

Sargent after Velázquez: the Prado studies

by RICHARD ORMOND and MARY PIXLEY

DURING JOHN SINGER SARGENT's training in the studio of Carolus-Duran, he was instructed to believe that, of the old masters, Velázquez had the most to teach him.¹ From the middle of the nineteenth century, the Spanish painter had become an important figure for a younger generation of realist artists, a proto-modernist revered for his faithful recording of reality and his mastery of tonal values. The recent exhibition *Manet/Velázquez*, held in Paris and New York in 2002–03, demonstrated how pervasive Velázquez's influence was on French nineteenth-century art, and how closely entwined it was with notions of the avant-garde.² To study Velázquez's works in the Prado, a steady stream of artists made the pilgrimage to Madrid, among them Léon Bonnat, Thomas Eakins, Henri Regnault, and Carolus-Duran who went to Spain in the early 1860s.³ The latter constantly invoked the name of the Spanish painter, admonishing his students: '*Cherchez la demi-teinte*', adding, '*mettez quelques accents, et puis les lumières [sic]* . . . Velasquez, Velasquez, Velasquez, étudiez sans relache Velasquez.'⁴ Sargent needed little encouragement to follow Carolus-Duran's advice and, in the autumn of 1879, he travelled from Paris to Madrid in the company of two now forgotten French painters, Edmond-Charles Daux and Armand-Eugène Bach.⁵ We know from the Prado archives that Sargent spent almost six weeks in Madrid (14th October to 22nd November 1879), much of it passed in copying the work of Velázquez. Apart from studying the art of the old masters, he also became intensely interested in Spanish dancing, as is evident from two sketches of Spanish dancers drawn on the torn-up halves of a receipted bill from a hat-maker's shop in Madrid,⁶ and from subsequent works inspired by Spanish flamenco such as *El jaleo* (1880–82; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston), *Spanish dancer* (c.1881–82; private collection) and *Spanish dance* (c.1881–82; Hispanic Society of America, New York), and the numerous surviving studies



13. *Buffoon Juan de Calabazas*, by John Singer Sargent. 1879. 106.6 by 82.5 cm. (David & David, Philadelphia).

associated with them. He also gave a vivid description of flamenco music in a letter written to Vernon Lee soon after his return to Paris.⁷ At the same time, he was also excited by the architecture of the Alhambra, Granada, recording sever-

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¹ For Sargent's early studies of old-master paintings, antique and Renaissance sculpture, see his early sketch-books in the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA. (nos.1937.7.1–3,6), and the sketch-book and loose sheets in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, catalogued by S. Herdrich and B.H. Weinberg: *American Drawings and Watercolors in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, John S. Sargent*, New York 2000, nos.1, 5–8, 9, 18, 25, 27, 32, 41, 43, 48, 50–52, 56–68 and 72.

² The exhibition as shown at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, with the subtitle '*La manière espagnole au XIXe siècle*', included Sargent's copy of *Aesop* (here Fig.22). The expanded version, with a section on American artists, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, included Sargent's copy of *Las meninas*, as well as the *Head of Aesop* and *Dwarf with a dog*; see G. Tinterow and G. Lacambre, eds.: exh. cat. *Manet/Velázquez*, New Haven and London 2002, cat. nos.211–13. For early literature on Velázquez, see J.-L. Augé et al.: exh. cat. *Velázquez et la France: La découverte de Velázquez par les peintres français*, Castres (Musée Goya) 1999. Influential publications include: T. Gautier, A. Houssaye and P. Saint-Victor: *Les Dieux et les Demi-Dieux de la Peinture*, Paris 1864; C. Blanc: *Histoire des peintres de toutes les*

écoles, Ecole Espagnole, Paris 1869; two articles in *L'Art* by P. de Madrazo; eleven articles by P. Lefort in the *Gazette des Beaux-arts*, 1878–84. W. Stirling's monograph *Velázquez et ses œuvres* was published in French in 1865.

³ See Augé, *op. cit.* (note 2), for details of artists travelling to Madrid.

⁴ E. Charteris: *John Sargent*, London and New York 1927, p.28; see also B.H. Weinberg: *The Lure of Paris: Nineteenth-Century American Painters and their French Teachers*, New York 1991.

⁵ The names of Sargent's two travelling companions are cited in Charteris, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.49, spelling Bach's name as 'Bac'. Students of Alexandre Cabanel, Daux and Bach showed paintings at the Salon shortly before the trip to Spain and continued to exhibit regularly throughout the 1880s. Both artists are listed as copyists in the Prado records for 1879 but Sargent's friendship with them is otherwise undocumented.

⁶ Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA, nos.1937.8.2 and 12; see M.C. Volk: exh. cat. *John Singer Sargent's El Jaleo*, Washington (National Gallery of Art) 1992, pp.136–39, nos.7 and 8.

⁷ Letter from J.S. Sargent to V. Lee, 9th July 1880 (private collection), quoted in *ibid.*, p.67.

⁸ The Alhambra oil paintings include *Patio de la Reja*, *Patio de los Leones* and *Patio de los Arrayanes* (all three in private collections). There are three watercolours of the *Patio de los Leones* (British Museum, London, no.1959.1.2.8; Metropolitan

al of the courtyards there in a sequence of oils and water-colours; and his absorption in Spanish daily life is seen, for example, in a sketch of a café in Seville.⁸ There are no extant letters by Sargent written from Spain, but we know from a later comment that the weather was uniformly bad: 'I regret the many months spent in Spain in the rain and bad weather that quite spoiled the trip as far as painting and enjoyment goes.'⁹ From southern Spain Sargent and one of his companions crossed to north Africa, by way of Gibraltar, spending several weeks in a small house in Tangier. Here Sargent began work on his orientalist picture *Fumée d'ambre gris* (1880; Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA), and also painted a number of sketches of buildings and street scenes on small mahogany panels.¹⁰ He returned to Paris in mid-February 1880.

