

Hiding in Plain Sight: A Profile of Artistic Purpose in Velazquez's *Las Meninas** Or: *The Artist as Creator King*:

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Abstract

Though Diego Velazquez's masterpiece *Las Meninas* is one of the most celebrated paintings in the modern world, its full meaning is still considered somewhat of a mystery. In view of this, the authors of this essay, two experienced law enforcement profilers, employ criminal profiling analysis and techniques to examine the *actual evidence* in plain sight within the painting as a whole. Much commentary has been written about the skills of the artist, and various eras and styles of art or the proportions in the painting; yet, this is not simply a painting about the artist and his manifold subjects portrayed in a specific era; the evidence within the painting points us in a rather new and unique direction, providing us with a "plausible rival hypothesis" about the artistic purpose in the painting. In essence, Velazquez is creating and *paying deep homage to the new royal court and power of artistic creation*; in turn, he is honoring the almost divine-like powers of new royalty, the artist as Creator-King. As such, *we as spectators are also participants and the critical subjects and audience, in this new ROYAL COURT OF ART*, as portrayed in this extraordinary painting by the Artist King, Diego Velazquez.

Methodologies: Criminal Profiling, Link Analysis, Multiplex Methodology

Critical Words: Velazquez, *Las Meninas*, Picasso, Spanish Art, Full Ground, Integral Inquiry

Authors' Preface: Profilers As Artists.

The authors of this essay are consultants or profilers of varied experience for law enforcement agencies as well as being amateur artists. In view of this, they have both shared a fascination with self-portraits of artists, especially those consisting of a painting of the artist in his or her own studio—as in Vermeer's *The Art of Painting*.² In the enclosed essay, the authors have developed a summary profile-study of Diego Velazquez's *Las Meninas* which hangs in the Museo del Prado located in almost the center of in Madrid, Spain, the homeland that gave it such an auspicious birth.³

Uniqueness is often overlooked by scholars, eager to situate singular events or even creations in a theoretical and thus generalized context, but never by law enforcement investigators. As such, the painting *Las Meninas* is the primary scene to be investigated, not of an illustrious example of Baroque period art, but first and foremost, *as a unique creation*. As such, our perspective is that of investigators searching for or looking at the evidence in plain sight, not simply as witnesses or appreciative spectators. Furthermore, the evidence in a superior realist painting (or crime scene) is often profoundly interrelated and interdependent; yet, such subtle interplay is often lost on spectators who cannot get beyond their own prejudices, stereotypes or shibboleths to see the *radical uniqueness* of life or art.

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² We will not engage in the ongoing debate of whether this is, in fact Vermeer in the painting except to note that, with the tangled yet apparent Black and White Masks on the table, separated by the head of an apparent serpent, pondered by the Muse of History, there may be much meaning uninvestigated in this painting as well.

³ *Masterpieces of the Prado*. Thames & Hudson; 1 edition (September 13, 2016); Also see: O.C. Paredes, *Prado Gallery, a New Guide*. Editorial Mayfe, S.S. Madrid, 1976; Bernardino de Pantorrrba, *A Guide Book of the Prado Museum*, Editorial Gran Capitan, Madrid, 1950.

This is why such uncorroborated accounts of a witness or various witness narrations and accounts are notoriously unreliable in reconstructing the events that a witness supposedly viewed firsthand. For this reason, we call the resulting perceptions of such immediate and uncorroborated narratives by individuals “Rorschach Realities” since the witnesses or profilers themselves, often see what they only want to see, or believe to perceive.⁴

So, in the following profile of *Las Meninas*, the authors relied on the painting itself as the primary evidence of the artist’s purpose or intent. Because of this, our academic references or citations from texts on the subject, though sometimes perused are kept to a minimum, in the following summary and preliminary profile;⁵ This is true with the exception of reviewing Picasso’s nearly fifty renditions of the same painting, many of which are whimsical and pure joy, yet retain key insights gleaned by a fellow great Spanish painter;⁶ we examined some of these masterful renditions carefully as well.

As a useful though tentative starting point, we have borrowed from Michal Foucault’s book *The Order of Things* which proved useful in our preliminary study and subsequent investigation.⁷ In particular, we share with Foucault a healthy skepticism, especially at first, of academic discourses within the domain disciplines, especially concerning the history of art; for instance, the authors regard critical commentary or artistic ‘labels’—such as “Naturalism” or “Baroque art”—as primary explanations or even as “witnesses” and, as such, offer only preliminary, non-definitive and even poor substitutes for *thinking and appreciating anew* in the exhaustive inquiry required to decipher a painter’s often complex purpose or intent in choosing the time, place, setting and subjects of his creative composition.

This is especially true, we believe, when the artist chooses his own studio for his or her self-portrait; the artist’s studio is often a profoundly personal place and space; yet, the artist studio is not simply a space where creative activity occurs; an artist’s studio is a source of personal inspiration and insight and becomes an essential part of the creative process itself, as Rodin’s personal studio which was full of models, busts, half-finished arms and legs attests.⁸

The artist studio is also a personal statement since he or she can choose what is there, and what to omit. In his or her private studio, the artist is fully in control to construct a “full-ground” creation that is can provide special insight into his or her artistic processes and purpose;⁹ this is especially true of a genius and master in his trade, Velazquez, who certainly has a unique vision to share in his Masterpiece (or one of them), *Las Meninas*.¹⁰ By “full ground,” we mean taking into account, and making fully explicit, the complex configuration of interrelationships that constitute a specific phenomenon.¹¹

⁴ We name this phenomenon of varied “eye witness” accounts of the same events as Rorschach realities in honor of Dr. Hermann Rorschach, a Swiss psychiatrist who was also an amateur artist but tragically died very young. Even so, he developed the famous Rorschach tests that are still used in criminal investigations today, especially of shallow art critics and other fraudsters. The table in the Vermeer painting cited supra, nte 1 is an example of such “realities.” We try to escape from this danger here, but we are inevitably embedded cultural beings as well, so you must be the judge of our success in the following very tentative profile.

⁵ The historic debate concerning *Las Meninas* is prodigious, often contentious, and at times trivial. For serious though contested commentary, see, for example: Steinberg, L. (1981). Velázquez' "Las Meninas". *October*, 45-54.; Searle, J. R. (1980). "Las Meninas" and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation. *Critical inquiry*, 6(3), 477-488. Snyder, J., & Cohen, T. (1980). Reflexions on "Las Meninas": Paradox Lost. *Critical Inquiry*, 7(2), 429-447; Alpers, S. L. (1983). *Interpretation Without Representation: Or, the Viewing of Las Meninas*. University of California Press

⁶ See: Sabartés, Jaume (1959). Picasso, Las Meninas y la vida. Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili; *Rafart i Planas, Claustre* (2001). *Picasso's Las Meninas*. Barcelona: Meteora; Calvo Serraller, Francisco; Giménez, Carmen (2006). *Picasso, tradición y vanguardia*. 38. Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado / Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía

⁷ Foucault, M. (2005). *The Order of Things*. Also see: Greslé, Y. (2006). Foucault's Las Meninas and art- historical methods. *Journal of Literary Studies*, 22(3-4), 211-228..

⁸ See Grappe, G. (1927). *Catalogue du Musée Rodin. Hôtel Biron*. Musée Rodin.; or, more recently, Crouch, C. (1982). In Rodin's Studio: A Photographic Record of Sculpture in the Making by Albert E. Elsen and Walter A. Haas. *Leonardo*, 15(2), 168-168.

⁹ Almost alone among her peers, Susan Alpers recognizes the central importance of the Artist’s personal studio, and devotes the first chapter of her book *Vexations*, to this critical topic. See: Alpers, S. (2007). *The vexations of art: Velázquez and others*. Yale University Press. Yet, she focuses on Velasquez’s painting the *Spinners* in this text.

