saint Bonaventura, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Dominic, and the four Doctors of the Church. This established his reputation and in 1628 he was commissioned by another religious order in Seville to produce 22 paintings. He had become so famous the city elders invited him to live permanently in Seville and he moved there with his wife and family.
- **In 1630** (32) he was appointed painter to **Philip IV** who is meant to have said "**Painter to the king, king of painters**".
- **After 1640** (42) his austere, harsh, hard-edged style was unfavourably compared to the sentimental religiosity of Murillo and Zurbarán's reputation declined. Beginning by the late 1630s, Zurbarán's workshop produced many paintings for export to South America.
- **In 1658** (60), late in Zurbarán's life, that he moved to Madrid in search of work and renewed his contact with **Velázquez**. Popular myth has Zurbarán dying in poverty, but at his death the value of his estate was about 20,000 reales or 2,500 'pieces of eight' or Spanish Dollars, roughly equivalent to a British pound.

## ART TERM: CHIAROSCURO

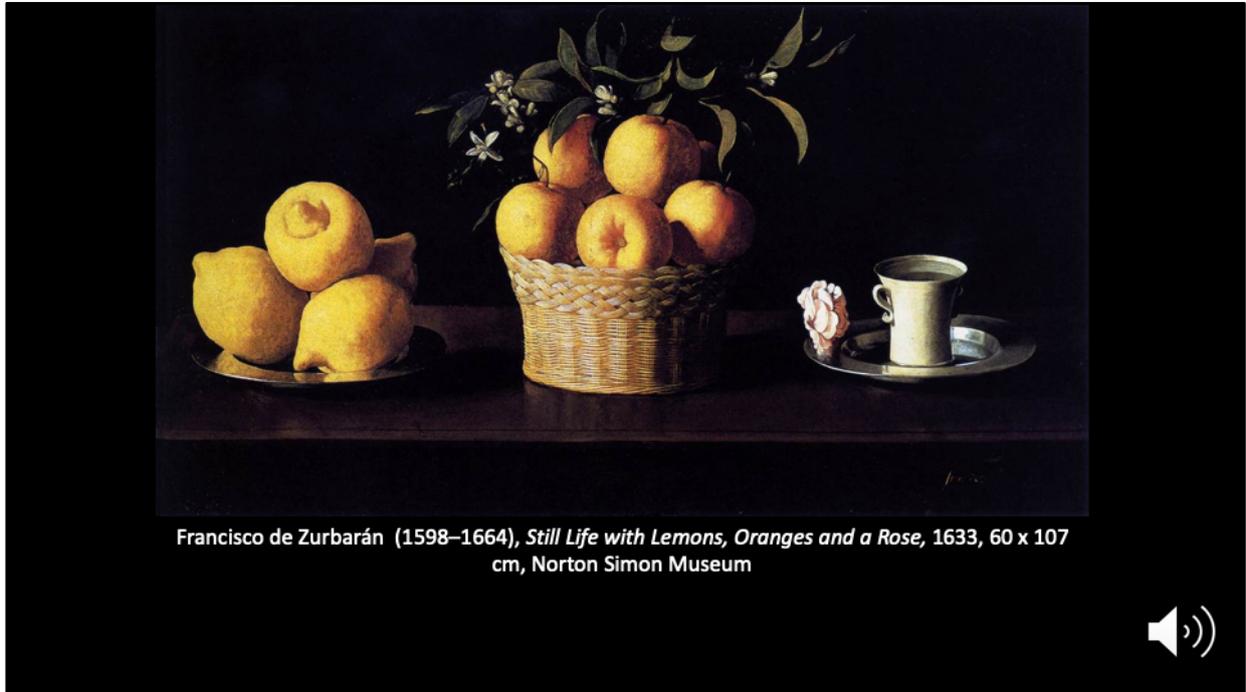
- Literally 'light-dark'
- The use of strong contrasts between light and dark
- Practitioners include Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Zurbarán and Goya
- Its extreme form is called tenebrism
- Other technical terms include
  - Cangiante, a change in colour to suggest shadow to avoid the use of adding black
  - Sfumato, a smoke-like, soft transition between colours or tones
  - Unione, like sfumato in that it aims at harmonising transitions but also like chiaroscuro in that it uses contrast but without any harshness



- The use of strong contrasts between light and dark, usually bold contrasts affecting a whole composition. It is also a technical term used by artists and art historians for the use of contrasts of light to achieve a sense of volume in modelling three-dimensional objects and figures.
- Artists known for developing the technique include Leonardo da Vinci, Caravaggio and Rembrandt. It is a mainstay of black and white and low-key photography. Artists well-known for their use of chiaroscuro include Rembrandt, Caravaggio, Vermeer, and Goya.
- The more technical use of the term is to described

shading, modelling the light to suggest three-dimensional volume.

- Tenebrism, from the Italian tenebroso ("dark, gloomy, mysterious") is exaggerated chiaroscuro, dramatic illumination with violent contrasts of light and dark, and where darkness becomes a dominating feature of the image. It adds drama to an image through a spotlight effect and was popular in Baroque painting.
- Chiaroscuro is one of four modes of painting colours available to Italian High Renaissance painters, along with
  - cangiante (pronounced, 'CAN-jantay', it means 'changing') a change in colour to suggest shadow to avoid the use of adding black or brown and making the colour impure, for example, adding red to yellow to make it darker),
  - sfumato (a smoke-like, soft transition between colours or tones) and
  - unione (pronounced, OO-ni-onay') like sfumato in that it aims at harmonising transitions but also like chiaroscuro in that it uses contrast but without any harshness).



Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664), *Still Life with Lemons, Oranges and a Rose*, 1633, 60 x 107 cm, Norton Simon Museum

- It is not known if Zurbarán met Caravaggio or even saw his work, but he is often described as the Spanish Caravaggio as he also combines realism with a strong chiaroscuro and tenebrism.
- Zurbarán preferred simple compositions, easy to understand with only a small number of people. He never painted comic scenes like Velasquez and Murillo sometimes did nor strange and grotesque one like

Ribera. He preferred severe religious scenes and the occasional still life and we will next see a mythology subject.



