

16th and 17th century Spain



01a Apse of Sant Climent de Taüll, a fresco from Church of St. Climent de Taüll

The rooms of the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya also feature a particularly outstanding example of European Romanesque art: the remarkable, original and extraordinarily expressive paintings from the Apse of Sant Climent de Taüll, including the famous Pantocrator or Christ in Majesty, an undisputed masterpiece from the 12th century that forms tangible evidence of the creative power of Catalan painting.



Luis de Morales (1510?-1586)

02 *Pieta* 1516. The most popular Spanish painter of the early 17th Century, called by his contemporaries "The Divine", because of the religious intensity of his paintings. From the Renaissance he also frequently used sfumato modeling, and simple compositions, but combined them with Flemish style precision of details. His subjects included many devotional images, including the Virgin and Child.

El Greco



Self Portrait 1595-1600

Doménikos Theotokópoulos (1541 – 1614), most widely known as El Greco, was a painter, sculptor and architect of the Spanish Renaissance.

El Greco was born in Crete, which was at that time part of the Republic of Venice, and the center of Post-Byzantine art. He trained and became a master within that tradition before traveling at age 26 to Venice, as other Greek artists had done. In 1570 he moved to Rome, where he opened a workshop and executed a series of works. During his stay in Italy, El Greco enriched his style with elements of Mannerism and of the Venetian Renaissance. In 1577, he moved to Toledo, Spain, where he lived and worked until his death. In Toledo, El Greco received several major commissions and produced his best-known paintings.

El Greco's dramatic and expressionistic style was met with puzzlement by his contemporaries but found appreciation in the 20th century. El Greco is regarded as a precursor of both Expressionism and Cubism, while his personality and works were a source of inspiration for poets and writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke and Nikos Kazantzakis. El Greco has been characterized by modern scholars as an artist so individual that he belongs to no conventional school. He is best known for tortuously elongated figures and often fantastic or phantasmagorical pigmentation, marrying Byzantine traditions with those of Western painting.

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03a The Modena Triptych 1568, tempera on panel, 37 × 23,8 cm(central), 24 × 18 cm (side panels), Galleria Estense, Modena) is a small-scale composition attributed to El Greco.



03b *The Dormition of the Virgin* (before 1567, tempera and gold on panel, 61.4 × 45 cm, Holy Cathedral of the Dormition of the Virgin, Hermoupolis, Syros) was probably created near the end of the artist's Cretan period. The painting combines post-Byzantine and Italian mannerist stylistic and iconographic elements.



03d *The Disrobing of Christ (El Espolio)* 1577–1579, is one of the most famous altarpieces of El Greco, which are renowned for their dynamic compositions and sense of movement.



03e *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* 1586–1588, (oil on canvas, 480 × 360 cm, Santo Tomé, Toledo), now El Greco's best known work, illustrates a popular local legend. An exceptionally large painting, it is clearly divided into two zones: the heavenly above and the terrestrial below, brought together compositionally.

The Count of Orgaz was a pious man who, among other charitable acts, left a sum of money for the enlargement and adornment of the church of Santo Tomé (El Greco's parish church). He was also a philanthropist and a right-thinking Knight. According to the legend, at the time he was buried, Saint Stephen and Saint Augustine descended in person from the heavens and buried him by their own hands in front of the dazzled eyes of those present.



03f *View of Toledo* c.1596–1600, is one of the two surviving landscapes of Toledo painted by El Greco.



03g *Portrait of Jorge Theotocopoulos* 1600-05



03h *The Opening of the Fifth Seal* (or The Fifth Seal of the Apocalypse or The Vision of Saint John) 1608-14, was painted in the last years of El Greco's life for a side-altar of the church of Saint John the Baptist outside the walls of Toledo.

The subject is taken from the Book of Revelation (6:9-11), where the souls of persecuted martyrs cry out to God for justice upon their persecutors on Earth. The ecstatic figure of St. John dominates the canvas, while behind him naked souls writhe in a chaotic storm of emotion as they receive white robes of salvation.

The upper portion of the canvas appears to have been considerably cut down (it was destroyed in 1880). This lost upper portion may have resembled that of another altarpiece, the Concert of Angels, painted by El Greco for the same church, and also cut off. Many believed that the bottom section, which has been preserved, depicted profane love, while the missing upper part depicted divine love.

