

The permanent collection as viewed by Benito Navarrete, scientific adviser to the Diego Velázquez Research Centre

Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) was born in Seville, a city that at the time was the gateway to the New World and the leading business and commerce centre in Europe. The capital of Seville attracted traders, adventurers and people seeking their fortune, as well as bankers and merchants who all set their sights on the city. The River Guadalquivir was the setting for their dreams and its waters became the route that the merchants would travel and through which a never ending stream of cultural articles and works of art would arrive; an intense activity that in the first part of the 17th century made Seville the centre of the art trade. Some of these pictures were absorbed by the city and become the inspiration and reference for many artists that saw in them the reflection and the spread of the progress of other powerful cities, such as Antwerp and Rome.

The fifteen master works in the exhibition have been chosen with a clear educational and scientific intent to demonstrate how Velázquez, in Seville, “revolutionised” the history of painting by highlighting the beauty of the real world, using very careful presentation techniques, putting museography at the service of museology.

1.- *Vista de Sevilla*, anonymous flamenco (hist. 1650-1660). Oil on canvas. Focus-Abengoa Foundation, Seville.

The work that best embodies this melting pot of illusions, the mass of people and the hustle and bustle of galleons and galleys is *Vista de Sevilla*, about which historian Juan Miguel Serrera said, “The details are more important than the whole”, since they present, better than in any other view that remains, a city that likes to see and been seen, and that during this period was a real reflection of the world. This *Vista de Sevilla* could be considered, together with the one in the Museo de América in Madrid, one of the most important and significant of the era.

The transformation demonstrated by this large city, seen from its west side, overlooking the Triana quarter and its pontoon of boats, allows us to pinpoint the city’s main landmarks, some of them stereotyped, such as the Giralda, the cathedral or the Torre del Oro, but others, surprisingly well positioned, such as the old *coracha*, which joins the Torre del Oro to the Torre de la Plata, or the buildings of the Milanese architect Vermondo Resta, which could have been taken, as well as the general view, from the engraving by Mathäus Merian (1593-1650) which illustrated the book *Neuwe Archontologia cósmica...* by Johan Ludwig Gottfried.

2 and 3.- *Santa Inés*, Francisco Pacheco (1608). Oil on board. Prado Museum, Madrid, and *Santa Catalina*, Francisco Pacheco (1608). Oil on board. Prado Museum, Madrid.

These two works by Francisco Pacheco come from the altarpiece that was owned by Doña Francisca de León in the church of Santo Ángel in Seville. The two works were acquired by the Dean, López Cepero in 1804, and given to the Prado Museum in 1821 in exchange for other paintings. These two paintings, which are returning temporarily to Seville, were a reference for the *retrato de lo divino* (divine portraits) and were undoubtedly a starting point for Velázquez's painting, especially for his works like the *Santa Rufina*.

The presence of these two works is of additional special interest, since Velázquez trained with Pacheco in his studio, managing to move from reformed mannerism to clear naturalism, which places emphasis on the real model. The aesthetic comparison between the two works by Pacheco, the *Santa Rufina* by Velázquez, and the *Santa Catalina* by Murillo, manages to recreate an enviable visual universe, which is connected through personified sacred images, in this cases specific people that were close to each of the artists. In the case of Pacheco, perhaps they were more artificial and rhetorical, but in the case of Velázquez and Murillo, they were very close, ordinary people.

4 and 5.- *Sagrada Familia con Santa Ana y San Juanito*, Juan de Roelas (hist. 1610-1615). Oil on canvas. Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias, Oviedo, and *Sagrada Familia con San Juanito*, Juan de Roelas (hist. 1610-1615). Oil on canvas. Selgas-Fagalde Foundation, Cudillero, Asturias.

These two *Sagradas Familias* by Juan de Roelas were recently discovered by Benito Navarrete in the tribute book to Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, *In Sapientia Libertas*. They are very important works in understanding early naturalism in Seville and the interest in natural representation, and they perfectly tie in with the narrative of the exhibition *From Herrera to Velázquez: the first naturalism in Seville*.

It is worth remembering that Velázquez's artistic background is from the artists based in Seville during his period of training. In addition to the incentive of being two unpublished works by Roelas, is the predilection for representing vivid and heartfelt themes, as natural as the baskets of fruit, as well as putting into practice sculptural and modelled painting, which the young Velázquez used sketched the outlines.

6.- *Sagrada Familia*, Bartolomeo Cavarozzi (1620). Oil on canvas. Private collection, Barcelona.

The work of the Italian Bartolomeo Cavarozzi, a disciple of Caravaggio, is crucial to understanding realism in Velázquez's painting, since he would undoubtedly have come across the Italian's works in Seville. The opportunity to contemplate this painting alongside the two *Sagradas Familias* by Roelas, allows the viewer to enjoy a formal narrative

that reconstructs the pictorial universe that feeds the painting of the young Velázquez, coinciding with his training.

The broken and sculptural naturalism that can be seen in the figures of San José, the Virgin and the Child, share the same perfection of the first works by a young Velázquez. This would explain one of the main catalysts behind realist painting in Spain.

7.- *Sagrada Familia con San Joaquín y Santa Ana*, Francisco de Herrera, the Elder (hist. 1620-1625). Oil on canvas. Rafael Pérez Hernando Collection, Madrid.