*Hercules separates Mounts Calpe and Abylla*

*Hercules defeats King Geryon*

*Hercules fighting the Nemean Lion*

*Hercules and the Erymanthian Boar*

*Hercules and the Cretan Bull*

*Hercules fighting with Antaeus*

*Hercules and Cerberus*

*Hercules diverting the Course of the River Alpheus*

*Hercules and the Hydra*

*The Death of Hercules*

All 1634, 136 cm × 167 cm, Museo del Prado

- The work was commissioned by Philip IV of Spain for the Queens Halls of the Buen Retiro Palace ('Good Retreat'). It was east of where the Prado is now located and little remains. Two salons that were part of the palace are now part of the Prado.
- Hercules was the son of Zeus but Zeus's jealous wife Hera found out and tricked Zeus into making the next king of Greece the sickly Eurystheus. Hera sent two serpents to kill him when he was a baby but he strangled them. She later made him mad and he killed his wife and children and he was made to become the servant of Eurystheus who imposed the famous twelve labours that he thought would kill him. The traditional order from the *Bibliotheca* is:
  1. Slay the Nemean Lion, whose skin he is often shown wearing.
  2. Slay the nine-headed Hydra of Lerna.
  3. Capture the Golden Hind (stag) of Arcadia.
  4. Capture the wild boar of Erymanthian.
  5. Clean the Augean stables in a single day.
  6. Slay the man-eating Stymphalian (pronounced 'stim-falian') Birds.
  7. Capture the mad Cretan Bull.
  8. Steal the man-eating mares of Diomedes.
  9. Obtain the girdle of Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons.
  10. Seize the cattle of the three-bodied, giant monster Geryon.

11. Steal the golden apples of the Hesperides at the world's end.
12. Capture and bring back the triple-headed dog Cerberus from the underworld.

- Zurbarán reduces the twelve labours of Hercules to ten possibly because there were 10 windows. Two episodes are not in the original so only eight labours are shown.
- In Zurbarán's series we see:
  - Hercules separates Mounts Calpe and Abylla, sometimes called the Pillars of Hercules separating the Mediterranean from the Atlantic. It has also been interpreted as Hercules pulling two rocks together relating to Philip IV as a monarch who unites disparate lands. This labour does not figure in most accounts of the 12 labours.
  - Hercules defeats King Geryon a fearsome giant. This is the tenth of the 12 labours. In the original story Geryon is a giant with three heads and six arms with a two-headed dog.
  - Hercules fighting the Nemean Lion which he kills with his bare hands, the first of the 12 labours. He is often shown wearing the lion's skin as a cloak.
  - Hercules and the Erymanthian Boar, the fourth of the 12 labours.
  - Hercules and the Cretan Bull, the seventh of the 12 labours. The Cretan Bull which was father to

the Minotaur was not killed by Hercules but sent back to the king but is escaped and wandered to Marathon. Both the Bull and the Minotaur were later killed by Theseus, the mythical founder-hero of Athens.

- Hercules fighting with Antaeus, the first part of eleventh labour while he was on his way to find the golden apples of the Hesperides at the end of the earth. Antaeus had killed all adversaries but Hercules found out he derived his strength from touching the earth and so he held him aloft and crushed him to death with a bear hug.
- Hercules and the three-headed dog Cerberus which he had to bring back from the underworld. The twelfth and hardest of the labours as Hercules had to visit hell and steal the guardian of its gates.
- Hercules diverting the Course of the River Alpheus in order to clean the Augean stables in a single day, the fifth of the 12 labours.
- Hercules and the Hydra, killing the nine-headed Hydra of Lerna was the second of the 12 labours.
- The Death of Hercules is not part of the 12 labours. He dies when his wife is tricked into giving him a shirt stained with the poisonous blood of the Hydra. As soon as he puts it on his skin catches fire and is burnt from his bones.
- The 12 Labours of Hercules were interpreted in the

Renaissance as an allegory representing wisdom overcoming human frailties, for example, the boar represents a lack of self-restraint (incontinence), the Cretan Bull irrational passions and the Augean stables the foulness of humanity.

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Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664), *Saint Francis in Meditation*, 1639, 162 x 137 cm, National Gallery

- “Saint Francis of Assisi (1181/82-1226) is shown meditating in a landscape, holding a skull in his hand. His hood is pulled back and the light catches one side of his face, marking out his strong nose and pronounced cheekbone, while the other side remains in deep shadow. He wears the fraying and patched robe of the Franciscans, the religious order he founded in the thirteenth century; all members took a vow of poverty.