¹⁰ It didn’t hurt that Velasquez was often tasked with buying art for the King which then found its way into his studio!

¹¹ Boudreau, T. (1998). *Universitas: the social restructuring of American undergraduate education*. Greenwood Publishing Group. Also see: BLINDSPOTS: AN EPISTEMIC EXPLORATION INTO INTEGRAL INQUIRY, LINK ANALYSIS AND THE CONCEPTUAL CAUSES OF CLIMATE CHANGE. (Unpublished manuscript) See infra, note 12 .

This is especially important in a now classical painting such as *Las Meninas* in which every subject as well as shadow is depicted in terms of its relationship to the overall “full-ground” or complete composition. We define “full ground” thinking as the ongoing epistemic analysis of how the whole and parts are integrally interrelated and understood within a unique phenomenon, “integral” in Latin meaning how the parts related to the whole, and vice versa.¹² Such thinking, not new though yet fully conceptualized, and yet is essential in conflict, complexity and chaos (fractal) theory, not to mention the preliminary investigation of a crime scene.¹³

As such, full ground thinking is dynamic as it seeks the proper proportion, ratio or “rationality” for explaining the part or parts within a greater whole, or the whole in relationship to its parts. Such inevitable interrelationships between the parts and the whole are found from the seemingly simple, single cell to entire solar systems. All too often, the parts are almost incomprehensible unless understood in terms of their inevitable interrelationships to the whole, as most artists and certainly Velazquez intuitively understand or understood, as revealed by a unique masterpiece such as *Las Meninas*.¹⁴

Unfortunately, the “full ground” of a unique phenomenon is often assumed as we often focus first and foremost on the *foreground horizon*, or a specific “person, place or thing,” in the rush to explain a phenomena efficiently or what Max Weber calls “operational rationality.”¹⁵ In contrast, full ground thinking, often implied, is usually found in the process of artistic creation or another creation as analysis of a unique and interrelated phenomenon (which is life itself). As such, we suggest that full ground thinking is *a priori* and necessary to “foreground” or efficient and specialized thinking. In fact, the FBI uses a methodology to aid in full ground thinking called “Link Analysis”¹⁶ to attempt to interrelate a unique event into plausible rival hypothesis, a subject that we will come back to shortly. So, to decipher the artistic intent and process in *Las Meninas*, the authors followed at three well established guidelines for constructing, at least in a preliminary way, the full ground of a profile, including:

a) HISTORIES: We undertook an exhaustive history of the “Life-World” of the main actor involved—in this case the great artist Diego Velazquez; in undertaking a history of such an extraordinary an accomplished artist, we amassed much more material than we could use in this single article. In doing so, we dispense with the often used examination of the possible aberrations, or “non-sequentials,” from a “consistent chronology” of the actor/subject/ victim prior to an event, creation or crime since we obviously don’t know the immediate whereabouts of the Artist prior to beginning the painting! However, we have the all too often evidence “hiding in plain sight” within the painting; we also note that this is the first of Velazquez paintings (that we know of) of the Royal family *in his studio*. This raises the question “Why?” What is so special about THIS painting, for it is unquestionably one of the Velazquez’s greatest works of art, if not his greatest.¹⁷

So, we edited and summarized the important highlights of Velazquez’s personal and cultural history in the first “Background” section of this essay; just as good medical doctors took an extensive history of each patient, a practice that is now a dying art, good profiles and investigators try to know as much about their subject’s history and life-world in which he or she existed.

¹² Ibid., See: Universitas, p. 113-115. We use the verb “understand” when describing the cognitive or artistic appreciation of uniqueness. In contrast, we use the verb “explain” to describe the process of generalization and theory building. Thus, the role of full ground rationality, (based on the Latin word “ratio”) is to determine the unique “ratio” or proportion of understanding and explanation needed to accurately describe a specific phenomenon. As such, this is NOT the same usage as described in Von Wright, G. H. (2004). *Explanation and understanding*. Cornell University Press. See: Boudreau, T. E. (2011). *Examining the Abyss: An Epistemic Inquiry into Violent Human Conflict, Contested Truths and Multiplex Methodology*”.

¹³ See Ibid., Andrei. Also: Boudreau, *Examining the Abyss*, supra, note 11.

¹⁴ Here, In this case, the “whole” is the complete canvas and the “parts” are the seen or supposed subjects and objects in the painting found, as we shall see, in complex interrelationships with each other as well as with the whole.

¹⁵ Ibid., Universitas.

¹⁶ See as an intro into Link analysis: <https://freeali.wordpress.com/2008/09/04/link-analysis-at-the-fbi/> Or: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/link-analysis>. There are many other metrics and methodologies used in constructing a variety of types of profiles, so we are simply using one or two such methods here, such as link analysis .

¹⁷ The authors are divided on this point; Boudreau thinks *The Water Seller of Seville* rivals this work which Velazquez painted (*The Water Seller*) when he was nineteen, and Boudreau first saw at the age of nineteen while doing finger paintings—as he calls them-- in his grandfather’s art studio; he noted with a great pang of disbelief the contrast in the relative artistic abilities.....

We focus especially on Velazquez's social "everyday" world which is obviously a significant factor in his misunderstood Masterpiece; simply stated, as this painting vividly illustrates, the life of the later Velazquez was dominated by power, prerogatives and privileges of the personages in the Royal Court of Spain. This is an obvious first clue; yet, the implications of this for a supremely talented artist, at the height of his creative powers, have been overlooked, we suggest, for the past 350 years. In particular, we conclude at the end of this essay that Velazquez is certainly painting a royal court, but *not* one for the King and Queen of Spain!

b) *THE PAINTING AND STUDIO AS EVIDENCE*: We will examine all the evidence in the artist's studio as portrayed in his painting without *preconceptions*. Long ago, Plato warned us about the "terribles simplifacteurs" of the human thought processes especially those highly educated—the *Sophists* of his time and place who, in particular, thought that they had an almost instant answer for everything.¹⁸ For instance, in modern times, unfortunately, Washington D.C. has become a "city of answers," often offered immediately by politicians and pundits alike, and not a place tolerant of enduring, or emergent questions which is critical to enduring and reflective inquiry....

We will try not to make the same cognitive mistakes here nor indulge in temptations to make terrible simplifications of an extremely complex subject; rather, we intent to let, as Dr. Brian Polkinghorn states, the actual evidence in the painting "do the talking."¹⁹ Our role is to question everything, and simply ask: "What is Velazquez trying to say, portray or accomplish in this painting? Is he merely trying to visually entertain? What *evidence within the painting* supports or contradicts prior claims about the meaning of the painting? What other plausible rival hypothesis are there? For instance, as an extraordinarily gifted virtuoso of oil art, is Velazquez merely trying to accurately represent what he sees before him in his studio, and that is ALL he is trying to do? (Even though he can't see—or is not looking – at much, if not most of what he paints in the painting!) Is he, above all, trying to please his King and Queen who are in his immediate presence within his studio? Or, is he trying to do all of these things, and more?

To answer this, this we must examine, as much as possible, the totality of evidence, looking at the painting as a whole, within its unique configuration or context, and then generate a number of "plausible rival hypothesis" to understand—but not yet "explain" the evidence before our eyes. In doing so, investigators of artistic or even criminal intent, meaning and motive can't afford to be sidetracked by superficial theoretical or cultural conceptual conditioning, though some such influence is perhaps inevitable.

