



# TITLE OF ART Project Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velázquez

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Volunteer:

Date:

Grade Level:

Artist: Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velázquez

Print/Sculpture:

Art Vocabulary:

## I The Artist.

Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velázquez, 1599-1660, Spanish painter, the country's greatest Baroque artist, who, with Francisco de Goya and El Greco, forms the great triumvirate of Spanish painters.

Velázquez was born in Seville on June 6, 1599, the oldest of six children; both his parents were from the minor nobility. Between 1611 and 1617 the young Velázquez worked as an apprentice to Francisco Pacheco, a Mannerist painter of Seville who was also the author of an important treatise, *El Arte de la Pintura* (The Art of Painting, 1649), and who became Velázquez's father-in-law. During his years as an apprentice Velázquez absorbed the most popular contemporaneous styles of painting, derived, in part, from both Flemish and Italian realism.

**Early Works.** Velázquez's early works, executed between about 1617 and 1623, fall into three categories—the bodegón, (everyday subjects combined with still life), portraits, and religious scenes. Many of his earliest paintings show a strong naturalist bias, as in *The Meal* (c. 1617, Hermitage, St Petersburg), a bodegón which may have been his first work as an independent master after passing the examination of the Guild of St Luke. In his bodegones, such as *Water Seller of Seville* (c. 1619-1620, Apsley House, London), the masterly effects of light and shadow, as well as the direct observation of nature, make inevitable a comparison with the work of Caravaggio. For his religious paintings, images of simple piety, Velázquez used as models people drawn from the streets of Seville, as Pacheco states in his biography of Velázquez. In *Adoration of the Magi* (1619, Prado, Madrid), for example, the biblical figures are portraits of members of his own family; a self-portrait is included as well.

Velázquez was also well acquainted with members of the intellectual circles of Seville. Pacheco was the director of an informal humanist academy; at its meetings the young artist was introduced to such people as the great poet Luis de Góngora y Argote, whose portrait (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) he executed in 1622. Such contact was important for Velázquez's later work on mythological and Classical themes.

**Appointment as Court Painter.** In 1622 Velázquez made his first trip to Madrid, ostensibly (as Pacheco tells it) to see the paintings in the royal collections, but more likely in an unsuccessful search

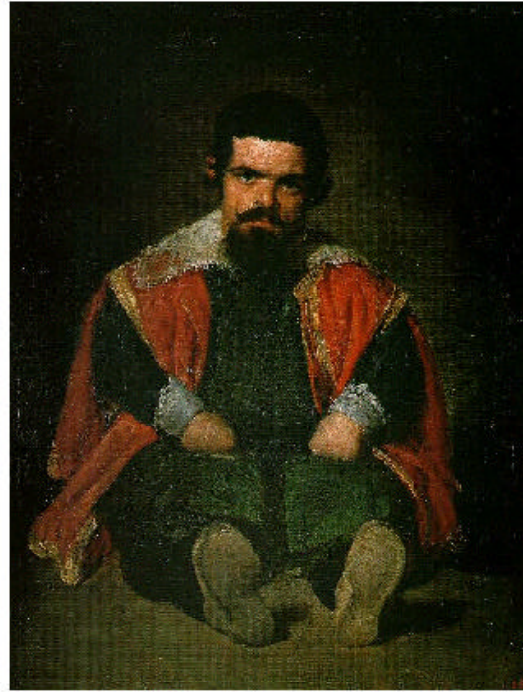


for a position as court painter. In 1623, however, he returned to the capital and, after executing a portrait (1623, Prado) of the king, was named official painter to Philip IV. The portrait was the first among many such sober, direct depictions of the king, the royal family, and members of the court. Indeed, throughout the later 1620s, Velázquez dedicated most of his efforts to portraiture. Mythological subjects would at times occupy his attention, as in *Bacchus or The Drinkers* (1628-1629, Prado). This scene of revelry in an open field, in which the god of wine is shown drinking with ruffians, testifies to the artist's continued interest in realism.

**Trip to Italy.** In 1628 Peter Paul Rubens came to the court at Madrid on a diplomatic mission. Among the few painters with whom he associated was Velázquez. Although the great Flemish master did not have a direct impact on the style of the younger painter, their conversations almost certainly inspired Velázquez to visit the art collections in Italy that were so much admired by Rubens. In August 1629 Velázquez left Barcelona for Genoa and spent most of the next two years travelling in Italy. From Genoa he proceeded to Milan, Venice, Florence, and Rome, returning to Spain from Naples in January 1631. In the course of his journey he closely studied both the art of the Renaissance and contemporaneous painting. Several of the works executed during his travels attest to his absorption of these styles; a notable example is *Joseph and His Brothers* (1630, El Escorial, near Madrid), which combines a Michelangelesque sculptural quality with the chiaroscuro (light-and-shadow techniques) of such Italian masters as Guercino and Giovanni Lanfranco.