Although documentary records of Sargent's Spanish visit are scanty, he collected a number of photographs in Spain which provide a visual record of the things he saw and admired. The photographs are mounted in a scrapbook (now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) which contains a large number of early drawings by Sargent, and a miscellaneous selection of reproductions.¹¹ Among these can be found a series of black-and-white photographs of old-master paintings in the Prado, at least twelve of which illustrated paintings by Velázquez, five of which we know Sargent copied.¹²

Thirty-seven days passed between Sargent's first and last studies after paintings by Velázquez. The Prado's *Libro registro de los señores copiantes* (for 1879) records Sargent's name on 14th October, when he first applied, giving his address as [Calle de la] Salud 13, but leaving the column for referees blank. It is in the daily register of copyists, the *Libros de copistas* (for 1879) that we find vital evidence about the pictures Sargent actually copied.¹³ This register records the consecutive number of each copy, the name of each copyist, the title of the work to be copied, the dates on which it was begun and finished, and the measurements. In spite of some discrepancies in size, the authors of this article are reasonably confident that the nine paintings by Sargent after Velázquez recorded in the *Libros de copistas* can be identified with the



14. *Madame Errazuriz*, by John Singer Sargent. c.1883–84. 81.9 by 59.7 cm. (Private collection).

seven copies in the artist's posthumous sale of 1925, and the two retained by Emily Sargent, the artist's sister, *Las meninas* and the *Buffoon Juan de Calabazas*. The copy of the *Infanta Margarita*, also in the artist's sale and currently untraced, may have been painted in the Louvre.¹⁴ In addition to the nine copies after Velázquez, Sargent also painted on this visit one study after Jusepe de Ribera in the Prado, probably his *Holy*

Museum of Art, New York, no.50.130.36; and private collection), and one of the *Alhambra vase* (Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore). The *Café scene, Seville* is part of an album of studies relating to *El jaleo* in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston; *ibid.*, p.170, no.27.

⁹ Letter from J.S. Sargent to B. Castillo, 4th January 1880, written from Tangier, quoted in Charteris, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.51.

¹⁰ See letter from the artist's sister, Emily Sargent, to Vernon Lee, 16th March 1880 (Vernon Lee's Papers, Special Collections, Colby College Library, Waterville, ME): 'John returned to Paris about a month ago, leaving Tangier in haste as the rain had begun, & he could not continue his picture of an Arab woman which he was painting in the Patio of the little house his friend & he hired for a studio.' Most of Sargent's panel paintings of Moroccan street scenes are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

¹¹ Scrapbook, no.50.130.154. The drawings in the scrapbook have been catalogued by Herdrich and Weinberg, *op. cit.* (note 1), but not the remaining material such as the photographs of studies of buildings in Madrid, Toledo, Cordoba and Granada, including several of the Alhambra; a group of flamenco musicians; and urban and rural scenes in Morocco.

¹² The Velázquez photographs in the scrapbook are as follows: *Infanta Margarita* (p.34v), *Surrender of Breda* (p.47v), *Las hilanderas* (p.48r), *Forge of Vulcan* (p.48v), *Las meninas* (p.49v), *Dwarf with a dog* and *Diego de Acedo, 'El Primo'* (both p.50r), *Buf-*

foon Don Juan of Austria (p.50v), *Juan Martinez Montañés* and *Mercury and Argus* (both p.51r), *Count-Duke of Olivares* (half-length) and *Juan Mateos* (both p.52r), and *Menippus* (p.52v). There may have originally been more photographs, as some pages in the scrapbook appear to be missing.

¹³ We are grateful to MaryAnn Goley, director of art programs at the Federal Reserve, Washington, for copies of the relevant pages of the registers, and for much subsequent help and advice. Her exhibition *The Influence of Velasquez on Modern Painting, the American Experience* (Federal Reserve Board Building, Washington, 2000) was a notable contribution to the subject and included Sargent's copy of *Las meninas* (pp.4–5; here Fig.15).

¹⁴ The copy of the *Infanta Margarita* (34.3 by 24.1 cm.) was in the artist's posthumous sale, Christie's, London, 24th and 27th July 1925, lot 235. It was bought by the New York dealers M. Knoedler & Co. (stock no.16262), and was sold by them to Sir Philip Sassoon (see note 40) in October 1925. The fact that it was painted on one of Sargent's standard-size mahogany panels indicates an early date. It may have been painted after the portrait of the Infanta in the Louvre, then attributed to Velázquez but now generally given to his workshop. In 1898, Sargent wrote to Stanford White about 'a Velasquez head of an Infanta, in perfect condition, delicious in color' which had just arrived at his studio (quoted in C.M. Mount: *John Singer Sargent*, New York 1955, p.225); no further information on this picture is recorded.



15. *Las meninas*, by John Singer Sargent. 1879. 113.6 by 100.3 cm. (Private collection).



16. *Venetian interior*, by John Singer Sargent. c.1880–82. 68.3 by 86.8 cm. (Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh).