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

Juan Sánchez Cotán (1560 – 1627) was a Spanish Baroque painter, a pioneer of realism in Spain. His still lifes—also called bodegones—were painted in an austere style, especially when compared to similar works in the Netherlands and Italy.

In 1603, Sanchez Cotán, then in his forties, closed up his workshop at Toledo to renounce the world and enter the Carthusian monastery Santa Maria de El Pualar. He continued his career painting religious works with singular mysticism. In 1612 he was sent to the Granada Charterhouse; he decided to become a monk, and in the following year he entered the Carthusian monastery at Granada as a lay brother. The reasons for this are not clear, though such action was not unusual in Cotán's day.

Cotán was a prolific religious painter whose work, carried out exclusively for his monastery, reached its peak about 1617 in the cycle of eight great narrative paintings that he painted for the cloister of the Granada Monastery.



04a Quince, Cabbage, Melon and Cucumber 1602



04b Still Life with Game Fowl, Vegetables and Fruits 1602

Cotán established the prototype of the Spanish still life, called a bodegón, composed mainly of vegetables. Characteristically, he depicts a few simple fruits or vegetables, some of which hang from a fine string at different levels while others sit on a ledge or window. The forms stand out with an almost geometric clarity against a dark background. This orchestration of still life in direct sunlight against impenetrable darkness is the hallmark of early Spanish still life painting. Each form is scrutinized with such intensity that the pictures take on a mystical quality, and the reality of things is intensified to a degree that no other seventeenth-century painter would surpass.



04c Cardo y Francolín

Norman Bryson describes Sánchez Cotán's spare representations as abstemious images and links his work to his later monastic life. They are supposed to express a monastic denial of worldly

pleasure and richness: "Absent from Cotán's work is any conception of nourishment as involving the conviviality of the meal What replaces their interest as sustenance is their interest as mathematical form." His fruits and vegetables are arranged in beautiful ballet like compositions. The Carthusians are vegetarian, but many of his works contain game birds.

He depicted few artifacts other than the strings from which vegetables and fruits dangle, this being the common means in the seventeenth century of preventing food and vegetables from rotting. Even if the objects are arranged so that they seem close enough to touch, they are nevertheless distanced. For all the realism with which they are depicted, the isolation of each object, heightened further by the black background, lends them a monumental, almost sculptural gravity.

Jusepe de Ribera (1591 – 1652), born in Xativa, was a Spanish Tenebrist painter and printmaker. Ribera was a leading painter of the Spanish school, although his mature work was all done in Italy.



05a *Ecce Homo* 1620



05b *Archimedes* c1630

Tenebrism, from the Italian, tenebroso (murky), also called dramatic illumination, is a style of painting using very pronounced chiaroscuro, where there are violent contrasts of light and dark, and where darkness becomes a dominating feature of the image. The technique was developed to add drama to an image through a spotlight effect, and was popular during the Baroque period of painting.



05c *The Martyrdom of Saint Philip* 1639, is in the Prado, Madrid.

In his earlier style, founded sometimes on Caravaggio and sometimes on the wholly diverse method of Correggio, the study of Spanish and Venetian masters may be traced. Along with his massive and predominating shadows, he retained from first to last a great strength in local colouring. His forms, although ordinary and sometimes coarse, are correct; the impression of his works gloomy and startling. He delighted in subjects of horror.



05d Drawing



05e *Portrait*

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



06a *Probable Self Portrait*
c1635-40



06b *Immaculate Conception*
1630



06c *Saint Barbara as a Shepherdess* 1631



06d *Francisco Zumel* 1633



Zurbarán painted his figures directly from nature, and made great use of the lay-figure in the study of draperies, in which he was particularly proficient. He had a special gift for white draperies; as a consequence, the houses of the white-robed Carthusians are abundant in his paintings.

06f St. Francis in Meditation c1631-40. A fine example of his work is in the National Gallery, London: a whole-length, life-sized figure of a kneeling Saint Francis holding a skull.

Velázquez



Self Portrait c1640

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



07b *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* 1618, dates to his Seville period. Housed in the National Gallery, London. At this time, Velázquez was experimenting with the potential of the *bodegones*, a form of genre painting set in taverns (the meaning of *bodegon*) or kitchens which was frequently used to relate scenes of contemporary Spain to themes and stories from the Bible. Often they contained depictions of people working with food and drink.

