

An abstract painting featuring vibrant, layered colors including blue, yellow, red, and white. The brushstrokes are expressive and textured, creating a sense of depth and movement. The colors are applied in various directions, some horizontally and some vertically, with some areas appearing more saturated than others.

Contemporary Discussions In Art History

Sociohistorical
And
Psychological
Observations

Bruna Bejarano

 EDITORA
ARTEMIS
2020



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PRESENTATION

Art History is a vast field of study which, loosely explained, deals with the effort to understand how, historically, different groups and people represented their artistic talents. Philosophical and religious beliefs, economic conditions, psychological constructions — all the elements that play a role in the development of human beings — influence stylistic choices of artists, whether they are manifested in painting, sculpture, ceramics, architecture, or any other form of artistic efforts. An interdisciplinary field *par excellence*, Art History looks at art from a holistic perspective, trying to understand artistic manifestations in their relation to the time periods and social context in which they are produced. Cultural influences — such as religion, social arrangements, institutions and gender constructions — all have a direct impact on every human intellectual manifestation, including the arts.

This book, entitled “**Contemporary discussions in Art History: sociohistorical and psychological observations**” is a collection of six articles that point to some ways in which specific art works are either (or both) a revelation of a sociohistorical moment or a subversive attempt to transform their context by denouncing operating power structures. In one way or another, all artists studied in this book used their craft to affirm what they perceive as an agenda worth advancing.

I hope you enjoy reading it!

Bruna Bejarano

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THE ART OF RESISTANCE IN THE WORKS OF GUSTAVE COURBET, JACOB LAWRENCE, PABLO PICASSO AND BARBARA KRUGER

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ABSTRACT: This article centers in the discussion of how certain historical moments might have influenced the development of four artists who lived in different places and times: Gustave Courbet (France, 1819-1877), Jacob Lawrence (USA, 1917-2000), Pablo Picasso (Spain, 1881-1973) and Barbara Kruger (USA, 1945-). Courbet, Lawrence, Picasso and Kruger, knowingly to them or not, were all shaped and influenced by their sociohistorical context and engaged in artistic expressions that can be thought of as “Art of Resistance” – a form of art that seeks to denounce or invert dominant discourse, representing a sort of rebellion against the ruling powers and established ideas. Specifically, the purpose of this article is to briefly analyze ways in which Gustave Courbet, Jacob Lawrence, Pablo Picasso, and Barbara Kruger – who, as many other artists, critically tried to reflect upon human condition – engaged in “Art of Resistance,” taking a critical approach to society and challenging the ways it creates and maintains power structures that often mask injustices, abuse of power, censorship, misogyny and prejudice.

KEYWORDS: Art of Resistance; Gustave Courbet; Jacob Lawrence; Pablo Picasso;

Barbara Kruger.

1. INTRODUCTION

Art history is a field of study that can provide readers with great knowledge and understanding of the past, while giving insight into the present. It helps to organize and interpret facts and train the mind to evaluate different world views and perspectives. Most importantly, the study of art history encourages empathy and humanity, allowing for the visual apprehension of other people and societies through time.

Since human experience is not documented only in the pages of history books, but on the many objects and paintings produced by artists as well, artistic productions are also objects of historic relevance – a history which stands still, made of the marks of the creativity of those who left behind pieces of their culture, inviting us to reflect upon a moment, a person, an idea in time and of a time (PREZIOSI, 2009). For no other reason, the study of history encompasses the study of all human production, including the manifestations we call art.

This article centers in the discussion of

how the historical moment – the social factors that make up human existence at a certain given time and space – might have influenced in the development of four artists who lived in different places and times: Gustave Courbet (France, 1819-1877), Jacob Lawrence (USA, 1917-2000), Pablo Picasso (Spain, 1881-1973) and Barbara Kruger (USA, 1945-). Each of these artists dedicated at least part of their efforts to challenge dominant views of society through their work.

2. RESISTANCE: A COMMON DENOMINATOR

Gustave Courbet, Jacob Lawrence, Pablo Picasso and Barbara Kruger, knowingly to them or not, spurred artistic expressions that can be thought of as “Art of Resistance” – a form of art that seeks to invert the dominant discourse, representing a particular kind of rebellion against the ruling powers and established ideas. To resist against “power” is to fight oppression, to challenge the ways a society or culture create and maintain structures that often mask social injustice, abuse of power, censorship, misogyny and prejudice.

Barbara Kruger, in her book *Remote Control*, explains the great power of art as a tool of resistance and its ability – albeit at times limited – to disseminate a message from within the confines of the market or of a ruling class:

That doubt tempers belief with sanity. That ‘we’ are not right and ‘the enemy’ wrong. That it’s a good idea to remain self-critical when power is near. That God is not on our side. That all violence is the illustration of a pathetic stereotype. That the notion of ‘human rights’ should include the oppression of women. That it’s important to vigilantly look for the moment when pride becomes contempt. That TV and print journalism should begin to acknowledge and understand their ability to create consensus and make history. That certain terms are long overdue for examination and clarification. That it is time to question what is meant by the words ‘moral,’ ‘normal,’ ‘manhood,’ ‘community,’ ‘standards,’ ‘drawing the line,’ ‘values,’ ‘political,’ ‘objectivity,’ ‘agit-prop,’ ‘avant-garde,’ and the prefix ‘post’ in front of anything. That the issues of money, sex, power and racial difference are inseparable from one another. That the richness and complexity of theory should periodically break through the moats of academia and enter the public discourse via a kind of powerfully pleasurable language of pictures, words, sounds, and structures. That empathy can change the world. That feminisms suggest many ways to live a life and that they continue to question both the conventional arrangements of power and the clichés of binary oppositions. That there should begin to emerge in America a kind of secular intellectual who can fight the fear of ideas with clarity, generosity, humor and eloquence. (KRUGER, 1993, p. 223)

It is beyond the scope of this article to include all forms of artistic works of resistance, since they are possibly infinite and resistance is sometimes very subtle. The artists selected, however, were able to “push the envelope,” each in their own way exploring and (re)defining many of the issues pointed out by Kruger, within their respective social context.

Thus, the French Revolution ushered a new era of radical social change and thought that influenced the work of Gustave Courbet; the rise of the Harlem

Renaissance imprinted itself onto the art of Jacob Lawrence; the Spanish Civil War inspired Pablo Picasso's most celebrated piece: Guernica; and the social and cultural issues of the 70s gave way to poignant criticisms in the images of Barbara Kruger. Each of these artists were able to surpass the boundaries of their sociohistorical condition to look at the world from a new perspective, seeking to redefine it in their own terms.

3. GUSTAVE COURBET

Well aware of art's great capacity for propaganda and influence, Emperor Napoleon III¹ thought it wise to hold many art exhibitions in France in order to showcase progress and consolidate his power. Of course, both aspiring and recognized artists sought to exhibit their works at such events, including French painter Gustave Courbet.

Having submitted his paintings for approval to the jury of the *Exposition Universelle* of 1855, in Paris, Courbet had some of his works denied. Fighting against the decision, the painter established his own pavilion (outside the official one) in which he could display the artworks that were not accepted, finding himself somewhat at odds with the government².

Among the works was *The Painter's Studio, A Real Allegory Summing up a Seven-Year Phase of my Artistic Life* (below). In total, there are thirty-five life-size characters in the painting and it is divided into three parts, with Courbet as himself in the middle:

1. Charles-Louis Napoléon Bonaparte was the first President of France (elected in 1848). In 1851, unable to be re-elected, he seized power and founded the Second French Empire, becoming the Emperor until 1870, when France was defeated in the French-Prussian War.

2. Despite the fact that Napoleon III held a traditional taste for art, the monarch was not insensitive to public opinion, and came to be a great contributor to the French avant-garde. In 1863, following a complaint by artists Edouard Manet, Camille Pissarro and Johan Jongking, whose works had been refused by a jury organized under the conservative director of the Paris Salon, the Monarch signed a decree allowing for the rejected paintings to be exposed at a different part of the palace where the Paris Salon took place. The new exhibit, the *Salon des Refusés*, attracted thousands of visitors who were, for the most part, contemptuous about the works of art. Ironically, despite the ridicule and the mocking comments from critics and visitors, this put the avant-garde alongside traditional art.



Figure 1. The Painter's Studio, A Real Allegory Summing up a Seven-Year Phase of my Artistic Life, Gustave Courbet, 1855.

Courbet shared, in letters to colleagues, some insights that have allowed for an interpretation of the figures and better understanding of the work. On the left of the canvas, Courbet depicts “commonplace life,” represented by various types such as a priest, a worker and a hunter (who physically resembles Napoleon III). On the right lower corner, some of Courbet’s close friends can be seen, many of them advocates of the artistic movement known as Realism, which wished to see a true, natural (and not idealized) depiction of existence. Thus, scenes of everyday life and people, which were a departure from the allegorical subjects of the past, were favored.

In a way, Courbet’s title addresses and summarizes this notion: he is not painting fictional, idealized characters in his work, but real people who pertain to his time and place – many of which share in his views about art and society.

Noteworthy characters on the right include philosopher and anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon – who had been arrested and jailed from 1849 to 1852 for insulting Napoleon III – and art critic Charles Baudelaire. These real-life subjects are of particular interest for the analysis of the painting due to the political and artistic ideologies they symbolize: Proudhon for his socialist views and ardent criticism of capitalist society; Baudelaire, who was known for penning many essays in which he discussed the ills of modernity and the need for artists to express these troubles within their work.

In the center and at the heart of the image, a seated Courbet is seen painting a landscape – here he affirms the ideologies of his Realist colleagues: a return to nature in its purest form. An opposition to the superfluous cities that are consumed with luxury and desires and which only lead to a life of dissatisfaction and pain.

Courbet scrutinizes his environment and paints subjects deemed unworthy of depiction both artistically and politically, rejecting academic convention and assuming an approach that was in stark contrast with some of his contemporary fellows, including Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, who respected the ruling class and monarchy and abided by classical artistic ideals.

The painting *The Stone Breakers* (destroyed in the bombing of Dresden, in 1945), considered one of his first great works, was inspired by a group of peasants Courbet met on a roadside:



Figure 2. The Stone Breakers, Gustave Courbet , 1849.

In the 1820s, French Utopian Socialist Henri de San Simone appropriated the word *Avant Garde* to distinguish an elite body of artists whose imagination and skills could create an art capable of paving the way to a better society:

Let us be filled with one great idea: the well-being of society... We, the artists, will serve as the *avant garde*, for amongst all the arms at our disposal, the power of the Arts is the swiftest and most expeditious. When we wish to spread new ideas amongst men, we use, in turn, the lyre, ode or song, story or novel, we inscribe these ideas on marble or canvas, and we popularize them in poetry and in song. (NOCHLIN, 1989, p. 12)

According to art writer Linda Nochlin (1989), Courbet was one of the first artists to portray *Avant-Garde* content successfully, as he promoted socialist ideals and

represented the artistic movement of Realism. His materialism (the emphasis on the physical characteristics of his subjects, their material reality) would later also influence Cubism. In a nutshell, he challenged convention and redefined art by painting common subjects and highlighting social issues.

4. JACOB LAWRENCE

Decades later, and across the globe, a new form of art resistance was occurring in America. Beginning in the 1920s, black artists sought control over their representation and actively depicted the lives of African-American men and women in their work.

The Federal Arts Projects, under the New Deal, encouraged the development of many black artists, including Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000). This art movement would later be known as The Harlem or Negro Renaissance.

In his work entitled *The Migration Series*, Lawrence places African American social issues at the forefront of the national agenda (Dickerman and Smithgall, 2015). Occurring in the decades after the Civil War, the Great Migration represents the movement of African-Americans from the South to the North of the country:

(...) the accomplishments of community leaders, student organizations, politicians, and other advocates of racial equality in the 1950s and 60s would in many ways have been unthinkable without the example set by the millions of black migrants in previous decades. In leaving their homes, black Southerners collectively took a stand against the enforcement of racial discrimination that had plagued their social, political, and economic well-being for centuries. (GREGORY, 2005, p. 18)

Several factors contributed to this migration including economic inequality, unfair labor practices (specifically on farms) and racial discrimination in the South; compelling African-Americans to move North in hopes of better treatment and prosperity in factories.

Composed of 60 individual panels, the work is a visual representation of this migration of Southern African-Americans to the north of the country:

The migration constituted one of the greatest demographic transformations in U.S. history, recasting an overwhelming rural Southern population as a largely urban Northern one. Over the next six decades more than six million African Americans decided to seek better lives far from the farms and small towns that had been their homes, forever changing the nation's racial profile, political priorities and cultural landscape. (SCOTT, 1969, p. 44)

Seen on the panels are expressions of sorrow, people crowded and tired, lifeless bodies riding on trains in pursuit of work. The images are strong and cannot be easily overlooked; the viewer is forced to imagine the context and left to wonder how hopeless, lonesome and infuriating the plight of an underprivileged and discriminated working class must have been:



Figure 3. *The Migration Series*, Jacob Lawrence, Panel 3, 1940-41.

Panel number 3 (above) displays a crowd of black women and men, some with their heads down, others walking towards the horizon as they follow the flock of birds into the unknown. With them, they carry their belongings in bags and boxes, their faces appear with no distinct eyes, mouth or lips – they are anonymous.

Panel 13 (below) shows a field going to waste – without the efforts of black men and women, the crops have spoiled and there is nothing left to harvest:



Figure 4. *The Migration Series*, Jacob Lawrence, Panel 13, 1940-41.

The painting depicts the dried abandoned fields at the end of the black migration

from the South, and highlights the importance of African-American contribution to farming: since the time of slavery, the American economy relies heavily on the working force of its black population.