**Return to Spain.** On his return to Madrid, Velázquez resumed his duties as court portraitist with the sensitive painting *Prince Baltasar Carlos with a Dwarf* (1631, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), an image made poignant by the young prince's death before reaching adulthood. From the 1630s on, relatively little is known about the artist's personal life, although his rise to prominence in court circles is well documented. In 1634 Velázquez organized the decoration of the throne room in the new royal palace of Buen Retiro; this scheme consisted of 12 scenes of battles in which Spanish troops had been victorious—painted by the most prestigious artists of the day, including Velázquez himself—and royal equestrian portraits. Velázquez's contribution to the cycle of battle pictures included the *Surrender of Breda* (1634, Prado), portraying a magnanimous Spanish general receiving the leader of defeated Flemish troops after the siege of that northern town in 1624. The delicacy of handling and astonishing range of emotions captured in a single painting make this the most celebrated historical composition of Spanish Baroque art.

The second major series of paintings of the 1630s by Velázquez was a group of hunting portraits of the royal family for the Torre de la Parada, a hunting lodge near Madrid. Dating from the late 1630s and early 1640s are the famous depictions of court dwarfs in which, unlike court-jester portraits by earlier artists, the sitters are treated with respect and sympathy. Velázquez painted few religious



**The Dwarf**  
**Sebastian de Morra**  
**Museo del Prado, Madrid**

pictures after entering the king's employ; SS Anthony and Paul (late 1630s, Prado) and Immaculate Conception (c. 1644, Prado) are notable exceptions.

**Late Works.** During the last 20 years of his life Velázquez's work as court official and architect assumed prime importance. He was responsible for the decoration of many new rooms in the royal palaces. In 1649 he again went to Italy, this time to buy works of art for the king's collection. During his year's stay in Rome (1649-1650) he painted the magnificent portraits Juan de Pareja (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and Pope Innocent X (Palazzo Doria-Pamphili, Rome). At this time he was also admitted into Rome's Academy of St Luke. The elegant Venus at Her Toilette (National Gallery, London) probably dates from this time also.

The key works of the last two decades of Velázquez's life are Fable of Arachne (1644-1648, Prado), an image of sophisticated mythological symbolism, and his masterwork, Las Meninas (The Maids of Honour, 1656, Prado), a stunning group portrait of the royal family and Velázquez himself in the act of painting. Velázquez continued to serve Philip IV as painter, courtier, and faithful friend until the artist's death in Madrid on August 6, 1660. His work had a subtle impact a century later on his greatest successor, Francisco de Goya.

Source: Microsoft Encarta

## II The Painting: Infanta Margarita

Velázquez was born in Spain. He was born in 1599, 107 years after Columbus set sail for the Americas.

Velázquez was the most important Spanish painter of the seventeenth century. (see, **Self Portrait**, right) He is known for his realism, his use of rich colors, light and shadow, his painting technique, and the dignity and decency with which he portrays people. He was an apprentice in the studio of Francesco Pacheco, which means he worked for and learned from the artist Pacheco. Before he was 20 he made popular a kind of painting called bodegon, which is a scene set in a kitchen, with ordinary people and a prominent still life. (see, **Old Woman Frying Eggs**, right) Do you see how clearly you can see everything? Velázquez leads our eyes around in circles, the small circle of the eggs, cooking pan, bowl with knife, mortar and pestle, hand holding the egg, and the hand with the spoon. A larger wheel encircles this center and moves from the cook, to the boy, to the pumpkin, onion, water pitchers, hanging kettles, and cloth draped water basket at the top. It is very realistic, and very beautiful. He painted this when he was 19. When he was



**Self Portrait**

1640

oil on canvas 45x38cm

Museo de Bellas Artes de San Pio



**Old Woman Frying Eggs**

1618

Oil

100.5 x 119.5 cm

National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh



King Philip

20, he married his teacher's daughter and they had two daughters.