Trinity (see no.6 in the Appendix below).¹⁵ If his copies of Titian's *Portrait of Philip II*, the *Three graces* by Rubens, and Domenico Tiepolo's *Deposition of Christ* (all three in the Prado) were done at this time, then they are not listed in the official register; they might have been made subsequently, as was the copy of El Greco's *Holy Trinity*, which Sargent painted in 1895.¹⁶

¹⁵ Three paintings by Ribera featuring the figure of Christ are recorded in the Prado at this time: *The Saviour*, *Entombment of Christ* and the *Holy Trinity* (*Catalogo de los Cuadros del Museo del Prado de Madrid*, Madrid 1878, pp.187 and 192–93, nos.955, 986 and 990). While *The Saviour* and the *Holy Trinity* remain firmly attributed to Ribera and are to be found in the Prado today, the *Entombment of Christ* has been relegated to the status of a copy, and has been placed on deposit in the Museo Provincial de Belles Artes in Játiva. The size of Sargent's copy recorded in the



17. *Daughters of Edward Darley Boit*, by John Singer Sargent. 1882. 221.9 by 221.6 cm. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).

Of Sargent's copies after Velázquez, the four that record complete compositions (Appendix, nos.2, 3, 4 and 5) are also those to which he devoted the greatest amount of time. The *Buffoon Juan de Calabazas* (no.2), on which he spent fifteen days, is the most highly finished, and the one most faithful to the original painting. *Las meninas* (no.3) was the most ambitious, taking eighteen days, and overlapping with *Juan de Calabazas* for nine of them. The later copies of *Prince Baltasar Carlos on horseback* and *Dwarf with a dog* (nos.4 and 5), the latter now given to Velázquez's workshop, are more painterly interpretations, both executed over roughly the same period, nine days for the former and eleven days for the latter. Sargent's first copy in the Prado was a study of the head of Prince Baltasar Carlos taken from the equestrian portrait, and this is the only work where no completion date is given in the register. Of the remaining four copies, two are heads taken from full-length compositions (nos.8 and 9), one is a figure from *Apollo in the forge of Vulcan* and the last is a partial reprise of *Las hilanderas* (no.10). Five of the copies, including the *Christ after Ribera*, were painted in the last week of Sargent's activity in the Prado (nos.6–10). With the end of his stay in Madrid in sight, he must have decided that the best way to use his limited time would be to carry out studies of parts of pictures rather than to attempt copies of complete works.

The pictures by Velázquez which Sargent selected reveal a strong bias, as one might expect, towards portraiture. *Las meninas* is something of an anomaly, being both portrait and grand figure composition. The only subject works copied by Sargent were *Las hilanderas* and *Apollo in the forge of Vulcan*; the first is about two-thirds of the original composition, and from the second he took a single figure. Four of the portrait studies are of dwarfs, buffoons and the deformed beggar-philosopher Aesop (nos.2, 5, 8 and 9). A love of the bizarre

Prado register of copyists (30 by 20 cm.) indicates an upright work. This fits both *The Saviour*, which shows only the head and shoulders of Christ, and the *Holy Trinity*. In view of its complex composition and dramatic lighting, the latter is much more likely to be the work which Sargent copied.

¹⁶ Sargent's copy of Titian's *Philip II* (44.4 by 26.7 cm.) is on loan to the Portland Art Museum, ME; the copy of two figures from Rubens's *Three graces* (45.7 by 30.5 cm.) is in the Wichita Art Museum, KS; and the Tiepolo *Dead Christ* (25.4 by 33



18. *Prince Baltasar Carlos on horseback*, by John Singer Sargent. 1879. 45.7 by 37 cm. (Private collection).



19. *Prince Baltasar Carlos*, by John Singer Sargent. 1879. 54.6 by 45 cm. (Private collection).

and outlandish was an important ingredient in Sargent's aesthetic sensibility, and he was naturally attracted to the human oddities who peopled the Spanish court. Velázquez's portraits of Philip IV's buffoons with their eccentricities and deformities were perceived as masterpieces in the nineteenth century, Richard Ford, in his *A Handbook for Travellers in Spain*, praising the 'wonderful portraits of Philip IV's dwarfs', as 'amongst the best examples of his vigorous and facile brush, and of his unrivalled power of portraying character and expression'.¹⁷ The only members of the royal family to be painted by Sargent were the Infanta Margarita from *Las meninas* and the heir to the Spanish throne, Baltasar Carlos, whose equestrian portrait he copied twice (nos. 1 and 4). The fact that he chose to explore Velázquez's royal iconography at the Prado in the person of the royal heir rather than through images of the king and queen probably relates to the dramatic nature of the prince's portrait.

Early in his Prado campaign, Sargent chose to copy the *Buffoon Juan de Calabazas* (Fig. 13), once known as the *Idiot of Coria* owing to a mistaken identification of the picture as the *Bobo de Coria* in a 1794 inventory of the Royal Palace.¹⁸ Sargent's copy, painted on the same scale as the original,

captures the detail of the face and figure, and the enveloping mood and atmosphere of the original. The modelling of the head and hands is done with the same carefully blended brushstrokes that Velázquez employs, establishing structure through the bold interplay of light and shadow. Sargent does not quite achieve the soft veiling of the features that tempers Velázquez's realism and transforms the distorted face of the buffoon into something infinitely touching and mysterious. As Théophile Gautier explained, '[Velázquez] *acceptait même les phénomènes de la nature, les monstruosités à montrer en foire*'.¹⁹ On the other hand, Sargent did copy some of the visible pentimenti of the original painting, such as the alternative placement of the gourd on the right side, as he sought to understand Velázquez's working methods.