Symbolic of the racial and social injustice endured by Black Americans is panel 14 (below), in which two black males stand before a white judge with bulging eyes:



Figure 5. *The Migration Series*, Jacob Lawrence, Panel 14, 1940-41.

As it can be observed, the magistrate and his desk are well above the two men, and the canvas space the magistrate occupies is larger. The atmosphere is intimidating, oppressive: legal authority, as it was often observed by Lawrence during his own life, is not only worthy of respect, but fear, since it often worked against black Southerners. This painting is representative of the injustices of the legal system which, to this day, African Americans endure.

Panel 22, titled *One-Way Ticket*, also addresses the fact that black Americans are overrepresented in prison facilities, a racial issue that remains a serious social problem in the United States (HARVEY, 2004 , p. 37-51):



Figure 6. *One-Way Ticket*, Jacob Lawrence, Panel 22, 1941.

The three African-American men in *One-Way Ticket* stand before a prison's bars, with their heads down, their shoulders low, in a position of defeat. They are wearing street clothes, suggesting that they have been recently arrested, and the painting's title tells the rest of the story: there was no return for them in the system, no life after prison for the thousands of African-American men convicted and submitted to the brutal reality of being forced to work chained to a string of fellow prisoners (the chain gangs, a particularly shameful chapter in American history).

Lawrence's *Migration Series* stands as a reminder of the conditions from which Southern blacks desperately tried to escape when they massively left their homes and lives to find more social equality and economic opportunity in the North.

As for Jacob Lawrence, who was only 23 when he became the most celebrated African-American artist in America, he maintained social consciousness in his work. In his long career as an art professor, he continued to express resistance and enlighten the minds of people about the plea of marginalized communities of color.

5. PABLO PICASSO

During the mid to late-1930s, Spain experienced a civil war between right and left-wing groups. The Spanish Civil War was fought in the context of a world's climate that had many facets, as it encompassed class struggles, religious war and bipolarization between democratic versus dictatorial, communist versus fascist ideals. In many aspects, the Spanish Civil War was considered the preparation for

World War II, a sort of “dress rehearsal,” which included a number of atrocities.

In order to overthrow the left-leaning republic, right-wing General Francisco Franco sought the support of fascist Nazi Germany and allowed Adolf Hitler to test his bombs on the city of Guernica. The attack, which occurred on April 26, 1936, killed hundreds and left thousands injured. The bombing shocked and enraged citizens – including Pablo Picasso – propelling the Spanish artist to depict the event in his artwork.

Perhaps the most famous anti-war painting, *Guernica* (1937) was a response to the bombing of the small Spanish town:



Figure 7. *Guernica*, Pablo Picasso, 1937.

Asked by the Republican government to produce a work for the Paris World Fair, Picasso initially set out to paint a studio scene, but after the bombing felt compelled to change his theme. The large oil on canvas helped attract worldwide attention to the conflict.

Using a palette of gray, black, and white – possibly inspired by photographs and reports of the incident – Picasso portrayed the forces of good and evil; light and dark. On the left side of the frame, a grief-stricken mother with her head tilted back sobs while holding the lifeless body of her child: a reminiscence of Michelangelo’s *Pieta*, a reoccurring image of suffering in art.

Mid-center, underneath the bulb, a horse with his mouth ajar seems to suggest an agonizing scream – perhaps an allegory for the victims (GLAVES-SMITH, 2008).

The distorted and exaggerated forms of the characters also add emotional drama and intensity to the scene – the figures are dismembered and look broken beyond repair. The viewer is instantly reminded of the tragedies of war and, most importantly, of man’s inhumanity to man.

In the end, the Nationalists would prevail in Spain, marking the beginning of a 40-year dictatorship under Franco's regime. Yet, to this day, Guernica remains an impactful and consistent reminder of an anti-war message. Picasso's piece indeed transcended its time. In fact, it is still so well understood that Colin Powell refused to take a picture with the work (or be seen near it) when he was trying to make a case for the Iraq war in 2003.

Besides campaigning for world peace, Picasso was a fierce opponent to fascism, and particularly to General Franco and his brutal regime. In *The Dream and Lie of Franco* (1937), a series of 18 images (arranged in two separate sheets of print of 9 images each), Picasso satirizes Franco by exposing how the dictator's flawed discourse in defense of conservative values and Spanish culture was at odds with all the destruction his actions inflicted to his country.

In 1951, the painter would again engage in openly political painting. *Massacre in Korea* (below), a criticism of American participation in the Korean War, depicts the Sinchon Massacre, in South Hwanghae Province, North Korea, in which civilians were killed by anti-communist forces:



Figure 8. *Massacre in Korea*, Pablo Picasso, 1951.

The expressionist painting was inspired by the atrocities associated with the participation of American troops in the mass killing. The composition is divided into two parts: in the left, defenseless naked women and infants stand, waiting to be executed and fall into the mass grave behind them. The army of strong but castrated and heavily armed "knights" stand in a ready-to-attack position - their condition as destroyers of life contrasting to the fact that the women on the left are pregnant and/or have young children.

Picasso continued painting throughout his long life: always true to his non-conformist spirit and continually innovative styles, he produced around twenty-two thousand works and is considered the most influential artist of the 20th century.

6. BARBARA KRUGER

Having been a commercial graphic designer early in her career and an art director for Conde Nast magazine in the late 1960s, Barbara Kruger is known for effectively combining simple words and images that address broad and controversial topics in her art.

With her background in advertisement, Kruger is able to employ the same strategies used to sell products or ideas to an audience to disseminate messages that challenge the ways we think about gender, politics and consumerism. Kruger's use of collage, appropriation, simplification, blurring of high art and popular culture and rejection of social ideologies have contributed to her classification as a “postmodern” artist (HEARTNEY, 2001).

Using mostly black-and-white photographs (often appropriated from well-known mainstream media) overlaid with white-on-red captions, Kruger's hallmark is to subvert dominant discourse (DROZDEK, 2006). In her works, she often addresses issues of identity, sexuality, reproductive rights and other socially relevant issues.



Figure 9. *Your comfort is my silence*, Barbara Kruger, 1981.

The almost cryptic text in “Your comfort is my silence” is delivered by an image of a male gesturing for the viewer to be silent. On closer observation, two messages are juxtaposed: if read in the order it is presented, the artwork says “your comfort is my silence.” However, if the text in the red caption (which stands out) is read first, the text reads “your silence is my comfort.” The play on words is also a self-referent statement that highlights the fact that Kruger uses advertising to dispute the very same ideas advertising sells.

That is, magazines and the power structure they represent (in the early 80s, advertising was still a male industry) may openly try to tell female viewers their comfort is what will keep them silent, when, in reality, what that message is concealing is that both men and the advertising industry (representative of the interests of a consumerist society) were more comfortable when women did not manifest their discontent.

On April 26, 1989 the Supreme Court was set to hear a case that many believed would overturn the *Roe vs. Wade* decision, which gave women the legal right to have an abortion. Made for the Women’s March in Washington – that was to be

held before the hearing – was Kruger’s untitled piece known as “Your body is a battleground,” advocating women’s reproductive rights:



Figure 10. *Your body is a battleground*, Barbara Kruger, 1989.

The words “body” and “battleground” pose questions to the observer, who has been addressed with a resounding “your.” In this case “your body” encompasses all women’s bodies. This way, Kruger highlights the female condition in the backdrop of the political climate. The woman’s bisected face represents the divide of her freedom of choice, currently under threat and being fought over – but not by her, since even she has been forgotten, her body itself is but a battleground.

Works such as *Your Comfort is my Silence* (1981) and *Your Body is a Battleground* (1989) highlight the intricate connection between politics and gender issues. Interpreted as pieces of feminist art, these works are art of resistance in its finest hour, for they are art and protest.

Market economy – a central tenet of capitalism – is also a recurrent theme in Barbara Kruger’s work. By means of visual language, exploring the Futura text-type she learned to use earlier in her career as a graphic designer and picture editor for magazines (financed by advertisers), she challenges the ways in which advertising influences all of our choices.

One pillar of a market economy is freedom of choice – in theory, shoppers

would buy solely based on their self-interest, able to interfere in the market by the logic of supply and demand and guided by notions of need and convenience. In reality, however, market economy is commanded by the values of society, which, in turn, are usually shaped by the wealthiest and influence our concepts about class, fashion, status, money and success: we are not as free to choose as we would like to think we are.

For this reason, Karl Marx's notion of "Commodity Fetishism" is often explored in the works of Kruger, who takes interest in society's relationship with money and material objects. In an essay entitled "Commodity," by Paul Woods, the author explains this idea further:

commodity becomes a power in society. Rather than a use value for people, it assumes a power over people, becoming a kind of god to be worshiped, sought after, and possessed. (NELSON & SHIFF, 1996, p. 257)

In Kruger's *I shop therefore I am* (below), she confronts the issues of this power with her viewer:



Figure 11. *I shop therefore I am*, Barbara Kruger, 1987.

With an appropriation and reworking of the famous Rene Descartes idiom "I think therefore I am," Kruger suggests that our thoughts and ideas are no longer what give us meaning and define our existence, but it is the items we are able to purchase that do.

Society has transferred the material worth of the things we own to our own worth as human beings. The "I," at first glance, seems to refer to the artist, which

would remove the viewer from responsibility; quickly, however, we realize we are the “I” because we are bound to the system and constantly being redefined by it. Where all things and people are evaluated not by their intrinsic value, but by values that are socially constructed, “to have” is more important than “to be” – and those who lack competitive advantage are excluded.

Art critic Lucy Lippard has expanded on the talent of Barbara Kruger to use visual art to promote awareness:

Artists alone can't change the world. Neither can anyone else, alone. But we can choose to be part of the world that is changing. There is no reason why visual art should not be able to reflect the social concerns of our day as naturally as novels, plays and music...The more sophisticated artists become, the more they able to make art that works on several levels. They can make specific artworks for specific audiences and situations, or they can try to have their cake and eat it too, with one work affecting art audiences one way and general audiences another...Art that is not confined to a single context under the control of the market or a ruling class taste is much harder to neutralize. And it is often quite effective when seen within the very citadels of power it criticizes. (DROZDEK, 2006, p. 1)

Whether addressing gender issues and reproductive rights or analyzing the social phenomenon of consumerism, Kruger's art has affected audiences for more than four decades, conveying messages that shake established ideas and revolutionize both the concept of art and the world.

7. CONCLUSION

The art of Gustave Courbet, Jacob Lawrence, Pablo Picasso and Barbara Kruger often extrapolated their context, challenging the *status quo* and stimulating reflections about different facets of human experience. Able to work around the controls of the power structures of their times, these artists produced art that has remained as indelible marks of the time and place in which they were produced.

Moreover, they reflect how those artists sought to deal with the issues that were relevant to them at the moment, constituting true instances of resistance through art expression: Courbet by challenging the power of Napoleon, Lawrence by revealing the cruelty of the treatment blacks received, Picasso by denouncing the horrors of war and Kruger by using the power of publicity to tackle socially relevant issues of her time and promote reflections on the many failures of our society. Each of them redefined the world in their own terms.

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RENE MAGRITTE: A TENTATIVE PSYCHOANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT: Considered a main contributor to the Surrealist movement, Rene Magritte explored ordinary objects to revise our standard definition of reality. Heavily influenced by the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, surrealist artists attempted to tap into that portion of mental experience that may not be available to the conscious mind. The purpose of this article is to analyze the influence of psychoanalytical thought in Rene Magritte's paintings, in an attempt to offer explanations for the recurrent use of faceless women in his works and the possible relation between this choice of subject to the tragic death of the artist's mother. It is known that Magritte himself denied any connection of his work to his past. However, it is improbable that his depiction of coffins and the choice of faceless and cloth-covered women in many of his paintings are mere coincidences dissociated from his life experiences.

KEYWORDS: Rene Magritte; Surrealism; psychoanalysis and art.

1. INTRODUCTION

The most celebrated Belgian artist of the 20th century was born in Brussels, Belgium,

in 1898, and died in 1967, in his hometown. Despite the fact that his father was a wealthy manufacturer, at the beginning of his career he worked a series of jobs including commercial artist, advertising and book designing in order to support himself and his wife. Although he refused the title of "artist," preferring to think of himself as a man of thought who communicated through his paintings, Magritte is a recognized Surrealist painter who achieved great popular acclaim for his work, which revolutionized our sense of the familiar. In spite of his success, he led a mostly quiet and anonymous existence avoiding the ostentatious lifestyle of his Surrealist peers.

While Magritte maintained a degree of separation from his Parisian surrealist colleagues – even renouncing the title of Surrealist as well – he is considered a main contributor to the Surrealist movement by art historians. The hallmark of Magritte's style undeniably connects him to Surrealism as he would arrange subjects and depict the state of mind in ways that revise our standard definition of reality.

The inner mind as inspiration was at the core of the Surrealist movement, heavily influenced by the study of psychoanalyst

Sigmund Freud, who employed the word unconscious to describe the portion of mental experience that may not be available to our conscious minds. It is the purpose of this essay to advance a possible psychoanalytical study of Rene Magritte's paintings, and more specifically, the recurrent subject of faceless women and its probable connection to the tragic death of the artist's mother, Regina, who committed suicide when Magritte was 14 years old.

2. FREUD AND PSYCHOANALYSIS¹

The theory of the mind proposed by Sigmund Freud highlighted the fact that part of our mental activity may be unconscious or subconscious (although the terms are often used interchangeably in other fields, in Psychoanalysis the term unconscious is preferred): that is, not readily available to our rational and conscious mind. While other thinkers had addressed the idea of the unconscious, Freud is credited with making it scientifically respected and recognized by psychologists and psychiatrists in the Western world. His theories greatly influenced both Psychology and Psychiatry and today most clinical psychologists and psychiatrists use variants of psychoanalysis in their practice.