So, keeping an *open mind* is advice that seems like a platitude, but is essential in our experience, since even partial or incomplete evidence is often immediately characterized in terms of preexisting paradigms, stereotypes, slang or sound-bites or even more dangerously-- labeled, branded and dismissed. The great economist and sociologist Herbert Simon described this as "bounded rationality" and specifically supposed "answers that simply "suffices"—those that seem to satisfy with the first thought or solution that comes to mind, a characteristic of the bureaucratic mindset seeking consensus among individual or groups.²⁰

Such quick resort to predetermined theories, stereotypes or slogans are often the greatest obstacles to an open mind, especially in an investigation, or within the scholar or society. All too often, such slogans, soundbites, or brand-names—become apparent "solutions" (to paraphrase Simon), seem to "simply suffice," and thus become superficial substitutes for serious, in depth inquiry and investigations of the unique. Equipped with such tempting shibboleths, even the most powerful minds can become mousetraps and snap at the first suggestion of any mental movement. We will not do this here but attempt to view and present the evidence afresh from this seemingly simple yet always intriguing painting *Las Meninas* by Velazquez. As we shall soon discover, nothing may seem as it seems.

c) *PLAUSIBLE RIVAL HYPOTHESIS*: We then use "link," "radial," or other investigative methodologies, in our in depth inquiry to interrogate initially the painting as evidence; in doing so, we frankly make a preliminary assumption, (demonstrably provable in an act of artistic creation such as this!) that the subjects and features in the actual painting of *Las Meninas* are deliberately chosen (to be omit or include) by the artist and thus constitute a creative pictorial whole. As such, the full ground is characterized first by uniqueness,

¹⁸ See, for example: Sisk, J. P. (1985). Poetry and the Forgetting of History. *Salmagundi*, (68/69), 66-77. ; or: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1968.tb00435.x?journalCode=psxa>.

¹⁹ Dr Brian Polkinghorn, Salisbury University, MD. USA. A valued colleague who is famous among students and professors alike for this excellent admonishment.

²⁰ See: Simon, H. A. (1991). Bounded rationality and organizational learning. *Organization science*, 2(1), 125-134.

Interdependence (the interrelationships between parts and the whole) and the resulting inevitable complexity; this is what constitutes the often stunning artistry exhibited in every great human creation. As such, all within the painting is somewhat interdependent and even indivisible, especially the apparent or actual subjects; for this reason, we can then use “link analysis”—a methodology pioneered by the FBI -- to develop our investigation into the artistic purpose or the meaning and “motive” of the painting.²¹

One of the authors-Boudreau- bases this type of investigation on what he describes as “integral epistemology” and inquiry²² found first in full ground existence and thinking in which the “parts” and “whole” dynamically and mutually define each as characterized by phenomena found biology or in complexity, conflict or even chaos (fractal) theory.²³ (As mentioned before, “Integral” in Latin means “pertaining of the parts to the whole.”) In this case, radial or integral inquiry begins with starting points of the artist himself as well as *his associates* and the *evidence* that he chooses to present or represent, and then develop this line of inquiry outward, like ripples in a pond, in a series of concentric circles to see if any circles overlap and begin to form interacting and even interlocking Venn diagrams of possible explanations based on the evidence before our eyes.

Almost inevitably, as the great social scientist Donald Campbell states, “plausible rival hypotheses” emerge and each hypothesis offers a singular way in which to understand and even explain part or all of the evidence.²⁴ The painstaking task then becomes one of examining and eliminating each plausible hypothesis until only one with the greatest potential explanatory power remains—with its own unique and specific constellation causes and effects—that best explains all evidence. (For instance, when law enforcement investigators begin to investigate a crime, there are often multiple scenarios and suspects, all involving the same unique crime scene.) So, in the following essay, due to limitations of space, we will not recreate all the plausible rival hypothesis considered when we examined *Les Meninas*.” instead, the enclosed profile contains in our best judgment the best and most “plausible hypothesis” of the artist’s purpose and thus enjoys a degree of accuracy that can be rated as slightly higher than a random degree of probability.²⁵©

In this sense, constructing a profile is *not at all* like the logical ordering of a sequential algorithm for NOAA or even NASA. We are entering the extraordinarily rich and complex world of human experience and unique artistic creation, not an artificially constructed and brave new world of digital cyberspace in our increasingly “E-tu” mail existence. Great art can help save us from such a sorrowful even sinister fate. In this artistic spirit of unique creation, let us begin!

Introduction: Hiding In Plain Sight?

²¹ See, for example: <https://freeali.wordpress.com/2008/09/04/link-analysis-at-the-fbi/> One of the authors of this essay argues in a separate essay that link analysis should be part of a new interdisciplinary domain in higher education in Boudreau’s forthcoming essay *Blindspots*. See, *supra*, note 9.

²² see, *supra*, note 9, *Blindspots*. “Integral inquiry is based upon the etymological origins of the word integral, meaning, in Middle French, “of pertaining to a whole, intrinsic, belonging as a part to a whole.” In the original Latin, “integer” literally means “untouched.” So, if we combine its ancient and more modern meaning, the term “integral” means: “Of or pertaining to a whole, intrinsic, untouched or *unique* and interrelated phenomenon, characterized by belonging as a part to a whole.”, *Ibid*, Andrei. We use such integral inquiry here. Such integral epistemology is radically distinct from that also used in naturalisms or scientism.

²³ *Ibid.*, Andrei. Also Boudreau, note 9, “Blindspots: Integral Epistemology and the Fractured Inquiries of Western Thinking Found in Domain Disciplines;” Also see: Boudreau, T. E. (2011). *Examining the Abyss: An Epistemic Inquiry into Violent Human Conflict, Contested Truths and Multiplex Methodology.*” As Coser and Simmel state, people even in conflict “unite to fight!”

²⁴ In the Foreword of this excellent book by: Yin, R. K. (2011). *Applications of case study research*. Sage. Donald Campbell was a pioneer and champion of evidence based research or outcomes. (In the interest of full disclosure), Campbell was also the mentor, colleague and friend of one of the authors, Thomas Boudreau. See: Petrosino, A., Boruch, R. F., Soydan, H., Duggan, L., & Sanchez-Meca, J. (2001). Meeting the challenges of evidence-based policy: The Campbell Collaboration. *The ANNALS of the American academy of political and social science*, 578(1), 14-34. Also see: Farrington, D. P., & Petrosino, A. (2001). The Campbell collaboration crime and justice group. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 578(1), 35-49.

²⁵We note with incredulity that the supposed “law of probability” can be wrong, on any single or given iteration, up to 50 % (or more) of the time! What kind of “law” has this odds of failure? As David Hume points out, any act of induction suffers from the same type of imprecision. This apparent weakness of induction is also the source of the self-described Black Swan phenomenon. While much of this footnote is admittedly made in jest, it nevertheless should be very reassuring to those art critics who often fail much more than even the “law” of probability allows!

Las Meninas, the mysterious masterpiece of the Spanish painter Diego Velazquez, has been the subject of artistic admiration and scholarly speculation since its creation in 1656. In this essay, the authors argue that Velazquez had at least three central purposes in his painting. First, Velazquez obviously wanted to depict the presence of the Spanish Royal Family in his studio.

Yet, to do this, he certainly did not have to go to the extraordinary lengths of portraying the entire length, depth and height of his private studio, the *Pieza Principal* (Translated as the main or even Long Room) in his painting as well. Some commentators, obviously not artists themselves, limit their commentary to the Artist himself and seem to have the rather quaint belief that the painting is all about a quest for status by Velazquez; such an facile and simplistic interpretation tells us much more about priorities of the critics than of the artist and misses the much complex purposes and deeper meaning perhaps hiding in plain sight in *Las Meninas*.

