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The Early Works of Velázquez Through a Phenomenological Lens

by

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to question the art historical notion of influences, specifically in the case of the seventeenth century Spanish Baroque artist Diego Velázquez. His work is often seen as an extension of the realist movements in Flanders and Italy at the turn of the seventeenth century, but that view is extremely reductive. Velázquez strove to depict the world around him as he saw it, attempting to incorporate the transient nature of the scenes before him into his works. The city of Seville, in which Velázquez lived and worked, provided the setting and cultural elements that would orient his work. He was able to simultaneously break free of the conventions that had been placed on artists in the early seventeenth century and embrace his proto-impressionistic artistic style while developing himself as an artist.

His paintings, especially his *bodegones*, showcase the low-class culture and citizens of Seville. Velázquez's subjective representation of these low class subjects and scenes allow him to re-create the city of Seville on his canvas, allowing the modern-day viewer to experience the represented environment. Velázquez's artwork allows his viewers to be immersed *Interweltsien* (in-the-world) and experience the world that he was depicting. This thesis will use both Place Theory and Phenomenology to better understand the works that Velázquez created while he was living in Seville.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The work of Velázquez has often been seen as a product of the influence of Caravaggio.¹ However, instead of being impacted greatly by a specific person or style, Velázquez was most heavily influenced by the environment in which he was reared. Furthermore, the most compelling drive in his career was not emulating a specific style, but rather creating and adhering to his own artistic philosophy, centered along a phenomenological premise. Velázquez strove to depict the world around him as he saw it, attempting to incorporate the transient nature of the scenes before him into his works. The city of Seville, in which Velázquez lived and worked, provided the setting and cultural elements that would orient his work. He was able to simultaneously break free of the conventions that had been placed on artists in the early seventeenth century and embrace his proto-impressionistic artistic style while developing himself as an artist. Rather than discussing the individual artistic influences on Velázquez, it would be more beneficial to consider instead the influence of “place” itself.²

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the city of Seville as a place and the impact that the city, itself, had on the artist. In addition to discussing the individuals who influenced the artist in Seville, we will consider “place” in terms of cultural tides,

¹ August Mayer, “A Velázquez Problem,” in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*. Vol 55 (Nov 1929), 226. Jonathan Brown. “Velázquez and the Evolution of High Baroque Painting in Madrid.” In *Jonathan Brown: Collected Writings on Velázquez*, ed. Bonaventura Bassegoda (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 91.

² Jonathan Brown, “Velázquez, Sevillian Painter, Universal Painter,” 322.

economic and political contexts, and the nature of the society in which Velázquez was working.

This thesis will investigate Velázquez's work through the vein of phenomenology, specifically the emphasis on human subjectivity and the notion that "knowledge and awareness of the world are always *someone's* knowledge and awareness."³ This thesis will suggest that the notion of subjectivity was pervasive throughout Velázquez's works, and his works were the culmination of a life-long desire to represent that subjectivity. His paintings, especially the *bodegones*, indicate that while Velázquez was representing his subjects naturalistically, he was primarily interested in depicting an experience. The most important aspect of phenomenology, as it relates to Velázquez's work, is Martin Heidegger's notion of *Inderweltsein*. This concept of 'being in the world' is clearly evident in Velázquez's *bodegones*, in which he demonstrates that "we do not exist apart from the world we experience, but are part of it."⁴ Velázquez's works, especially those in which the subjects are citizens of Seville, clearly illustrate this notion of human interaction with the world, and encompasses the notion of a 'lived experience'. His attempt to create a real-world experience on canvas enables the modern viewer to place himself or herself in seventeenth-century Seville.

Velázquez was one of the first artists to play with the idea of perception to create a more subjective representation. According to Eric Matthews, perception "is not a matter of passively receiving the representations given from the outside world, and then interpreting them. It is a direct contact with the world, and that contact takes the form of

³ Eric Matthews, *Merleau Ponty: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006), 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

active engagement with the things around us.”⁵ Velázquez strove to convey a sense of experience, situating the viewers of his works at a particular place, and in a particular time. This ultimately resulted in incredibly realistic works, that were not “a matter of creating a resemblance of what we think we see in nature, but . . . constituting the world of the painting itself.”⁶

This thesis will focus on understanding the work Velázquez created prior to his move to Madrid at the end of the 1620s, and recognizing that his early work evolved during his stay in Spain, yet also managed to maintain a unique style and technique. The change in Velázquez’s style should be attributed less to the arbitrary influence of contemporary painters, such as the Carracci Brothers and Caravaggio, and more to the unique cross-current of politics, religion, artistic styles, and influences present in Seville in the early seventeenth century. Jonathan Brown, the prominent scholar on Velázquez, confirmed the importance of Velázquez’s environment when he suggested the need for further research to explore which city Velázquez is more indebted to, Seville or Madrid.⁷ In addition to investigating the importance of specific places and their influence on artistic creation, focusing on the work that Velázquez created in Seville, this thesis will examine the style, genre, and specifics of Velázquez’s important early works. Furthermore, by investigating his early works, this thesis will delve into Velázquez’s avant-garde focus on representing subjectivity in his artwork and how it relates to the theory of phenomenology.

⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁶ Ibid., 136.

⁷ Jonathan Brown, “Velázquez, Sevillian Painter, Universal Painter,” in *Jonathan Brown: Collected Writings on Velázquez*, ed. Bonaventura Bassegoda (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 320.

Velázquez's work is the unique production of an artistic individual who was exposed to a vast number of sources and styles, but who chose not to re-create or mimic existing styles or artists. Rather, Velázquez respected and understood past and present styles and chose instead to use a different way of representing the world on canvas. Velázquez attempted to capture earnestly the environment he was depicting – essentially taking a snapshot of the particular place and time he was depicting. Prior to fully exploring the proto-impressionistic nature of the quotidian, Velázquez was formally trained in a salon-esque group of classicizing Sevillian men. These men, especially Velázquez's master, Francisco Pacheco, provided Velázquez with the fundamentals of the classical tradition that he would need when he went to Madrid to work as Philip IV's court painter.

Due to the cosmopolitan nature of Seville and the political ties Spain had to the rest of Europe, Velázquez was exposed to a large number of cultures during his artistic and intellectual development. Most importantly to Velázquez's work were the strong dynastic and economic ties between the Netherlands and Spain, which ultimately resulted in a significant cultural exchange between the two regions. The Netherlandish art market exported numerous painters to regions across Europe, but there was an especially large number on both the Italian and Iberian peninsulas.⁸ Thus it seems not only incredibly reductive to suggest, as many scholars do, that Velázquez was highly or solely influenced by Caravaggio or the Italian masters, it also seems problematic to ignore the fact that the

⁸ Alexander Vergara, "Velázquez and the North" in *The Cambridge Companion to Velázquez*, ed. Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52.

Flemish sources “may have been as abundant as the Italian” in Baroque Spain.⁹ The relevance of the origin of the sources Velázquez may have looked at, however, is questionable, especially considering that some prominent art historians, such as Enrique Lafuente Ferarri, feel that “few painters have been as impervious as Velázquez to what are called influences.”¹⁰ This thesis will question the art historical model that attempts to present an artist’s work as the product of particular influences.

Whether or not Velázquez had access to prints of other European Baroque artists is a highly debated topic. Jonathan Brown, notes Spanish Baroque art historian, stated that it is probable that “Velázquez saw paintings as well as prints by Flemish and Italian masters.”¹¹ This assumption is made by Brown due to the fact that by the “closing years of the sixteenth century, Flemish genre paintings were being inventoried in several Madrid collections.¹² He argues that many Flemish works, as well as comparable Spanish imitations, would be available for Velázquez to peruse in Seville. John Moffitt agrees with Brown, stating that role of Netherlandish prints in “providing compositional prototypes for Spanish artists. . . is increasingly being considered significant.”¹³ David Davies suggests that Caravaggio’s work had a strong influence on Velázquez’s *bodegones*, and that his style is closely related to the Caravaggist tradition and ultimately reflects a definite exposure to Caravaggio’s work via prints.¹⁴ Conflictingly, Anne Sutherland Harris takes the stance that “nobody brought anything by Caravaggio to

⁹ Martin S. Soria, “Some Flemish Sources of Baroque Painting in Spain,” *The Art Bulletin* 30 (Dec 1948): 249.

¹⁰ Enrique Lafuente Ferarri, *Velázquez*, trans. James Emmons (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1960), 29.

¹¹ Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain 1500-1700*, 110.

¹² *Ibid.*, 110.

¹³ John Moffitt, “Francisco Pacheco and Jerome Nadal: New Light on the Flemish Sources of the Spanish ‘Picture-within-the-Picture’” In *The Art Bulletin* Volume 72, (Dec 1990), 631.

¹⁴ David Davies, “*Velázquez’s Bodegones*,” 55.

Seville.” She goes on to state that “if Velázquez had been able to visit Italy in his late teens and thus see an original by Caravaggio, the Carracci, and their sixteenth century sources of inspiration, that his artistic evolution would not seem so astonishing.”¹⁵

Numerous scholars assume that because prints of Caravaggio and the Carracci Brothers were circulating around Spain, that Velázquez’s work is simply a Spanish interpretation of the newly developed Italian realism. While prints of Italian and Flemish sources did eventually make their way to the Iberian Peninsula, it is clear even in his early religious works that Velázquez sought to capture scenes rather than objects. Other artists focused on specific planes, angles, and surface, whereas Velázquez captured the idiosyncrasies, textures, and essences of his subjects to encompass an entire atmosphere on his canvas.