Several of Sargent's portraits from the early 1880s of strained and beautiful women have an affinity with the copy of *Juan de Calabazas*. It can be traced in their strongly lit and shadowed faces, in the subtle blending of flesh tones, the dark colours of their ambiguous spaces and the atmosphere of suppressed emotion and distress. The melancholy *Mrs Charles Dyer* (1880; Art Institute of Chicago) clasps her hands in a gesture very similar to that of the buffoon.

cm.), on one of the standard-size mahogany panels, indicating an early date, was sold at Christie's, London, 21st November 1995, lot 230; it had earlier belonged to the artist Henry Tonks. The copy of El Greco's *Holy Trinity* (78.7 by 48.3 cm.) is recorded in the Prado register of copyists under 1895. It was in the artist's sale cited at note 14, lot 219, as 'A Pieta', and is now in a private collection.

¹⁷ R. Ford: *Handbook for Travellers to Spain*, London 1878 edition, p. 52.

¹⁸ The copy of the *Juan de Calabazas* descended through Sargent's two sisters, Emily Sargent and Violet Sargent (Mrs Francis Ormond), to his niece Reine

Ormond (Mrs Hugo Pitman). It was sold at Christie's, London, 27th October 1961, lot 90, as the 'Idiot of Coria', and at Parke Bernet, New York, 13th–14th March 1964, lot 276, as 'Portrait of the Dwarf Calabazas'. For the original, see J. López-Rey: *Velázquez, A Catalogue Raisonné of his Œuvre*, London 1963, p. 265, no. 424, and J. Brown: *Velázquez Painter and Courtier*, New Haven and London 1986, p. 148.

¹⁹ T. Gautier et al.: *Les Dieux et les Demi-Dieux de la Peinture*, Paris 1864, p. 284.



20. *Dwarf with a dog*, by John Singer Sargent. 1879. 142 by 106.5 cm. (Hispanic Society of America, New York).

Madame Errazuriz (Fig. 14), also in black, gazes up at us with her lips parted in a similarly enigmatic smile. Edgings of fur and lace relieve the black dresses of *Eleanor Jay Chapman* (c.1881; Maxime Jay Furlaud and Richard Mortimer Furlaud) and *Mademoiselle Boussenet-Duclos* (1882; private collection) in a manner similar to the lace collar and cuffs worn by Juan de Calabazas. The example of Velázquez provided Sargent with the refined means of expressing a new artistic vocabulary, one that he had lacked before his journey to Madrid.

If the *Buffoon Juan de Calabazas* gave Sargent a lesson in the technique of oil painting and in the construction of a riveting portrait, then copying *Las meninas* at practically the same moment taught him not only some of the principles of perspective, but also the art of relating figures to the surrounding space.²⁰ His copy (Fig. 15), one-fifth of the size of the original, is a complete rendition of Velázquez's painting although it is darker in tone, especially in the upper reaches of the chamber. In order to understand how the artist had created the illusion of deep, receding space,

suffused with light from a variety of sources, Sargent painstakingly reproduced the proportions of the room and the infinitely subtle gradations of tone and colour that mark its depths. That was the challenge that engrossed him. He did not ignore the figures, for they are the subject of the picture, but he expended less effort on them. They are painted quite thinly, with deft strokes of impasto to suggest the silvery tonality and rich decoration of the costumes, and only the faces are brought to any degree of finish (the Infanta's alone being slightly smudged). It was the sophisticated grouping of the figures in relation to the overall space that interested him, more than the figures themselves.

In the years following his return from Spain, Sargent became a master of the dark interior. His 1882 portrait of *The daughters of Edward Darley Boit* (Fig. 17) has often been cited as a modern-day *Las meninas*. The way in which the layering of spaces and the spatial ambience mirror the narrative of the figures reveals the influence of the Spanish prototype. At the same time, the two pictures are very different. In place of the clear proportions of Velázquez's grand hall and the lighted space to the rear, Sargent presents a room of uncertain dimensions with an alcove opening out of it so dark that one can see little more than the faint reflections of a window in the glass of a mirror. The idea and dimensions of the inset alcove have more in common with *Las hilanderas* (Fig. 25) than they do with *Las meninas*, where the secondary space is small and subsidiary. Sargent's picture is carefully structured, but it lacks the balance and systematic arrangement of the interior furnishing that give *Las meninas* its ordered formality. Sargent deliberately sets his pictorial elements askew, as he fragments the figure composition and uses large areas of dark shadow to create a thoroughly modern picture.

The works that derive more directly from *Las meninas* are the series of interiors he painted of an upper hallway in a Venetian palazzo in the period 1880–82.²¹ They are small-scale genre works depicting groups of local Venetian women in an enclosed world of their own. Although they lack the grandeur and formality of Velázquez's painting, these genre scenes present deep, rectangular spaces in which the perspective is indicated by door-frames, rows of pictures, windows, stairwells, balcony openings and long benches. Moreover, the perspective is slightly exaggerated to give the effect of a larger and deeper amount of space exactly as Velázquez had done. Light flows into these scenes from the front, from streaks of sunlight cutting in from the side and from dramatic bursts of back-lighting (Fig. 16). As in *Las meninas*, the mystery of the people and of the lives they lead is inseparable from the mystery of the shadowy interiors they inhabit. The spaces become emotionally charged and expressive of the subjective inner world of the

²⁰ The copy has descended in the family of Sargent's sister, Violet Sargent (Mrs Francis Ormond). It has been much noted in recent literature on Sargent, and was shown in *Manet/Velázquez: the French Taste for Spanish Painting*, New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art) 2003, no. 211.