In particular, the existence and portrayal of a painter's art studio is a profound personal statement; In short, Velazquez is saying something very important about himself as the artist *in relation to the royal family*. We will explore this complex relationship in this essay. In particular, the painting obviously "captures" and compares Velazquez with the royal family in the very moment of creation, creating an "immortal" canvas in his private studio, within the very center of his life-world. In other words, Velazquez does so for a much larger reason than portraying for promotion his virtuosity in art, which was already well established by the time he pick up the paint brush to begin the painting of *Las Meninas*.....

Second, the most important activity for the Velazquez is *artistic creation*. As such, for reasons we will presently explore, *Las Meninas* is meant to reveal and celebrate the *artist's personal and almost divine-like power of creation*, as illustrated by his constant work on the towering canvas to create such artistic reality and beauty out of literally nothing but his eye, hand, common "clays" or pigments and his subsequent artistic skills -- which in his case are truly extraordinary. By doing so, Velazquez subsequently and quite deliberately synthesizes and unites all these elements and subjects together to create a timeless work of art that is unique in human history. In short, this is undoubtedly a painting with many subjects and themes, especially the sheer *power of artistic creation* as an elevated and unique human activity that rivals—as we shall see in the actual evidence—the artistic gifts of the gods. Velazquez seems to be making a personal statement that the struggle of the artist as creator tempts the fates but if he or she is successful, wins endless beauty for all of humanity.

This central and elevated purpose of creation by the artist is clearly illustrated, not only in the relative foreground of the painting where the *canvas of the creator artist is the tallest object in the room* but also the two large paintings in the deep and shadowed background; originally done by Reuben, *Minerva Punishing Arachne* and *Apollo as Victor over Marsyas (Pan)*.²⁶ These two paintings, portrayed in detail unlike the others in his studio, are illuminating of Velazquez's artistic frame of mind; both painting illustrate a Greek god in competition with a mortal to create immortal art.²⁷ The Reuben's illustrates a human artist Arachne in the midst of her strenuous artistic contest with the Greek goddess Minerva concerning *who* creates the better art—the mere mortal or the immortal god; the second portrays two gods—Apollo and Pan²⁸ competing over who performs the best music; more to the point, Jocelyn Small identifies Marsyas as an artist *great enough to challenge a god*, who can only be defeated through a ruse.²⁹ Both artists in each of these paintings are competing with a god, and are terribly punished as a result. So, in choosing these painting as background to his canvas, hanging them previously in his studio, Velazquez is portraying the contests, travails and frequent fate of mere mortals, Velazquez's "fellow artists," in trying to match the immortal art of the Greek gods.

By doing so, Velazquez is paying homage to the divine inspiration and power of profound artistic creation. By depicting these two background paintings in such detail, Velazquez is portraying—in essence boldly stating—that artistic creation competes with, and often rivals in accomplishment, the divine creations of the immortals.

²⁶ The Creator of *Apollo as Victor over Marsyas* has been argued down through the ages. Yet, the factual history is that King Philip IV had a copy of this painting by Jacob Jordaens in his possession during this time; other scholars attribute this painting to Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo, or even to Velazquez himself. Since the CONTENT of the painting is important in this essay and inquiry, we will not settle this question here.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Marsyas is obviously a mortal since he was frayed as his punishment; his identity evolved in ancient times to Pan, a minor god in mythology, who is portrayed in the painting.

²⁹ Jocelyn Penny Small, (1962) *Cacus and Marsyas in Etrusco-Roman Legend* (Princeton University Press):68.

After all, placing these painting there, in the background of this studio, was a personal choice,³⁰ long before a single brush was committed to the canvas that was to become *Las Meninas*.

Finally, the sheer size of the canvas suggests the central importance of artistic creation. The canvas is precisely the spot upon which artistic creation occurs. So, the domineering height and size of the partial canvas that is visible in *Las Meninas* is the key clue in this regard. As we shall see, the huge canvas isn't even nailed (in the painting) or otherwise attached to its frame; as such the painting as the focal point of the Artist's creation seems to float on and over the scene it is intended to depict. It is clearly the tallest object, either human or otherwise, in the room. By giving this artistic portrayal of the canvas such a prominent place and part in the overall painting, Velazquez is letting us know the central role he gives for his *raison d'être*³¹— the immediate yet immortal act and power of artistic creation.

In other words, Velazquez's is presenting *Las Meninas* as a very special self-portrait—as well as a portrait of the royal family whom he loved and admired-- to illustrate and announce a much greater truth than reproducing the mere moment, namely that the artist in his studio is the Creator-King whose life long training and full ground synthetic sight gives him the powers and abilities to CREATE, a power rivaling the gods, and thus recreate and preserve this fleeting moment for all of prosperity.

A third purpose of Velazquez in *Las Meninas* is intimately related to his second and involves the seemingly endless debate concerning who is the *real subject* of the painting?³²

The superficially correct answer to this inquiry is that there are several obvious and not so obvious subjects in the painting. Art historians have ventured to suggest several potential candidates, including Margaret Theresa, the Child Infanta, the King or Queen, Velazquez or even the pet dog who are all ventured as the true subject or subjects of the painting.³³ Personally speaking, we believe that *all of these answers* are accurate in view of this wonderfully complex painting since it is obviously possible to have several subjects simultaneously in such a magnificent panorama of the royal family and court, complete with dwarfs and clergy! So, to clarify this debate and ongoing inquiry in art history, we will introduce the simple premise that every potential subject of the painting also has its representation in the painting. This seemingly simple and obvious premise opens up much deeper question when we ask the simple question: “Who is Velazquez actually looking at in the painting?”

A closely related question that we will also asking and trying to answer as well in this section is: “What is the artist Velazquez himself trying to portray, or even “say” in *this first of modern paintings*?”

As we shall see, the “modernity” of the seemingly simple painting *Las Meninas* is decisively determined by its *subject matter*. At this point, for the purpose of analyzing this painting, we want to distinguish “modernity” from the idea of the west or “western” which one of the authors critiques elsewhere.²

Specifically, “Modernity” is the progressive movement through history to empower and develop the individual's potential. The “West” or Western” phenomenon is a Eurocentric historical development spreading though-out he world via abject colonialism to exercise greater political and economic control through science, machinery and advances in technology over humans and nature; the two movements--Modernity and the West—historically overlap but are actually incompatible; yet, most modern scholars confuse and even conflate the two. We will not make the same mistake here especially since Velazquez is obviously though artistically and whimsically bringing the now modern individual-subject into view and, in doing so, freeing him or her (or us!) from the shackles of oppressive medieval aristocracy. In essence, he is depicting in plain sight the *new royal court of the artist and his “subjects,”* now rivals --if not replaced-- the greatly diminished court or presence of the king and queen.

In this regard, the painting vividly illustrates the extraordinary access and ease in which Velazquez enjoyed to the inner circles of the royal court, and to the King and Queen of Spain. This special relationship gave Velazquez, as artist with uncommon powers of observation, a privileged inside view of the pomp and sometimes all too “common” circumstances of the royal court who consisted of, after all, mere human beings with all our aspirations, faults and foibles. As someone not of their status due to the simple accident of birth, Velazquez must have noticed the irony of aristocratic preference for birth and breeding over actual ability and accomplishment.

³⁰ Velazquez brought art for the king, and presumably supervised its placement in the palace; more on this later.

³¹ Or “razón de ser” in Spanish ; our apologies, but one of our authors (Boudreau) thinks he's French!

³² See, supra, note

³³ See for example,

So while he was a beneficiary of the royal system of aristocracy, he was also an artist and human being who did not squarely fit into the inner circle of royalty and this may have been a source, to say the least, of irony and even iconoclastic impulses and attitudes, probably never verbally expressed, that he subsequently expressed in his art.