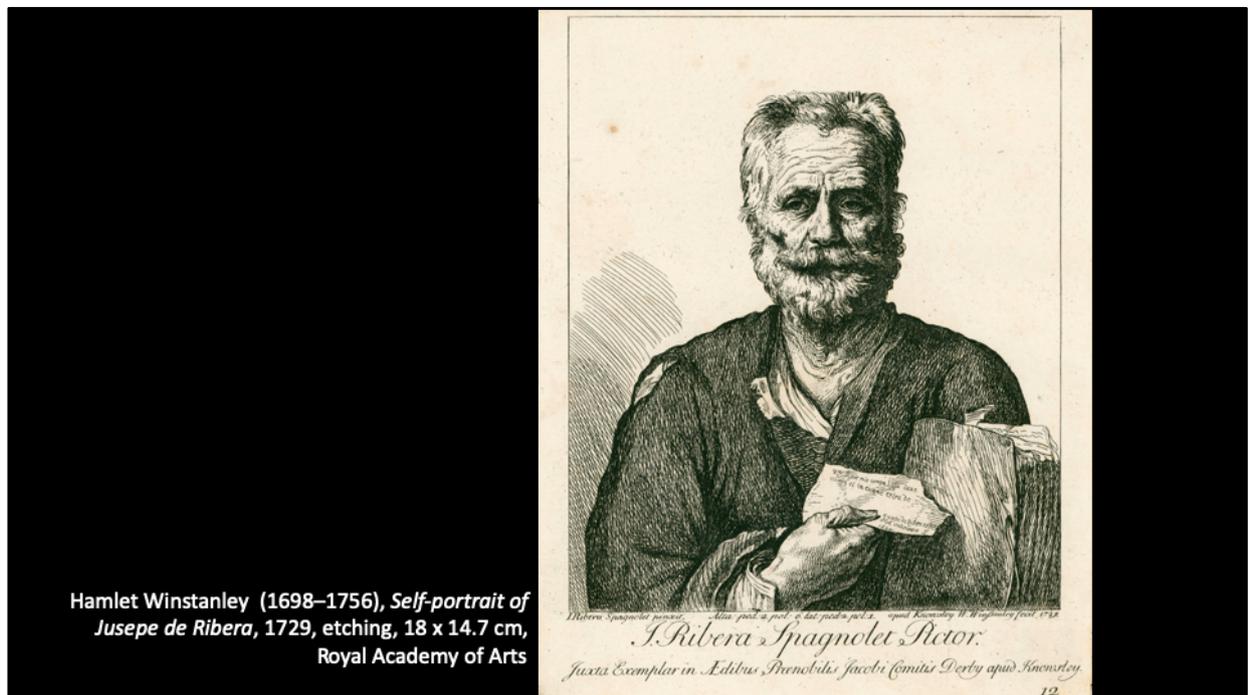
- The skull symbolises death and refers to the suffering of the crucified Christ – the focus of the saint’s meditation. But this is not a scene of quiet contemplation: Francis’s upward gaze, slightly open mouth and upturned palm suggest he is talking with God. His hands are marked with the stigmata, the wounds of Christ’s crucifixion. In the landscape background you can just make out a simple hut, suggesting that the saint is not in complete isolation.” (National Gallery)
- He received the stigmata while in religious ecstasy in 1224.



## JOSÉ DE RIBERA (1591-1652)

**José de Ribera (1591-1652).** *Ribera: Art of Violence*, Dulwich Picture Gallery, 26 September 2018 – 27 January 2019. This is the first UK show of work by the Spanish Baroque painter, draughtsman and printmaker, Ribera displaying his most sensational, shocking and masterfully composed works. Ribera is one of the titans of Spanish Baroque art. Born in Valencia, Spain, Ribera emigrated to Italy as a young artist in 1606. He spent most of his career in Naples, where he influenced many artists including Salvator Rosa and Luca Giordano. He is often regarded as the heir to Caravaggio for his dramatic use of light and shadow, and his practice of painting directly

from the live model.



Hamlet Winstanley (1698–1756), *Self-portrait of Jusepe de Ribera*, 1729, etching, 18 x 14.7 cm, Royal Academy of Arts

Hamlet Winstanley (1698–1756), *Self-portrait of Jusepe de Ribera*, 1729, etching, 18 x 14.7 cm, Royal Academy of Arts

- Jusepe de Ribera - a Spanish Tenebrist painter, (born in 1591, deceased 1652) also known as Giuseppe Ribera or Jusepe de Ribera.
- **Tenebrism**, from Italian tenebroso ("dark, gloomy, mysterious"), also occasionally called dramatic illumination, is a style of painting using profoundly pronounced chiaroscuro, where there are violent contrasts of light and dark, and where darkness

becomes a dominating feature of the image.

- His works are gloomy and startling. He painted the horrors and reality of human cruelty and showed he valued truth over idealism. The gradual rehabilitation of his international reputation was aided by exhibitions in Princeton in 1973.
- Ribera's art is full of bound figures in torment but this was a time when such things were an everyday event on public display. The question becomes not why was Ribera so obsessed with torture but how did other artists ignore it.
- One legend recounts that the wife of the owner of one of his works (*Ixion*, Prado) gave birth to a child with deformed fingers because she saw Ixion's fingers distorted in agony. Ixion was condemned to spend eternity spinning on a fiery wheel for trying to seduce Hera the wife of Zeus.
- José (Jusepe) de Ribera (1591–1652) is regarded as the foremost Spanish printmaker active before Goya and one of the greatest of all seventeenth-century virtuosos of etching. His reputation is all the more remarkable since there are only eighteen etchings known to have been made by his hand. Ribera's career as a printmaker seems to have been limited to a relatively short period, between 1620 and 1630. All his etchings were made in a single decade, towards the

beginning of his artistic career: a fact that suggests they were primarily a means of earning money while he was trying to establish himself as a young Spanish artist in Italy. With the help of these prints, Ribera could make his art known to a broader audience and attract the attention of potential patrons and clients.

- Gained international renown in Naples decided not to return but he always asserted his Spanish birth. He described Spain as a very cruel stepmother. According to his biographer Ribera said he who studies the immortal Raphael's works will be a true history painter. We do not normally associate Raphael with Ribera.