Depicts the interior of a kitchen with two half-length women to the left; the one on the left appeared in his *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* from the same period. On the table are a number of foods, perhaps the ingredients of an *Aioli* (a garlic mayonnaise made to accompany fish). These have been prepared by the maid. Extremely realistic, they were probably painted from the artist's own household.

In the background is a biblical scene, generally accepted to be the story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42). In it, Christ goes to the house of a woman named Martha. Her sister, Mary, sat at his feet and listened to him speak. Martha, on the other hand, went to "make all the preparations that had to be made". Upset that Mary did not help her, she complained to Christ to which he responded: "Martha, Martha, ... you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." In the painting, Christ is shown as a bearded man in a blue tunic. He gesticulates at Martha, the woman standing behind Mary, rebuking her for her frustration.

The plight of Martha clearly relates to that of the maid in the foreground. She has just prepared a large amount of food and, from the redness of her creased puffy cheeks, we can see that she is also upset. To comfort her (or perhaps even to rebuke her), the elderly woman indicates the scene in the background reminding her that she can not expect to gain fulfillment from work alone. The maid, who cannot bring herself to look directly at the biblical scene and instead looks out of the painting towards us, meditates on the implications of the story, which for a theologically alert contemporary audience included the traditional superiority of the *vita contemplativa* (spiritual life) over the *vita activa* (temporal life), not that the latter was inessential. Saint Augustine had drawn this moral from the story in the 5th century, followed by countless other divines. In the Counter-

Reformation the usefulness of the "active life" was somewhat upgraded by many writers to counter Lutheran assertions of the spiritual adequacy of "faith alone".



07c *Old Woman Frying Eggs* is a genre painting by Diego Velázquez, produced during his Seville period. The date is not precisely known but is thought to be around the turn of 1618 before his definitive move to Madrid in 1623. It is now in the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh. Velázquez frequently used working-class characters in early works like this one, in many cases using his family as models; the old woman here also appears in his *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (1618).

Like other early works by the artist, it shows the influence of chiaroscuro, with a strong light source coming in from the left illuminating the woman, her utensils and the poaching eggs, while throwing the background and the boy standing to her right into deep shadow.



07d *The Venerable Mother Jerónima de la Fuente* 1620. Born to a noble family in Toledo, sister Jerónima de la Fuente Yáñez was a Franciscan nun at the convent of Santa Isabel in her native city. In 1620, at the age of sixty-six, she sailed from Seville to the Philippines, where she founded and became the first abbess of the convent of Santa Clara de la Concepción in Manila. There, she died in 1630. The portrait was undoubtedly made in Seville in June 1620, while she was waiting to embark on her long voyage. In it, she stands, energetically holding a crucifix in her right hand and a missal -or perhaps the rules of the order- in the left. This imposing image bears witness to Velázquez's activity before moving to Madrid, when he was immersed in a Caravaggiesque use of chiaroscuro with powerful characterizations and a crude light that unforgivingly emphasizes the irregularities of her face and hands. Her energy is marvelously expressed in her intense and scrutinizing gaze and her manner of wielding the crucifix, almost as if it were a weapon, as has often been observed.



07e *Apollo in the Forge of Vulcan*
1630



07f *Philip IV in Brown and Silver*
1632



07g *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* executed during a trip to Italy around 1650. Many artists and art critics consider it the finest portrait ever created. The painting is noted for its realism, in that it is an unflinching portrait of a highly intelligent, shrewd but ageing man.



Detail, Self Portrait

07h *Las Meninas* 1656. Its complex and enigmatic composition raises questions about reality and illusion, and creates an uncertain relationship between the viewer and the figures depicted. One of the most widely analyzed works in Western painting.

The painting shows a large room in the Royal Alcazar of Madrid during the reign of King Philip IV of Spain, and presents several figures, most identifiable from the Spanish court, captured, according to some commentators, in a particular moment as if in a snapshot. Some look out of the canvas towards the viewer, while others interact among themselves. The young Infanta Margaret Theresa is surrounded by her entourage of maids of honour, chaperone, bodyguard, two dwarfs and a dog. Just behind them, Velázquez portrays himself working at a large canvas. Velázquez looks outwards, beyond the pictorial space to where a viewer of the painting would stand. In the background there is a mirror that reflects the upper bodies of the king and queen. They appear to

be placed outside the picture space in a position similar to that of the viewer, although some scholars have speculated that their image is a reflection from the painting Velázquez is shown working on.