So, one possible rival hypothesis to the countless explanation of all the characters in the painting is that these figures are in fact, the ARTIST'S ROYAL COURT as well, including—with a great deal of subtle irony, the King and Queen themselves! All the elements of the royal court—the Dwarf, the ladies in waiting, even the King and Queen—are now part of the artistic court of creation as well, in the world of the true artistic aristocracy. In short, we are suggesting that the element of artistic expression, license and especially whimsy is profoundly at work in this wonderful and even mischievous painting.

Not surprisingly, Picasso recognizes the central subject and thrust of Velazquez's artistic themes in his fantastic and equally whimsical first and subsequent multiple paintings of *Las Medinas*. Furthermore, in his subsequent renditions, Picasso even enlarges upon the original artist's aspirations and playfully recreates the manifold meanings of *Las Meninas*. In fact, Picasso created almost fifty extraordinary and different versions of *Las Meninas*, indicating his centered focus and fascination with this great work of art. In this regard, one can only imagine that both great artists enjoyed a great deal of whimsy, sheer fun and possessed great humor in creating their art—both in the original and Picasso's subsequent renditions of *Las Meninas*.... In short, there is unquestionably an element of artistic whimsy in the *Las Meninas* for both of these great artists. In fact there is a very large element of the whimsical in much of Spanish art and culture, as evidenced in Picasso's renditions of *Las Meninas*, or the *Book of Good Love* by that naughty 12th century priest, Juan Ruiz, or even in yet another world masterpiece of the Spanish Art and letters, *Don Quixote* by Cervantes.³⁴ Similarly, there is a wonderful element of whimsy in the art of Velazquez as well; we will come back to this delightful aspect of *Las Meninas* shortly.

Meanwhile, the supposed *subjects* of *Las Meninas* has fascinated and puzzled viewers and scholars for generations as well; one recent commentary simply states that:

"*Las Meninas* really has two subjects. One is the subject the artist is painting and then we also see the main characters in the room."³⁵

As we shall see, this is not quite accurate.... Really? Only two? That's it?

As we shall see, this simplistic observation and "explanation" seems to impoverish or even ignore the presence of generations of "spectators as subjects" that have subsequently seen the painting. So, our main effort in the following sections is to try to explain the painting and its various subjects from the artist's point of view. We shall expand upon Foucault's insight where he hints at, the central subject of the painting, determined by *who* Velazquez is actually looking at; his view apparently is hidden in plain sight, among many other rather obvious aspects of the painting that have been largely ignored or overlooked throughout the ages, except by fellow artists like Picasso. So, building upon the works and ideas, of Picasso and Foucault,³⁶ Ibid and I will present a novel theory of the painting that is literally hiding in plain sight.³⁷

Velazquez And The Royal Family: A Road Well Travelled.

Las Meninas is obviously a painting about Velazquez and the Spanish royal family of the time. So much has been written about this painting, some of which seems clearly wrong, that we don't think we can add much commentary to this criticism here —except, perhaps, more errors; we rather refer you to the vast literature on this painting with the warning and caveat that we really haven't read *all* the literature written on the painting for the past 350 years, beyond what exists on the texts already cited, as well as those on stock and shelf in Quantico (which has a huge Unit devoted to fraud in historical documents and art), or on our own at home; after all, this is a rather rushed and preliminary profile since we have our regular jobs to do.³⁸

³⁴ See, *infra*, note 55 on Cervantes.

³⁵ Fortunately, we have lost to posterity the author of this rather meaningless observation.

³⁶ Foucault, *Ibid*.

³⁷ *Ibid*., Andrei

³⁸ In short, we simply offer a unique perspective outside the mainstream, which is especially personified in the mainstream reaction as characterized by Mel Brook's first Art Critic.

So, as profilers AND artists, we look at the painting itself for evidence, choosing to keep an open and fresh mind about what we may find in our investigation of the painting itself, rather than rely on the texts of people who, for the most part, don't seem to be artists themselves or who have never tried their hand at artistic creation, however modest the result.

After we present the findings of our investigation (below), we will then venture into this rather voluminous literature on the paintings and see if it modifies or changes the original observations of our investigation and profile of *Las Meninas*. But that investigation will be the subject, if necessary and sufficient, for another essay. (If so, it will undoubtedly resemble the hilarious preface to *The Book of Good Love* by that naughty priest of the 12th century Juan Ruiz as he sat in Prison, superbly translated and published by the veteran of two wars and NC professor on the Spanish book by that imprisoned priest for an analogous introduction and effort. His preface is not to be missed....)

Part I: Historical Analysis: The Cultural Context Of *Las Meninas*

From a historical viewpoint, from the personal perspective of Velazquez himself, the central cultural reality of his life-world (Lebenswelt) revolved around the royal court of King Phillip IV of Spain. From the historical records, we know that Velazquez was born in Seville to parents who were of the lower nobility; so the young Velazquez had some of the advantages of his class and enjoyed a certain degree of formal education and then began his apprenticeship in art in which he excelled. Already an accomplished artist at the age of nineteen,³⁹ he married Juana Pacheco, the daughter of his art teacher. Due to his truly extraordinary talent, Velazquez enjoyed a rapidly rising reputation in his early twenties throughout Spanish artistic circles, and some of the people he impressed apparently had influence at the royal court.

So, as a young man of twenty-four, he was accorded the singular honor to paint the portrait of the King of Spain, which he completed in one day. King Phillip IV was so pleased with his portrait, as well by other paintings by Velazquez that the king made him his court painter, and ordered that no other painter would have the right to paint his portrait; this appointment represented an amazing rise to the inner circles of aristocracy and royalty for a young artist at the very beginning of his professional career. In short, blessed by extraordinary artistic gifts, Velazquez enjoyed a “rocket rise” as an aspiring painter to the heights of political influence and Spanish power.

So, Velazquez moved his wife and family to Madrid where he was to serve in the royal court for the remainder of his life—till 1660. At the time of his employment, the king gave him his own art studio which was progressively added on to and enlarged with many of his subsequent paintings until we see in *Las Meninas* (1656) the very large and last studio in which he worked.⁴⁰

So, as an adult, Velazquez's life-world—his actual historic and cultural context of social coherence—was the royal court of Spain, an undoubtedly lively and colorful place, consisting of highly capable military men and administrators to the king, members of the royal household and lesser nobility, bishops, priests and nuns, servant's, beautiful court courtesans as well as —one could only imagine— all sort of aspiring adventurers, opportunists, charlatans and spies. Velazquez would have seen all of these people in their daily lives as well as moments of high pomp and circumstance. One can only imagine that, with his inner artistic and eagle eye, he took in all the follies, fancies and foibles of the royal family and their “lower” contemporaries.

No doubt, blessed with extraordinary gifts of observation and visualization, he was no doubt storing up his observations for the day when he might publicly express some of the inner truths of what he witnessed of such “high nobility” in private....

Velazquez's chance to make a lasting illumination and statement concerning the court came towards the end of his life, with his painting *Las Meninas*; so, we will now turn and focus fully on this majestic yet often misunderstood masterpiece until we reconstruct the inner eye of Velazquez that he sees us with, especially expressed in *Las Meninas* after his lifetime of observations of the royal court.....

³⁹ For instance, Velazquez created his truly extraordinary *The Water Seller of Seville* at age nineteen or so, an age at which one of the authors, Boudreau, exclaims in dismay: “Everything I painted at age 19 turned into a finger painting!” One can feel the heat rising in the painting....So, the *Waterseller* is no mere *bodegón* painting; in awe of this painting, Boudreau says that he still gets thirsty every time he looks at the *Water Seller*...