²¹ Two of the Venetian interiors show the same space looking towards a back staircase (Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, and Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo). A third Venetian interior (here Fig. 16), looking towards a window and balcony, may represent a view of the same space looking the other way.

²² For more on the psychological expressiveness of the interior in Sargent's work, see S. Sidlauskas: 'John Singer Sargent's Interior Abysses, the Daughters of Edward Darley Boit', in *Body, Place and Self in Nineteenth-Century Painting*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 61–90.

²³ *Prince Baltasar Carlos on horseback* and *Dwarf with a dog* were in the artist's sale cited at note 14, lots 233 and 229, where they were purchased by Alvan T. Fuller (see note 39) and M. Knoedler & Co. (stock no. 16260) respectively. The former appeared in the Fuller sale at Christie's, London, 1st December 1961, lot 43, and is



21. *Buffoon Don Juan of Austria*, by John Singer Sargent. 1879. 52 by 41.9 cm. (Private collection).



22. *Head of Aesop*, by John Singer Sargent. 1879. 45.7 by 36.8 cm. (Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, NC).

inhabitants by the way in which Sargent arranges the figures within them.²² He places the women in the foreground and dresses them in black and white much as Velázquez composed his images of royal personages and attendants. Ostensibly they are bead-stringers, but in reality they are beautiful Venetian models deliberately posed to create a mood of inward reverie and sensuality. Sargent's modern reading of female psychology in a working-class setting is far removed from the stately rituals of Spanish court life, but his use of deep space to give resonance to the people within it links his artistic aims to those of Velázquez.

The two copies which occupied most of Sargent's time after the completion of the *Buffoon Juan de Calabazas* and *Las meninas* were *Prince Baltasar Carlos on horseback* (Fig. 18) and *Dwarf with a dog* (Fig. 20).²³ Both present incongruities of scale that appealed to the artist.²⁴ The diminutive figure of Baltasar Carlos sits astride a bounding pony whose barrel-shaped belly is exaggerated by the perspective, for the picture was designed to be hung high.²⁵ The small stature of the dwarf is comically revealed by the size of the hunting dog whose leash he holds. In his *Prince Baltasar Carlos*, Sargent reduces to a shorthand note the painterly qualities that enabled Velázquez to capture the movement of pony and rider, with the windswept mane and tail echoed in the prince's flying sleeve and sash and the flowing lines of landscape and sky. Sargent's copy is a small-scale impression that catches the spirit of the original but does not address the

technical aspects of Velázquez's painting style. The self-possession and authority of the young prince, in perfect control of his mount and holding out his baton in a gesture of command, seem especially to have touched Sargent's imagination. He made a separate study of the prince's head and shoulders (Fig. 19), in which he elongated the head and enlarged the pupils of the eyes to give them a piercing look.²⁶

The authorship of the Prado's *Dwarf with a dog* has been assigned to various artists who painted in the style of Velázquez, but in Sargent's day it was given to the master himself.²⁷ Sargent's version (entitled *Un Enano* in the register; Fig. 20) is the largest of his copies and a work on which he prided himself, for he hung it prominently in his Paris studio, above his copy of *Las hilanderas*. He obviously appreciated the irony and pathos implicit in this image of a miniature courtier, dressed up in all his finery for some special event, showing off his master's hound. To enhance his dignity, Sargent shows the dwarf on the same level as the viewer, so that one looks across at him rather than down, with the result that he retains the poise and self-importance of a person of note. Sargent's copy is a tour de force, its strong tonal contrasts, running impasto and vivid colour perfectly capturing the spirit and character of the original. The man and the dog are projected against a deep space, with a sharply angled floor ending in a wall, and an imposing double door on the left. The study demonstrates Sargent's growing

now in a private collection; the latter was sold by Knoedler in July 1926 to Archer M. Huntington for his new foundation, the Hispanic Society of America, New York.

²⁴ Note for example the two older Boit sisters overtopped by oriental vases (here Fig. 17), and the parrot and cage dwarfing the tiny figure of *Beatrice Golet* (1890; private collection).

²⁵ The picture appears to have been hung high on the walls of the Hall of Realms, in the Buen Retiro Palace, between the equestrian portraits of the king and queen;

for a conjectural drawing of the hang, see Brown, *op. cit.* (note 18), p. 108, pl. 124.

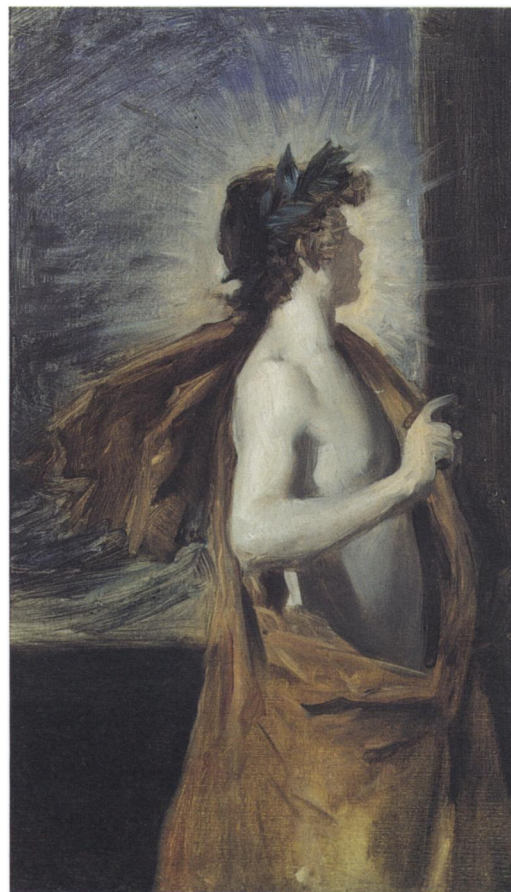
²⁶ Artist's sale cited at note 14, lot 231, bought by Van der Neut; a note in the auctioneer's copy of the catalogue (Christie's, London) suggests that it was bought in. It re-appeared on the market in 1957, and was sold at Christie's, London, 16th June 1961, lot 73, but is currently untraced.