Freud also greatly influenced other areas of thought, including the arts. Despite criticism of the science behind his theories, many of his ideas became mainstream throughout the 20th century: the tripartite model of the human mind (id, ego, superego); the Oedipus and Electra Complex; defense mechanisms, and especially, the clinical method of psychoanalysis – based on free association (method of interpretation of the patient's free flow of thoughts, expressed as they occur), on the interpretation of dreams, slips of the tongue; faulty acts, etc. – all of which constitute forms of unveiling the unconscious mind.

Defense mechanisms, in turn, are ways in which the mind operates to protect one's ego from hurtful or undesirable thoughts or feelings and, in general, are well-known to the public, although the way they operate may not always be clear to most people who use these terms: denial, rationalization, repression, projection, acting out and even altruism were defined by Freud as defense mechanisms.

It is not the purpose of this article to deeply analyze all mechanisms, but a few will be pointed out in the analysis of some of Magritte's paintings and briefly explained as they serve as a possible insight into his art.

1. Psychoanalysis – or the analysis of the psyche – is both a field of study and a method of treatment which arose in the 1890s, developed by the physician Sigmund Freud to deal with psychic disorders by investigation of the unconscious. Since Freud, psychoanalysis has developed in many ways, and today there are several schools –founded by his various disciples and their disciples.

3. THE UNCONSCIOUS IN SURREALISM AND IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

In the first “Manifesto of Surrealism,” Breton identified “automatism,” which means to perform an action unconsciously, as one of its key elements. Magritte, on the other hand, renounced automatism, according to his friend Suzi Gablik because of its inauthenticity, as “would-be spontaneity of automatism, in that it seemed to him to be contrived, ultimately the result of too mechanical and mediumistic a process” (Gablik *apud* ALLMER, 2009, p. 93).

Magritte’s rejection of automatism voiced the criticism of many art historians including that of writer George Bataille, who believed that the unconscious effort put forth by Surrealists was all too conscious. As Eugene Tériade described in 1930, “the return to instinct undertaken by the Surrealist is self-defeating for the very reason that everything in this effort was conscious, highly conscious, calculated and premeditated” (LOMAS, 2000, p. 3).

The very decision of Magritte to distance himself from the Surrealists acknowledges that he may well have been one of the few of them who understood the paradoxical state of the art they produced. However it may be, and whether Magritte and other critics were right or not about the possibility of artists to consciously tap into the unconscious, there is no doubt that in all other respects Magritte’s art adjusts to the definitions of Surrealist art, and had psychoanalysis as its muse and the unconscious mind as a constant subject.

In fact, one of his hallmarks was to play with the constraints of the rational mind, creating art pieces which were provocative to the viewers and posed the idea that something was hidden from them. Even though he declared often that his paintings hid nothing, and that it was not his intention for them to “have a meaning,” he famously also stated that “*Everything we see hides another thing, we always want to see what is hidden by what we see.*”

Interestingly, Freud seemed to have shared Magritte’s doubts about the Surrealist claim that one could access the creativity repressed in the unconscious, as he personally refused an invitation by Andre Breton to work on a Collection of Dreams, citing the following reason:

that which I call the ‘manifest dream’ is not of interest to me, I dealt with the search for the ‘latent dream’ content which one can extract from the manifest dream by analytical interpretation. A collection of dreams without enclosed associations, without knowledge of the dreaming circumstances says nothing to me and I could hardly imagine that it could say to others. (Freud *apud* LOMAS, 2000, p.5)

In other words, Freud believed that a dream – and, by analogy, all other forms of tapping into the unconscious – could be interpreted only in its context: the same dream could mean different things in different circumstances. To psychoanalysts, the dream is but a tool, a means to an end used for psychoanalytical interpretation.

To Surrealists, however, to depict a dream was the main purpose, an end in itself: Salvador Dali openly voiced his reservations at the possibility of interpreting the products of the unconscious declaring that rational interpretation dissipates its complexity (LOMAS, 2000, p. 6).

4. A POSSIBLE PSYCHOANALYSIS OF MAGRITTE'S ART

It is the major premise of this research that although Magritte denied any connection of his work to his past, it is practically impossible, even for a non-Freudian, to miss the coincidences between his paintings and his life experiences; especially in relation to death and even more so his mother's suicide and how his art seem to take a high interest in coffins, the faceless and cloth-covered people.

The two paintings below highlight the presence of coffins and coffin-like containers in Magritte's artworks:



Figure 1. The Reckless Sleeper, 1928.



Figure 2. *The Vulture's Park*, 1926.

As Patricia Allmer noted, the sleeper in Figure 1 seems unaware that his peaceful resting place is a coffin; while the structure in *The Vulture's Park* (Figure 2) contains the only living object of the painting, representing a state between life and death.

Below, in *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (Figure 3), the body of a woman is covered by nightgown hanging in a cupboard, establishing ghostliness in different dimensions (ALLMER, 2009, p. 173-174):

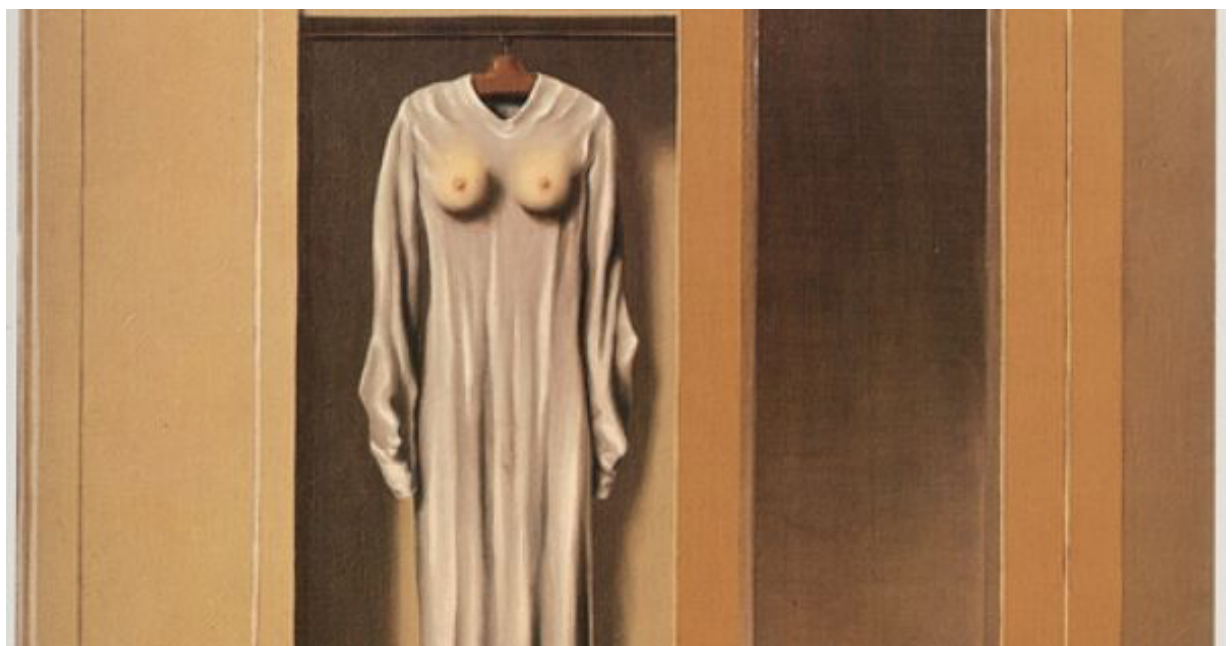


Figure 3. *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, 1936.

Judging by the intense interest in lifeless objects (or death) that his art

demonstrates, it doesn't seem to be a far-fetched idea to believe that from an early age Magritte might have censored feelings and thoughts about some of his life experiences (censorship is a defense mechanism consisting of selectively creating a barrier between the conscious and the unconscious mind, which leads to repression, or the "pushing back" of unpleasant or traumatic events into the unconscious). As it seems to be the case, repression could be at work in Magritte's art expression: it is possible that events he refused to acknowledge explicitly played an important role in his development as a Surrealist and some of his art's unique characteristics may give us a glimpse of what occupied his mind.

One such characteristic is that of painting hidden faces – which were a recurring theme in Magritte's art, as can be observed, for example, in the painting *The Lovers II* (1928):



Figure 4. *The Lovers II*, 1928.

The most interesting element of the painting is, undoubtedly, the fact that the lovers' faces are covered with veils. The couple is depicted kissing through veils tightly covering their heads, in a room with a low ceiling, between two walls: one psychological impact being that of a suffocating atmosphere. An alternative explanation is that this might also have been a true manifestation of Magritte's repressed memories, and may have served as a way of coping with his mother's drowning in 1912. When he was only 14 years old (his mother was found lifeless, by her children and husband, with her nightgown wrapped around her face in the

Sambre river, the same night she died).

According to Suzi Gablik, who was a close friend of the artist, Magritte claimed to recollect very little about the passing of his mother, and one of his only memories was that of becoming the center of attention and developing an enlarged sense of identity – and a certain pride – from being the son of the “dead woman”.

If Magritte was truthful when saying he did not remember much about the evening his mother passed away, and also in saying that his paintings were not a reflection of his life, his work can be seen as either a Freudian experience of suppression, and later release, through art, of memories pushed into the unconscious, or an uncanny coincidence, since Magritte chose to paint faceless figures all throughout his life.

As it is explained in Psychoanalytic Theory, defense mechanisms are also unconscious – and it could be argued that not for any other reason but denial, Magritte always refused to acknowledge the influence of his past on his artworks or any hidden meaning behind them:

“One often asks oneself, what does my painting hide. Nothing!” (ALLMER, 2009, p. 1)

“Inspiration is the moment when one knows what is happening. In general, we do not know what is happening.” (GABLIK, 1985, p. 14)

“I detest my past and anyone else's.” (GABLIK, 2185, p. 17)

Magritte's *The Central Story* (1927) seems to also offer a glimpse on a past perhaps the painter remembered more than he would allow himself to admit, as even the title chosen for the painting is suggestive: who's “central story” could be closer to the art than his own?



Figure 5. *The Central Story*, 1927.

Mary Ann Caws, an accomplished academic on Surrealism and Modernist art and literature, discusses Magritte's *The Central Story*:

Magritte's painting mysteriously juxtaposes a veiled woman, a tuba and an attaché case: three recurring motifs in his work of the late 1920s. According to David Sylvester, the artist first referred to this work as *The Veiled Woman*, and both his provisional title and the final one have been read as having highly personal significance for Magritte. From biological information passed on by the artist to Louis Scutenaire, it is known that the image of the veiled woman relates to his mother's apparent suicide by drowning (CAWS, 2004, p. 87)

More disturbing than the veiled faces, the painting below reveals a half-human, half-fish figure stranded on a beach:



Figure 6. *The Collective Invention*, 1934.

The figure's upper body is that of a fish and, judging by the way it lays on the sand, it is either already dead or drowning. Even though the depiction is often interpreted as a mockery of the figure of a mermaid (a collective invention, as the title suggests), it may also be seen as related to the unconscious subject matter of death by drowning.

According to Gablik (1985), Magritte profoundly disliked to have his art analyzed, and recounted to her one such circumstance in which someone tried to discuss his paintings with him: “He had me cornered for an hour telling me sublime and incomprehensible things about my painting. What a pain in the neck!”

Gablik noted, however, that when Magritte encountered people uninterested in his art, he also found it “a pain in the neck!” – which indicates he was not at all insensitive to social acceptance and public recognition.

In fact, it may be that Magritte’s art unconsciously served him two purposes, which can be appreciated better through the understanding of the concept of sublimation, advanced by Freud and later reinterpreted by his followers to amplify the concept. Understood today as a higher order defense mechanism, sublimation occurs when socially unacceptable impulses are unconsciously channeled into acceptable or even valuable social activities, such as the redirection (displacement) of energy into sports, literature, cultural endeavors, creative invention or artistic expression. Sublimation serves to protect the mind as it guarantees that instincts that could be violent or aggressive (therefore met with social resistance and result in frustration to the ego) are shifted into activities that are both a form of release

of these instincts and a satisfaction to the ego – as in Magritte's case, a channel through which he could release the anger and sadness his mother's suicide certainly generated and also a satisfying profession as a recognized artist.

5. CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that Magritte denied any influence of his life experiences in his work, it is highly unlikely that anyone's artistic expression may be analyzed without any reference to the creator. Freud's idea that a dream is only a tool for accessing the mind if in connection with a person's entire context can also be applied to the tentative understanding of the forces behind creativity in the artistic field.

The paintings of lifeless or faceless subjects, coffin-like structures and faces covered with a cloth certainly reveal more about the inner contents of Magritte's mind than he desired to discuss or was perhaps aware of himself.

It is almost unlikely, however, that his mother's suicide by drowning and especially the form in which her body was recovered – with her face covered by part of her dress – is disconnected to Magritte's art.

If it is true that our inner monsters can be controlled by the satisfaction of instincts from the id (a large portion of our unconscious), or the release of repressed traumas there contained, it is possible that Magritte found peace of mind through his own "psychoanalysis" in the form of painting.

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DECORUM IN RELIGIOUS PAINTINGS

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ABSTRACT: The Council of Trent – convened between 1545-1563 within the context of the religious movement known as the Counter-Reformation – embraced art as a tool for catechesis and evangelization. Although art was not the main point in the agenda at the time, prominent Catholic figures established guidelines about its proper content through several writings produced during and after the Council. In fact, the Catholic Church was the first institution to consistently engage in the activity of propaganda, creating a new administrative body inside the Church to oversee the propagation of the catholic faith. Thereafter, the issue of *decorum* became a central element to be considered by artists: religious art ought to be appropriate to its ecclesiastical objectives. The censorship imposed by the Church created limitations to artistic activity and affected the artistic production of the period. While Catholics fully embraced an aesthetic of embellished works that appealed to the emotions and had the specific objective of silent preaching, Protestant art sponsored a more humble, simpler approach

to religious themes in works that were true to the values of Reformers. Besides, without the patronage from ecclesiastical sources, Protestant countries saw a huge reduction in the amount of religious art, opening the way for more secular works: genre, portrait, historical painting and still-life grew in demand.