The back wall of the room, which is in shadow, is hung with rows of paintings, including one of a series of scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by Peter Paul Rubens, and copies, by Velázquez's son-in-law and principal assistant Juan del Mazo, of works by Jacob Jordaens. The paintings are shown in the exact positions recorded in an inventory taken around this time. The wall to the right is hung with a grid of eight smaller paintings, visible mainly as frames owing to their angle from the viewer. They can be identified from the inventory as more Mazo copies of paintings from the Rubens Ovid series, though only two of the subjects can be seen.

The paintings on the back wall are recognized as representing Minerva Punishing Arachne and Apollo's Victory Over Marsyas. Both stories involve Minerva, the Goddess of Wisdom and patron of the arts. These two legends are both stories of mortals challenging gods and the dreadful consequences. One scholar points out that the legend dealing with two women, Minerva and Arachne, is on the same side of the mirror as the queen's reflection while the male legend is on the side of the king.

Interpretation

The elusiveness of *Las Meninas*, according to Dawson Carr, "suggests that art, and life, are an illusion". The relationship between illusion and reality were central concerns in Spanish culture during the 17th century, figuring largely in *Don Quixote*: the best-known work of Spanish Baroque literature. In this respect, Calderón de la Barca's play *Life is a Dream* is commonly seen as the literary equivalent of Velázquez's painting:

What is a life? A frenzy. What is life?
A shadow, an illusion, and a sham.
The greatest good is small; all life, it seems
Is just a dream, and even dreams are dreams.



07j *The Surrender of Breda* 1634-5, was inspired by Velázquez's first visit to Italy, in which he accompanied Ambrogio Spinola, who conquered the Dutch city of Breda a few years prior. This masterwork depicts a transfer of the key to the city from the Dutch to the Spanish army during the Siege of Breda. It is considered one of the best of Velázquez's paintings.

One of twelve life-size battle scenes intended to perpetuate victories won by Philip IV's armies. It illustrates the exchange of keys that occurred three days after the capitulation between Spain and the Netherlands was signed on June 5, 1625. Hence, the focus of the painting is not on the battle itself, but rather the reconciliation. At the center of the painting, literally and figuratively, is the key given to Spinola by Justin of Nassau. The key is "the precise center of his design, [enclosing] it in an emphatic parallelogram so that it becomes the focus of the entire large canvas—literally the key to the composition, locking all other components into place."

The extraordinary respect and dignity Spinola demonstrated towards the Dutch army is praised through *The Surrender of Breda*. Spinola "had forbidden his troops to jeer at, or otherwise abuse, the vanquished Dutch, and, according to a contemporary report, he himself saluted Justin."

Velázquez's relationship with Spinola makes *The Surrender of Breda* especially historically accurate. The depiction of Spinola is undoubtedly accurate, and Spinola's memory of the battle contributed to the perspective with which Velázquez composed the painting. Velázquez's knowledge of the intimate history of the siege of Breda makes *The Surrender of Breda* an especially important historical commentary. Velázquez "desired in his modest way to raise a monument to one of the most humane captains of the day, by giving permanence to his true figure in a manner of which he alone had the secret." *The Surrender of Breda* salutes a moment of convergence between Spanish power, restraint, and kindness in the battle.

Alonso Cano (1601 – 1667) was a Spanish painter, architect and sculptor born in Granada. He was made first royal architect, painter to Philip IV.



08a *Ideal Portrait of a Spanish King* 1643



08b *Christ Gathering His Robes* 1646



08c *Crucified Christ* 1646

He was notorious for his ungovernable temper; and it is said that once he risked his life by committing the then capital offence of dashing to pieces the statue of a saint, when in a rage with the purchaser who begrudged the price he demanded.

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682) was a Spanish Baroque painter. Although he is best known for his religious works, Murillo also produced a considerable number of paintings of contemporary women and children. These lively, realist portraits of flower girls, street urchins, and beggars constitute an extensive and appealing record of the everyday life of his times. His first works were influenced by Zurbarán, Ribera and Cano, and he shared their strongly realist approach. The great commercial importance of Seville at the time ensured that he was subject to artistic influences from other regions. He became familiar with Flemish painting.



09a *The Young Beggar* c 1645 was the first of Murillo's many paintings of children, in which the influence of Velázquez is apparent.



09b *Boys Eating Grapes and Melon* c1645-46



09c *Saint Jerome* c1650-52



09c *Two Women at a Window* c1655-60