(see madonna and child, modeled by wife and child)

Two years later he moved to Madrid, Spain which is where the court of King Philip IV was. After 3 portraits of the king, he became, at the age of 24, the royal painter, the only painter allowed to make portraits of the king. (See, King Philip (in dark clothes), right) Here is an early portrait of King Philip. Note the ruff around his neck. King Philip had decided that Spain needed to save money, and he made many changes, such as firing people, paying them less, and giving them less food. One of his changes was to wear plain, dark clothes, as in this portrait, instead of the fancy clothes royalty used to wear. Another was to outlaw the fancy ruff that had been popular, and start wearing this new ruff, the golilla. (see, pictures of ruffs, right) If someone wore the old ruff, they could be put in the pillory, or stock. (see Pillory or Stock picture, right) They could also be banished, which means they had to leave Spain and never return. So the new ruff became popular, and you can see it in all the portraits from this time one. After awhile, King Philip dropped his other reforms, but he kept the ruff.

(see, 1632 Portrait of Philip)

Over time Velázquez made Philip more handsome, gave him a longer nose, narrower face, and sharpened his chin. That is part of being the royal painter. Do you see how Velázquez painted this so that it looks like you're looking up at his face, but also down at his feet? This is how you should see a king, as above you, taller than you. There is supposed to be a distance between you and the king. For the rest of his life, Velázquez was the royal painter, and painted mainly portraits. When someone criticized him by saying he "painted only heads," he replied: "that is very high praise. I know hardly anyone who knows how to paint a head." He always painted from life, that is, the people he painted sat for him and he painted them. They would have to sit for an hour or two each day. He said, "I would rather be an ordinary painter working from life than be the greatest copyist on earth." He painted all of the royal family, he painted scenes to decorate different rooms, and he painted other members of the court, such as the dwarves. He Spanish court, like many courts in Europe, had dwarves and fools as members of the court, to amuse the nobility, the lords and ladies. The Spanish court had 110. Velázquez painted many of them, but always with dignity. He painted them realistically, but not as something funny. He painted them as human. Here is a famous portrait he made of his slave, a black man whose name was Juan de Pareja. (see portrait of Juan de Preja, following page) In 1970, this painting sold for \$5,544,000, which set a record at that time. Juen de



Pillory or Stock



Unknown Woman  
c. 1561



Unknown Girl  
noblewomen,  
1569



Queen Elizabeth  
(Darnley Portrait),  
1575

Pareja was his servant and mixed his paints. In 1650 to amuse the nobility, the lords and ladies. The Spanish court had 110. Velázquez freed him, and Juan de Pareja became a painter himself. There is a Newberry Award winning book called, *I, Juan de Pareja* that I think some of you might like. (see book cover) And here is his most famous picture called *The Maids of Honor*. It is a very complicated picture. This is the Princess Margarita, and she does not want to pose for her portrait. Her two maids of honor are trying to coax her. Here are two dwarves, there are servants in the background, and the artist. Only in the mirror can we see who he is painting, and it is the king and queen. What do you look at first? (Princess) Where is the light? (Princess) By this time in his life, he was painting very differently than his early painting of the woman frying eggs. He realized that the eye does not see everything clearly. It focuses on one thing, and the other things are fuzzy, not as clear. And that's how he painted



**Juan de Pareja**  
1650  
Oil on canvas  
81.3 x 69.9 cm.  
The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art, New York