KEYWORDS: Decorum; Counter-Reformation; Council of Trent and art.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the religious movement known as the Protestant Reformation¹ initiated by Martin Luther in the 16th century, a delayed but vigorous reaction by the Catholics ensued. The Council of Trent – an ecumenical council of the Catholic Church that was held in 25 separate sessions from 1545-1563 and overseen by three different popes over the course of those years – embodied the spirit of the Counter-Reformation.

Although the Council condemned the selling of indulgences (one of the main reasons for the Protestant Reformation), it passed several decrees aimed at reaffirming

1. The Protestant Reformation (ca. 1517-1555) was an initially religious reform set forth by Martin Luther's "95 theses" (embraced by many other reformers, such as John Calvin, Henry VIII) which challenged the Catholic Church's power and authority to define Christianity. It triggered wars and had vast political, cultural and intellectual implications that changed the entire European Continent and the world.

the dogmas of the Catholic faith and defining as heresies the objections of the Protestant doctrine. Thus, it glorified the worshiping of the Virgin Mary and the saints; emphasized the doctrine of transubstantiation and confirmed Latin as the language for saying the Mass. In addition, it reactivated the Inquisition (*Tribunal do Santo Ofício*), reaffirmed the doctrine of papal infallibility and confirmed the seven sacraments, the indissolubility of marriage and the existence of purgatory.

In other words, the Council of Trent forcefully strengthened the Catholic dogmas by an uncompromising defense of them. It also embraced art as a tool for catechesis and evangelization. The Second Decree of the Council of Trent, “On the invocation, veneration and relics of saints and on sacred images,” affirms the importance of art for religious teaching:

And the bishops shall carefully teach this,- that, by means of the histories of the mysteries of our Redemption, **portrayed by paintings or other representations**, the people is instructed, and confirmed in (the habit of) remembering, and continually revolving in mind the articles of faith; as also that great profit is derived from all sacred images, not only because the people are thereby admonished of the benefits and gifts bestowed upon them by Christ, but also because the miracles which God has performed by means of the saints, and their salutary examples, are set before the eyes of the faithful (...) Moreover, in the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, and **the sacred use of images**, every superstition shall be removed, all filthy lucre be abolished; finally, all lasciviousness be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust; nor the celebration of the saints, and the visitation of relics be by any perverted into revellings and drunkenness; as if festivals are celebrated to the honour of the saints by luxury and wantonness. (MATHIAS, 1832, p. 402).

Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), an important figure in the later sessions of the Council, wrote a treatise about the proper content of art. In his *De sacris et profanis imaginibus* (Sacred and profane images, 1582), the former Archbishop of Bologna argued for the power of holy images in the development of Catholic devotion:

Not the first, but perhaps the most influential strategists of propaganda for the Church's power, he knew exactly how man's mind worked, how society functioned, and what one should do to make the medium carry the message. To him, beyond the written text, it was the spoken word, but even more, the visual image that were the most influential information carriers. (RIETBERGEN, p. 17)

More specifically, to Paleotti art was to be used to influence the public into accepting the religious Catholic teachings and to secure the Church's power: a tool of propaganda that better achieved its goal when it reached people's hearts. Baroque culture – and painting style – developed precisely from this notion of an all-encompassing emotion.

To reach people's feelings, Paleotti thought, one needed to consider the consumers and the producers of art. To him, society was divided into four categories of people: the “spirituali” (represented by the clergy, who generally were the most

powerful group even in non-papal states) and the “letterati” (which included the nobility and all literate members of society) were the actual producers of art, in the sense that their patronage was what sustained it. The “pittori” was the third group, and included those who could be employed or paid to use their skills to represent the messages the producers of art would like to convey in an adequate manner, tuned to the groups they intended to reach. Finally, the fourth and largest group (about 85% of all females and 75% of males, by his estimate) was the “idioti,” formed by the illiterate who were the target group - the intended consumer of art. Thus, in the shrewd analysis of Paleotti, artists were instrumental in the conveying of the message, as they were the “image builders” of the time.

The Catholic Church was, in fact, the first institution to consistently engage in the activity of “propaganda” – the term itself was coined in the context of the Counter-Reformation, and has its origin in the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Propaganda Fide), which created a new administrative body inside the Church to oversee the propagation of the Catholic faith.

2. PROTESTANT VERSUS CATHOLIC ART

The Protestant Reformation, in varying degrees, triggered a wave of destruction of imagery in many countries: paintings, sculptures and other Catholic decorations were removed from churches, usually burned, and replaced with more “Protestant” items. The dismantling often yielded treasures: the enormous wealth of the Catholic Church, mostly in the form of land ownership and gold relics, was an incentive to many political leaders who supported the Protestant Reformation. As an additional benefit, secular rulers gained greater control over churches traditional affairs, such as the appointment of clergy. Thus, while Catholics fully embraced an aesthetic of embellished works that appealed to the emotions, Protestant art sponsored a more humble, simpler approach to religious themes in works that were true to the Christian values of Reformers.

The difference in theological approaches was reflected in the choices of subject: images of the Immaculate Conception, the Annunciation of the Virgin and the Transfiguration of Christ became recurrent in the sacred art produced by Catholic artists. Protestants, on the other hand, favored paintings that were more naturalistic, less symbolic: according to Protestant theology, the relationship between the worshipper and God was an individual one, thus common people, landscapes and ordinary scenes were all pleasing to God. Without the patronage from ecclesiastical sources, Protestant countries saw a huge reduction in the amount of religious art, opening the way for more secular works: genre, portrait, historical painting and still-life grew in demand.

As for Catholic art, one of the consequences of the Council of Trent was that it was decided that religious art had a specific objective of silent preaching. Without acknowledging any of the claims of the Reformers to be correct, the Second Decree (“On the Invocation, Veneration and Relics, of Saints and on Sacred Images”) reaffirmed the doctrine that veneration of images is not to be construed as idolatrous, but as an educational tool to instruct the illiterate. To achieve this divine ending, art should closely follow scripture and, for the sake of legibility and proper instruction of biblical narrative, should avoid “superstition,” “beauty exciting to lust” or any other form of “indecorous” themes.

Thus, the issue of decorum became a central element to be considered by artists: religious art ought to be appropriate to its ecclesiastical objectives.

3. AGAINST DECORUM

Even though the Council of Trent did not provide specific guidelines about how religious art should be, it made some clear indications about what it should avoid, which brought the Renaissance art of the time into debate.

The Counter-Reformation occurred at a time when Renaissance art had reached its peak – with the scientific advances of the post-medieval period, Renaissance as a socio-cultural movement had imposed its humanist character on painting, sculpture, architecture and literature. In painting, the techniques had evolved to the use of perspective, depth, the balance of forms and the search for harmony based on classical art, which contrasted with the dominance of straight and two-dimensional planes of the medieval period.

Furthermore, if medieval art was related to a theocentric religious culture, Renaissance art was inspired by classical antiquity - that is, the Greco-Roman arts - thus departing from the Church’s dogmas. Although many Renaissance themes were associated with religion, the change in mentality was evident in the variety of themes, which started to include elements from Greco-Roman mythology, landscapes and customs. Renaissance art, it can be said, prioritized reason, knowledge and the pursuit of perfection: although its themes are often religious, its aesthetic is classic. The public of Renaissance art, therefore, was a select cultural elite.

Not surprisingly, in the context of the Counter-Reformation, notable Renaissance painters became an additional obstacle to be managed: if art should serve the purposes of the Catholic Church and incite an emotional religious response, how to reconcile with Michelangelo’s Christ, who in everything resembled a Greek athlete?

It is thought that Michelangelo Buonarroti’s *The Last Judgment*, although not mentioned directly at the Council, inspired much of the debate about decorum and,

on the onset of the Catholic Church's Counter-Reformation became an example of what should be avoided:



Figure 1. *The Last Judgment*, Michelangelo, Sistine Chapel, Vatican. 1535-1541.

Painted on the high altar of the Sistine Chapel, a beardless Christ is located at the top center; on his left are the damned, who are going to hell, while on the right are those who are going to heaven. Beside Christ is the Virgin Mary, who looks over the blessed. The angels, not readily identified as they are seen without wings and lack any visual markers that would make them recognizable, are blowing their trumpets and struggling to save the souls beneath them.

Michelangelo was accused of desecrating the Sistine Chapel with his nudes, which followed the aesthetic ideal of Greek beauty: strong, healthy and proportional bodies. Besides the nudity, the painting was decreed heretical for mixing elements of Greek (pagan) mythology – as Charon and Minos – with Christian subjects, and for giving Christ a distinct Apollonian² aspect:



Figure 2. *Mary and Christ (detail)* Sistine Chapel, Vatican. 1535-1541.

Furthermore, the contorted positions of the bodies painted were seen as undignified poses of labor men and performers, not the holy.

Following Michelangelo's death, a painter by the name of Daniele da Volterra applied vestments and loincloths to many of the figures - covering some of the genitals in the work and sending the message that nudity was frowned upon and no longer allowed.

Another example of how the censorship by the Council would affect the artistic production of the period and impose limitations to artistic activity is the *imbroglio* in

2. Apollo was considered the most beautiful and Greek of all gods and was represented as the ideal of the *kouros* - a beardless, athletic youth.

which the painter Paolo Veronese was found in 1573.

Commissioned to paint *The Last Supper* for the refectory of the Dominican Monastery at Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Veronese painted a huge (5.55 x 12.8 meters) canvas, on which Jesus and his apostles are not lead characters and several other figures - dwarves, buffoons, drunken soldiers, dogs - share the canvas with a self-portrait of the painter in the foreground, drawing the attention away from Jesus and the spiritual moment:



Figure 3. The Feast in the House of Levi, Paolo Veronese, 1573.

The scene, Church officials would argue, looked more like a 16th century Venetian banquet than a last supper. It was inadequate, among other reasons, for the fact that if art was to serve the faith, it should not be distracting, but a channel for disseminating the important messages they cared to propagate.

Called by the Inquisition, Veronese was asked to explain and defend the inclusion of certain subjects, and told to remove the dog in the foreground and paint Magdalene in its place:

They first gave Veronese the option of changing the dog in the foreground into a figure of the Magdalene, thus implicitly converting the picture into the episode where Christ encounters a repentant prostitute while feasting in the house of a Pharisee. Veronese provoked them by arguing quite correctly, on the basis of pictorial decorum, that the Magdalene had no place in a Last Supper. (CAMPBELL, 2012, p. 561)

In view of the technical difficulty of reforming it to meet the requirements of decorum, Veronese found a solution that would save the work of more than a year: rather than submit to the changes requested, he and the friars simply renamed the

piece *The Feast in the House of Levi*.

According to a biblical passage found in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was invited to a party at Levi's house – the painting, under its new name, illustrated a biblical story in which a wealthy man entertains Christ. The fact that Church officials accepted the painter's justification for the change illustrates the lack of clear criteria used to determine what was and what was not considered adequate.

Although Agnolo Bronzino's monumental *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* represented a Catholic narrative, it also fell short under the guidelines set forth by the Council of Trent. In the painting – which combined the characteristics of the styles we know today as High Renaissance – Bronzino approached the demands of the Acts of the council inadequately. The tone of the scene is in conflict with the fact that St. Lawrence was being burned alive, and the massive fresco fails to portray the true horror of his martyrdom and the injustice committed against the persecuted Christian saint:



Figure 4. *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence*, Agnolo Bronzino, 1569.

Again, the striking abundance of naked bodies and the festive organization of the characters in the frame (their poses contorted much like that of the figures in Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement*) reveal a secular concern with aesthetics, more than with the actual gruesome narrative. The nudity would have been considered profane under Catholic doctrine and a mimicry of allegorical Greco-Roman subjects. The absence of pain, the multitude of figures and the dynamic setting distract the viewer from the suffering of the martyr, thus failing to communicate the religious message.

The art of the 15th and 16th centuries – produced by artists such as Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Botticelli and Titian, to name a few – and by which we refer today as Renaissance art for representing a humanist, anthropocentric and rationalist view of the world, inspired by classical antiquity, would enter decline following the Counter-Reformation.