⁴⁰ There are many excellent biographies written about Velazquez, including one written by his father in law, *Francisco Pacheco del Río*. In view of all the possible sources, we refer you to a modern Spanish one, Calvo Serraller, Francisco (1999). *Velázquez: Madrid: Electa*.

Velazquez And The Royal Family In *Las Meninas*

Modern art scholars and critics and historians, especially those who live in what Gore Vidal describes as the “United States of Amnesia,” often study and write as though the *present moment*—digital clock time—provides a more than adequate context to understand their world.⁴¹ This is fine presumption when dealing with current creations made in this specific historical era, but is woefully inadequate in understanding the great creations and masterpieces that we have inherited from the past. So, just as good doctors—an all too rare and dying breed-- takes the time to take a *personal history* of his or her patient before presuming to perform or prescribe any medicine on the otherwise hapless biological experiment (which is you or me...), any adequate analysis or viewer of *Las Meninas* must as fully appreciate the historical context of the painting, or potentially make fatal lapses of judgment.

So, to understand Velazquez’s life-world of life in the Royal Court, one has to recreate the actual personal and social experiences as well as expectations of each of the participants in such an aristocratic world, especially those portrayed in the painting. Perhaps the most important and certainly most dominant social reality of Velazquez’s world is its almost *absolute structure as an aristocracy* capped by a royal family headed by a King or Queen. Hence, this was a world in which the social allocation of status was ultimately determined by birth and one’s parent’s prior position in life.

There was no escaping this dominant social reality of this self-selecting aristocracy by birth especially if one, like Velazquez, actually lived within the Royal Court. Within such a world, the extreme determinants of royal social status demanded equally rigidly extreme social strictures, including inviolate ones about towering over, hobnobbing with, or speaking to or before Spanish royalty; as we shall see, Velazquez seems to dismissively violates every one of these strict rules of royal etiquette in his painting; was this defiance of such strict court protocol in his masterpiece pure chance or coincidence as the hapless art-critic may say? Yet, especially in painting, the ARTIST is in total control of his creation and hence “what to leave in” and thus what to create, and what then to leave out. So, as criminal investigators, we must take a second and closer look at the clues of these royal “crimes” of court.

A KEY FIRST CLUE: Height As Royal Status

Perhaps one of the most important outward signs of the elevated social status of aristocracy and the royal family is *height*; in the presence of royalty, one’s head is technically never *supposed to be above* that of the King or Queen, or both. In fact, height was so important to royals that one shrimpy king—King Louis XII—actually invented the high-heel shoe so that he could tower over his subjects. French and “world culture” has never been the same since this artificially evaluated Frenchman...⁴² Yet, being lower than royalty is obviously hard for everyone to do all the time, especially if any work is to be done by their hard pressed servants. So, the custom of *bowing* was gradually allowed and accepted as an alternative to the abject servitude and shortness of, say, the Pharaoh’s subjects, those luckless souls, who actually had to wallow on the floor for hours in the presence of their all too human god-kings.⁴³

So, the ancient habit using height to connote royal status still lingers, even in this supposed modern age. This is why all mere mortals—you or I—were and still are expected *to bow* to royalty and, if in their immediate presence, bow our heads to our chests in an act of submission, which is sometimes feigned—especially by irreverent Americans-- but that is another story.⁴⁴ The point is that *height as royal status* was a very real social reality in the life-world of Velazquez.

⁴¹Gore Vidal: *The United States of Amnesia*". gorevidaldocumentary.com.

⁴² Being practically minded, especially in committing or escaping from the scene of a crime, men soon gave up this royal pretention; yet, the poor and innocent women of the world, including the current or former wives of the authors, took up the “high heel” as a hapless symbol of royal fashion and so have been uncomfortably uplifted and off balance, especially when the ground or floor is wet, ever since! So, to paraphrase those social revolutionaries, “women of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your *high heels!*” Seriously, your local Emergency Rooms will thank you. Let the shrimpy Frenchmen wear them, despite Messieur Boudreau’s faux protests (over this entire footnote). But he doth protest too much, especially since he is laughing with me as this is being written.

⁴³As described in John Perry’s excellent analysis of how mere mortals mimic the Pharaohs and ancient royalty to ultimately want to become, like them, fully realized individuals: See *The Heart of History: Individuality in Evolution* by John Weir Perry. SUNY Press, 1987.

⁴⁴ As Americans, we bow to no royalty. Yet, there is one exception. The Current Queen of England, Elizabeth wears, not only an outward diadem, but also wears an inner Crown of Conscience, as illustrated by her singular support of President Mandela while he was still a prisoner of the Apartheid regime; her personal interest and interventions—such as the Commonwealth Council of Eminent Persons who visited President Mandela while he was still in prison-- is but one example and may have helped to save his life. As such, we happily and gratefully bow before her regal inner Crown of Conscience.

So, not surprisingly, *height as royal status is a critical factor* in *Las Meninas* as well. Specifically, Velazquez uses height to signify the relative importance of all that is present in *Las Meninas*. Apparently, this obvious reality has been hiding in plain sight within the painting from most art critics for over three hundred years. [Footnote: This serves, once again, as a rather blatant confirmation of Mel Brook's all too accurate judgment of art critics in his movie, *History of the World, Part One...* 😊)

Thus, the element of height is obviously present in *Las Meninas* as a deliberate decision of the Artist in the act of his creation; in fact, the inclusion of such towering height in the design of *Las Meninas* is a dominant determinant of the “full-ground” relational architecture of the entire painting!⁴⁵ First, there is the towering height of the studio itself which serves as the critical “background” to measure and place into proportion all that follows. Second, there is the obvious and towering height of the Artist's canvas—the tallest object by far in the painting. In this way, Velazquez is stating, in essence, that the canvas-- as the very site of the artist's creation -- enjoys supreme royal status, and towers over all that is occurring below in his studio. Next, there is the commanding height of the artist himself who towers over all other mortals in the painting, including those in the foreground, the Nun and warrior-monk (?), perhaps a bodyguard, in mid ground and the mysterious “stranger” entering through the brilliantly lit door in the back...⁴⁶ Most importantly, in the still largely medieval world of royalty, Velazquez as artist has placed himself higher than the King and Queen, whose presence is only indicated by the small mirror on the back-wall of the studio. Hence, the two people that Velazquez has been bowing to all his life are suddenly lower in height and hence status than that of the Artist, the newly crowned king, at least in this pivotal and transitional painting between archaic aristocracy and modernity.

Next in line, according to height, is the mysterious stranger entering the Artist studio, who some identify as the brother of Velazquez, Don Jose Nieto Velazquez, the queen's chamberlain, (and hence of lower social status compared to the august royal company within the room.) Some speculate that he is either coming or going;⁴⁷ but if he is leaving, he is presumably positioned (by looking at the posture and his feet) to be talking with someone in the room—yet, no one seems to be addressing him at all. Furthermore, *who would grab a curtain by his right hand, presumably for support, across his body, if he is climbing the staircase and leaving?* (He would have to twist almost a full 180 around on a stairway to leave.) So, in our judgment, he is obviously *stepping into* the studio. In particular, the position of his right foot suggests that he is pausing as he steps *into* the room; it is certainly not a footprint that indicates an ascent up the stairs. So, we posit that he is entering the room by the position of his right arm and his feet, pausing perhaps to glance the entire scene, the entire living landscape of the studio. In short, the stranger, who is actually in the epicenter of the painting, is literally pausing to step into the studio, seeing all, and thus the painting--*which he, alone (besides the artist) can see.* The most important evidence is his the direction of his gaze; his head is slightly tilted to the left, with only one eye visible; in short, the “stranger” is looking directly at the canvas. Specifically, he is the only person in the studio besides the artist himself who can see the stunning whole canvas in the process of unfolding artistic creation.