Regardless of how Velázquez was first exposed to, or came to develop, his highly realistic, gritty style, the fact remains that Velázquez was an inventive and innovative artist. As Jonathan Brown noted in *Painting in Spain 1500-1700*, the genre scenes that Velázquez created have “no known precedents in Seville.” In these scenes, “using a powerful, focused light, itself a novel feature, Velázquez creates a tour de force of naturalistic painting in which different shapes, textures, and surfaces are miraculously brought to life.”¹⁶

Velázquez’s familiarity with specific baroque artists, such as Peter Paul Rubens and Titian, helped him broaden his approach to the handling of paint, but the city of Seville itself provided the strongest impact on Velázquez’s artwork. The location, culture,

¹⁵ Anne Sutherland Harris, *Seventeenth Century Art and Architecture*, 225.

¹⁶ Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain 1500-1700*, 108.

¹⁸ Zahira Veliz, “Velázquez’s Early Techniques,” in *Velázquez in Seville*, ed. Michael Clarke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 81.

and the citizens of Seville provided Velázquez with artistic inspiration. Even the grounds and pigments he used were typical of the city of Seville. These specific materials helped Velázquez develop his gritty, realistic style, which highlighted minute details and depicted exactly what the eye could see, without idealization.¹⁸ Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, he used the citizens of Seville, working class and low class everyday men and women, as models for his *bodegones*.¹⁹ It is evident that the city of Seville played a critical role in the development of Velázquez's style and technique.

The cultural spaces that Velázquez occupied early in his career clearly influenced him in different ways, beginning with his mentor, Francisco Pacheco and the strong classicizing influence he had during Velázquez's apprenticeship. This relationship with one of the most prominent classicizing figures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries allowed him to explore Seville in terms of setting, models, and pigments, as well as *designo*. After his move to Madrid, his friendship with the *colour* advocate Peter Paul Rubens in Madrid would enable Velázquez to establish relationships with important patrons, to explore the handling of paint in a loose and informal manner, to use new and expensive painting materials, and to be exposed to the global art market. This thesis will use the study of place by exploring the nature and importance of community influences; Seville's location, and the specific components to the city of Seville will be examined to determine how the unique culture that developed in the city during the turn of the seventeenth century was an important force in shaping Velázquez's style.

¹⁹ David Davies, "Velázquez's Bodegones" in *Velázquez in Seville*, ed. Michael Clarke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 52.

It is crucial to consider primary sources from the early seventeenth century, especially works by Velázquez's master, Francisco Pacheco, when investigating the evolution of Velázquez's early work. Pacheco was a noted scholar and art critic who was entrusted not only by the Spanish crown, but also the papacy, to monitor the decorum of artwork in Spain. He eventually came to write his theories down in a treatise entitled *Arte de la pintura*, in which he compiled extensive information about the history, theory, and practice of painting in seventeenth century Spain.

The environment in which Velázquez was trained to paint was considered a locale of humanist and Italian philosophy, and it further served to familiarize Velázquez with the Italian penchant for *disegno* over *colore*.²¹ This association between Velázquez's upbringing and the strict discipline of Renaissance masters enables one to see how unique Velázquez's style was in the seventeenth century. Numerous scholars²² note how Velázquez radically broke with the classicizing ideology instilled in him by his mentor Pacheco, which focused on extensive planning and idealizing certain subjects. Velázquez instead chose to embrace spontaneity and "immerse" his paintings in the "current of life."²³ It is in this break that the impact of the place of Seville can truly be felt in Velázquez's work. His handling of paint was unique for Iberia, where the prominent belief was that the foundation of good art lies in the "supreme importance of accurate,

²¹ Gridley McKim, Greta Anderson-Bergdoll, and Richard Newman, *Examining Velázquez*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 15.

²² Enrique Lafuente Ferarri. *Velázquez*, 28. David Davies, "Velázquez's Bodegones," 53. Jonathan Brown. "Velázquez and the Evolution of High Baroque Painting in Madrid." In *Jonathan Brown: Collected Writings on Velázquez*, ed. Bonaventura Bassegoda (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 95. Jonathan Brown. "Velázquez in Seville." In *Jonathan Brown: Collected Writings on Velázquez*, ed. Bonaventura Bassegoda (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 326.

²³ Enrique Lafuente Ferarri, *Velázquez*, 29.

analytical drawing” emphasizing the classical ideal rather than the actual scene before the artist.²⁴

The main sources to be explored in this thesis are works of art that were created by Velázquez. Through the careful study of these paintings, one can gain an understanding of the evolution of Velázquez’s art during his time in Seville. *Immaculate Conception* and its companion piece *St. John on the Island of Patmos*, created in 1618, demonstrate Velázquez’s conformity to Pacheco’s regulations regarding religious representations. Another religious piece, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (1618), establishes Velázquez’s individualism by shifting the focus of an iconic religious moment to a fabricated genre scene, and relegating the religious aspect of the work to a small mirror in the background.

Other works that will be considered are the *bodegones* that Velázquez created in Seville just prior to his move to Madrid. Three works that best represent the *bodegone* genre are *The Lunch* (1617), *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* (1618), and *Watersellers* (1619). These works are firmly rooted in the tradition of what a *bodegone* is, showcasing humble people in humble settings.²⁵ The representation of these scenes, “both convincing and uncompromising,” further demonstrate Velázquez’s creative independence.²⁶

Though his studies of real life, Velázquez found that the “ordinary could be raised to the level of art and enjoyed in its own right,” which is something that the Carracci brothers and Caravaggio had discovered in Italy at the turn of the century.²⁷ This elevation of the mundane is exemplified by the work *Christ in the House of Mary and*

²⁴ Zahira Véliz, “Becoming an Artist in Seventeenth Century Spain,” 16.

²⁵ David Davies, “Velázquez’s *Bodegones*,” 51.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁷ Dale Brown, *The World of Velázquez 1599-1660* (New York: Time Life Books, 1969), 39.

Martha, in which the religious scene is pushed back to a tiny reflection in the corner, allowing the genre/kitchen scene to take up the majority of the canvas and demand the viewers' attention. Significantly more time, attention, and detail went into perfecting the representation of different textures and objects in the kitchen scene. This work enabled Velázquez not only to do a study of still-life objects, but to explore and study the differences in human figures. More specifically Velázquez was obsessed with the depiction of age. He constantly contrasted young and old, smooth and wrinkled, vibrant and weathered. By doing these figure studies, Velázquez was able to move away from Pacheco's "empty idealism" (he "found it impossible to adopt"), and move towards the accentuation of wrinkles and dirt, the markers of the gritty realistic nature of his early paintings.²⁸

Velázquez's spontaneity is what gives his work such distinguished verisimilitude, and the development of his personal style in Seville, which was primarily cultivated independent from circulating prints of other famous artists, is what makes his work so astonishing.²⁹

The first chapter of my thesis will discuss the culture, religion, and political nature of Spain, specifically Seville. It will fully develop the notion of Seville as a unique place. It will provide a detailed account of the city and how such an environment most likely affected the young and observant painter. It will make clear how unique Seville was, and how strongly "place" conditioned Velázquez's works.

²⁸ Carl Justi, *Diego Velázquez and His Times*, trans. A. H. Keane (London: Hazell, Watson, & Viney, Ld, 1889), 77.

²⁹ Anne Sutherland Harris, *Seventeenth Century Art & Architecture* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 225.

The second chapter will discuss the specific environments in which Velázquez worked. It will focus on the Sevillian art market, Pacheco's influence, and the works that Velázquez created as an apprentice/young master. His paintings in this period were primarily limited to religious scenes; they demonstrated the strong impact Pacheco's classicizing philosophy had on the young artist.

The third chapter will delve into Velázquez's artistic development, and document his transition from the classicizing idealism promoted by Pacheco. It will discuss the development of Velázquez's naturalistic style and how it was incorporated into his early work in Seville. This chapter will detail the importance of the *bodegones* to the development of Velázquez's artistic philosophy. It will discuss the phenomenological aspects of Velázquez's work, and consider how Seville was explored in a phenomenological way through his work.

The concluding chapter will summarize the importance of environment and culture for the creation of artwork. It will address the other theories on Velázquez's style and development, but in doing so it will reaffirm that the city of Seville had the single-greatest impact on his stylistic choices. The conclusion will thoroughly discuss Velázquez's unique approach to painting and how influential it was on subsequent artists.

Chapter 2: Seville and Spanish Society

As Jonathan Brown, premiere Velázquez scholar, notes: Velázquez's work creates an "unceasing play between the past and the present, between the subjective and the objective, which keeps great art of earlier ages before our eyes."³⁰ Velázquez's work also enables the modern viewer to get a glimpse of seventeenth century Spain. Great masters are "products of living and working in a specific environment," and Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) epitomizes that fact.³¹ Velázquez's work can only be understood if the societal context of Seville is understood. Only by truly knowing the environment and cultural trends of Seville can Velázquez's works be fully appreciated for their avant-garde nature. Velázquez's work is not just a product of Seville, but it produces Seville as well. His works re-create scenes that enable viewers to experience that particular environment. Velázquez's artwork allows his viewers to be immersed *Interweltsien* (in-the-world) and experience the world that he was depicting.