The two renditions of *The Last Supper* below, one by Leonardo da Vinci and the next by Tintoretto (a Late Renaissance painter) help illustrate the transition that occurred at the end of the 16th century:

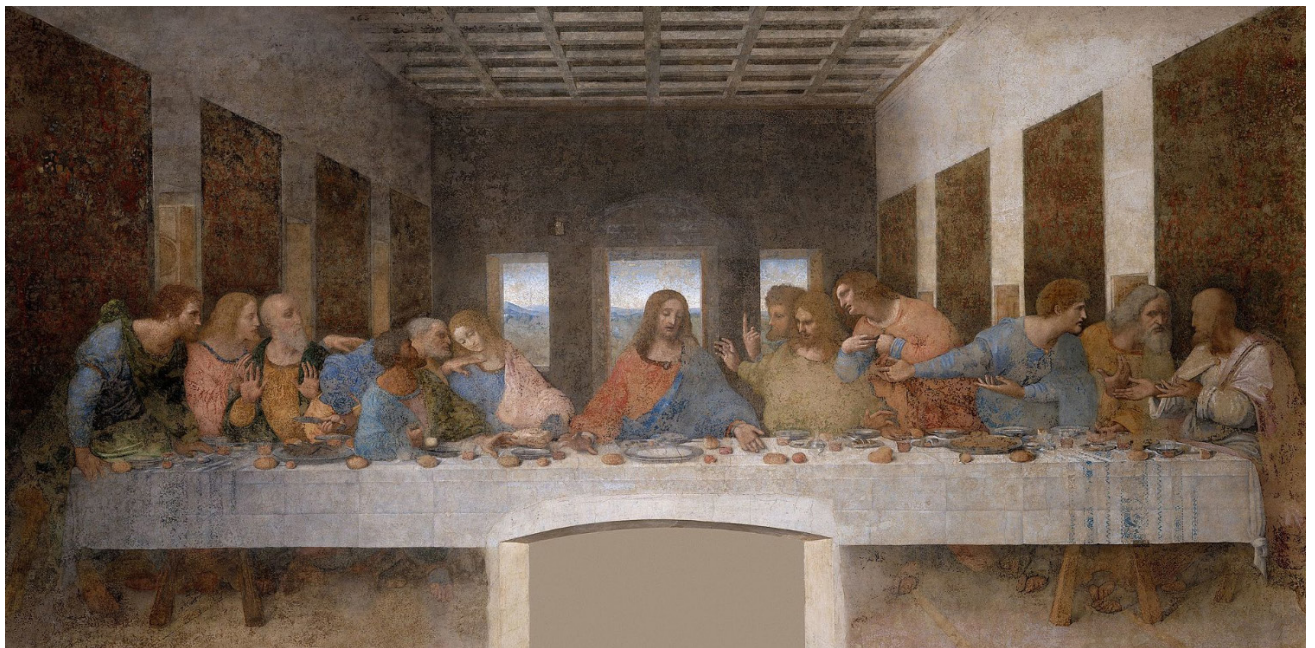


Figure 5. *The Last Supper (restored)*, Leonardo da Vinci, 1490.



Figure 6. *The Last Supper*, Tintoretto, 1592-1594.

As it can be observed from the two paintings, Tintoretto's *The Last Supper* drastically broke away with the stylistic formula of his fellow Renaissance artists and engaged the viewer in a scene more aligned with the Counter-Reformation ideals:

"The contrast of the two pictures reflects the direction Renaissance painting took in the 16th century, as it moved away from architectonic clarity of space and neutral lighting toward the dynamic perspectives and dramatic chiaroscuro of the coming Baroque." (KLEINER, 2014, p. 524)

Tintoretto brought the biblical story of the Eucharist alive, with Jesus standing out, his halo glowing while he hands bread to his disciples. The belief in saints is also observed – as there are other smaller halos in the figures – and the contrast between earthly life – represented by the servants, the cat looking into a basket – and the divine, all contribute to the conveying of the religious message.

4. CONCLUSION

Tintoretto's *The Last Supper* is considered a "transition" piece to the Baroque style that would prevail in the 17th to 18th centuries and largely met the plans that the Catholic Church reserved for art: to manifest religious messages in a dramatic way, through great emotional appeal. From a technical point of view, this meant greater attention to curves and diagonals, the play of light and dark and attention

to the whole of the work, as opposed to the concern with details, which marked Renaissance art.

The strong, healthy and lively figures of Christ and the Saints painted by Michelangelo gave way to suffering and pain in the crucified Christ and Saints of the Baroque painters. Martyrdom, which was thought to strengthen the Church by demonstrating the value of those who bravely died for their faith, became a favorite topic. Paintings of Saints and the Virgin Mary would also serve to reaffirm Catholic faith as distinct from Protestant beliefs.

Throughout the years, the issue of decorum continued to play an important role in art production, demanding that themes and modes of execution be aligned with the Church's ideals. Art served as a didactic tool, helping to consolidate a set of religious imagery in the minds of followers – most of them illiterate – and to spread the message to those the Church wanted to guide into the principles of the faith. With the adequate visual portrayal of biblical narratives, ordinary men and women could be converted. It would be the task of Baroque art, with its emotional and realistic appeal, to rescue the suffering Christ and bring the “consumers” of the art of that time closer to the dogmas of the Church.

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DISEGNO VERSUS COLORE

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ABSTRACT: While wealth and classical tradition contributed to the birth of Renaissance, it was the rivalry between independent states that stimulated competition and fostered an exceptionally productive period for the arts. The desire to maintain a long-established local identity was also at the heart of a peculiar aesthetic discussion which arose between Florence and Venice in the 16th century: the *disegno* versus *colore* paragone. The artistic preference for *disegno* was strong in central Italy, particularly in Florence, where drawing was considered the fundamental skill of Renaissance artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. Venetian painters, on the other hand, mastered the use of oil paint, using color to develop aesthetically innovative techniques, creating a uniquely rich style. Through the harmonization of pigments and tones, artists such as Tintoretto, Veronese, and Titian created expressive works which left a profound influence on future generations of Western artists. The *disegno* versus *colore* paragon debate would reemerge a century later in France between Poussinists, who defended the supremacy of *disegno*, and Rubenists, who defended *colore*. Finally, the legacy of the colorists influenced the development of

the impressionist movement that took place in France in the 19th century.

KEYWORDS: *disegno* versus *colore*; Florentine versus Venetian painting; Renaissance Art.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the 16th century, a discussion about the superiority of different techniques with which artists of Venice and Florence executed their works emerged in the peninsula of Italy. The question of whether *disegno* or *colore* was more important in painting was at the core of the debate.

Florentine practices were faithful to *disegno*, meaning drawing or design, which was believed to be the foundation of all art. Foremost essential to painting was the use of line to depict form. Precise contour and lines were characteristics of a clean, concise aesthetic which appealed to the intellect and reason, adhering to the principles of classical art. *Disegno* was considered by the likes of Michelangelo to be the foundation of architecture, painting and sculpture.

Venetians, on the contrary, prioritized *colore*, *colorito*, or color. By blending and layering pigments, it was possible to achieve

the natural effects of light found in nature and allow artists the liberty of expressive creation. Furthermore, color was believed to attract the viewer emotionally and thus could be enjoyed by everyone – it was more appealing.

Although the paragone (comparison) between *disegno* and *colore* was a technical discussion about stylistic preferences, its origins are much deeper and not always clearly defined. Historical factors help explain why similar disputes took place between different independent Italian states.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The political organization of Italy had been, for more than 600 years until the 15th century, characterized by the phenomenon known as city-states – small, independent states which grew in the Middle Ages to become important trading centers. The revival of trade in medieval Europe facilitated the growth of urban areas, and by the 14th century Italy was the most urbanized region in western Europe.

Ancient Roman tradition marked the development of the city-states, many of which consolidated their position as important commercial, banking and cultural centers during the Renaissance. Venice (the Republic of Venice) was a sovereign state from 697 to 1797, and Florence (the Republic of Florence) from 1115 until 1532. The spirit of independence, therefore, dominated these urban centers in which political power belonged to wealthy merchants and bankers.



Figure 1. Italy at the end of 15th century

It must be highlighted that independence always involved both internal and external conflicts: internally, between powerful families who disputed political power; externally, cities fought constantly to expand territories, to access seaports, to control commerce and trade routes and to gain access to smaller cities' natural resources.

The fragmentation of Italy and the rivalry between the prosperous independent states stimulated competition and contributed to the flourishing of the arts. Among other things, cities disputed who had the largest and most beautiful cathedral and the best artists: Leonardo Da Vinci, for example, was disputed between Milan, Florence, Venice and Ferrara. Besides the rivalry, the combination of wealth and classical tradition help to explain why Italy was the birthplace of Renaissance.

By the early 16th century, several smaller and previously independent cities had been absorbed by powerful neighbors and Italy was largely dominated by five states: Milan, Florence, Venice, the Papal States and the kingdom of Naples. Florence and Venice, therefore, were two very important cities which had fought hard to maintain and expand their power by promoting a long-established regional identity, as opposed to a national sentiment.

3. THE AESTHETIC COMPETITION

Although the *disegno* versus *colore* paragon was closely related to the inter-state competition of the time, and artistic expression was one of many ways by which a state could claim cultural supremacy, it developed from a larger and previous comparison to determine what forms of art were superior: painting or sculpture.

The artistic preference for *disegno* was strong in central Italy, particularly in Florence. Drawing was the fundamental skill of Renaissance artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo (both representative of the Florentine tradition), who mastered sculpture and architecture as well as painting. *Disegno*, it was argued, was a unifying prerequisite to all arts, and a key activity in the training of new artists. The painting of frescoes (an ancient technique of mural that became a hallmark of Italian Renaissance), in particular, often required several drawings before the execution of the final product, and both Michelangelo and Da Vinci left extensive studies attesting to the highly intellectual activity undertaken prior to the creation of their works.

Since *disegno* means both “design” and “drawing” in Italian, the mastery of *disegno* meant not only that the artist could execute the work with technical knowledge, but was also capable of inventing or envisioning (designing) an artistic idea. The painting of Adam in the fresco *The Creation of Man*, for example, on the vault of the Sistine Chapel, evolved from a series of drawings:



Figure 2. *Study of a reclining male nude*, Michelangelo, c. 1511.

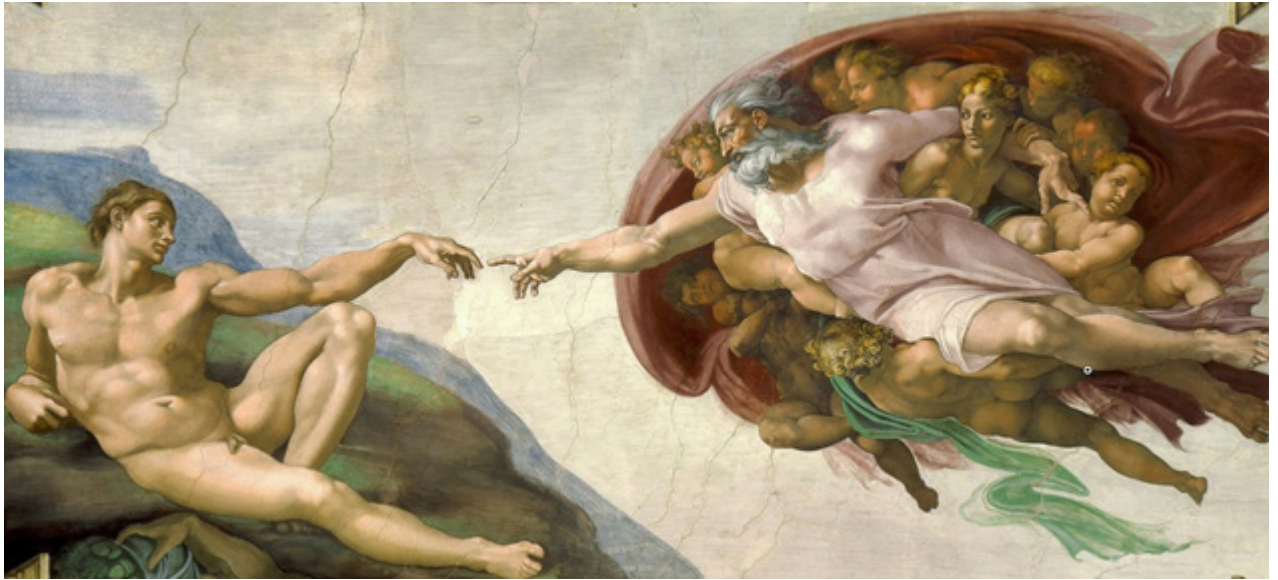


Figure 3. *The Creation of Adam*, Michelangelo, c. 1512.

Giorgio Vasari, in his biographical collection *Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani* (Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, 1550) described *disegno* as the supreme skill required for all creative process. The painter and writer from Arezzo, a town dominated by Florence since 1384, considered the artistic value of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Michelangelo superior to those demonstrated by other artists of the peninsula and abroad. Vasari regarded the painter of the Sistine Chapel, in particular, the greatest of all masters: a “divine” artist so beyond perfect that there would be nothing to be improved in the arts after him. Titian was forgotten from the first edition of Vasari’s work, and when included, in the second edition, he was used to highlight the superiority of Raphael and Michelangelo and to solidify the assumption that he lacked the study of *disegno*:

(...) and I remember that when Fra Sebastiano del Piombo was discussing this work, he told me that if Titian had been in Rome during this period and had seen the works of Michelangelo, those of Raphael, and ancient sculpture, **and if he had studied the art of design, he would have created the most stupendous works**, given his fine knowledge of colours; and he added that Titian deserved the reputation of being the finest and most able imitator of Nature in his use of Colour in our time, and that **with a foundation in the grand art of design, he would have reached the level of Raphael and Buonarroti.** (VASARI, 1991, p. 492)

In 1557, Ludovico Dolce published the first theoretical treatise about painting produced by a scholar. In *Dialogo della Pittura, Intitolato l’Aretino* (Dialogue on Painting or L’Aretino) the Venetian intellectual discusses, among several other topics, the role of invention, drawing and color in painting. The Dialogue compares those who were, in the opinion of the author, the greatest painters of the moment: Raphael, Michelangelo and Titian.

Although Ludovico partially agreed with some of Vasari's ideas, his writings were an indirect critique of the Florentine’s work. Besides sustaining the relevance

of Venetian Art, which he paralleled in greatness to the art of central Italy, Vasari refuted the superiority of Michelangelo's artistic virtues. Using an earlier critique written by Pietro Aretino, Dolce agrees that Buonarrotti's drawing is superb, but condemns the exaggeration in the contorted and overly-muscular figures. According to Dolce, Raphael was more virtuous and skilled than Michelangelo, and Titian was superior in comparison to both – not only did he master invention and drawing, he surpassed his contemporaries in the technique of color.