The importance of the entering “stranger” is vividly illustrated by the radiant light that literally surrounds him. To surround him with the golden light of a seeming sunrise is the artistic way or act of *explicit emphasis*—as known to those of us who actually paint; the rule of artistic composition is that “light highlights and brings forward.” So, for Velazquez, this is a supremely important presence who is located, almost literally in the center of the painting. But why? Thus, the placement of this “stranger” as subject—as second in height only to the artist himself—is a critical clue that all is not what it seems in the painting; we will come back to this in the third and final section of this essay. Since his identity is not with certainty established, we will continue to refer to him as the “stranger” in the painting.

⁴⁵ See supra, note on Universitas.

⁴⁶ Perhaps it is José Nieto Velázquez, brother of the painter, was the queen's chamberlain, or an attendant on of the sovereign. Also see: Portrait of a Man. BBC Your Paintings. But this is also disputed in the contested world of Art history, as it should be since we were not there and can't claim to know with any degree of absolute certainty. Or is José the only Spaniard that is bearded and bald?

⁴⁷ Who grabs a curtain *by his right hand*, presumably for support, across his body if he is climbing the staircase and leaving? His left hand is, well, literally at hand....So, He is obviously stepping into the studio. Yet, not knowing if one is coming or going may be typical of the French, or so says Ibid, while Messieur Boudreau obviously dissents to this characterization, and he seems to be in good company; see, for example, Harriet Stone who says it's not clear if the stranger is coming or going in her book: Stone, Harriet. *The Classical Model: Literature and Knowledge in Seventeenth-century France*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996. But we must admit the evidence is suggestive, not conclusive.

At this point, it is interesting to note that the great Picasso in his first painting (we believe) of *Las Meninas* playfully places this stranger at the epicenter of the painting, and then places Velazquez as artist *higher* than the canvas, thus enlarging and intensifying the pictorial roles of both the stranger as well as Velazquez; in fact, by making the Artist the tallest subject in the room, Picasso is confirming the ultimate royal status of the Artist as creator, a role greater than that of any King or Queen..... Of course, Picasso painted at the evolving pinnacle of modernity, unlike Velazquez who still painted in reference to actual, living and dominant royalty. In this sense, Picasso may have been freer, in terms of his living historical context, to elevate the Artist to such august, lonely heights as the Creator-King.....

Yet, Velazquez continues to make profound statements concerning the contents and subject in *Las Meninas* by *using height as his indicator of actual royal status* in the free or freer world of artistic creation. The next human subjects in importance, in terms of tallness, are the nun and monk/ bodyguard (?) in the shadowed mid-ground, of *Las Meninas*, who are almost rivals in height to the artist himself. In this sense, Velazquez is giving homage to his profound respect for Spanish Catholicism and clergy who were an inevitable presence at the Royal Court. Velazquez was a devout Christian and Catholic and is expressing his deep respect for the people and representatives of his Church; while portrayed lower than the Artist as creator—since it is he who makes this entire pictorial reality possible—the nun and priest are still significantly higher than any or all of the royal family.

So, though it seems to be hiding in plain sight (since this is NOT mentioned, so it seems in much if not most of the critical commentary⁴⁸ on the painting down through the ages), *this painting is obviously about height* as well, as we have seen, the primordial importance of the creative act as represented by the artist standing in the moment of applying paint to the canvas itself. As a clue to the issue of height, he paints two dwarfs in the forefront of this painting, right in front of the voluminous and high studio. These courtly dwarfs are in sharp contrast to the height of the tallest person in the room, the Artist himself as the Creator-King, recreating his royal court of art. As such, height is admittedly a significant statement in the reconfigured “royal world” of Velazquez’s painting. This is because height was of essential importance to the medieval world of royals and aristocrats; that’s why mere “commoners had to bow to them; their heads could never be above that of the “royals.”

But a very different story is unravelling in Velazquez’s *Las Meninas*; the height of all possible royal subjects of the painting are actually far below those of the Artist—as Creator King as well as that of the entering stranger; in fact, the head of the servant girl to the right of the Infanta is co-equal to the height of the King and Queen! There seems to be no patience or toleration here for the pretense of heightened royal prerogatives, let alone the living royalty in the painting. (Or, by implication, perhaps—though he personally never would have said or believed as much the imperious hubris of other subsequent aristocrats to claim the “divine rights” of kings, or Emperors!) At the very least, Velazquez is breaking new ground, at least for his own art, in portraying a new artistic royalty as those that tower above the word. The subject and royal have been reversed. In doing so, Velazquez is beginning to break the deeply personal and social bonds with royalty as a divine right that, a personal break that evolved and is mirrored and magnified much later in the American and French revolutions as well as the subsequent outbreak of democratic republics around the world. This clear break will become even clearer when we consider the person or persons who are the actual subject of this seemingly “obvious” visual painting. Here as then, not all is as it seems.....

For instance, in his recreated life world of artist as king, Velazquez is placing in his painting himself as the *artist in the act of creation*; thus he is replacing the role of the actual homage due to the living King and Queen and stating that now it is the *artist who the new royalty in the recreated world of Las Meninas* where sheer ability seems to ultimately rule.

Thus, the portrayal of his self-appointed rank of artist as king *being higher* than the clergy is not necessarily sacrilegious; if we look again at the copies of the paintings on the back-wall of Velazquez’s studio, we will note that the artists portrayed in these shadowed works— Arachne and Pan – are depicted as using their divine gifts that even rival the artistically dominant divinities—Athena and Apollo— of classical times.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ That is, the critical commentary that we are aware of; now, after this profile comes out, someone may undoubtedly discover an 18th century tract that makes the same or similar claim, proving what the modern day genius Dan Deudney (somewhat comically) states, “there are no new ideas, just new mistakes.....”

⁴⁹ Such a struggle between a mere mortal and the gods was a familiar one for Velazquez; see his *Las Hilanderas*, or *The Spinners*, now in the Prado as well in Madrid, for his rendition of the same contest between Arachne and Athena, a similar theme to the one being played out in *Las Meninas*.

Just as the ancient regime of royalty, still very much alive in Velazquez's painting, received homage from the Church, now it is the Artist as King who deserves the same, if not greater, respect as the one, the Artist as creator-King, who literally wrestles with the gods.....

In the "foreground" of the painting, we have an extraordinary display of artistic virtuosity that has been rarely rivaled in human history; using his famous broad brush strokes, Velazquez recreates the magical world of the Royal Court in all of its magnificence in the form of the daughter *Infanta* and her beautifully painted entourage, including the court dwarfs and dog.⁵⁰ One can almost hear the swirl of the dresses and the whispered conversations between one of the *meninas*, or Court servant girls,⁵¹ and the *Infanta* as she looks lovingly upon her parents, the King and Queen, presumably being painted on his canvas.

Yet, pictorial height is here, once again, used to recreate the ranks of true royalty in this brave new world of the artist as king. For instance, notice that the heads of both of the *Las Meninas*, the servant girls, including the one nearest the *Infanta*, are actually higher than that of the royal daughter. If height is royal status in this artistically created world of Velazquez, as it is in the then all too real world of Spanish royalty, then the *Las Meninas* have been *dramatically portrayed and thus promoted to lords and ladies over and above* the little royal *Infanta*. This is sacrilege to medieval or even modern Europeans, but not to those who live in the Americas, a key cultural difference between the Old and New Worlds.