### III Composition of Artwork

### IV Artist's Materials or Techniques

### V Students' Self-Expression: Guided Activity

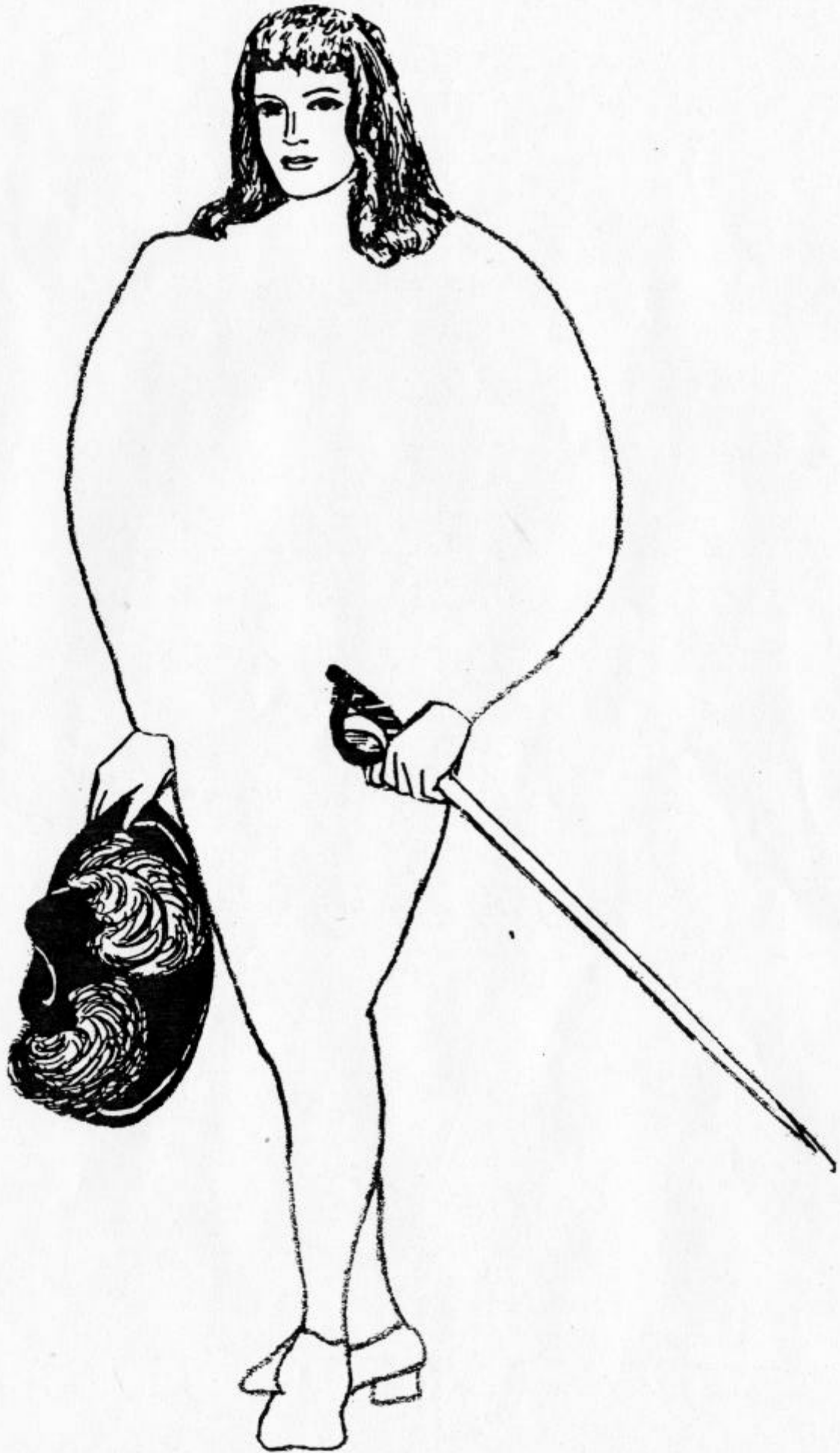
There were 2 books at the Berwyn Library:  
*A Weekend with Velazquez* by Florian Ricaro  
 (Juvenile biography section)  
*Velazquez*, from the art section. Many color plates.



The *Weekend* book, which is told in the first person, to portray Velazquez. The book effectively covers the subject matter. The kids enjoy it when you pretend to actually be the artist. They seemed to have no trouble believing that [the volunteer] was indeed a male Spanish artist, long dead. [The volunteer] skipped a few sections of the book, but basically read the interesting parts, paraphrasing when possible to make it seem more like a portrayal.

For the project, [the volunteer] photocopied male and female characters and allowed the kids to “dress” them in period costume, using wallpaper samples set out as if they were fine fabrics. They cut and glued them on creative ways. ([the volunteer] put the extra wallpaper sample books in the Cultural Arts closet). [The volunteer] also supplied paper doily “lace.” Most of the kids really got into the project. I thought that the boys would only want to do the “male” character, but most of them wanted to do both, as did the girls. A few of the boys rejected the fabric idea and colored the female character in macho-type outfits, such as a Chicago Bears uniform. [The volunteer] placed the completed costumed characters up on the bulletin board.











*The Infanta Margarita, 1653*

The Spanish court “wasted the fresh mornings in hunting for flowers, the days in feasts, and the nights in comedies,” the contemporary diarist Barrionuevo wrote acidly. In this mindless milieu wandered Mariana of Austria, King Philip’s niece and his second queen. At the time she posed for this Velázquez portrait (*opposite*), shortly after the artist’s return from Italy, she was only 19 but had been Philip’s wife for nearly five years. Her express function was to produce a sound male heir to the Spanish throne—a duty she failed to fulfill.

Mariana’s costume holds her rigidly. But she seems not only physically but psychologically imprisoned, her plight revealed in her face (*detail, overleaf*). Under a plumed headdress of ribboned ringlets, the Queen’s eyes reflect both petulance and melancholy.

A totally different quality pervades the artist’s first portrait (*above*) of the Queen’s daughter, the Princess Margarita, completed at about the same time. Bathed in soft, diffused light the chubby-cheeked Princess, then about two, radiates the innocence of childhood.