Colore appealed to the taste of Venice, a city in northeastern Italy with an artistic tradition close to the Byzantine Empire, which ruled the state briefly after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire and with whom Venetians had a long history of commercial partnership. The embellished style of the Byzantines can be appreciated in the architecture and decoration of many of the city's touristic places – including the opulent Saint Mark's Basilica, the Muraro Church and Ca'da Mosto, a 13th century Venetian-Byzantine style palace.

With the prosperity of Venetian trade, oil paint quickly became popular, slowly replacing tempera. Oil was much more resistant to moisture, thus better suited for the humid climate of Venice. It was also less costly than its predecessors and allowed more blending and a wider range of pigments. Artists were able to explore and play with a new medium, typically working out their images directly onto the canvas – this generally resulted in more expressive and spontaneous creations.

Skilled in the use of rich colors and the study of the effects of light, Venetian artists created forms defined not by lines, but by highlight and shadow effects accomplished by the use of layered brushstrokes of color. This is not to say that drawing was abandoned – just as color, obviously, was an integral part of the work of those who favored *disegno*. However, it was color, or the subtle modulations of it, and not precise lines, which defined form.

The painting *The Venus of Urbino* justifies Ludovico's praise of the Venetian painter for the mastery of *colore* as well as *disegno*:



Figure 4. *The Venus of Urbino*, Titian, 1534.

Titian's skill in the use of color accentuates the sensuous and soft surface of Venus' pale and luminescent flesh. The flushed red cheeks of her face and the cascading curls are defined by highlights and shadows, all emphasizing the sensuality of the scene. Although the artist uses thick paint to create the character's form, the brushwork is not painterly, but precise and contoured. The composition is neatly balanced, divided by the resting and horizontal Venus and vertically by the curtain backdrop while the floor tiles create linear perspective. Titian contrasts the lines of the architecture with the arabesque curve of Venus' form.

The harmonization of color to define forms and the use of contrasting light and dark (to create the feel and look of fabric) can also be appreciated in the painting *The Rape of Europa*:



Figure 5. *The Rape of Europa*, Titian, ca. 1560-1562

A master of the oil medium, Titian pays close attention to garments and texture, playing with vibrant crimson and subtle pinks to give life to Europa's windblown scarf. Likewise, muted grays, beiges and whites of all tonalities create dimension in the bull's coat and Europa's torn dress. He employs similar techniques to the sky: creamy peach colors start mid-canvas and slowly draw the eye to orange clouds, which melt into varying hues of blue. Through his knowledge and understanding of colors, Titian is able to create volume, depth and dimension.

4. CONCLUSION

The artistic discussion known as the *disegno* versus *colore* paragon was, to a large degree, a manifestation of a deeper, long-standing regional dispute which stemmed from political and commercial interests.

The prosperous town of Florence was home to artists of the status of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael, who achieved glory in their mastery of *disegno*.

The Florentine school was, undeniably, a chief contributor to the skills so long associated with the development of Renaissance Art. Compositions were detailed in several drawings before painting and perfection was achieved through studies that helped create carefully contoured, sculpture-like figures.

Venetian artists, on the other hand, were great contributors to the mastery of the technique of *colore*, engaging in the study of light and shade, and their effect on the creation of form. Through the harmonization of pigments and tones, artists such as Tintoretto, Veronese, and Titian created expressive works with softer effects of shape. The contribution of the Venetian school, as it was argued by Ludovico Dolce, was the opening of a new perspective in painting. Through mixing and layering of color, creativity and intuition could reveal the artist's perception of how light shapes form.

The *disegno* versus *colore* paragon was not settled in the 16th century and it resurged in France in 1671. Reflecting the same regional competition and animosity, the Poussinists (named after French painter Nicolas Poussin) defended the supremacy of *disegno* over *colore*. Rubenists (named after Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens) defended *colore*. Only in 1717 the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, which had *disegno* as one of its key tenets, recognized the value of Rubenists: *the Embarkation for Cythera*, by Antoine Watteau, was accepted by the French Academy as his reception piece.

Finally, the legacy of the colorists would, as many art historians point out, influence the development of the Impressionist movement that took place in France in the 19th century.

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THE RENDERING OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AT THE CHAPEL OF LA MERCED

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ABSTRACT: Among the dozens of artworks depicting Catholic subject matter, a rendering of the *Immaculate Conception* stands out on the wall on the far left of the main entrance of the *Iglesia-Museo Perú de Nuestra Señora de la Merced* (Our Lady of Mercy of Peru Church-Museum), in the Miami-Dade neighborhood of Allapattah (or *Little Santo Domingo*). This article undertakes an analysis of that specific artwork, painted by an anonymous artist at an undetermined time, but showing distinctive marks which connect it to the original and unique style of the School of Cuzco. In conclusion, the piece embodies the popular Catholic imagery of the religious Spaniards, who wished to consolidate their power in the region by disseminating their ideals and religious beliefs, while portraying also the originality of the conquered natives, evident in the style and decorative techniques of the artists of Cuzco.

KEYWORDS: Immaculate Conception at the Chapel of La Merced; School of Cuzco; Spanish Baroque.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the Miami-Dade neighborhood of

Allapattah – also known as *Little Santo Domingo* in honor of its large Dominican community – a Peruvian inspired chapel stands as a bridge to Latin America’s colonial past and cultural roots.

Home to one of the largest and most impressive collections of 17th and 18th century sculptures and paintings, the *Iglesia-Museo Perú de Nuestra Señora de la Merced* (Our Lady of Mercy of Peru Church-Museum), or simply the Chapel of La Merced, holds more than 150 works of art from several Latin American countries. Most of the art collection was gathered by Father José Luis Menendez over the past several years and has been studied and catalogued by Carol Damian, a former Chief Curator for the Frost Art Museum and professor from the Department of Art and Art History at Florida International University.

The purpose of this article is to analyze this specific artwork, which has no known artist or date of completion and was probably painted – as most pieces in the collection were – by a colonized Indigenous artist using tools and techniques learned from Spanish colonizers.

To fulfill this purpose, it is necessary to engage in a brief recollection of historical context, as well as to describe the insurgence

of Spanish Baroque and the School of Cuzco – whose characteristics I will try to demonstrate as present in certain visual cues that attest to the suggestion of their influence and can, perhaps, give us a hope to roughly estimate the piece’s time and place.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1492, while in search of a sea route to Asia, explorer Christopher Columbus encountered the Americas instead. Believing the land to be a part of the Orient, Columbus went to his deathbed never fully realizing the extent of his “discovery.” Pregnant with riches, the Americas (specifically Central and South America) were of great interest to the Spaniards, who along with other European countries sought to gain control of the newfound territory.

Throughout the next centuries, Columbus’ voyage across the Atlantic and onto the New World marked what would be the beginning of the colonization of its people. As part of a plan to evangelize the natives, the explorers brought with them missionaries, who would spread the word of God in an attempt to convert the indigenous to Christianity.

As an early form of propaganda, art was a great vehicle and didactic tool for the dissemination of the Catholic religion and its beliefs:

The importation of religious texts illustrated with scenes of Christian doctrine was a common practice first established during the reign of the Spanish King Phillip II (r.1556-1598). Literally, thousands of illustrated religious books were generated by the printing houses of Antwerp (then under Spanish rule) and Northern Europe and exported to the Catholic missionaries in the colonies. This apparently effective and prolific use of engraved images served to keep Spanish colonial artists abreast of the European styles and movements. Many aspects and artists of the European Baroque were introduced to the colonies by way of the printed page. (MO, 1992, p. 34)

As Spain took over Andean land, the Spanish art and artists came along too, infiltrating their culture while influencing the natives, who were starting to paint religious themes themselves:

Imported prints were sometimes literally copied; sometimes their images were only partially used or reinterpreted by colonial artist. Among the native artists credited with being strongly influenced by the influx of printed works was Diego Quispe Tito (1611-1681), who oftentimes referred to himself as “the Inca.” (MO, 1992, p.34)

Diego Quispe Tito was a Quechuan¹ painter that is credited with defining the characteristics of what would be the Cuzco School of painting. Since the subject matter was new to the natives, and possibly because they wished to preserve

1. Quechua people originated among the indigenous people of Peru, and today the term encompasses all indigenous people of South America who speak the Quechuan languages.

their own set of beliefs, a lot of paintings produced by Andean artists – as those of Tito – display a combination of Catholic images and influence with indigenous interpretations and renditions. In other words, the natives imprinted their style to the style of the Spanish colonizers they were imitating.

3. SPANISH BAROQUE AND THE CUZCO SCHOOL

With the rise of the Protestant Reformation² in the 1500s, a Counter-Reformation³ by the Catholics ensued in retaliation.

Intrinsically connected to religion, Baroque Art originated in Italy precisely in the context of the Catholic Counter-Reformation and:

(...) suggests religious devotion radically separated from the workaday world, engaged less with the intellect than direct, emotional experience of the heavenly realm through dazzling displays of holy objects and the fine arts. (MILLS & TAYLOR, 1998, p. 347).

Baroque Art dominated the artistic style in Europe from about 1600 to 1750 and quickly spread throughout other countries, notably Spain. The painting *Martyrdom of Saint Philip*, considered the most expressive work by Spanish painter Josep de Ribera (1591-1652), displays some typical Baroque characteristics in that it uses contrast of dark and light, deep color and broad diagonals to help illustrate a dramatic and emotionally charged religious message:

2. The Protestant Reformation (ca. 1517-1555) was an initially religious reform set forth by Martin Luther's "95 theses" (embraced by many other reformers, such as John Calvin, Henry VIII) which challenged the Catholic Church's power and authority to define Christianity. It triggered wars and had vast political, cultural and intellectual implications that changed the entire European Continent and the world.

3. The Counter-Reformation was the Catholic Church's response to the Protestant Reformation. The Catholic Church was slow to systematically address the Reform, and only articulated their arguments in the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which produced forceful answers combining a renewed spirituality and the reorganization of Inquisitions to fight the heresy of Protestants.



Figure 1. *Martyrdom of Saint Philip*, 1639.

The influence of Catholic religion is evident: the canonization and veneration of saints was condemned by Protestantism as heresy of apotheosis or idolatry, and Ribera's painting represents the preparation for the crucifixion of Philip the Apostle I (*Saint Phillip*). The theme of martyrdom of saints was, thereafter, very dear to the Catholics and the Counter-Reformation⁴.

From Spain, Baroque Art spread to Latin America by missionaries, especially the Jesuits, who used the visual arts to overcome the language barrier in the conversion of indigenous people:

Since the language barrier that separated the Europeans from the Native Americans could not be overcome in a short period, at least at an early stage of contact, the missionaries often relied on what they called 'materialities', 1) namely, the visual arts, architecture, music, theatrical performances, etc. Convinced that they could touch the heart through the eye as effectively as the ear, they built splendid churches, decorated them sumptuously with paintings and sculptures, and staged spectacular ceremonies with music and dancing (SAITO, 2006, p. 2).

During colonial times, several cities in Latin America flourished as artistic centers. Cuzco, a city that had also been the core of the Inca Empire, came to occupy an important role in the Andean region:

4. Note: see Chapter 3 of this book for an analysis of the development of propaganda in the Catholic Church.

The city of Cuzco (...) was considered the most productive artistic center in South America. It was in this city that an enormous number of painters' workshops developed and produced what is now known as the Cuzco style of painting. In its heyday, thousands of paintings and artworks were created and exported to areas throughout the Spanish colonies. The Cuzco style clearly came to reflect an art that is characteristic of the city's mestizo spirit and culture. (MO, 1992, p. 29)

As it is clear from the text above, the artists who worked there didn't simply reproduce the Baroque style as it was developed in Spain, but were also influenced by local traditions, giving way to an original art that established analogies with their native religious beliefs.

It is noteworthy that the Catholic Church had a very important role in the developing of these cultural centers in general, and of Cuzco in specific:

The Church's role in the development of the art of Cuzco Circle would be paramount (...) Its use of artists, at first imported and in time, native-born, was to advance Christianity. Art became the visual language and tool which aided in the Christian conversions of the native populations. The Church's use of various art media helped translate Christian iconography for the aboriginal people and helped convey an understanding of the symbolism associated with Church doctrines. Jesuit missionaries in the early sixteenth century found art to be so effective in their conversion of the Indians that they frequently requested Rome to send more artists to aid their religious mission. (MO, 1992, p. 30)

Over time, the Cuzco style of painting was established, reflecting an originality born out of the mix of the cultural and ideological domination from Spain on one side, and resistance and preservation of local traditions by the indigenous people, on the other side.

The anonymous painting below, "Nuestra Señora de Cocharcas bajo el baldaquín" (*Our Lady of Cocharcas Under the Canopy*), exhibited in the Brooklyn Museum, is an example of the art produced by the School of Cuzco (Peru, 1765), in that it samples the native adaptation to religious themes:



Figure 2. *Nuestra Señora de Cocharcas bajo el baldaguín*, 1765.

In summary, some of the characteristics of the European Baroque brought to the art of the New World were: a heavily religious influence, which originated mostly themes akin to the Catholic church; the related conflict between the heavenly/spiritual versus earthly life; the emotional appeal aimed at conveying the religious messages and the use of dark, shadowy imagery – all of which, to a lesser or greater extent, made their way into the art promoted in Latin America during the colonization period – including the works of arts from the Cuzco school.

4. THE DEPICTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

During the colonization period, religious imagery was extremely popular in Europe, as the Middle Ages had left behind a strongly faithful and devout Catholic public. Over time, since the Protestants had abolished the cult to the saints and

the veneration of the Virgin Mary, the Catholic Church came to prioritize her representation – thus, paintings depicting the Virgin also became extremely popular in the evangelization of the colonies.