²⁷ See J. López-Rey: 'A Pseudo-Velázquez in the Picture of a Dwarf with a Dog', *Gazette des Beaux-arts* 37, 2nd series (October–December 1950), pp. 274–84, and *idem*, *op. cit.* (note 18), pp. 269–70, no. 437.

confidence in composing a formal portrait where the figures stand within a convincing pictorial space (even if unfinished), and not in front of it. The space envelops dwarf and dog and recreates their world with a minimum of distracting detail. In his full-length portraits such as *Dr Pozzi* (1881; Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles) and *Louise Burckhardt* (1882; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) one can see Sargent putting these principles into practice, for in both pictures the background is left suggestively vague, but the sitters are conceived in terms of an embracing aerial space that plays its part in defining place, character and mood.

Sargent's copy of *Dwarf with a dog* displays a painterly finesse and freedom of technique not seen before in such large-scale works. He depicts the figure and animal with such brio and immediacy of effect that the picture looks more like an original than a copy. The dominant whites are made to stand out with startling brilliance from the subdued tones of brown and black. The different textures of linen, lace, leather, hat plumes and fur are made to seem tactile in the way the paint is actually applied, here smoothly impasted, there delicately transparent, elsewhere blurred and furry. The gold thread embroidered on the brown silk doublet and breeches is picked out with flecks of yellow paint, and two accents of red highlight the ribbon entwined in the dwarf's hair and in the dog's leash. Like *Prince Baltasar Carlos on horseback*, *Dwarf with a dog* marks a transition from the more objective recording of the early studies after Velázquez to a more personal interpretation.

The final four studies that Sargent undertook in the Prado are all details from larger works. He was painting at speed and seeking to capture the general imagery and compositional lessons of Velázquez rather than trying to replicate details and technique. Two of the copies are heads, those of *Aesop* and the *Buffoon Don Juan of Austria* (Figs. 22 and 21).²⁸ Much of the emotion of Velázquez's full-length *Aesop*, the figure dressed as a beggar-philosopher in a loose robe open at the neck, is concentrated in the expressive features and powerfully modelled head. Sargent, in focusing on the head, abandons the gradual shading of Velázquez and brightens the highlights and darkens the shadows as if he were consciously following the lessons of his teacher Carolus-Duran. These Evan Charteris condensed from a dialogue between Sargent and William James as: 'You must *classify* the values. If you begin with the middle-tone and work up from it towards the darks – so that you deal last with your highest lights and darkest darks – you avoid false accents.'²⁹ Exchanging blended detail and gradual shading for configurations of light and dark and bold brushstrokes, Sargent reveals a new fluidity and sureness of touch in the handling of paint. The head is slightly elongated in the copy and refined in the process, but the hooded eyes, drooping mouth and world-weary expression are faithful to the original.



23. *Apollo*, by John Singer Sargent. 1879. 45.7 by 36.8 cm. (Alfred Beit Foundation, Russborough).

Unlike the other portraits of buffoons, Sargent chose to concentrate on only the head of Don Juan of Austria (entitled *Un Soldado* in the register). The original shows the buffoon dressed as a grandee surrounded by the accoutrements of war in a parody of his famous namesake who had commanded the Christian fleet at the battle of Lepanto in 1571; a scene of the naval battle is shown in the background. In his copy, Sargent focuses on the strongly modelled, brightly lit structure of forehead, cheek, nose and eye, framed by a high silvery collar and a stylish black hat with plumes. Regardless of whether or not we recognise the sitter's identity in Sargent's copy, what gives the latter its enigmatic, serio-comic air is due quite as much to the things we do not see as to those we do – the mouth, chin and moustache, and the left eye and cheek, which are lost in deep shadow. The passage between light and dark in the realisation of form and character was a lesson Sargent never forgot. The head of Don Juan, with its sparkling highlights and liquid impasto became exemplary for several of Sargent's portrait heads of the early 1880s.

The incandescent, supernatural figure of Apollo from *Apollo in the forge of Vulcan* was already famous in the literature on Velázquez when Sargent made his copy in the course of a single day (Fig. 23).³⁰ The original picture shows Apollo on the far left disclosing to Vulcan and his assistants

²⁸ *Head of Aesop* was in the artist's sale cited at note 14, lot 234, where it was purchased by Alvan T. Fuller (see note 39). It was in the Fuller sale, Christie's, London, 1st December 1961, lot 41, and is now in the Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina. The *Buffoon Don Juan of Austria* was in the artist's sale, lot 232. It was there purchased by Knoedler and sold to Sybil, Mar-

chioness of Cholmondeley. It was acquired by Adelson Galleries, New York, in 1998, and is now in a private collection.

²⁹ Charteris, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 29.

³⁰ Artist's sale cited at note 14, lot 237, as 'An Angel'. It was twice sold at auction in 1957 before entering the collection of Sir Alfred Beit.