Seville is located in the southwest corner of Spain. It is land-locked, located approximately fifty miles from the coast, but the Guadalquivir River enabled ships to navigate from the Gulf of Cádiz to the city.³² Velázquez's work expressed the cosmopolitan nature of the port, which, at its peak, had a population larger than London,

³⁰ Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez Painter and Courtier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), vii.

³¹ Juana Miguel Sierra, "Velázquez and Sevillian Painting of His Time." In *Velázquez and Seville*, ed. Michael Clarke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 37.

³² John Elliot, "The Seville of Velázquez," 15.

Rome, or Madrid. Its development as a port town ultimately provided Seville with important commercial links to the rest of Europe, Africa, and the New World.

Seville was a city of international trade, fueled by wealth created from the New World, and was inhabited by a uniquely cosmopolitan and passionately religious population. With strong ties to central Italy, the Netherlands, and the New World, Seville was open to numerous influences that helped shape Velázquez's early life, such as his exposure to humanist scholars, foreign books, and Italian and Flemish prints and engravings.³³ This diverse society, which had a love of visual and theatrical creations, resulted in Seville's development into an "ideal environment for the cultivation of the arts," and it is in this environment that Velázquez first learned artistic techniques and created his own artistic style.³⁴

The city of Seville was incredibly important for Velázquez's development, but later in his life one of the most important relationships he would have was with the Spanish Hapsburg King, Philip IV. Spain was under Hapsburg control at the turn of the sixteenth century, first under Philip III (1598-1621) and then Philip IV (1621-1665). The Hapsburgs, as well as the city's oligarchy, dictated the types of artwork that were commissioned in the Seville. The city's powerful oligarchy was comprised of less than 200 families who engaged in the trade market, infiltrated city offices, and monopolized the city council.³⁵ The Sevillian elite was convinced of Seville's superiority to all other towns in Spain and called Seville "New Rome," thus many efforts were made to beautify

³³ John H. Elliott, "The Seville of Velázquez," in *Velázquez in Seville*, ed. Michael Clarke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 15 – 21.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16

the city and have it live up to its new name.³⁶ At the turn of the seventeenth century, there were numerous urban renewal projects that involved the commissioning of public artwork, creation of public fountains and parks, as well as the establishment of monasteries and convent.³⁷ The improvement of the city's public spaces, the focus on culture, and the development of religious institutions not only testified to the religious devotion of Sevillians, but demonstrated the culmination of the cities transformation from Moorish Seville into a European Renaissance city between 1248 and 1600.

Seville has a strong religious history steeped in Catholicism, beginning with the Christian re-conquest of Moorish Seville in 1248.³⁸ The city maintained a strong relationship with the Catholic Church, one that had a strong impact on the city's culture during the turn of the seventeenth century.³⁹ During the late fifteenth century, the Hapsburgs declared themselves as "Catholic Kings," divinely appointed to rule.⁴⁰ This declaration resulted in increasingly oppressive Catholicism, enforced by the full might of the Spanish Empire. Seville, due to its wealth, population, and presence of monastic orders became an increasingly important stronghold in the Catholic Church. Due to Seville's proximity to the Moorish North Africa, the Catholic Church and the Spanish crown had to work together to defend "Catholicism and the evangelization of Andalusia."⁴¹

In addition to the increased importance of Seville in Catholic society, Christopher Columbus, Isabella, and Ferdinand's involvement with the discovery of the New World

³⁶ Ibid., 15

³⁷ Ibid., 16

³⁸ Ibid., 15

³⁹ Sara Nalle, "Spanish Religious Life in the Age of Velázquez," 109.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 110.

⁴¹ Ronald Cueto, "The Great Babylon of Spain and the Devout: Politic, Religion, and piety in the Seville of Velázquez," In *Velázquez and Seville*, ed. Michael Clarke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 30.

gave Seville a new role on the world stage. The city quickly developed into a lively port and a major point of exchange between the Mediterranean, North Africa, Northern Europe, and the New World. The discovery of, and subsequent trade with the West Indies boosted the Sevillian economy and “marked the beginning of Seville’s monopoly of the transatlantic trade.”⁴² Precious metals and American produce was shipped from the recently conquered Americas and Mexico back to the port of Seville. The desire of the Spanish crown, its financiers, and trans-Atlantic shipping interests to control New World resources led to the creation of the *Casa de Contratacion*. The *Casa de Contratacion* retained between twenty and forty percent of all bounty.⁴³ That tax covered the cost of Spain’s army in Italy and the Netherlands, and the remaining money was either used to pay back the Italian and German financiers, taken by the individuals involved, or put back into the Indies trade.⁴⁴ These exchanges placed Seville at the heart of a European network of commerce and credit.

The increased economic status of Seville, coupled with the fact that in 1503 the city was declared the only official port of entry between Spain and the New World, encouraged individuals throughout Europe to relocate to Seville.⁴⁵ This exclusivity not only enabled Sevillians to experience tremendous wealth; it also resulted in a large increase of migrants hoping to either make money in the city or leave for America. These foreigners lived and worked in the city and eventually intermarried with Sevillian families to become naturalized Spaniards.⁴⁶ Over the span of the fifteenth century,

⁴² John Elliot, “The Seville of Velázquez,” 16.

⁴³ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁵ Juan Miguel Serrera, “Velázquez and Sevillian painting of his time,” 37.

⁴⁶ John Elliot, “The Seville of Velázquez,” 15.

Seville's demographic drastically changed from one of Iberian and Moorish decent, to a truly cosmopolitan place with individuals from across the world. Seville's culture became very open to influences from abroad. The close ties to Italy and the Netherlands resulted in the exposure of Velázquez to foreign books, as well as Italian and Dutch prints and engravings. Seville was also an important publishing center that printed books for both the domestic, European, and American markets.⁴⁷

Ultimately, at the time of Velázquez's birth, the city pulsed with life, even though the disparity between affluent and deprived became increasingly evident. Members of the elite class established hospitals, schools, and orphanages to help the poor during the early 17th century.⁴⁸ Seville was a city of international trade, West Indian wealth, a cosmopolitan population and society, and a center of passionate religious devotion. This society, coupled with the Sevillians love of visual and theatrical creations, created an "ideal environment for the cultivation of the arts."⁴⁹

There was a close relationship between the Netherlands and Spain, for a variety of reasons. There were strong economic ties between the two provinces, primarily due to the industrialized Netherlands producing goods out of raw materials found on the Iberian Peninsula or shipped in from the Americas. Furthermore, there were strong political ties between the two regions. The Spanish Hapsburgs owned Flanders and had a lot of political influence in the region. "Seville should have been one of the most prosperous places in Spain for the art of painting" due to its exclusive trade connections to the New

⁴⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 21.

World, its cosmopolitan nature, and the large population of wealthy merchants who relocated from across Europe to profit off of the port.⁵⁰

After the turn of the century, the streets of Seville were becoming increasingly congested; enormous wealth and abject poverty were violently juxtaposed, and there were growing strains and fissures in Spanish society.⁵¹ Seville's banking house collapsed in 1601 just after the accession of Philip III.⁵² This collapse resulted in cataclysmic losses for some families as well as the permanent closure of a state-run bank in Seville. The trade routes to the New World still provided profit, but the dwindling American market for Spanish goods resulted in a steep decline in remittances for the Spanish Crown.⁵³

There are incorrect assumptions that at the turn of the seventeenth century, Seville went from a "vital, cultivated and well-ordered city into a chaotic morass of corruption and misery."⁵⁴ The seventeenth century, rather, was a period of slow decline that exacerbated the income disparity between the extremely wealthy and the poor masses. This decline was caused by a number of factors, the most prominent of which was the Spanish government's "unprecedented levels of immorality and corruption."⁵⁵ Fortunately for Diego Velázquez, the city of Seville experienced its greatest prosperity between 1592 and 1622, allowing him to receive commissions from both religious and private patrons.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain, 1500-1700* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 99.

⁵¹ John Elliot, "The Seville of Velázquez," 18

⁵² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁴ Vincente Lleó Cañal, "Cultivated Elite of Velázquez's Seville," in *Velázquez in Seville*, ed. Michael Clarke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 23.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

Seville as a place is distinctly different from other areas of Spain, and the art in Seville is similarly unique in the Iberian Peninsula. Seville became a “locale of Humanist and Italian philosophy,” something that not only enabled a cultivation of the arts, but also resulted in a cultivation of scientific interests. Several members of Sevillian society contributed to both scientific and artistic advancement including naturalists, surgeons, and navigators. Seville, rich with gold from the New World, as well as cultural and intellectual figures, soon became a main publishing center for all of Europe.⁵⁷

At the turn of the seventeenth century, there was also a shift in the type and style of literature that was created in Spain. Toward the middle of the sixteenth century, the picaresque novel began gaining popularity. This genre of writing focused on low-class citizens and glorified street heroes, and captured realistic details about the baroque culture and society that was represented in print. This style of writing developed in the same manner as Velázquez’s style, with a focus on humble subjects and humble settings and attempting to capture the essence of that society in print. These works are a reaction to the highly classicized Renaissance and Baroque styles. Both in literature and in painting the artists of Spain were creating work that focused on the lower class majority, documenting with great detail their daily struggles and lives.