Herrera the Elder, with whom Velázquez worked for several months as an apprentice, is, compared to Roelas, one of the key painters of early Sevillian naturalism. This work picks up the theme of the *Inmaculada*, which was put into practice by Martínez Montañés, creating a narrative and iconographic journey that reconstructs the most vivid aesthetics of the era, and which is complemented by the sculpture by Montañés and the painting by Zurbarán on the same theme. The dogma of the *Inmaculada* was one of the main themes in both intellectual and artistic circles.

8.- *Inmaculada*, Juan Martínez Montañés (hist.1623-1624). Santa Clara Convent, Sevilla.

The sculpture and the attention to classicism by Montañés, a friend of Velázquez, was a salutary lesson for the young painter. The works in the Santa Clara Convent in Seville represent the best of his work, which highlights explanations that can be connected to the painting of the time. The attraction of the Santa Clara work comes from the fact that Montañés carried it out just as Velázquez decided to leave for the Court. He completed the *Imposición de la Casulla a San Ildefonso* around the same time. Once again, the works are interconnected and related in time and space.

9.- *Inmaculada*, Francisco de Zurbarán (1635). Oil on canvas. Seville City Hall.

This *Inmaculada* is an excellent example of the naturalist painting developed in Seville, and forms a perfect narrative between the *Inmaculada* by Montañés and the one by Herrera the Elder. The origin of the work is unknown, but it is not linked to the *Inmaculada* painted by Zurbarán and commissioned by City Hall since it appears to have painted before this date. Nevertheless, it is a perfect example of Purism at a time when themes related to the Virgin Mary were especially important.

10.- *Portrait of Juan Martínez Montañés*, Francisco Varela (1616). Oil on canvas. Seville City Hall.

Montañés was a friend of Velázquez and probably his sculptor, and his attention to classicism was a salutary lesson for the young painter. The collective works of the Santa Clara Convent represent the best of his work, which highlights explanations that can be interconnected to the painting of the time. This oil is also a perfect testament to the

portraits of the time and undoubtedly shows that the subject was an important person in Francisco Pacheco's circle of friends and a continuous point of reference for Velázquez's work.

11.- *San Juan Bautista*, Juan Martínez Montañés (hist. 1623-1624). Santa Clara Convent, Seville.

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12.- *Fray Pedro de Oña*, Francisco de Zurbarán (1629). Oil on canvas, Seville City Hall.

In 1836 it was taken to the *Convento de Hermanas Mercedarias* from the library of the *Convento de la Merced* in Seville, where it was then discovered by the Marqués de Lozoya. It is undoubtedly a "companion" to the famous *mercedarios* by Zurbarán, which today is in the Museo de la Academia de San Fernando in Madrid, and also from the Convento de la Merced in Seville.

It is related to one of the first and most important works by Zurbarán in Seville, around 1629, and falls into the classic taxonomy of the monks of Zurbarán, with a sculptural profile.

13.- *Imposición de la casulla a San Ildefonso*, Diego Velázquez (hist. 1622-1623). Seville City Hall.

This work is a key piece to understanding the importance of the *Santa Rufina* and to examining Velázquez's attention to personal and intimate portraits in particular. It was painted while Montañés was sculpting the Santa Clara work, just as Velázquez was planning to go to the Court. This work introduces the importance of combining painting-sculpture and portraiture in this set of fifteen works.

On the other hand, the feminine figures that appear in the "opening of the heavens" have special relevance due to their relation to the model of the *Santa Rufina*. This fact justifies bringing these two works together, united in Seville by time and fate.

14.- *Santa Rufina*, Diego Velázquez (hist. 1629-1632). Oil on canvas. Focus-Abengoa Foundation and the Seville City Hall.

The *Santa Rufina* marks the end of the museological journey in this selection. It picks up Velázquez's work following his training in Seville. Painted in Madrid, it embodies the purpose of this narrative since the model is intimately related to the feminine figures of the "opening of the heavens" in the *Imposición de la Casulla de San Ildefonso*.

Observing it begins to reveal the creative universe of the Sevillian painter, who recreates one of the most cherished iconographies in the city.

A child *Santa Rufina*, who is depicted alone, without her sister Justa and without the Giralda, which usually appears in the centre. The design of the painting is admirable; the detailed drawing, the dark background and the density of the oils that Velázquez used, all constant reminders of Sevillian naturalism.

15.- *Santa Catalina*, Bartolomé E. Murillo (1650). Oil on canvas. Private collection.

This work by Murillo is clearly a result of the painting of the young Velázquez, and of the prevailing appetite for naturalism in the city. Furthermore, it represents the end of the journey for the *retrato a lo divino*. The work was stolen by Mariscal Soult from the Santa Catalina church in Seville. Such was the fame and importance of the work, that it was copied by Delacroix and the copy is in the Béziers Museum, France.

In his book *Viaje de España*, art writer Antonio Ponz, refers to it in the following terms: “And by Murillo is a half length depiction of the Saint in a painting of this parish”. While the chronicler González de León, talking about the ecclesiastical painting of 1844, refers to the paintings of the Convent of Santa Catalina, of which he says, “There were various works of merit in this church, which have not lost much through neglect or theft; a half length portrait of the Santa Catalina by Murillo”.

Now it returns to its city, back to the references that highlight a magnificent time in the history of Seville, in the hope that the Moorish temple from which its came will soon be saved from ruin.