24. *Las hilanderas*, by John Singer Sargent. 1879. 58.4 by 71.1 cm. (Alfred Beit Foundation, Russborough).



25. *Las hilanderas*, by Diego Velázquez. c.1656–58. 167 by 250 cm. (Museo del Prado, Madrid).

the news of Venus's infidelity with her lover, Mars. Sargent simply copied the upper left-hand section of the picture, isolating Apollo against the rectangle of the window opening, and shortening the length of fabric over his left shoulder in order to narrow the proportions of his study. The way that the orange robe wraps around the tenderly modelled torso of the adolescent model reminds us of Sargent's own academic studies from life.³¹ The pose too, with the uplifted finger of the right hand to indicate that Apollo is speaking has classical parallels which would have been familiar to Sargent through his earlier studies of antique sculpture.³² Apart from the beauty of the figure and the drama implicit in the way he stands, with mouth open and hand raised, the appeal of this work lies also in its complicated scheme of lighting. Apollo is modelled in strong light falling from the front, while his profile is thrown into shadow by the sunburst behind him, symbolising his divine status. Sargent's preference for heads in profile and silhouettes is noticeable

from early in his career, as can be seen from such works as *El jaleo* (1880–82) and the portrait of *Madame Gautreau* (1883–84; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

The last of Sargent's copies, a fragment from *Las hilanderas* (Fig. 24), was painted, according to the record, on Sargent's last day in the Prado (22nd November).³³ The subject of the picture comes from the sixth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Arachne, famous for her skill in weaving, challenges the goddess Pallas Athena to a contest. Her finished tapestry, injudiciously depicting the loves of the gods, angers the goddess who strikes her several times. In despair, Arachne attempts to hang herself, but is saved by Pallas Athena who turns her into a spider. There has long been debate as to whether the young woman and the older one seen spinning in the foreground of Velázquez's picture (Fig. 25) represent Arachne and the goddess or whether they are simply ordinary weavers.³⁴ In either case, the simplicity of the figures and their setting contrasts with the grandeur of the scene taking place in the background where Pallas Athena, with upraised arm, confronts the impudent Arachne. In his copy of two-thirds of the right side of the composition, Sargent concentrates on the relationship of the young woman in front (possibly Arachne) with the action in the alcove behind. The figure is reminiscent of the beautiful young models whom Sargent had employed in Venice in 1880–82, and brings to mind, for example, the young woman in *Venetian glass workers* (Art Institute of Chicago), whose pose is reminiscent of Velázquez's model. She, too, dominates the foreground, while her fellow-workers are set further back in the gloom of the interior. The bared neck and subtly modelled arm of the spinner in *Las hilanderas* seems to have stayed in Sargent's mind, for echoes of it are found in the pose of the dancer in *El jaleo*, and in Mme Gautreau's outflung arm in *The toast* (c.1883; Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston).

It was the relationship between foreground and background, dark and light, which Sargent set out to explore in his study. The foreground space and right-hand wall remain mostly in darkness, causing the second centrally located figure to be read as a silhouette. The three attendants who frame the alcove are dramatically lit from below, as if from footlights within the space, while Pallas Athena and Arachne are brightly lit from another source. The way in which the picture is structured, with the rectangular alcove opening from the foreground, is surprisingly similar to *The daughters of Edward Darley Boit*; its influence is far more apparent than that of *Las meninas*. While Sargent reversed the use of light and shadow in the foreground and background, leaving the alcove dark in the portrait of the Boits, the two paintings are similar in their proportions and both provide an inner alcove within a larger space. The placement of the Japanese vases and the oldest Boit daughters echoes that of the attendants in Velázquez's picture as they provide a comparable framing device.

³¹ See, for example, Sargent's partially draped *Study of a male model*, sold Sotheby's, New York, 1st December 1994, lot 12, as 'Young Man in Reverie'.

³² See, for example, early sketchbooks in the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA, nos.1937.7.1–3, 6.

³³ Artist's sale cited at note 14, lot 230, where purchased by Alvan T. Fuller (see note 39). It was in the Fuller sale, Christie's, London, 1st December 1961, lot 38, and was purchased soon afterwards by Sir Alfred Beit.

³⁴ See Brown, *op. cit.* (note 18), pp.252–53.



26. The studio of John Singer Sargent, 41 boulevard Berthier, Paris. c.1884. Photograph.

The influence of Velázquez remained a potent one in Sargent's art, both immediately following his return from Spain and in his subsequent career, throughout which we can detect the evidence of his absorption of aspects of Velázquez's ingenious artifice. Even during the time he made these studies, Sargent became more confident in the rendering, with a fully loaded brush, of both the physiognomy and personality of the sitter. Two of the copies, *Dwarf with a dog* and *Las hilanderas*, can be seen hanging prominently on the wall, together with his copy of two of the figures from Frans Hals's *Regentesses of the old men's almshouse*, in a photograph of Sargent's Paris studio at 41 boulevard Berthier, taken in about 1884 (Fig. 26). The Dutch artist was another of his youthful heroes and he spent some days in Haarlem in the summer of 1880 copying works by Hals.³⁵ In 1908, Sargent and his sister Emily were persuaded to lend three of the copies after Velázquez to an exhibition at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, largely composed of copies by contemporary artists after the old masters.³⁶ The three chosen were the largest and most finished of the copies, *Don Juan de Calabazas*, *Las meninas* and *Dwarf with a dog*. Reviewing the exhibition in the *Saturday Review*, Laurence Binyon contrasted Sargent's copy of *Las meninas* with one by John Phillip: 'The paint of the Sargent has sunk, no doubt; the surface lacks quality and the colour freshness compared with the Philip [*sic*]; but in the latter the rendering of pose and gesture shows a little heavy; it is not intimately felt and delicately seized as in the Sargent.'³⁷

³⁵ Sargent painted four copies after group portraits in the Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem; two heads and the standard bearer from *The banquet of the officers of the St George Civic Guard* of c.1627 (exhibited *Millennium Exhibition*, Agnew's, London, 2000; both private collections); *The regents* and *Detail of two figures from the regentesses of the old men's almshouse* (untraced, and Birmingham Museum of Art, AL).