One of the most popular writers in Spain during Velázquez’s lifetime was Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547-1616). Cervantes was a novelist, poet, and playwright who expertly captured Spanish society in print. *Don Quixote* in particular is closely connected to Velázquez’ work due to the strong phenomenological nature of the novel. The entire

⁵⁷ Vicente Lleó Cañal, “Cultivated Elite of Velázquez’s Seville,” 26.

work is centered on the subjective perception of reality and how different realities result in vastly different experiences of the same situation.

The *bodegones*, or scenes of low-class citizens performing everyday activities such as eating and drinking that Velázquez expertly created, have perpetuated the idea that seventeenth century Spain was in a severe economic depression and a state of decay from the once abundant society of the late sixteenth century.⁵⁸ While the economy did decline during the first half of the seventeenth century, there was a great wealth disparity. There were many low-class, poor citizens, but there were also numerous wealthy and educated individuals in the city.. As Vincente Lleo Canal has noted, Seville at the beginning of the seventeenth century was “the city of the picaresque novel and of poor government, but it was also the home of a cultivated elite with a passionate interest in antiquity which debated the most abstruse iconographical and literary questions and whose members formed right collections of archeological material.”⁵⁹

These elite members of society that debated cultural and artistic developments were the Spanish version of the formal academies that existed in Italy and France. These intellectuals, united by their common interest in the arts, had informal meetings to discuss antiquity, poetry, science, and iconography.⁶⁰ There were several groups in particular that devoted their lives to understanding and discussing the cult of antiquity. Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644) was a member of this group of men that showed an aesthetic and intellectual appreciation for all aspects of antiquity. This respect for, and focus on, ancient cultures by Pacheco and the members of his artistic circle had a huge impact on

⁵⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 24.

the early work of Velázquez. Pacheco instilled in his apprentices a serious regard for the philosophical aspect of artwork and an extensive knowledge of artistic masters (from antiquity through the sixteenth century), as well as a “concern for the representation of reality with decorum.”⁶¹

Sevillian art in particular has always been perceived as distinct from other Spanish art, due to the city’s unique position at the intersection of various cultural currents.⁶² In addition to the various contemporary influences across Europe that were converging on Seville, Pacheco was a member of an elite group of men who obsessively studied classicism and the cult of antiquity, and who employed classical ideals in their own works.⁶³ Seville lacked the official artistic academies that developed in Italy; instead this group of classicizing Sevillians formed an informal salon-esque space that fostered dialogue among these learned men, artists, and nobles who were united in their common interest in antiquity, poetry, and matters of iconography.⁶⁴

Ultimately these developments in Seville led to a society that was comprised of highly educated and wealthy individuals who took great pleasure in discussing iconography, artistic styles, and artistic content. This was the group of individuals (including Benito Aria Montano, Philip II’s librarian and Pablo de Céspedes, an Andalusian artist) that Velázquez was surrounded by while completing his apprenticeship with Pacheco.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Zahira Veliz, “Becoming an Artist,” 12.

⁶² Vincente Lleó Cañal, “Cultivated Elite of Velázquez’s Seville,” 24.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁵ Zahira Veliz, “Becoming an Artist,” 13.

Chapter 3: Velázquez's Early Works

The works of Velázquez cannot truly be understood without the context of the Sevillian art scene. As discussed in the previous chapter, Seville developed into an important city with a unique culture in seventeenth century Europe. The cosmopolitan society and intellectual elite, combined with the exclusive trade routes to the New World, ultimately resulted in significant cultural contributions by the creative members of Sevillian society. Seville became one of the most important centers for the production and distribution of art in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.⁶⁶ The amplification of Sevillian artistic production and prominence was due to the increased artistic commerce with the Americas. Foreign artists came from across Europe to work in Seville and fill the artistic demand for paintings in newly settled the New World.⁶⁷ This escalated demand and influx of artists played an important role in the development of the Sevillian School of painting. The works created in Seville, beginning with the works by Velázquez, began taking on a combination of Italian, Dutch, and Iberian influences.⁶⁸

Several artists famously relocated to Seville, such as Francisco Zurbaran, Alonso Cano, Pieter Kempeneer, and Ferdinand Sturum⁶⁹. Initially those artists relocated to Seville to fill the New World's demand for artwork and were primarily preoccupied with practical and pragmatic issues rather than artistic creativity. Painting at the time was not

⁶⁶ Juan Miguel Serrera, "Velázquez and Sevillian Painting," 37.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Brown, "Painting in Spain 1500-1700," 27.

considered a liberal art, but instead a trade and the craftsmen were primarily concerned with profits, price drops, and unlicensed practitioners.⁷⁰ These artists brought with them their own personal styles from the cities in which their artistic techniques were developed. This melding of artists with different styles contributed to the truly cosmopolitan, intellectual, and aesthetically minded nature of Seville, and impacted developing artists in the area, such as Velázquez. Seville was at the cross-currents of major political, economic, and artistic trade routes, resulting in a unique cultural exchange of influences that enabled Velázquez and other young artists to break free of the conventions set forth by the classicizing cultural elite.

Concurrently with the radical break in artistic tradition, which took place towards the end of the fifteenth century and allowed artists and authors to explore subjective representations of experiences, there were still many members of the artistic community who accepted the style of the Italian Renaissance hegemony. One of the major proponents for this style was Velázquez's instructor, and father-in-law, Francisco Pacheco. Both classical ideals and the Catholic Church heavily influenced Pacheco's work. Pacheco strove to pass on his adherence to classical proportion and design as well as religious decorum and protocol to his apprentices.

Velázquez's work was subject to two main developing traditions of European painting, one of which was the Italian Renaissance style, which was modeled on antiquity and attempted to create "an idealized vision of the world according to the canons of beauty and proportion defined by the ancients."⁷¹ The other canon that developed around

⁷⁰ Ibid., 38.

⁷¹ Alexander Vergara, "Velázquez and the North," 49.

the Renaissance was the Northern style of painting from Flanders. The Flemish style of art focused on attaining a sort of hyperrealism, which paid close attention to details and textures. This style was influenced by the development of oil paint in the Netherlands, which enabled artists to capture minute details and fully express textural differences in a much more realistic fashion than faster-drying tempera. Jonathan Brown expressed, Sevillian painters “operated at the end of the geographic line with respect to Flemish painting,” yet also “in Spain, the seductive appeal of Italian art became ever more irresistible, and new Italian models were increasingly accepted into the prevailing system of representation.”⁷² According to Brown, the Spanish baroque style “essentially remained faithful to its northern biases,” but we should not lose sight of the other (Italian) tradition and its vastly different components.

The counter-reformation had a tremendous impact on Spanish culture, especially on the religious paintings that were created throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Seville. During the counter-reformation, the Catholic Church made numerous decrees at the Council of Trent that were intended to ensure that no indecorous or offensive religious art was created or displayed. In this post-Tridentine Catholic culture, artists were “coloured by the consciousness of the inspired purpose” of artistic creation.⁷³ The official purpose of art was to instruct the mind and elevate the spirit; thus art itself became a form of worship.⁷⁴ Pacheco was such a proponent of the counter-reformation’s edicts, that he eventually was appointed to the title of Inspector of Images for the

⁷² Jonathan Brown, “Painting in Spain 1500-1700,” 27.

⁷³ Zahira Veliz, “Becoming an Artist,” 11.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

Bishop.⁷⁵ He went on to fulfill a similar role for the Papacy later in life. Pacheco's focus on religion and antiquity ensured that Velázquez apprenticed in an environment in which the church was an omnipresent "client, arbiter of taste, and censor."⁷⁶

In addition to being a vocal religious supporter, Pacheco was also an important proponent of the classical arts. He collected extensive information about the history, theory, and practice of painting and compiled his findings into a work entitled *El arte de la pintura*, published in 1649. This work is extremely important in understanding the "theoretical parameters within which the art of painting was taught and practiced in Pacheco's studio."⁷⁷ *El arte de la pintura* provides an incredibly detailed and accurate testimony of the beliefs that Pacheco instilled in his apprentices.

Pacheco believed that God created the world in his divine wisdom, and that Christian artists were responsible for depicting natural objects in a particular manner. He fully agreed with the Church's decree that art must contain an unambiguous pro-religious message as well as maintain its decorous nature.⁷⁸ Pacheco instilled in his apprentices that an artist must transcend nature in order to truly ruminate on God. According to Pacheco, it is absolutely essential that the artist utilize an editing eye in order to fully express the intellectual aspect of art.⁷⁹ The intellectualization of painting, editing and perfecting the natural world, is what elevates painting from a trade to a liberal art

⁷⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁹ David Davies, "*Velázquez's Bodegones*," 51.

according to Pacheco “It is an intellectual exercise whereby the painter can imitate nature and God himself,” which resulted in works of art that are idealized and perfected.⁸⁰

Pacheco ultimately preferred a “methodical didactic” approach to painting, in which one learns to paint small parts and those small perfected parts eventually lead up to a whole object.⁸¹ This method of comprising a completed image from segments of perfected parts in order to create one composite perfect object was something that Velázquez broke from shortly after obtaining his master designation, due to the fact that this careful, studied approach to the creation of art neglected the ability to use paint to create texture and expressive handling.⁸²

Velázquez’s work is a true product of Seville – from the preparatory clay on his canvas, to the pigments used to create his paint. Seville was known for its incredibly smooth clay, which was used to create the preparatory layer on the canvas to ensure that paint did not bleed through. Early in his career Velázquez limited his palette to more affordable, widely available colors in Seville.