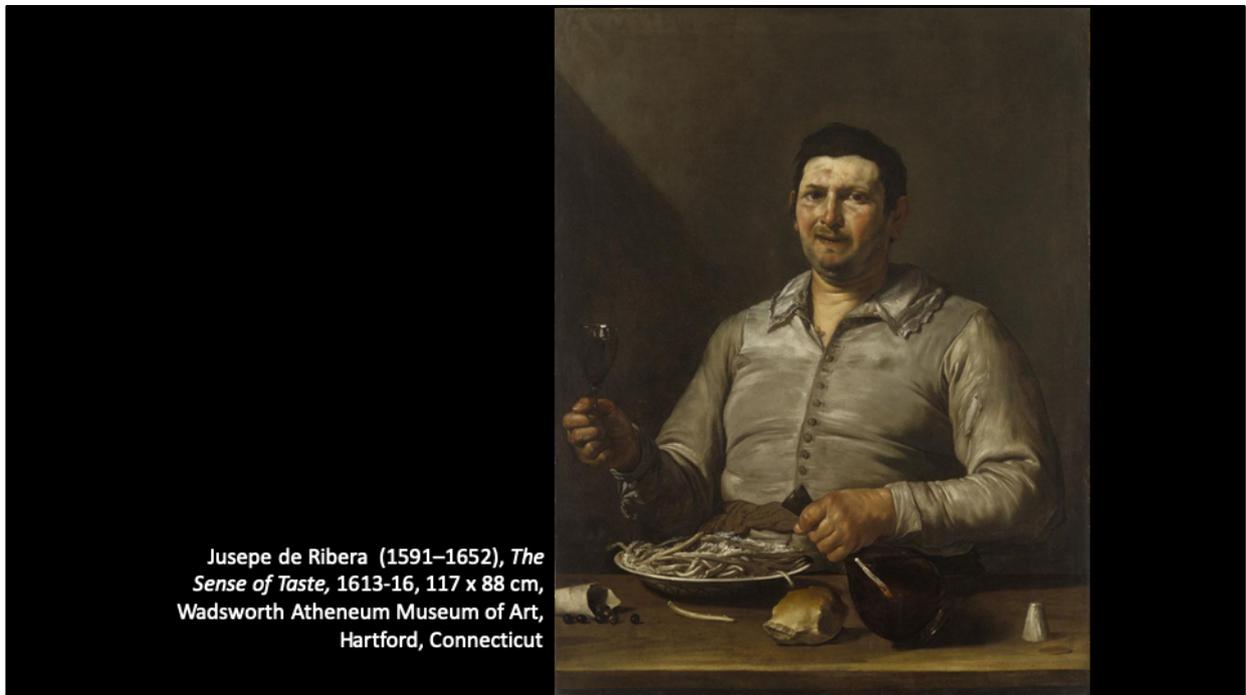


José de Ribera (1591-1652), *Magdalena Ventura with Her Husband and Son*, 1631, Toledo

- The painting is also known as *The Bearded Woman*. It shows a tall woman nursing her baby standing. She is said to have grown a beard at the age of 37 and in the painting she is 52. Apart from her breast she shows none of the conventional signs of being a woman, she is tall, strong, with a full beard and hairy hands. She became a celebrity in 17<sup>th</sup> century Italy at a time when unusual bodies were of general interest and toured the country. Ribera painted her in Naples where he was

court painter. He was commissioned by the Viceroy of Naples at a time when the city was under Spanish rule. Ribera paints her as a human being, with sensitivity and understanding, rather than as a curiosity.

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2016/dec/08/bearded-woman-of-abruzzo-magdalena-ventura-jusepe-de-ribera-gender-hero>



Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652), *The Sense of Taste*, 1613-16, 117 x 88 cm, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut

- This was painted in Rome where Ribera stayed for only a few years. It is one of a set of the five senses made, we believe for a Spanish client. The theme was made popular in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth century. Ribera presents us with the human embodiment of gluttony with a bowl of what might be pasta and a full glass of wine. The man has red cheeks and nose and a swollen finger on his left hand which is

indicative of gout. Gout was regarded as a aristocrat's disease but he is a common working man so it could be seen as a warning against overindulgence aimed at all levels of society.

- Of the *Five Senses* four remain and *Hearing* has been lost. *Smell* is in private collection, *Sight* in Mexico and *Touch* in Pasadena.



Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652), *Apollo and Marsyas*, 1637, 182 x 232 cm, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte

Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652), *Apollo and Marsyas*, 1637, 182 x 232 cm, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples

- Ribera was exhibited at the Dulwich Gallery in 2018 in an exhibition called *Ribera: Art of Violence* and this is one of the picture's shown. The exhibition showed the horror, violence and gore of the Inquisition but this is a mythological scene. We see the god Apollo skinning Marsyas alive for daring to compete with him musically. Marsyas's scream seems to haunt the painting and ring in our ears.

- How did Ribera convey such pain? It is because it was because he was surrounded by the cruelty and horror of the Spanish Inquisition. Torture and brutality was displayed daily on the streets of Naples. Every man, woman and child saw people being hanged, beheaded, tortured and burned alive. Ribera painted what he saw and his honesty makes him an artist who will always be contemporary.
- There are two versions of this painting one shown above and the other in the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium.

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BARTOLOMÉ ESTEBAN MURILLO (1618-1682)

- **Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618-1682)**, was born in Seville where he lived and worked his entire life. Seville foremost city in Spain equal in power and population to Venice, Amsterdam and Madrid.
- “Although he is best known for his religious works, Murillo also produced a considerable number of paintings of contemporary women and children. These lively, realist portraits of flower girls, street urchins, and beggars constitute an extensive and appealing record of the everyday life of his times.” (Wikipedia).
- Murillo was a story teller who held a mirror up to the

ordinary people to enable them to see their best qualities. He painted Christ, the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist as beautiful children to inspire empathy and by extension charity.

- He used trompe l'oeil to fool the eye and draw viewers deeper into his pictures.



Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682), *Self-portrait*, 1668-70?, 122 x 127 cm, National Gallery

- “Murillo was the leading painter in Seville in the later 17th century. He remained one of the most admired and popular of all European artists in the 18th and early 19th centuries. His early works were much influenced by the early works of Velázquez, executed before Velázquez left Seville in 1623, and by the paintings of Zurbarán.
- Murillo's first famous cycle of paintings was produced for the cloister of the convent of San Francisco in

Seville (1645). There followed paintings for the cathedral (1658), and a celebrated series for the church of the Caridad (1667-70), including the National Gallery's 'Christ healing the Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda'.

- Visits to Madrid (one certainly in 1658) would have made Murillo familiar with works by Rubens and Van Dyck and contemporary Italian painters. His style became increasingly free in its handling, as is apparent in his many well-known representations of the Immaculate Conception.” (National Gallery website)



Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682), *The Holy Family with a Bird*, c. 1650, 144 x 188 cm, Prado

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682), *The Holy Family with a Bird*, c. 1650, 144 x 188 cm, Museo del Prado

- “A domestic scene filled with tenderness showing the Virgin Mary winding a skein of thread and watching the Christ Child, who leans on Saint Joseph while he plays with a little bird and a dog. The almost leading role of the saint corresponds to the increased worship of his figure during the Counterreformation. The apparently insignificant composition of this painting exalts home life, the family and work. The latter is symbolized by Saint Joseph’s carpenter’s bench and

the Virgin's sewing basket. The strong chiaroscuro lighting of this composition reflects the influence of Italian painters, especially Barocci (Urbino, 1535-1612)." (Prado website)

- This is a very naturalistic scene without any supernatural elements such as haloes. We see a child playing with a bird and a dog while his mother and father watch. His mother, the Virgin Mary has stopped her sewing to watch and his father, Joseph, is shown not as a grey-haired old man but as a strong middle-aged man.



Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682), *Two Women at a Window*, c. 1665-75, 125.1 x 104.5 cm, National Gallery of Art

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682), *Two Women at a Window*, c. 1665-75, 125.1 x 104.5 cm, National Gallery of Art

- “While Murillo is best known for works with religious themes, he also produced a number of genre paintings of figures from contemporary life engaged in ordinary pursuits. These pictures often possess a wistful charm; *Two Women at a Window* is a striking example. A standing woman attempts to hide a smile with her shawl as she peeks from behind a partially opened shutter, while a younger woman leans on the

windowsill, gazing out at the viewer with amusement. The difference in their ages might indicate a chaperone and her charge, a familiar duo in upper-class Spanish households. Covering one's smile or laugh was considered good etiquette among the aristocracy.

- The convincingly modelled, life-size figures, framed within an illusionistically painted window, derive from Dutch paintings that were meant to fool the eye.” (National Gallery of Art website)
- Genre paintings like this were rarely painted by Spanish artists during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It has been suggested that this was painted for a Flemish or Dutch client who would be familiar with this type of work. A later engraving of the work was titled *Las Gallegas* (the Galician women) at a time when the women of this province were reputed to be prostitutes. The painting could therefore represent an amorous solicitation. The painting was later exhibited with the title ‘Spanish Courtesan’. Also, pictures of women at a window often referred to sexual license. However, there is no procuress, an old woman often shown in this type of painting. Both the women are young and so it could be an innocent flirtation.
- Some authorities place the painting before 1660 because its style does not show the sfumato of later works.

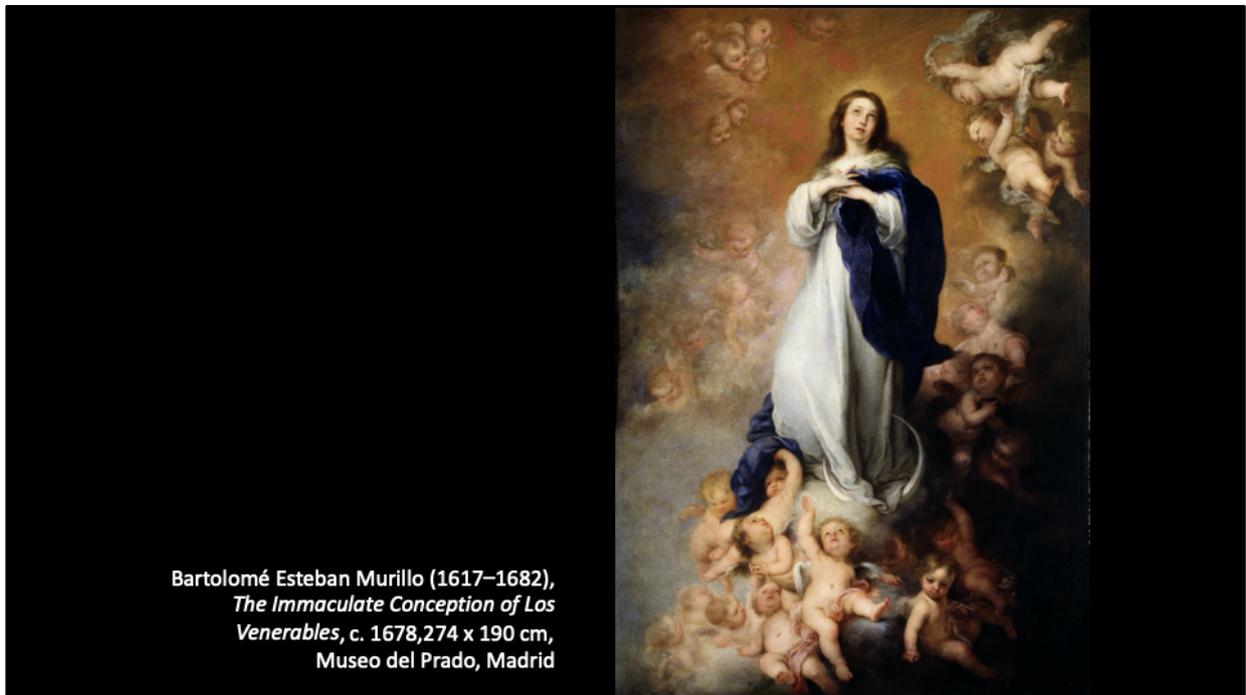


Murillo, Bartolomé Estéban (1617 - 1682), *Three Boys*, late1660s, 168.3 x 109.8 cm, Dulwich Picture Gallery

- “A black boy asks for some pie from a white boy, who refuses, while another turns to the viewer and grins. In the 19th century the painting's title, 'The Poor Black Boy,' implied that the boy was begging for charity. However, his earthenware jug, clothes and shoes clearly indicate he is a servant or errand boy whose position is probably better than that of the white boys, who may have resorted to stealing the pie. The servant boy could even be a portrait of the son of Murillo's

household slave girl, Juana de Santiago, who is thought to have been born in 1658 and whom Murillo freed in 1676. Indeed, it has been suggested that the two white boys are Murillo's own sons, Gabriel (b.1657) and Gaspar (b.1661).

