



Diego **Velázquez**



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1. *Self-Portrait*, ca.1640.

Oil on canvas, 45.8 x 38 cm.

Museo de Bellas Artes de San Pío V, Valencia.

SEVILLE. 1599-1623

Spanish art flourished and reached its highest peak in the seventeenth century. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, El Greco's art shone forth brilliantly in Toledo. He was a master, uniting both the Byzantine and Italian heritage, who found a spiritual milieu for his religious, philosophical and moral convictions on the Iberian Peninsula. In Naples, Jusepe de Ribera, one of the staunchest followers of Tenebrism, was renowned. His art was filled with true Hispanic passion and religious tension. In Seville, Francisco de Zurbarán, and later, Bartolome Esteban Murillo, decorated numerous monasteries and churches with religious canvases. Velázquez holds a special place in this constellation of great masters on account of the unusual versatility of his art. This is reflected in both the content and the stylistic originality of his work.

Diego Rodríguez de Silva Velázquez, a native of Seville, the capital of Andalusia, was christened on 6 June 1599. His parents, Juan Rodríguez de Silva and Doña Geronima Velázquez, belonged to the minor nobility but were far from wealthy. According to the Andalusian custom, the son adopted his mother's surname. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Seville was a wealthy trading port. From here, ships set out to the New World and returned with untold treasures. Seville was the leading religious centre of Andalusia with more than forty monasteries and convents, numerous churches, religious fraternities, hospitals and alms houses. But the cathedral, of course, surpassed them all, being a veritable treasure-house of art. When he was ten, Velázquez began his training with the Sevillian painter, Francisco Herrera the Elder. He was only there for a short time however, since in December 1616, his father approached Francisco Pacheco with regard to his son's training. Pacheco was a respected artist in Seville who had obtained important commissions, although he demonstrated

no particular talent. His merit in regard to Velázquez's education lay in the fact that he, better than any other, was able to acquaint his pupil with the higher accomplishments of European culture.

From the 1560s, the city boasted an "academy" of which Pacheco's uncle, a canon of the Seville cathedra and who also bore the name Francisco Pacheco, was a member.

With regard to the Italian Renaissance, Francisco Pacheco was a great admirer of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian and other famous masters. Pacheco devoted many years of his life to the writing of the book *Arte de la Pintura*. One of Pacheco's principal ideas — the nobility and virtue of the art of painting — played a key role in the formation of Velázquez's profound consciousness as a painter. While eulogizing the classical art of the Renaissance, Pacheco nonetheless also paid tribute to the new realistic trend emerging in painting.



2. *The Musical Trio*, ca.1617-1618.
Oil on canvas, 87 x 110 cm.
Staatliche Museum, Berlin.



3. *An old woman cooking eggs*, ca. 1618.
Oil on canvas, 100.5 x 119.5 cm.
National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.



4. *The Investiture of St Ildefonso with the Chasuble*, ca.1620.
Oil on canvas, 166 x 120 cm.
Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes, Seville.



5. *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1619.
Oil on canvas, 204 x 126.5 cm.
Prado Museum, Madrid.