The works that Velázquez created while living and working in Seville can be split into two major categories: religious works, and *bodegones*. The earliest paintings he created, such as *Adoration of the Magi* (1619), *Immaculate Conception* (1618), and *St. John at Patmos* (1618) were all heavily influenced by Pacheco, and adhered to the strict standards placed on religious work at the time.

His earliest works demonstrate that while apprenticing under Pacheco, he closely followed his master’s advice. Velázquez worked from very carefully constructed

⁸⁰ Ibid., 51.

⁸¹ Zahira Veliz, “Becoming an Artist,” 16.

⁸² Ibid., 16.

drawings, and Pacheco's "belief of the supreme importance of accurate, analytical drawing as the foundation of good art is evident" in Velázquez's early technique.⁸³

Velázquez's earliest subjects also reflect the influence of his master, as his main commissions or projects as an apprentice and shortly after leaving Pacheco's studio were religious scenes. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were rife with theological debate in Spain, and one of the primary components of those debates was religious iconography. There were varying viewpoints on decorous iconography and Pacheco, as overseer of religious imagery beginning in 1618, ensured that Velázquez's work strictly followed the Church's standards, such as in his representation of the *Immaculate Conception*.⁸⁴

It was inevitable that working closely with Pacheco for so long would leave an imprint that would result in Velázquez creating religious imagery for a few years after leaving Pacheco's studio. Furthermore, due to Seville's significant religious population and the large amount of religious institutions located in the city, the majority of commissions for work in Seville were religious in nature.⁸⁵

One of the first works Velázquez created as a master was a representation of the *Immaculate Conception* in 1618. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was a fiercely debated topic in seventeenth century Spain, and it had a great impact on the city of Seville, which historically had been dedicated to the Virgin Mary.⁸⁶ Pacheco, acting as inspector of images, set out to make an authoritative version of the Virgin Mary. There

⁸³ Zahira Veliz, "Becoming an Artist," 17.

⁸⁴ Peter Cherry, "Artistic Training and the Painters' Guild," In *Velázquez and Seville*, ed. Michael Clarke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 67.

⁸⁵ Enriqueta Harris, "Velázquez, Sevillian painter of sacred subjects." In *Velázquez in Seville*, ed. Michael Clarke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 45.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

were several rules that Pacheco established for the “Orthodox Treatment” of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, including: being represented as a beautiful young girl with flowing golden hair, serious eyes, perfect nose and mouth, surrounded by the sun, standing on the moon, with the crescent pointing downward, crowned by 12 stars, wearing a blue cloak over a white robe.⁸⁷

There is a distinct dichotomy that separates the religious subjects from the human subjects in these paintings. This is clearly evident in Velázquez’s *Immaculate Conception* (1618), in which the religious figure, the Virgin, is depicted precisely as Pacheco advises. This renders her both idealized and stoic, befitting of the depiction of a religious figure in a post-Tridentine society that was known for its devoutly religious citizens and its adherence to tradition.

Velázquez followed his master’s instruction perfectly. He created the *Immaculate Conception* as a companion piece to his depiction of *John the Evangelist*. The two paintings reside in a pendant, and depict John the Evangelist having a vision of Mary on one side, and the enlarged vision of the *Immaculate Conception* on the other.

While abiding by the strict conventions of the depiction of Mary, Velázquez demonstrated his desire to break with Pacheco’s regulations on artwork by taking liberties with his depiction of John the Evangelist. He depicts John the Evangelist as a young, handsome man as opposed to the traditional depiction of John the Evangelist as an older man during his composure of Revelation. The reason why he did not follow the traditional template for depicting St. John of Patmos is unknown, but it could be due to the fact that St. John was a seer who was divinely inspired to create the Book of

⁸⁷ Ibid., 47.

Revelations. Velázquez perhaps inserted himself in the position of St. John the seer is to insinuate that his artistic vision is divinely inspired, and that he is a vehicle for God's vision, akin to St. John.

Shortly after creating the *Immaculate Conception/St. John at Patmos* diptych, Velázquez created *The Adoration of the Magi* in 1619. Velázquez only created a small number of religious subjects, including this one. Velázquez also abided by Pacheco's guidelines for the creation of this piece. The scene takes place in the mouth of a cave, Joseph is present, and the virgin holds the infant in her arms. Velázquez's representation of the traditional scene of the Magi is distinguished by the sobriety of the costumes and the lack of gifts and crowns. Velázquez's Mary is depicted as austere and somber. At this point in his career, Velázquez was still adhering to Pacheco's highly analytical technique while creating his compositions, but the incredibly life-like human figures indicate the use of live models.⁸⁸

Velázquez seemingly attempts to shock his viewer in order to emphasize moments, such as in his *Adoration of the Magi*, in which the "distinction between the world of the spectator and the world of the holy personages is almost entirely obliterated."⁸⁹ This concept of shocking the audience by depicting religious figures as regular citizens is one that was employed with great success by Italian artist Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio at the turn of the seventeenth century. The human subjects appear to be portraits of specific individuals rather than idealized religious figures.⁹⁰ Eventually Velázquez's Pacheco-influenced, thoroughly worked drawings and

⁸⁸ Ibid., 49.

⁸⁹ Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain 1500-1700*, 106.

⁹⁰ Jonathan Brown, "Velázquez in Seville," 328.

etchings on his canvas became more infrequent in the 1620s, once Velázquez had attained his status as a painting guild member.⁹¹

Religious works in Spain had to adhere to strict rules and regulations in order to ensure clarity and proper depiction of religious figures. Thus original and imaginative interpretations of religious scenes, akin to the scenes Caravaggio created in Italy, were unauthorized. This requirement to create conventional and authorized images of religious figures essentially ensured that Velázquez would not continue to create religious works throughout the course of his career as a painter. Velázquez began to move away from Pacheco's influence by shifting his subjects from authorized religious scenes, to scenes of everyday life. By shifting his focus from religious subjects to the quotidian, Velázquez rejected the orthodoxy and decorum that dominated Spanish painting in the early seventeenth century. He instead opted to develop a new aesthetic based on intensely observed reality. By focusing on his observations, and drawing strictly from life, Velázquez's work assumed a verisimilitude that Pacheco eventually came to admire.⁹²

Pacheco's careful and studied approach to the creation of artwork ignored the use of paint to create texture and to develop expressive handling. Instead, similar to the classical treaties on art, he favored the exploitation of the properties of design and line.⁹³ This approach to painting was common in the post-Renaissance late sixteenth century society which favored a Mannerist style (comprised of elongated limbs and smooth

⁹¹ Zahira Veliz, "Becoming an Artist," 17.

⁹² Enriqueta Harris, "Velázquez, Sevillian Painter of Sacred Subjects," 45.

⁹³ Zahira Véliz, "Becoming an Artist in Seventeenth Century Spain," 16.

features) which ultimately represented objects as “aesthetically harmonious and rhythmical” according to Walter Friedlaender.⁹⁴

There were several disconnects between student and teacher when it came to Velázquez and Pacheco’s artistic foundations and beliefs. While Pacheco was continually encouraging his students to emulate classical ideals and produce highly intellectual representations of ‘reality,’ Velázquez instead decided to depict nature as he saw it. Velázquez continued to apprentice with Pacheco, even though the two differed on several issues, because Pacheco was highly respected and very talented. Velázquez preferred not to create a harmonious whole more perfect than anything found in nature, and instead chose to create his works using live models and actual objects.⁹⁵ He depicted every facet of the objects or subject in front of him on the canvas, including bruised apples and dirty hands. Velázquez observed forms separately and intensely, “emphatically modeling every plane and accentuating their presence through foreshortening and strong contrasting light.”⁹⁶

Velázquez produced two major types of works while he was in Seville both working under Pacheco as an apprentice and on his own as a master: religious paintings and *bodegones*. It is clear that Velázquez did not paint the religious subjects out of desire, but rather out of necessity.⁹⁷ Rather than create idealized religious paintings that adhered to Pacheco’s long list of requirements for official religious depictions, Velázquez was inspired by his Sevillian surroundings to create new works focusing on subjective

⁹⁴ Walter Friedlaender, *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting* (New York: Columbia University press, 1957), 8.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁹⁶ David Davies, “*Velázquez’s Bodegones*,” 56.

⁹⁷ Sara T. Nalle, “Spanish Religious Life in the Age of Velázquez,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Velázquez*, ed. Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 109.

representations of various settings in the city. This switch in subject matter, from religious to secular, was only one of the many ways in which Velázquez broke with Iberian tradition. His works used real, low class citizens as models for his *bodegones*, dark clay exclusive to Seville for his ground, and inexpensive, widely available pigments which ultimately resulted in the creation of his gritty, dark, realistic works. Velázquez incorporated these aspects of his secular *bodegones* into the few religious works he was obligated to create – forming a hybrid that allowed him to placate his patrons with the subject matter while allowing him to stay true to his realistic, spontaneous style of art.