- This painting is unique in Murillo's oeuvre in that he appears to have changed his mind as he painted, a rare occurrence for an artist who is thought to have carefully planned and drawn out most of his compositions. Close examination of x-ray images reveals an earlier composition where Murillo depicted the seated boy with a smirking expression on his face, his teeth bared mockingly. In this version, instead of groping in the standing boy's pocket, he defiantly pulls the black boy's hand away from the pie. The subsequent changes to the composition shed light not only on Murillo's working methods but also on the kind of poverty he wished to portray; he may have found the expression and gesture of the boy too physical and decided to subtly tone down the dynamics of the narrative. Although Murillo takes the reality of poverty as his cue, his artistic eye and sense of composition act as filters - this painting is by no means a realistic portrayal of vagrant life in 17th-century Seville.” (Dulwich Picture Gallery website)



Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682), *The Immaculate Conception of Los Venerables*, c. 1678, 274 x 190 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid

- In 1813 it was looted and taken to France and then bought by the Louvre in 1852 for 615,300 francs, the largest amount paid for any painting at this time. It was exhibited until 1941 when his art fell out of fashion and it was returned to Franco in exchange for some other works.
- Murillo painted about two dozen versions of the Immaculate Conception more than any other artist at

that time. In most of them the Virgin Mary wears a white robe and a blue mantle, with her hands crossed on her chest, a crescent moon at her feet and she is looking up to heaven.

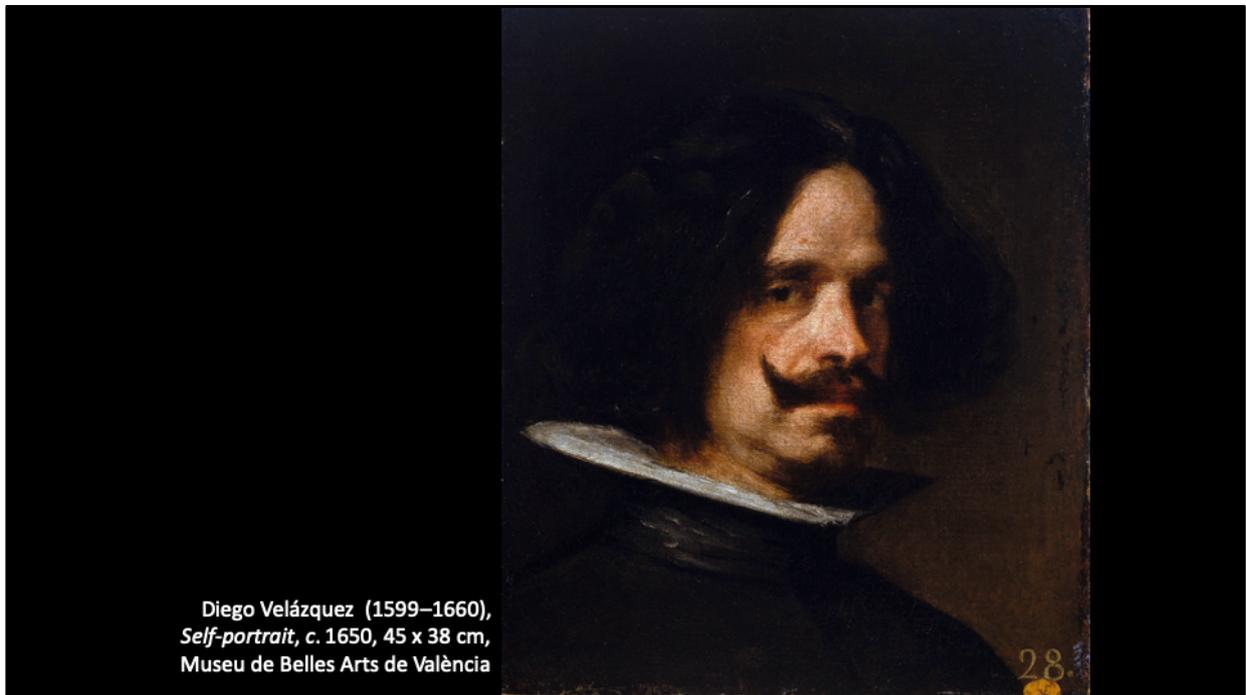
- The painting was commissioned by the canon of Saville Cathedral for his personal collection and he later donated the painting. Belief in the Immaculate Conception, the belief that Mary was without sin and that Jesus was conceived without a father, had been growing in Spain since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and it fought for the belief to become Catholic dogma which took place in 1854.



## DIEGO VELÁZQUEZ (1599–1660)

- **Diego Velázquez (1599-1660)**, “the leading artist in the court of King Philip IV, and one of **the most important painters of the Spanish Golden Age**. He was an individualistic artist of the contemporary Baroque period. In addition to numerous renditions of scenes of historical and cultural significance, he painted scores of portraits of the Spanish royal family, other notable European figures, and commoners, culminating in the production of his masterpiece *Las Meninas* (1656)” (Wikipedia).
- He became court painter and friend of the king, Philip

IV, who would sit and watch him paint. Velázquez was responsible to the king's collection and he acquired paintings from all the great artists. The collection at the Prado was largely acquired by Velázquez.



Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), *Self-portrait*, c. 1650, 45 x 38 cm, Museu de Belles Arts de València

- The most important artist of this period was Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). He was born in Saville and his grandparents had moved from Portugal and were tradespeople, possibly converts from Judaism. This is relevant as when he was **knighted in 1658 he claimed descent from lesser nobility**.
- He was taught languages and philosophy and showed an early gift for art so when he was 12 his parents sent him to study with the artist Francisco de Herrera for a

year. He then became an apprentice of Francisco Pacheco for the next five years studying perspective and proportion.

- In 1618 he married the daughter of his teacher and by the **early 1620s his reputation was assured**. She bore him two daughters although one died in infancy.

### **Notable Works**

- *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* (1618)
- *The Surrender of Breda* (1634–35)
- *Rokeby Venus* (1647–51)
- *Portrait of Innocent X* (1650)
- *Las Hilanderas* (1655)
- *Las Meninas* (1656)



Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), *Old Woman Cooking Eggs*, 1618, 100.5 x 119.5 cm, National Galleries of Scotland

- Velázquez was eighteen or nineteen when he painted this remarkable picture and he still lived in Seville and so it was painted before he first visited Madrid in 1622. It is his first masterpiece and clearly demonstrates his flair for painting people and everyday objects directly from life. At this time he was known for painting these amusing and popular genre scenes known as bodegón (pronounced 'body-gone', it literally means 'pantry',

'tavern' or 'wine cellar' but has come to mean 'still life') such as *Old Woman Frying Eggs*. It was regarded as the lowest form of art and was much despised by connoisseurs. One wrote "workmen [probably Velázquez] of scant knowledge or reflection, who debase the noble art to vulgar notions, as we see today, in so many pictures of bodegones'.