³⁶ *Spring Exhibition*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 12th March to 28th April 1908, no.76 (*Dwarf with a dog*), no.97 (*Las meninas*) and no.99 (*Buffoon Juan de Calabazas*, under the title 'Idiot of Coria').

³⁷ L. Binyon: 'Bond Street and Whitechapel', *Saturday Review* 105 (11th April 1908), p.463.

³⁸ The next highest prices paid for copies after Velázquez were £1,995 for *Las hilanderas*, £1,680 for *Prince Baltasar Carlos on horseback* and £378 for *Dwarf with a dog*.

At the time of the exhibition, the copy of *Juan de Calabazas* already belonged to Emily Sargent, and at the artist's death she retained the copy of *Las meninas*. Of the eight copies after Velázquez that appeared in Sargent's posthumous sale in 1925 (including the *Infanta Margarita*), three went to the discerning Boston collector Alvan T. Fuller (*Prince Baltasar Carlos on horseback*, *Aesop* and *Las hilanderas*), one each to Sargent's close friends Sir Philip Sassoon and his sister, Lady Cholmondeley (*Infanta Margarita* and the *Buffoon Don Juan of Austria*), one to Archer Huntington for his new foundation, the Hispanic Society of America, New York (*Dwarf with a dog*), one to the New York collector Edwin Levinson (*Apollo*), and one to a buyer called Van der Neut (*Head of Prince Baltasar Carlos*). This last copy made the then staggering sum of £6,300, the third highest price paid in the sale and the subject of headlines in the newspapers.³⁸ Alvan Fuller owned no fewer than fourteen works by Sargent, including copies after Frans Hals,³⁹ while Sir Philip Sassoon's collection was even larger.⁴⁰ Clearly the copies appealed to a discerning type of collector, appreciative of the central importance of Velázquez's art to the evolution of Sargent's style.

Appendix

List of works copied by Sargent in the Prado as given in the 'Libros de copistas' for 1879 (title, number, measurements, date begun in 1879, date finished in 1879):

1. Principe Baltasar; no.813; 50 by 40 cm.; 17th October; –
2. Tonto de Coria; no.823; 50 by 40 cm.; 21st October; 5th November.
3. Meninas; no.835; 100 by 110 cm.; 27th October; 14th November.
4. Principe Baltasar; no.859; 40 by 20 cm.; 11th November; 20th November.
5. Un Enano; no.860; 140 by 107 cm.; 11th November; 22nd November.
6. Cristo de Ribera; no.873; 30 by 20 cm.; 15th November; 15th November.
7. Vulcano; no.874; 20 by 15 cm.; 15th November; 15th November.
8. Esopus; no.881; 30 by 20 cm.; 20th November; 22nd November.
9. Un Soldado di Velazquez; no.882; 30 by 20 cm.; 22nd November; 22nd November.
10. Las Hilanderas; no.884; 20 by 30 cm.; 22nd November; 22nd November.

Current details of Sargent's copies (title, measurements, artist's sale [Christie's, London, 24th and 27th July 1925], current location):

1. Head of Prince Baltasar Carlos; 54.6 by 45 cm.; lot 231; private collection.
2. Buffoon Juan de Calabazas; 106.6 by 82.5 cm.; (Emily Sargent); David & David, Philadelphia.
3. Las meninas; 113.6 by 100.3 cm.; (Emily Sargent); private collection.
4. Prince Baltasar Carlos on horseback; 43.1 by 34.2 cm.; lot 233; private collection.
5. Dwarf with a dog; 141 by 105.4 cm.; lot 229; Hispanic Society of America, New York.
6. Christ after Ribera; untraced.
7. Apollo; 45.7 by 26.6 cm.; lot 237; Alfred Beit Foundation, Russborough.
8. Head of Aesop; 45.7 by 36.8 cm.; lot 234; Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, NC.
9. Buffoon Don Juan of Austria; 52 by 41.9 cm.; lot 232; private collection.
10. Las hilanderas; 58.4 by 71.1 cm.; lot 230; Alfred Beit Foundation, Russborough.

³⁹ Alvan T. Fuller (1878–1958) was a leading industrialist, a US Congressman, Governor of Massachusetts (1925–29) and a trustee of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. His collection ranged from early Italian and Dutch pictures to works by the French Impressionists. Of the fourteen works he purchased at the Sargent sale, three were copies after Velázquez (see Figs.18, 22 and 24), and three were copies after Frans Hals (see note 35). He also owned *Japanese dancer* and *Boat with a golden sail* by Sargent (1889 and 1913 respectively; both private collections).

⁴⁰ For the statesman, connoisseur and collector Sir Philip Sassoon (1888–1939), see P. Stansky: *Sassoon. The World of Philip and Sybil*, New Haven and London 2003. His collection included *Two wineglasses* and *Venise par temps gris* (both in the same private collection), as well as Sargent's portrait of him now in Tate Britain, London.