Controversial was the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception – which held that the Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin – an idea that was not accepted by the Church until the mid-1800s. Opponents of the Immaculate Conception believed in the Doctrine of Sanctification, that is, that Mary was conceived in sin and later, while still in her mother's womb, had been purified by God. The subject was of great appeal to the people of Spain during the 16th and 17th centuries:

(...) monarchs repeatedly petitioned the papacy to rule in favor of the Virgin's Immaculate Conception. Inspired by the fervor of the crown and its theological advisers, the populace of Seville would take to the streets whenever the doctrine was challenged by its critics or exalted by its proponents (...) In these circumstances, it is no surprise that paintings of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception were always in demand (BATICLE, 1988, p. 33)

Thus, the Virgin became an emblem of protest for believers and notably celebrated in works of art. Religious orders would commission the likes of such artists as Francisco Zurbarán and Bartolomé Murillo – both famous Baroque Spanish painters – to illustrate works with a religious narrative. To achieve a faithful representation, artists relied on John of Patmos's Book of Revelations, where he describes “A woman robed with sun, beneath her feet the moon, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (DAMIAN, 1995, p. 32).

Francisco Pacheco wrote at length about how to depict the Virgin Mary in his book *Arte de la Pintura* (published in 1649), where he displayed an “almost obsessive concern with orthodoxy” and “decanted his life's study of what would now be called the Counter-Reformation iconography” (BROWN, p. 121).



Figure 3. *The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception with Miguel Cid*, Francisco Pacheco, 1961.

Pacheco also helped establish the “orthodox formulas for the major themes of Catholic art,” advancing an idea that was dear to him and to Catholic painters of his time, which was that the “principle aim of painting, and its principle glory, was to excite the faithful to adore and love God and to cultivate piety.” In recognition for his efforts, he was appointed in 1618 as the “overseer of sacred images by the Seville Inquisition” (BROWN, 1991, p. 121).

It is no wonder that his paintings of the Virgin Mary – including their iconography – seemed to have served as more than an inspiration to painters who followed, including Zurbarán and Murillo. It is also not a coincidence that many of its iconography is present in the *Immaculate Conception* at the Chapel de la Merced.

5. THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION AT THE CHAPEL DE LA MERCED

The painting of the *Immaculate Conception* located at the Chapel de la Merced, in Allapattah, Florida, exhibits a number of characteristics of the Spanish Baroque style: from its heavily religious theme – the Immaculate Conception – to the use of Christian symbolism. It is almost certain that the artist(s) who painted the artwork had been exposed to the works of Pacheco, Zurbarán and Murillo or at the very least inspired by works that had emulated those masters.

The artwork, which is about 1.60 x 1.40 meters (63 x 41 inches) is an oil painting with no known artist or date of completion. In it, the Virgin Mary stands atop a moon, covered in a blue cloak, looking downward, hands in prayer. She is surrounded by some of the same symbols described by Pacheco.



Figure 4. The Immaculate Conception at Chapel of La Merced, unknown artist and date.

The influence of Francisco Zurbarán can be visually appreciated in the comparison to some of his Immaculate Conception paintings:

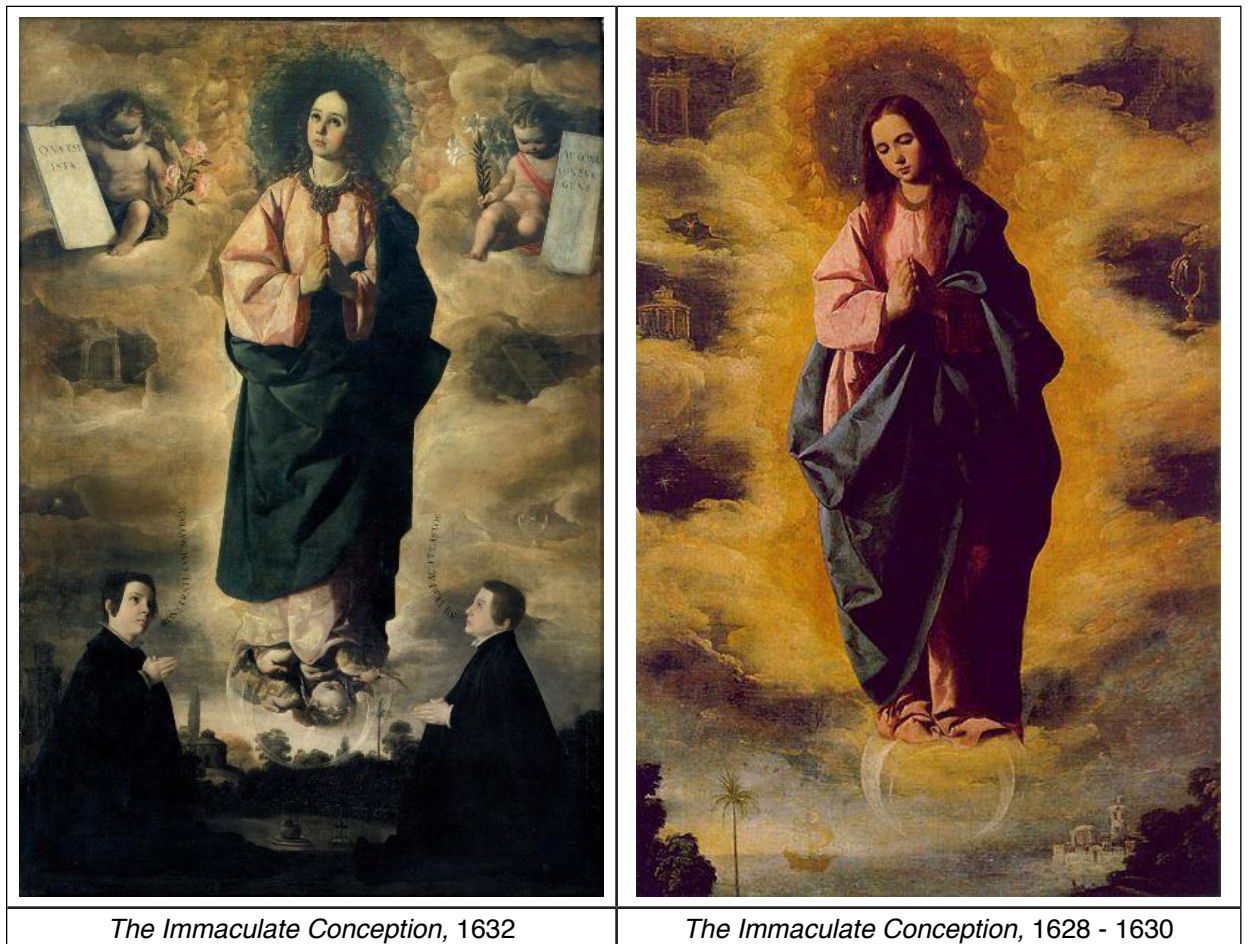


Figure 5. Two different renditions of the Virgin Mary by Francisco Zurbarán.

In Zurbarán's paintings, which are closer to Pacheco's prescriptions than Murillo's, a young Mary appears center frame upon a crescent moon with her hands in prayer.

Alternatively, the work also shows a not surprising resemblance to Bartolomé Murillo's renditions of the Virgin Mary:



Figure 6. Two different renditions of the Virgin Mary by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo.

Both Francisco Zurbarán and Bartolomé Murillo's Immaculate Conceptions painted in the 1630s are more or less reflective of the work by Pacheco – incorporating the same symbols and iconography that their predecessor had laid out for them. More specifically, those paintings show a very young Mary standing on a crescent moon, surrounded by symbols of her purity, her head usually encircled by a ring of twelve stars (as is the case of Zurbarán paintings, and a more faded version of the stars in Murillo's work). Still following Pacheco, in Zurbarán's paintings she stands over a naturalistic landscape that includes additional symbols of purity – the cypress of Zion, the well of living waters, the tower of David, and the enclosed garden, among others.

As we can see in most of the works that probably inspired the art piece being analyzed, Mary is always dressed in a long robe, enveloped by a navy blue coat, standing on a crescent moon – an essential part of Pacheco's prescribed iconography – her hands clasped in front of her chest and her image surrounded by cherubim and by symbols of her purity – white lilies, roses, and the mirror.

In the handbook of Christian Symbolism, color is mentioned as a tool of metaphor in painting. Blue is considered the color of heaven and piety, while white is thought to be the color of purity and – in the case of the Virgin Mary – used to

convey her Assumption⁵.

All of these characteristics can also be appreciated in the painting at La Merced, marking a distinct influence of the Spanish Baroque style of painting. As it would have been natural in the historical context already described, Andean artists also used the Virgin Mary as one of their regular themes.

What distinguishes the *Immaculate Conception* rendition at the Chapel de la Merced from the works of Zurbarán and Murillo are precisely the qualities more specifically associated with the Cuzco style. The painters from the Cuzco school were not satisfied with painting the Virgin Mary with the decorum seen in Zurbarán and Murillo. The addition of some unique native elements suggests that the piece being analyzed is definitely a product of the Cuzco school. The most obvious of these elements is the triangular shape formed by the attire of Mary, a clear approximation to the Virgin of the Andes, as Professor Carol Damian describes:

The one consistent feature that appears as a dominant stylistic and iconographic trait in Cuzco paintings of the Virgin is the triangular shapes of Mary's dress, a reference to the shape of the mountain and, especially, her role as Pachamama, the Earth Mother. Whether the subject relates to her role as protector of the earth, the moon deity, or the royal queen, the Cuzco Virgin is the most frequently dressed in an elaborately decorated dress of triangular form. It appears not only on canvas but on murals and statues as well. (DAMIAN, 1995, p. 50)

That is, the dress does not softly flow on Mary's body, but rather produces a mountain-like form that suggests that the Virgin Mary was assimilated but also culturally associated with that of the native deities, such as Pachamama⁶.

Furthermore, the relative modesty of the attire worn by the Virgin Mary in the Spanish Baroque gives way to a more "royal" attire in the Cuzco paintings, suggestive of her connection with the Inca queen:

The Coya as the queen and consort of the Inka king took as her symbol the moon, perpetuating Andean reverence for the celestial body. The virgin painted by Cuzco artists on the crescent moon continues this association with the queen of the Inkas as the Christian Queen of the Heavens." (DAMIAN, 1995, p. 73)

The intricate gold pattern on her dress too is a hallmark of Cusquenian painting. The stenciling, known as *estufado*, is also often seen in the Cuzco school:

The Cuzco artists' Virgin carries a complex of symbols and concepts derived from Andean beliefs and Inka ritual. It is not necessarily the image itself of the Virgin but her attributes, such as the shape of her dress and its ornamentation that might be considered. Her garments, with their gold patterns and rich array of flowers and jewels; the offerings of Andean flora and fauna which accompany the virgin... including the crescent moon, contribute to the image of the Virgin in Cuzco art as a distinct product of her natural and spiritual environment." (DAMIAN, 1995, p. 51)

Thus, while influenced by European Baroque Art, the artistic production of the Cuzco School steered away from its initial influence and, at the hands of mestizo

5. **The Assumption of Mary into Heaven**, according to Catholic Church, is the ascending of the Virgin Mary's body into heaven.

6. Pachamama is an indigenous people's goddess from Inca's mythology.

painters, established a style that was independent from the constraints of the European schools.

6. CONCLUSION

The distinctive and original features appointed on the image of the *Immaculate Conception* at the Chapel de la Merced are precisely what link the painting to the Cuzco style. The art works attest to the confluence of two diverse cultures: one represented by the colonizer's ability to influence the religious beliefs of the indigenous people; the other, a mestizo expression of the resistance of the colonized, who were able to retain their unique vision of the world and establish some autonomy in their decision to revere their roots and ancestral knowledge.

In short, the characteristics observed in the oil on canvas painting displayed in the Chapel de la Merced clearly connect it to the Spanish Baroque art of the 17th and 18th century, and more specifically to the art of the Cuzco school developed in one of the most important artistic centers in colonial America. It embodies the popular Catholic imagery of the religious Spaniards, who wished to consolidate their power in the region by disseminating their ideals and religious beliefs, while portraying also the originality of the conquered, evident in the style and decorative techniques of the artists of Cuzco.

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CHAPTER 6

LAS MENINAS

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ABSTRACT: Celebrated as Diego Velázquez's masterpiece and one of the most important artworks in Western art history, *Las Meninas* is a huge oil on canvas that has been part of the Museo del Prado (Madrid) art collection since its foundation, in 1819. Throughout the past three centuries, dozens of interpretations of *Las Meninas* have been offered by art historians. While some have assumed that the painting is a literal representation of the Royal family – a genre scene of court life, with the king and queen reflected in the mirror behind Velázquez, others have contended that the painting is a representation of a classical representation: a painting about painting, raising ambiguity about the point of view of the artist and of possible onlookers. The following article explores the painting, including a brief analysis of its historical context and a review of scholars Jonathan Brown and Simon Altman's research on the subject.

KEYWORDS: Las Meninas; Velázquez; Art of Spain.

1. INTRODUCTION

Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (1599-1660) was one of the most important

Spanish painters and a favorite of King Phillip IV of Spain. He lived in the period known as the "Spanish Golden Age" (*El Siglo de Oro*, circa 1560-1660), in which artistic and literary activity flourished: Miguel de Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*; painters as El Greco, Francisco de Zurbarán, Bartolomé Murillo (and Velázquez himself) produced masterpieces; and Tirso de Molina created *Don Juan*, the legendary character from his play *The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest*.

Spanish art was then marked by a strong religious influence, encouraged by patronage of the Catholic monarchs and the spirit of the Counter-Reformation. An apprentice of Francisco Pacheco (whose daughter the Sevillian artist would later marry), Velázquez was introduced to King Phillip IV and became one of his court painters. His early works, as those of his father-in-law, were of religious themes, but he was later influenced by Italian painter Caravaggio.