- Velázquez was very conscious of his mastery of painting and painted to dazzle. He selects a wide variety of objects and textures to show his ability to represent anything. His aim is not illusion, not to fool you into thinking it is real life but to dazzle you with his virtuosity through you recognising it is just paint but with what impact, what mastery, what mystery. The objects in the painting radiate light as if self-illuminated and the woman and the boy are transfixed in time. The woman and the boy seem unaware of each other and suspended in time while they are poised to engage in some mysterious ritual.



Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), *Old Woman Cooking Eggs*, 1618, 100.5 x 119.5 cm, National Galleries of Scotland

- Velázquez was only 18 or 19 when he painted this. It is a tour de force, a remarkable picture for any artist with its nearly photographic realism. It is his first masterpiece. In it he shows his ability to represent people as well as objects from the reflections on the bottle to the texture of the eggs. He uses a strong light from the left to highlight the woman and throw the background into shadow. Velázquez also worked

particularly hard on the detail of the two figure's hands. It is generally regarded as the finest of his early works.

- It was painted when he was still living in Seville and before he moved to the capital Madrid in 1623. The painting is sometimes called *Old Woman Frying Eggs* or *Old Woman Poaching Eggs* as there has been some dispute of the cooking process.
- It is likely that the woman is his mother-in-law and the boy is a village apprentice he hired as a model.
- The figures seem frozen in space without the dynamism of **Caravaggio** (1571-1610) who had introduced close physical observation with a dramatic use of **chiaroscuro** (that came to be known as tenebrism).



Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), *The Surrender of Breda*, 1634–35, 307 x 367 cm, Museo del Prado

Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), *The Surrender of Breda*, 1634–35, 307 x 367 cm, Museo del Prado

- *The Surrender of Breda* (1634–1635) was inspired by Velázquez's first visit to Italy, in which he accompanied Ambrogio Spinola, who conquered the Dutch city of Breda a few years prior. This masterwork depicts a transfer of the key to the city from the Dutch to the Spanish army during the Siege of Breda. It is considered one of the best of Velázquez's paintings.



Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), *The Toilet of Venus ('The Rokeby Venus')*, 1647-51, National Gallery

Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), *The Toilet of Venus ('The Rokeby Venus')*, 1647-51, National Gallery

- **“This is the only surviving example of a female nude by Velázquez. The subject was rare in Spain because it met with the disapproval of the Church.** Venus, the goddess of Love, was the most beautiful of the goddesses, and was regarded as a personification of female beauty. She is shown here with her son Cupid, who holds up a mirror for her to look both at herself and at the viewer.
- 'The Rokeby Venus' is first recorded in June 1651 in the

collection of the Marqués del Carpio, son of the First Minister of Spain. It was probably made for the Marqués and was presumably displayed privately, thus avoiding the censure of the Spanish Inquisition. In the Carpio collection, Velázquez's painting was paired with a 16th-century Venetian picture of a naked nymph in a landscape seen from the front. The painting is known as 'The Rokeby Venus' because it was in the Morrill Collection at **Rokeby Park, now in County Durham**, before its acquisition by the Gallery.” (National Gallery)

- At 10am on 10 March 1914 a small soberly-dressed woman carrying a sketch book entered the national Gallery and took out a meat chopper from her sleeve and slashed the painting. The painting was displayed on an easel making it easy to attack and the attendant on hearing breaking glass at first thought it was a skylight breaking. When he realised what was happening he slipped on the recently polished floor in his haste to stop her. She was Mary Richardson, a militant suffragette and she was sentenced to six months in prison. Richardson said, **“I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the Government destroying Mrs Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history. Justice is an element of beauty as much as colour and outline on canvas.”** Emmeline Pankhurst had been arrested in violent circumstances the day before. Richardson was a

student of art and said it had been difficult for her to damage such a beautiful work, but that her hand had been forced by the government's indifference to the suffragist cause. In an interview Richardson gave some decades later she added: "I didn't like the way men visitors to the gallery gaped at it all day"

- In general the press reaction was one of outrage and it was reported as if it had been an attack on a beautiful woman. Richardson was called 'Slasher Mary' or the 'Ripper', a reference to the infamous Jack the Ripper 25 years earlier. The painting was described as the 'victim' and the damage as 'cruel wounds'. After the attack the national Gallery, the Tate, Hampton Court and Windsor Castle were all closed for two weeks. It generated a number of copy cat attacks and over the following five months fourteen paintings were slashed and nine women arrested. The attacks included Giovanni Bellini's *The Agony in the Garden*, Gentile Bellini's *Portrait of a Mathematician* and John Singer Sargent's portrait of Henry James.



Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), *Portrait of Innocent X*, 1650, 141 x 119 cm, Doria Pamphilj Gallery, Rome  
A smaller version is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and a study is on display at Apsley House in London.

Francis Bacon (1909-1992), *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1953, Des Moines Art Center, Des Moines, Iowa

- It was painted by Velázquez during his second trip to Italy from 1649 to 1651. Many artists and art critics consider it to be the finest portrait ever painted.