Due to Pacheco's influence, Velázquez's early work reflected the idealizing aspects of the Italianate tradition, but he was also affected by the hyper-realistic Netherlandish genre paintings.⁹⁸ Velázquez allowed both of these styles to show through in his unique approach to painting that captured real-life moments on canvas as realistically as possible. Velázquez, while referencing the different styles that were popular around him, simultaneously displayed his independence by so many different styles and influences, such as the Italianate classicism and Flemish hyper-realism. By expressing this wide range of artistic sources, his works are less focused on exact replication of fabrics and surfaces, and rather were treated in a more painterly fashion. Sometimes he left his brush strokes unblended.⁹⁹ This allowed him to capture not only the visual aspects of the scene, but also its atmosphere.

The later works that Velázquez created in Seville show the evolution of his art and his blending of religious and secular subject matters. *Christ in the House of Mary and*

⁹⁸ Alexander Vergara, "Velázquez and the North," 51.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

Martha is the best example of this integration. For Spain it was unusual to combine religious scenes and genre scenes, as most artwork in Spain was commissioned by the Church, resulting in mostly religious works and altarpieces. This integration of a religious theme and scene into a secular study enabled him to appease his religious patrons while studying both people and natural objects. Velázquez sought to capture the scenes before him as if they were actually happening, a feat he was continually perfecting, until it culminated in his most avant-garde and impressionistic work, *Las Meninas*.

Christ in the House of Mary and Martha (1618) is a painting that is rooted in the Flemish tradition of religious subjects being treated as genre paintings. These genre scenes, which originated in the 1550s by Flemish painter Pieter Aertsen, were continued by Flemish artists, and eventually acquired by Italian and Spanish artists.¹⁰⁰ This work truly bridges the gap between Velázquez's earlier religious works and his later secular *bodegones*. The scene depicts two "mundane figures in contemporary dress and in contemporary setting" in the foreground.¹⁰¹ The work employs a compositional device-- "in effect a narrative format, that was to become a characteristic staple of the Spanish Baroque painting, the so-called 'cuadrop dentro del cuadro', or, 'the picture-within-the-picture'."¹⁰² The first Iberian treatment of the picture within the picture dates back to 1616, and was completed by Pacheco. Velázquez's work seems to have trouble combining the "generalized Flemish characteristics of immobility, compositional symmetry, dichotomy of perspective" with his own style of realistic representation and

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain 1500-1700*, 109.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁰² John Moffitt, "Francisco Pacheco," 631

capturing ephemeral scenes.¹⁰³ In the background, there is a religious scene depicting Jesus, Mary, and her sister Martha. The foreground depicts two servants creating a meal of fish and eggs. Velázquez here juxtaposes old and young, and fleshes out the elements of representing different ages. The cooks are working on a humble meal, but Velázquez put a significant amount of time and effort toward evoking specific textures and colors that reflect the light in different ways across the genre scene in the forefront. Velázquez expertly depicted different shapes and textures in the food, an attestation of his skill level, even at a young age. But his inexperience is also shown, as Jonathan Brown notes: Velázquez was forced to tip the “tabletop at an impossible angle in order to accommodate the array of food and cooking utensils” that he wanted to portray.¹⁰⁴ This same technique was later used in the nineteenth century by the post-impressionist artist Paul Cézanne, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty.¹⁰⁵

The picture-within-the-picture is employed for a specific purpose: to illustrate two different episodes that took place at two different times. This technique results in “what we may call temporal displacement.”¹⁰⁶ The Flemish origin of this scene is reinforced by Velázquez’s inclusion of a Flemish-style ‘fish and market’ scene in the foreground with the religious scene relegated to the background.¹⁰⁷

In the foreground, there are numerous religious references found in the kitchen scene, including fish, eggs, mortar and pestle, ultimately depict a means of abstinence.¹⁰⁸

Christ in the House of Mary and Martha has a simple composition, but it wholly engages

¹⁰³ Ibid., 631.

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 16.

¹⁰⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cezanne’s Doubt” in *Sense and Non-sense* (Northwestern, University Press, 1964), 13

¹⁰⁶ John Moffitt, “Francisco Pacheco,” 631.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 633.

¹⁰⁸ Enriqueta Harris, “Velázquez, Sevillian Painter of Sacred Subjects,” 45.

the audience through the attitudes, gestures, and facial expressions of the two main figures in the foreground. The purpose of this type of work is to attract the audience's attention, to bring them in showing a meal of abstinence on the table, hinting at the religious nature of the work. Then the background scene, when the viewer finally directs his or her attention towards it, allows one to understand fully the serious religious implication of the work. Velázquez was able to transform this convention into something modern, local, and personal.¹⁰⁹ It enabled him to merge his obligation to create religious works with his personal desire to depict humble figures in humble settings.

These four early works (*Adoration of the Magi*, *Immaculate Conception*, *St. John at Patmos*, and *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*) are among the few religious paintings that Velázquez created in his career. As previously stated, Velázquez was not interested in being forced to adhere to regulations on his artwork; instead he opted to turn his focus towards secular representations.

Eventually Velázquez's work developed to fit an even bolder painterly style, especially after he met Peter Paul Rubens while working as the court painter in Madrid. His work began using lighter grounds, a freer technique, and more transparent paint layers.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 46.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 63.

Chapter 4: *Bodegones*

To explain Velázquez's personal objective as an artist is a difficult task. There are very few private letters, none of which touch upon his personal philosophy of art.¹¹¹ There are no records of his "feelings, thoughts, and reactions to events" as such, so it is "hard to know the human side of the artist."¹¹² By analyzing the choices that Velázquez made in his career, it becomes apparent that his personal life attempted to "reconcile the often-contradictory demands of the desire to be considered both a great gentleman and a great artist."¹¹³ His ambitions to be associated with nobility were apparent in the early stages of his career: he associated himself with some of the most powerful and influential individuals in Seville, including his master and father-in-law, Francisco Pacheco. Velázquez's entire professional career was a documentation of his struggle to depict scenes that he witnessed onto canvas. This emphasis on "human subjectivity" and the clear understanding that "knowledge and awareness of the world are always *someone's* knowledge and awareness" are two major aspects of Velázquez's work that indicate that he was a revolutionary, utilizing phenomenological approaches to his work that were not truly articulated in academic circles until the nineteenth century, concurrent with the arrival of impressionism.¹¹⁴ Velázquez's later subject matter and avant-garde style

¹¹¹ Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, Vii.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, ix.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁴ Eric Matthews, *Merleau Ponty*, 5.

“seems totally disconnected from the artistic world of Seville,” which was rife with traditional religious iconography and idealizing, classical representations.¹¹⁵

Jonathan Brown feels that Velázquez’s “break with the existing [Sevillian] stylistic tradition must be the most radical in the entire history of Renaissance and Baroque art.”¹¹⁶ Velázquez not only accurately portrays textures and figures, but his work captures specific nuances that allow him to convey the entire atmosphere of a scene. This is especially prevalent in his *bodegones*, which used real life models acting out whole scenes. Velázquez, akin to a few other artists at the turn of the century (most notably the Carracci brothers and Caravaggio) felt the need to draw from life, taking out the ‘intellectual’ aspect of art. By not modifying and idealizing his subjects, Velázquez allowed himself to capture the unadulterated scene before him.

Velázquez’s work in Seville is largely undated and, according to Jonathan Brown, is best treated as creations all from a single period, spanning from when Velázquez became a master artists in 1617 to his move to Madrid in 1623.¹¹⁷ His works differ drastically from the traditional polychrome statues and religious altarpieces that were the most popular artistic products of seventeenth century Spain. His works stand out for a variety of reasons, but the most prominent are the subject matter that he depicted, and the manner in which he depicted it. His *bodegones* were the “earliest surviving genre scenes painted by a Spanish artist in the seventeenth century.”¹¹⁸ The rendering of the figures in these scenes is “much less idealized and more directly rooted in appearances than

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain 1500-1700*, 99.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez Painter and Courtier*, 7.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

anything else done at this time in Seville.”¹¹⁹ This accurate depiction of figures, coupled with Velázquez’s fascination with the play of light and color while representing still-life objects, enable his works to truly capture the essence of the scene before him. This notion of intensely and accurately describing a scene, enabling those who are not present to, in a sense, experience what is presented, is one of the first forays into the application of a phenomenological approach to art. Velázquez’s work, much like phenomenology, is not solely based on empirical data. A phenomenological approach is “descriptive rather than explanatory,” and is akin to Velázquez’s style of presenting a scene, rather than an idealized, overworked version of a scene that Pacheco would suggest.¹²⁰ Phenomenology is not concerned with explanations for why an object looks the way it does, or how an object is ideally supposed to look. Instead it focuses on ones’ perception of a particular object, and how the perception of the artists is translated into artistic form.¹²¹ Phenomenology, “like art, does not simply represent a pre-existing truth, but forces us to see the world differently, and in that sense, create a new truth.”¹²² It is by implementing this notion of phenomenology, and embracing the idea of representing what the artist can physically see in front of him, that Velázquez differed most significantly from his peers and mentors.