Under the patronage of the King, he enjoyed the benefits of a good salary and was commissioned less than his counterparts for religious painting, dedicating most of his talent to portraits of the royal family. Still, he painted members of the inner papal court, and during a

visit to Italy, between 1649 and 1651, painted a portrait of Pope Innocent X himself:



Figure 1. *Portrait of Pope Innocent X, ca. 1650.*

Velázquez also demonstrated his realistic style and unparalleled psychological insight painting *hidalgos*¹, such as poet Francisco Quevedo, and common people.

2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Power struggles between Church and state were common in medieval Europe and continued well until the end of the Middle Ages, when a fragile equilibrium was established in the form of several alliances between the European Monarchs and the Church. The Inquisition, for example, which had been an exclusively papal affair, became a state enterprise in 1478, when Pope Sixtus IV (1414-1484) was pressured into issuing the papal bull *Exigit sinceræ devotionis affectus* (*Sincere Devotion Is Required*), authorizing the creation of the Inquisition in Castile.

Two episodes help illustrate the shift in the balance of power during the transition from medieval to modern age: In 1076, Henry IV, Emperor of Germany, entered into

1. Hidalgo: a member of the Spanish or Portuguese nobility.

the Investiture Controversy (concerning the question of who should appoint local church officials) with Pope Gregory VII. In retaliation, the Pope excommunicated the king and signed an interdict releasing his vassals of their feudal obligations. To save his throne, the Emperor was forced to make a humiliating pilgrimage to the city of Canossa to ask the Pope for forgiveness.

On the other hand, in 1301, Philip IV (Phillip the Fair), king of France, came into a conflict with Pope Boniface VIII, who constantly interfered in “temporal” affairs. Phillip succeeded in barring the clergy from the administration of the law and imposing taxes on them. This time, the monarch won the battle and, in 1303, ordered the Supreme Pontiff to be arrested. Under Phillip IV’s influence, the papacy was transferred from Rome to Avignon, France.

The 1600s in Europe started with food shortages resulting from harvest failures due to prolonged periods of exceptionally difficult weather. During the previous century, Spain had lost nearly half a million inhabitants, and prophecies about the end of the world proliferated. To make matters worse, the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), initially a religious conflict between Catholic and Protestant states, developed into one of the most destructive wars in human history, resulting in around 8 million fatalities, mostly in the Holy Roman Empire (Western and Central Europe, its final dissolution only happened in 1806, during the Napoleonic Wars). The Peace of Westphalia (1648) ended the religious wars and recognized secular kingship as a legitimate and dominant form of government – marking the beginning of the modern international system of sovereign states.

Spain, under the reign of Catholic monarchs and away from the epicenter of the religious conflicts, enjoyed a period of relative prosperity and great colonial expansion under the Habsburg dynasty (1516-1700), but by the time of Philip IV the influence of the empire was in decline. On the other hand, despite the major upheavals and the substantial loss of power which followed the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church continued to largely influence Western politics well until the 21st century.

Thus, at the time of Velázquez, there was an intricate relation of interest between Church and state: Monarchs supported the Catholic faith, and Catholic thought endorsed the power of the emperors and helped them conquer the New World through the evangelization of the native people.

Sir Anthony Blunt, in his *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1660* (still considered a foundation work in Renaissance studies) dedicated a full chapter to the status of artists in Europe during that period. According to Blunt, the advent of scientific methods influenced the divide between what would be considered mere craftsmanship and the work of artists, who only began to achieve a higher social status in the 15th and 16th centuries. The theoretical discussion was whether painting and sculpture could be classified as liberal arts – practiced by freemen and requiring intellectual ability,

or by slaves using manual training. Therefore, the more an artist could integrate a knowledge of mathematics (in the form of proportion and linear perspective, for example) and other branches of learning in his work, the more he would be able to distance from mechanical art.

The claims of artists to better social positions took many forms, but the highest glory was to become a royal artist, which became a recognition of the nobility of the artist's work. In Spain, painters rarely achieved high social status, as painting was still largely considered a craft. Remarkably, Velázquez lived more than 3 decades with the royal family, became the palace chamberlain (*apostador mayor del palacio*) and the curator for the king's art collection. Besides that, he also had his own studio in the *Pieza Principal* (main room) at the Royal Alcázar of Madrid (today's Royal Palace of Madrid), where he painted *Las Meninas* and where King Phillip IV would often visit him.

3. LAS MENINAS

Celebrated as Diego Velázquez's masterpiece and one of the most important artworks in Western art history, *Las Meninas* is a very large (3.18 x 2.76 meters) oil on canvas that has been part of the Museo del Prado (Madrid) art collection since its foundation, in 1819:



Figure 2. *Las Meninas*, 1656.

The portrayal of the royal family, in which Infanta Margaret Theresa stands surrounded by her maidens and other members of the Spanish court, was earlier titled *The Family of Philip IV*, or simply *The Family*.

Studied by art historians and scholars at length, the painting has generated complex interpretations, as it is considered an enigmatic artwork: Velázquez himself is portrayed working on an unseen canvas, creating a painting inside the painting composition.



Figure 3. Las Meninas - detail.

The fact that the artist could not be, at the same time, the painter and the object of the painting creates a reality versus illusion effect that has left critics and audiences entertained for centuries. The mystery is enhanced by the fact that almost all subjects gaze at the possible viewers – or perhaps the royal couple, reflected on what seems to be a mirror on the back wall – as if the painting of the scene had been interrupted by their arrival:



Figure 4. Las Meninas - detail.

A man in black stands in the back of the room (which reproduces Velázquez's studio), adding to the oddness and ambiguity of the painting, which has left scholars debating for over three centuries on its meaning.

French philosopher Michel Foucault, in the book *The Order of Things*, has argued that *Las Meninas* is the representation of Classical representation: a painting about painting, in which Velázquez staged the invisibility of the painter, who was the source of the work but was made invisible by the mirror on the back wall. If the royal couple was what all eyes turned to look, the artist could not be outside painting. To Foucault, *Las Meninas* was a work of self-reflection and, in essence, the first modern painting.

Scholars such as Jonathan Brown have since denied the “hidden meanings” to the painting, offering less philosophical interpretations. However it may be, to this day, *Las Meninas* continues to generate curiosity and discussion.

4. POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF LAS MENINAS

The analysis that follows is based on the research of Jonathan Brown, as published in the book *Images and Ideas in Seventeenth Century Spanish Painting*.

A hypothesis about the non-existence of the mirror from the article entitled *The illusion of Mirrors: Velázquez's Las Meninas*, by author Simon Altman, complements Brown's theories and examples.

For purposes of context, the identities of the figures are delineated below. According to Brown, Antonio Palomino – who was a Spanish painter and art writer – was able to identify all the people in the artwork:



Figure 5. *Las Meninas* - list of characters.

The young girl in the center was Infanta Margarita Maria Teresa (1), heiress to the Spanish Crown at the time. The two girls immediately next to her are Isabel de Velasco (2) and Maria Augustina Sarmiento (3). On the right, two palace dwarfs can be seen: Mari-Bárbola (4) and Nicolas Pertusato (5), the court jester, who has his left foot placed on the mastiff dog. In the middle ground stands Infanta Margarita's chaperone, whose name is Marcela de Ulloa (6). In the center-back, a man is walking up a flight of stairs as he turns to look behind him; he is Jose de Nieto (8), who works for the royal family as the head of tapestry. Velázquez (9) stands in front of the canvas he is painting, palette on his arm, brush in hand. The man and woman in the mirror are King Philip IV of Spain and his wife, the Queen Mariana of Austria.

Not surprisingly, because of the painting's "snapshot" quality, Carl Justi – a German art historian who analyzed *Las Meninas* in the late 19th century – believed Velázquez was portraying a direct and true depiction of palace life at that time. This "photograph interpretation" of the piece contradicted the opinions of those who

wanted to entertain the notion that Velázquez might have been using his artistry to convey deeper meaning with the work. In 1949, however, Hungarian art historian Charles de Tolnay suggested the painting could be “an allegory of artistic creation,” and the proposal opened the door to a reexamination of the piece.

In an article published in 1960, Spanish architect Ramiro de Moya discusses studying *Las Meninas*, measuring it against the rules of perspective and recreating the scenario of Velázquez’s studio to see if the setting was indeed true to reality. To Moya, if Velázquez was following perspective, two things could be confirmed: that the mirror on the back wall reflected what the artist was painting (the king and queen) on his canvas and that Velázquez used a stand-in of himself to paint the image from the outside. Brown disagrees and says that Moya wrongfully believed that the science of how we see can be depicted in a two-dimensional drawing. Brown also cites that conflicting arguments arose amongst architects and engineers whose perspective drawings were entirely different.

An explanation of a narrative offered by Soehner and centered around the gaze of the characters in the room likewise discredits Moya. Soehner believes that the reason some of the figures have a suspended stare is directly because the king and queen are in the room. He also notes that Jose de Nieto’s attire affirms this, as it was customary to wear a cape before persons of royalty. These nuances, according to Soehner, all point to a royal presence in the quarters and the mirror positioned in the back wall with the king and queen confirm this.

Moreover, the image of aristocracy in the painter’s studio was a recurring one throughout art history and often used to promote art. The relationship between king and artist was important because what was patronized by nobility was also seen as noble. Velázquez revisits this imagery in his own work. Brown asserts that he would have known of such tradition and implies that its influence is portrayed in *Las Meninas* for the purposes of guaranteeing his status as a painter and confirming a friendship with the king. In addition, sources prove that Philip IV frequented Velázquez’s atelier regularly, further supporting the claim that Mariana of Austria and Philip IV are possibly present in the painting, either physically, or as a representation.

Brown declares *Las Meninas* an example of Baroque illusionism. An architect as well, Velázquez used his knowledge of geometry, mathematics and perspective to make a two-dimensional plane appear three-dimensional but also incorporated artistic elements. In this sense, the real and artificial are depicted in the painting. This aided in making the setting appear true-to-life while also allowing for manipulations of the scene. For example, the reflection of the mirror could now place Mariana and Philip in Velázquez’s space without the need to paint them standing next to him, which would have been against decorum. To solidify the attendance of the monarchs, the painter focuses on the faces of the figures, who are aware and responsive to the

royal presence.

Furthermore, through extensive research and evidence we know that *Las Meninas* is displaying the *pieza principal del cuarto del Príncipe*, an actual room in the royal palace. All of these facts lead many to conclude that the people present in the room that we cannot see are without a doubt the king and queen. It is important to note that if we are to believe this theory, the space in which Mariana and Philip stand is illusionary based on the architecture of the room. The “idea” of the royals being present is solely to make an ideological point about the nobleness of art and the couples’ immortality; existing forever in the room, on the wall and in the painting.

In an article entitled *The Illusion of Mirrors: Velázquez’s Las Meninas*, author Simon Altmann questions the existence of the mirror at all, which solidifies the idea that the mirror was a tool to represent the king and queen. Altmann believes Velázquez drew in a pretend mirror for the sole motivation of adding in the noble pair.

According to Altmann's research, there is no record of the mirror between 1636 to 1686, which would be odd because inventory of palace items would have been carefully documented. The size of the mirror is equally questionable given the period in which the painting was done. In addition, estimates show that the mirror in *Las Meninas* would have been larger than those of the Hall of Mirrors and of the king’s study. The idea that a painter would have a bigger mirror than the king in his atelier was highly unlikely, but were it so, the frame would not be made of wood as is the one in the picture. Mirrors of that size would have been decorated with ornate frames from Venice and frames made out of wood did not become available until much later.

Hence, if Moya was mistaken and the mirror does not portray what Velázquez is painting but instead reflects the royal couple in the room, what is the representation of Velázquez’s painting? Throughout the years, three responses have been formed: a) he could still be painting the king and queen (who were also reflected in the mirror); b) he might be painting Infanta Margarita and stopped to look at the couple when they walk-in and, finally, c) Velázquez was painting *Las Meninas* itself. Unfortunately, the answer cannot be confirmed because we have no clue as to what the large canvas in the painting looked like. Interestingly, it should be noted that the size of the canvas is similar to that of *Las Meninas*. If the painting that is being painted is *Las Meninas* itself, this would deepen the significance of the artwork because aside from royal attendance it would signify the acknowledgement and support of the couple for the picture and art. What can be affirmed is that *Las Meninas* was in good part a comment on the status of art and a desire to elevate the artist.

It is important to remember that during this period, artists were still considered beneath the ruling class, regardless of whether or not they held a respectable position in the king’s court, as did Diego Velázquez. Even the painter had to pay a

manufactured goods tax on works he painted. It was revolutionary, therefore, that the artist saw it fit to represent himself and his work in such a way that paralleled his status to the greatness of nobility. In Velázquez's eyes, he had earned the right and the position to do so and used his skills and intellectual ability to paint a picture in which he too was as relevant as those in the room with him.

It took Velázquez ten years to be accepted into the Order of Santiago; but this could only have been possible with the intervention of Philip IV. According to Palomino, after Velázquez died, Philip had the red cross of the Knights of Santiago added to the painter's tunic in *Las Meninas*. To many, this was a sign of the king's recognition of the artist and an elevation of the status of painter and painting in the court of Spain.

5. CONCLUSION

Throughout the past three centuries, dozens of interpretations of *Las Meninas* have been offered by art historians. While some have assumed that the painting is a literal representation of the Royal family – a genre scene of court life, with the king and queen reflected in the mirror behind Velázquez, others have contended that the painting is a representation of a classical representation: a painting about painting, raising ambiguity about the point of view of the artist and of possible onlookers. The fact is that Velázquez painted himself in a self-referential representation, along with his royal subjects, challenging long established social norms and paralleling, in honor, the artist and his art to the highest nobility of his time.

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