- It is noted as a realistic portrait of a highly intelligent, shrewd and aging man. The pope, born Giovanni Battista Pamphilj, was initially wary of having his portrait taken by Velázquez, but relented after he was given reproductions of examples of Velázquez's portraiture. It was displayed only to his family and was lost from public view during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- Apparently, when the Pope saw the finished portrait, he exclaimed, somewhat disconcerted: "*Troppo vero!*" ("all too true!"), though he was not able to deny the intrinsic quality of the portrait as a masterpiece.
- Velázquez's signature is on the piece of paper held by the Pope.
- It has been described as the greatest portrait ever painted.
- The Irish-born painter Francis Bacon painted a series of distorted variants often known as the "Screaming Popes", which consists of more than 45 known variants executed throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait\\_of\\_Innocent\\_X](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portrait_of_Innocent_X)



Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), *Las Hilanderas* ('The Spinners'), c. 1656, 220 x 289 cm, Prado

- Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), *Las Hilanderas* ('The Spinners'), c. 1656, 220 x 289 cm, Museo del Prado
- Originally this was thought to depict a tapestry workshop, but more recent scholarship argues that it represents Ovid's Fable of Arachne, the story of the mortal Arachne who dared to challenge the goddess Athena to a weaving competition and, on winning the contest, was turned into a spider by the jealous goddess. This is now generally accepted as the correct interpretation of the painting.
  - It was painted for the huntsman to King Philip IV of

Spain. It was damaged by fire in 1734 and new sections were added at the sides and top. It is now displayed behind a screen that hides the additions.

- In the foreground is the contest. The goddess Athena, disguised as an old woman, is on the left and Arachne, in a white top facing away from the viewer, is on the right. Three helpers assist them. In the background, a raised platform (perhaps a stage) displays the finished tapestries. The one visible to us is Arachne's, showing *The Rape of Europa* — another Greek myth. This is in fact a copy of Titian's painting of the subject, which was in the Spanish royal collection.
- The work has been interpreted in various ways contrasting the intellectual activity of the goddess representing fine art with the manual dexterity of Arachne representing craft. It may be that Velázquez was showing that a great work of art requires both creativity and hard technical work.



Diego Velázquez (1599–1660),  
*Las Meninas* ('The Maids of  
Honour'), 1656-57, 318 x 276  
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- This is it. This work has been described by many artists and critics as the greatest painting every produced by any artist. It raises profound question about art and illusion, about the viewer and the figures depicted. It is one of the most widely analysed works in Western painting. Velázquez is looking out at us and he is holding a paintbrush and palette so it appears he is painting us. But in the mirror at the back of the room is the reflection of the king and queen. Does this mean

we are meant to be them or are we standing with them? In the foreground the five-year old Infanta Margaret Theresa stares at us (our the king and queen). Two ladies in waiting attend to her, one curtsies and the other offers a red cup on a golden plate. On the right are two dwarves one of whom tries to rouse a sleeping mastiff with his foot. Behind them is the princesses chaperone talking to a bodyguard. In the doorway the queen's chamberlain pauses. One of his jobs was to open doors for the queen and it has been suggested that he has opened the door and is holding back the curtain as the royal couple (or us) are about to leave. This also explains why one of the ladies-in-waiting is beginning to curtsy.

- It has been suggested that the royal couple in the mirror are a reflection of the painting. The canvas is very large for a Velázquez portrait and is about the same size as *Las Meninas*. Also this painting contains the only double portrait of the royal couple by Velázquez so it is suggested it is a reflection of the couple in the portrait.
- There is a mirror at the back of Jan van Eyck *Arnolfini Portrait* (1434) which was owned by Philip at the time and would have been seen by Velázquez.
- One of the most profound analyses is Michel Foucault in his *The Order of Things* (1966). He devotes a whole chapter to the analysis which solely concerns the complex network of visual relations without regard to

subject matter, biography or the social context. His conclusion is that this painting represent a new way of thinking for all of European thought. It illustrates the great discontinuity between the Classical and the modern. The Classical is about representing something, the modern is about the representer, the artist. In this case the artist appears in front of the represented, a part of it but separate from it.

- It has been suggested that the painting “suggests that art, and life, are an illusion.” A contemporary playwright wrote:
  - *What is a life? A frenzy. What is life?  
A shadow, an illusion, and a sham.  
The greatest good is small; all life, it seems  
Is just a dream, and even dreams are dreams*
- In 17th-century Spain, painters rarely enjoyed high social status. Painting was regarded as a craft, not an art such as poetry or music. Nonetheless, Velázquez worked his way up through the ranks of the court of Philip IV, and in February 1651 was appointed palace chamberlain. The post brought him status and material reward, but its duties made heavy demands on his time. During the remaining eight years of his life, he painted only a few works, mostly portraits of the royal family. When he painted *Las Meninas*, he had been with the royal household for 33 years. If we look

closely we can see the red cross of the Order of Santiago painted on his breast. Presumably this detail was added at a later date, as the painter was admitted to the order by the king's decree on November 28, 1659.

- Its complex and enigmatic composition raises questions about reality and illusion and creates an uncertain relationship between the viewer and the figures depicted. The relationship between reality and illusion were central concerns of Spanish culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as we see in Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616) *Don Quixote*, the best known work of Spanish Baroque literature. Because of these complexities, *Las Meninas* has been one of the most widely analyzed works in Western painting. It has long been recognised as one of the most important paintings in Western art history and has been voted one of the ten most influential works of art of all time.
- The painting has been cut down on both the left and right sides. It was damaged in the fire that destroyed the Alcázar in 1734 and was restored by court painter Juan García de Miranda (1677–1749). The left cheek of the Infanta was almost completely repainted to compensate for a substantial loss of pigment.
- In recent years, the picture has suffered a loss of texture and hue. Due to exposure to pollution and crowds of visitors, the once-vivid contrasts between blue and white pigments in the costumes of the

meninas have faded. It was last cleaned in 1984 under the supervision of the American conservator John Brealey, to remove a "yellow veil" of dust that had gathered since the previous restoration in the 19th century. The cleaning provoked "furious protests, not because the picture had been damaged in any way, but because it looked different". However, in the opinion of López-Rey, the "restoration was impeccable". Due to its size, importance, and value, the painting is not lent out for exhibition.

### **Depicted people**

- Philip IV of Spain (1605-1665), in the mirror
- Mariana of Austria (1634-1696), wife of Philip IV, in the mirror
- Infanta Margaret Theresa of Spain (an infanta is the eldest daughter of a ruling monarch who is not heir to the throne). She became Holy Roman Empress; German Queen; Queen consort of Hungary and Bohemia and Archduchess consort of Austria.
- Diego Velázquez (at the easel)