Velázquez’s early works, from 1618 through 1623, were completed on stretched canvas. He had a choice between two materials, mantel (chequered) or lienzos (tabby).¹²³

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹²⁰ Eric Matthews, *Merleau Ponty*, 9.

¹²¹ Ibid., 9.

¹²² Ibid., 18.

¹²³ Zahira Veliz, “Velázquez’s Early Techniques,” in *Velázquez in Seville*, ed. Michael Clarke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 80.

Patterned mantel was probably more attractive or precious, and fitting for subject of iconographical importance such as the *Immaculate Conception*. Once chosen, the canvas would then be stretched and nailed over thick panels to protect it from humidity. This resulted in an unyielding painting surface, which gave Velázquez greater control over his brushstrokes.

After stretching and mounting the canvas itself, Velázquez would then prepare the canvas for the application of paint. On the stretched canvas, he would apply a sizing layer followed by a preparation of earth pigments ground in linseed oil. This provided Velázquez with an even surface for the application of paint, while impeding the pigment from seeping into the canvas. The sizing layer, comprised of smooth priming clay, was a dull brown color. The ground layer will inevitably influence the tonality of the painting. Dark red/brown lent itself to the effective depiction of strongly contrasting light and shadow. Light pigments had to be built up in layers in order to stand out against the dark ground. The “contrast between dark shadows and well-defined highlights” is enhanced due to the darkened primer.¹²⁴ The basis for Velázquez’s early works was well suited to the tenebrism that is so apparent in his *bodegones*.

His paintings from the Seville period show a subtle progression from controlled, steady brushwork to a more vigorous, rather emphatic, handling. In addition to the looser brushstroke, he also worked wet on wet – utilizing a wet ground and wet paint, enabling him to blend together the opaque tones necessary for the representation of reality.¹²⁵ Velázquez intentionally limited his palette to inexpensive, abundantly available colors. Exceptionally rich colors were only used in important religious paintings in which the

¹²⁴ Ibid., 79.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 80.

Virgin Mary was depicted. The Sevillian clay used for the background is prone to flaking. Furthermore, his use of inexpensive pigments has rendered his paintings extremely unstable, causing them to lose much of their original color. Velázquez's earlier works, thoroughly indebted to the city of Seville and the specific materials located in that area, have unfortunately not held up over the course of time.

Velázquez's treatment of religious subjects and genre paintings was controversial, specifically because his paintings were "populated with mundane figures in contemporary dress and in commonplace settings."¹²⁶ This is especially evident in his work, *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, which utilizes a 'picture-within-the-picture' technique. This work, along with the other religious scenes he painted in Seville after becoming a master, demonstrates that Velázquez had the confidence to break with the "existing patterns of painting in Seville."¹²⁷ It exemplifies the fact that rather than mimic what his fellow Spaniards and mentors were creating in the visual arts, he instead looked to the radically different Flemish prints of genre scenes for inspiration.

His style did not lend itself easily to the purposes of the Baroque art. His influence and allusion are incredibly subtle, and his subjects may not be explained to the satisfaction of the casual observer.¹²⁸ His paintings may appear as an exploration of depiction, rather than the recreation of a narrative scene, as his contemporaries were accustomed to viewing.¹²⁹ Velázquez works, lacking the narrative present in religious and history paintings, were considered to be deficient in clarity and dramatic emphasis,

¹²⁶ Ibid., 108.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 109.

¹²⁸ Jonathan Brown, "Velázquez and the Evolution of High Baroque Painting in Madrid," 101.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 101.

according to some of his contemporaries.¹³⁰ Furthermore, his “obsession with capturing the most subtle and figurative effects of light and color” resulted in proto-impressionistic works that conflicted with the Baroque aesthetics that were popular at the turn of the seventeenth century.¹³¹

Velázquez took special care to depict each individual object as a sacred object. He dedicated a tremendous amount of time and effort to ensuring that each individual aspect of the scene not only properly represented the object he was depicting, but also ensuring that it properly fit in and reflected the scene as a whole. Inanimate objects, such as water jugs, eggs, and mortars and pestles became “almost transcendental.”¹³²

Velázquez’s most famous works that were created in Seville are his *bodegones* – a term developed in the seventeenth century to signify depictions of low class scenes. These scenes are not necessarily historical, but allow the modern day viewer to get an idea of what life was like for the lower class citizens during the seventeenth century in Spain. The tradition started in the Netherlands, due to the Reformation and the ban on religious images in the protestant Dutch lands. It was during this time that Dutch genre scenes and *bodegones* became very popular in the Netherlands. The *bodegone*, in Netherlandish tradition, depicts a tavern or kitchen scene in which a low class individual is eating or drinking, and is intended to be didactic and warn beholders against gluttony.¹³³ Velázquez’s *bodegones* are firmly rooted in the tradition of what a *bodegone* is, and reflect the tradition by always depicting humble people in humble settings.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 101.

¹³¹ Ibid., 103.

¹³² Ibid., 313.

¹³³ David Davies, “Velázquez’s *Bodegones*,” 52.

Velázquez's work received particularly positive reviews by his contemporaries, something that can be attributed to the fact that he interpreted his subjects with compassion, and never lost sight of the *bodegones* humble origins.¹³⁴ While his contemporaries appreciated the emotional content of his *bodegones*, the intense realistic depiction of his subjects was also appreciated.¹³⁵ Velázquez looked constantly and critically at the objects and scenes in front of him while creating his paintings; the result is that his paintings go beyond the representation of objects to create an entire atmosphere surrounding the depicted scene.

One of his earliest genre scenes is entitled *Three Men at a Table* (1618), and was created shortly after Velázquez completed his apprenticeship with Pacheco. This work contains the naturalistic depiction of figures and strong tenebrism that Velázquez's work later became known for, but it also is indicative of a young artist learning his craft. As Jonathan Brown notes, there are some aspects of the painting that are not unified into a whole composition, possibly due to the "desire to call attention to the novelty of the style."¹³⁶ Brown also notes that the exaggerated light on the figures indicates that this composition was compiled together piece by piece. At this time Velázquez was still following Pacheco's advice, and was putting time and effort into compiling completed figure studies into a whole scene. The most telling aspect of the scene, regarding Velázquez's method for composing this piece, is the universal emphasis on detail given to each aspect of the scene. This enables Velázquez to "demonstrate his impressive ability to reproduce light, color, and texture", but by treating each object separately,

¹³⁴ Ibid., 51.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 51.

¹³⁶ Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 7.

Velázquez sacrifices the compositional unity that he becomes famous for later in his life.¹³⁷ The scene portrays three figures grouped around a table, with an additional fourth figure representing a servant in the background. This composition has the figures surround the table, but looking at the viewer, ultimately representing a produced scene rather than a captured moment. The shadows on the table and the figures seem to be somewhat multi-directional, demonstrating that he did create studies of these figures at different times with different light sources, and compiled them together on the canvas later.

The work demonstrates his mastery of the technical elements of painting and is far more engaging than other works by many of Velázquez's contemporaries. He accurately captures the juxtaposition between hard and soft, transparent and opaque, angular and curved, demonstrating his mastery in recreating objects on canvas. Although it shows tremendous promise from a young artist, the painting is ultimately unresolved, due to the proportional inconsistencies and compositional disunity.

Three Musicians is a painting that was created at approximately the same time as *Three Men at a Table* and has a similar unresolved quality to it. In this composition, there are three figures grouped around a table, two of which are playing musical instruments. This scene attempts to depict the musicians mid-song, as the center figure is open mouthed and gazing up in apparent concentration. This scene, however, does not have the air of both verisimilitude and ephemerality that his later works will have. This seems less like a snapshot of an organic scene, and more like a composed, forced, and stoic set up.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 9.

The painting *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* (1618) exemplifies how Velázquez evolved during his stay in Seville. This work is the first genre painting that can be called a masterpiece, according to Jonathan Brown.¹³⁸ In this work, the treatment of light and colors are highly calculated. Light direction is uniform, but the reflection is selective, and only touches objects Velázquez wants to highlight. The palette of this painting is representative of the earthy nature of the city in which it was created. Earth colors are chosen due to the earthy setting. The somber color palette, with punches of color with the egg yolk or melons, reflects the gritty nature of Sevillian street life. Seemingly contradictory, Velázquez's meticulous calculation results in a composition with a realistic and seemingly fleeting representation of each figure and object in this one particular moment.

In *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* the subject matter itself shows the artist's intention to capture of a brief, specific moment. In this first scene of everyday life from Seville, the eggs are just beginning to congeal in the pan, and water is still moving in the glass vase.¹³⁹ This painting depicts a brief snapshot of the gritty, lowly, everyday lives of the Sevillian people struggling to survive. Both the child and the old women display a lack of emotion and exude a sense of boredom and monotony, adding to the bleakness of the scene and rendering it truly unidealized and lifelike.

The titular subject in *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* is serious in expression, dignified in countenance, soberly dressed, and clearly of the lower class. She is shown cooking eggs in a chipped earthenware dish. There is no narrative and no dialogue between the figures. It is as if Velázquez is truly capturing a real moment, but the action is suspended.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁹ Jonathan Brown, "Velázquez in Seville," 326.

The uncanny intensity with which Velázquez recorded this scene is riveting. Each object and or subject is observed separately and studiously, modeled in line and tone rather than color. The figures and objects in the foreground seem to pop out of the canvas toward the viewer, due to the characteristic strong tenebrism in Velázquez's works and minimal background. Ultimately, this work is not only resolved, but exceptional as "the representation of these characters and objects is realistic – it is both convincing and uncompromising."¹⁴⁰ Each object scrupulously based on nature, has its identity but is subordinated to a larger, unified and more complex vision, which is Velázquez's representation of nature. This scene, more than any other created in Seville, demonstrates Velázquez's phenomenological approach to painting because it is an expression of Velázquez's own experience. This work is a true "imitation of nature," which expresses the artist's subjectivity, and in doing so creates a unified pictorial composition.¹⁴¹

Created shortly after *Old Woman Cooking Eggs*, *Waterseller* was taken to Madrid with Velázquez in 1623 in an effort to secure a position in Philip IV's court as an artist.¹⁴² This painting captures Velázquez's ability to depict minute details. Velázquez was not forced to sacrifice treatment of any particular object in this work for the sake of clarity of the picture, unlike *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*. Instead, the individual objects in the painting each are represented with an "ostentatious demonstration of painterly skill," while also being "subordinated to the figures in an effective composition which seems to have an almost sacramental quality."¹⁴³ In particular the glass of water that the younger boy is holding is truly representative of Velázquez's painterly

¹⁴⁰ David Davies, "Velázquez's Bodegones," 57.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁴² Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 12.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 12.

philosophy. The glass “both admits and transmits light to objects within and beyond it” seemingly capturing every aspect of a specific moment of a scene.¹⁴⁴

The vertical format, which elevates some of the figures and objects, ultimately brings the figures closer together and intensifies the intimacy of their relationship. This scene is more monochromatic than some of Velázquez’s earlier works. There are no punches of color like *Old Woman Cooking Eggs*. This monochromatic aspect creates greater compositional unity. It also adds to the atmosphere that Velázquez is attempting to recreate. Ultimately “the formal harmony enhances the quiet stillness of the figures,” and enables Velázquez to truly capture the scene of a man selling water.¹⁴⁵

These works effectively convey Velázquez’s phenomenological approach to art. The viewpoints he represents are subjective, and incredibly descriptive. These works, especially his *bodegones*, encapsulate the notion of *Interweltsein* (“Being-in-the World”), and allow the modern viewer to experience seventeenth century Seville through Velázquez’s detailed, subjective depictions of everyday life. These are paintings that have gone “back to the things themselves.”

Velázquez continually represented scenes of faithful realism, which helped him achieve his ultimate goal of painting, imitation of nature.¹⁴⁶ The creation of these works signified to the public that the quotidian has an equal claim to artistic attention as every other genre of painting.¹⁴⁷ Velázquez proved, over the course of his career, that all art worthy of repute does not need to be religious, royal, or historical. He dwells lovingly on each bit of food and on each and every object. His “uncompromising naturalism” was

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹⁴⁵ David Davies, “*Velázquez’s Bodegones*,” 58.

¹⁴⁶ Jonathan Brown, “*Velázquez in Seville*,” 327.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 327.

considered “simpler, more purely objective, more truthful” than any other realist artists of the time.¹⁴⁸ His phenomenological attempt to overcome classical theorizing and get down to a basic description of objects and experience is one of the hallmarks of his work.

Velázquez’s progression in Seville culminated in his two major *bodegones*, *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* from 1618, and *Watersellers* from 1619. These ground-breaking works catapulted Velázquez onto the artistic scene and gained him notoriety and fame, which enabled his quick promotion to court painter for Philip IV. These genre scenes abandon the formulaic, carefully planned nature of his religious scenes and instead embrace the secular and spontaneous.

Velázquez’s *bodegones* are remarkable in his ability to depict different textures. In *Watersellers* Velázquez was able to flush out his study of age while also creating a study on texture. *Watersellers*, as well as all of Velázquez’s *bodegones*, demonstrate what Jose Lopez Rey sees as a “subtle interplay of light and shade” that enables the creation of not just a scene, but also an atmosphere.¹⁴⁹ Velázquez essentially created a snapshot of a scene, which was able to capture individual beads of water making their way down an earthenware jug. This type of work enabled Velázquez to explore and showcase his ability to depict everything he physically sees at a scene and to highlight the different textures seen with the naked eye that might not normally be transferred onto the canvas.¹⁵⁰ These works demonstrate that Velázquez’s career trajectory had truly broken with that of his master, Pacheco. Velázquez was no longer interested in trying to improve

¹⁴⁸ Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt, “A Brief History on the Literature of Velázquez” in *The Cambridge Companion to Velázquez*, ed. Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 9.

¹⁴⁹ Jose Lopez Rey, *Velázquez’s Work and World*, 30.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

upon nature, rather he wanted to get back to the visual basics of nature and elevate the quotidian to something worthy of artistic attention.¹⁵¹

In many of his early works, he tips the planes of tables or plates in order to allow the viewer to see all surfaces. This amalgamation of different perspectives renders some of his works ‘unfinished,’ but it allows Velázquez to focus on the human experience in his work. He is then able to faithfully recreate textures, objects, and figures on the canvas, and enable viewers who were not present at the time, to feel and see what that scene was like in real life.

This notion of intertwining human experience with the objective world has been deemed ‘*Inderweltsein*’ and is the essence of being, phenomenologically speaking. It is the idea that humans cannot exist apart from the world that is experienced. As Heidegger put it: “we experience the world . . . not as detached subjects or pure reason, but as actual human beings who exist at a particular time and place, and who interact with their surrounding world from that position in space and time.”¹⁵² If phenomenology is determined as an “analysis of how things appear to us in the course of our ordinary human interactions with the world” then it is clear that Velázquez may have been the first artist to express fully this idea of subjectivity and human interaction with a scene in paintings.

He takes painstaking care to properly depict textures, and often juxtaposes hard with soft, smooth with bumpy, shiny with rough.¹⁵³ Velázquez desperately wants to ensure that the viewer of his painting can see the true differences that are apparent to the

¹⁵¹ Jonathan Brown, “Velázquez in Seville,” 327.

¹⁵² Eric Matthews, *Merleau Ponty*, 12.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 12.

human eye while looking at a scene. He focuses all of these different textures and objects under a bright light that forces the viewer to contemplate the young painter's technical mastery and heighten the illusion of reality.¹⁵⁴ Velázquez would never abandon his singular vision of art and reality, and his greatest masterpiece, *Las Meninas* completed in 1656, "is a culmination of a lifetime's meditation on the function of the art of painting to recreate reality."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Jonathan Brown, "Velázquez in Seville," 328

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 329.

Conclusion

This thesis has suggested that Velázquez's work constituted something of an artistic revolution. As Jonathan Brown summarizes: Velázquez "invents a completely new way to structure the relationship between the world of art and the world of experience."¹⁵⁶ His unconventional approach to the art of painting, coupled with his radically free (for Seville) brushstrokes, as well as his attention to minute details, ultimately resulted in incredibly realistic representations. Jonathan Brown expresses the phenomenological dimension of Velázquez's work when he notes that it is "characterized by a remarkable sense for the look and feel of people and things; these pictures seem to reach deep into the essence of the visible world and to exalt it."¹⁵⁷

If Velázquez was the first artist to approach painting in a phenomenological way, then his work can be seen as a Baroque anticipation of modern art. Nineteenth century scholars considered him the "ultimate realist and the first impressionist."¹⁵⁸ His work has strong elements of realism and naturalism, and his approach to painting is a "faithful, observant, minutely ordered construction, a fusion of self and nature, in which the visible world is re-constructed" on the canvas.¹⁵⁹ While some scholars attest that Caravaggio's works directly influenced Velázquez's development as an artist, this thesis has argued

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 325.

¹⁵⁷ Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier*, 15.

¹⁵⁸ Susan L. Stratton-Pruitt, A Brief History on the Literature of Velázquez, 10

¹⁵⁹ Galen A. Johnson, "Phenomenology and Painting: Cezanne's Doubt." in *The Merleau-Ponty aesthetics reader: philosophy and painting*, 1-11, ed. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 11.

that the Sevillian's unique style was a product of an artist living at a specific place at a specific time. Velázquez was moved, first and foremost, by the various religious, cultural, and political trends that shaped his hometown in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The paradigm that would explain an artist's style in the sole terms of "artistic influence" needs to be reconsidered. Cultural and societal factors play an incredibly important role in the types of work an artist can create, and how an artist is exposed to different sources. It is misleading to assume that one artist's work can be reduced to a matter of the influence of the style and technique of another.

The scenes that Velázquez represents seem to formulate before the viewer's eyes. His works capture the essence of a scene, and allow the viewer to relive that scene as often as he or she desires. His works clearly have a phenomenological aspect to them, even if phenomenology as a theory had not been articulated during his lifetime. Velázquez is considered the forefather of the impressionist movement, due to his faithful representation of the world that he saw and the subjective nature of his works.

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