Most importantly, the head of the standing servant girl, one of the painted *las meninas*, is exactly equal to the height of the King and Queen who are rather limply lit up on the mirror on the back wall of the studio. In doing this, Velazquez is actually making a radical, even dangerous, statement for his time, place and age; he is saying, in effect, the "common" servant girls are now, at least artistically speaking, *the equals of royalty!* In short, *Velazquez is, in effect, creating a new artistic royal court in Las Meninas that literally towers over the supposedly "real" royal court*; this is a new artistic life-world where even the servant girls are the equal, if not greater, than the royal daughter that they supposedly attend to and serve. Less this be doubted, is there another, better reason or explanation *for the very obvious use of height, depth and space* or more accurately spacing of each of the potential subjects in this extraordinary painting *Las Meninas*? Nothing seems as it seems.

Yet, Velazquez is not yet done with his use of height as royal status in this extraordinary artistic creation and, in fact, recreation and transformation of his life world into a new royal court of creative ART. Even the Court dwarf, elegantly dressed and portrayed, is taller than the *Infanta*, and her colleague is leaning over to her and seems to be speaking in her ear. Again, one of the suffocating "conventions" of royalty is the absolute control of speech among subjects; one is simply not to speak in the presence of royal unless spoken to directly. In particular, there is a critical convention of royalty is that, in the time of Velazquez (as now) one is not supposed to talk to the King or Queen unless spoken to, for some strange reason (we hope) lost to antiquity.

So, the presence of any conversation portrayed in the painting has obvious symbolic, artistic and even royal implications as well. It is as though the real royals, in the form of the king and Queen are not really present, either as true subjects or even as "mannequins in a mirror,"⁵² since nothing seems to be inhibiting the dwarf from speaking to her colleague.

In other words, the king and queen seem isolated in this hermetic bubble artistically created around them in which *none* of the critical conventions concerning height or speech in regards to royalty are being observed; perhaps this was the actual norm in the daily life of the Spanish Court—we just don't know since we were not there, nor invited, for some reason. ☹ So, we merely note the three "couples" apparently speaking in the painting—the servant girl or *La Menina* to the *Infanta*, one dwarf to the other, and the Nun to the bodyguard/monk. To paraphrase the early Rock and Roll song, there seems to be a 'whole lot of talking going on....'⁵³

⁵⁰ The dog is obviously falling asleep, or just awaking; if the royal couple was just entering, as some commentators and petless art critics seem to suggest, the dog of the household would be on its feet, tail wagging, to greet its royal masters. In contrast, the pet would be sleepy during a prolonged time of artistic composition and creation. In other words, the royals have been sitting there a long time to put this dog to sleep.....

⁵¹ *Las Meninas* has no accurate Spanish translation; the word seems to mean: a "girl from a noble family brought up to serve at court" (*Oxford Concise Spanish Dictionary*)

⁵² We are using "mannequins" in its old meaning as a person employed by a designer or store to model clothes. ☹

⁵³ Jerry Lee Lewis, Whole lot of Shaking Going on, Dick Clark's Bandstand, 1964

Yet, on second glance, we must ask: why *choose to portray these three conversations or anyone one of them*, and paint each speaking encounter on this canvas which supposedly would embody the strict courtly decorum and dignity of royalty? Such a setting is exactly where the critical conventions would be presumed, at first, to be strictly observed. All present knew the importance of this moment—that of a royal couple and their daughter being captured in the ultimate act of creation to portray them on a canvas that was then the only representative medium besides the printed page that was known to survive the ages. (Answer—he was playing to multiple audiences—the theme of the third part) Why then place the dwarf, elegantly dressed as the most forward of human subjects and the extraordinarily detailed yet sleepy, if not bored, dog in the very front? Is this almost divinely gifted artist and painter playing with us? (In case you doubt, a one word answer: “Absolutely, meaning yes!”☺) Or, at the same time, is he saying that these once critical conventions of the dominant living royalty no longer matter at all in the newly created artistic royal court in which the artist is now king? If the latter true, then the artist’s world and canvas as immortal creation, becomes the new measure of true royalty. Best of all, this is a world that allows even speaking among “servants” and commoners, in the presence of the very busy artist as the new Creator King.

Part II: Putting Paint To The Paintbrush: The Artist As Creator King

THE ACT OF CREATION: FULL GROUND THINKING AND SYNTHESIS.....

Las Meninas is preeminently a painting that celebrates the power and ability of the master artist to create. In short, *Las Meninas* is a canvas that Velazquez uses to celebrate the epic artistry and ability to create, to actually make a great creation of lasting beauty and eloquence; this ability and power of artistic creation is at the very heart of Velazquez’s endeavors in *Las Meninas*. In turn, this creative power and ability is inseparable from the painting’s ongoing creation and thus influences the contents and subjects of *Las Meninas*; as we shall see, this is a painting that is, as an example of participatory art, in the vibrant, febrile process of constant *recreation* that ultimately places this painting in the very forefront of the best artistic creations in human history.

The inclusion in of the “full ground” of the composition of the “artist as subject” within the three dimension depth and height of his vast studio indicates his deeper purpose of illuminating the artist, *in the very moment of creation*; in *Las Meninas*, he is captured in the act of putting his paint-brush to palette and hence to the canvas; the height of the canvas and artist relative to everything in the room is a critical clue; The portrayal of *height in general* in the painting is a critical to the works meaning and purpose. The canvas as the very site of artistic creation is the undoubtedly the tallest object in the room, dominating everyone and everything else in the painting. For Velazquez, creation was the true king. Less this be doubted, Velazquez leaves several very vivid and vibrant clues about the importance of artistic creation in *Las Meninas*. For instance, *Las Meninas* captures Velazquez in the supreme moment of creative tension—when the artist has his paintbrush in hand—as he also holds other unused brushes-- and is about to use the brush to apply the paint that will be pressed gently to the canvas and thus bring his artistic vision to life. In *Las Meninas*, Velazquez portrays himself in this critical moment when the paintbrush hangs from his hand and is pointed down to the palette full of the colors, some mixed and others pure, as he stares as the subjects in a pregnant pause full of creative possibilities—the supreme moment of the creative moment and process in which his inner eye of artistic majesty and vision attempts to mix and match the realities of his sight, and then press this brush filled paint drenched possibility to the canvas to create a work that can potentially, as he knows well, last for all time.....

In this way, Velazquez is unequivocally stating that the artist in his studio at work is the creator king of his world, even if it includes, at that moment, the entire royal family of Spain. In essence, the artist is creating a new royal court of art, complete with dwarfs, representative (s) of the church and even royalty! To emphasize the importance of this moment, Velazquez makes his canvas the largest object in the room; in his world of the royal court, in which height equates status.

There can be no missing the meaning of his making the canvas this large, towering over all the subjects and objects in his studio. This is the supreme moment of artistic creation on the canvas that makes all his art possible; thus, in making the canvas so large and dominant in this painting, he is clearly making the *strongest personal statement possible about the importance and power of artistic creation*, especially—as we shall see below in section III—in relation between the old world of royalty and the new world of art.....

Second, *Las Meninas* is meant to reveal and celebrate the *artist's personal and almost divine-like power of creation*, as illustrated by his constant work on the towering canvas to create such artistic reality and beauty out of literally nothing but his eye, hand, common “clays” or pigments and his subsequent artistic skills -- which in his case are truly extraordinary.

By doing so, Velazquez subsequently and quite deliberately synthesizes and unites all these elements and subjects together to create a timeless work of art that is unique in human history. In short, this is a painting about the sheer *power of artistic creation* as an elevated and unique human activity that rivals the gifts of the gods. Velazquez seems to be making a personal statement that the struggle of the artist as creator tempts the fates but if he or she is successful, wins endless beauty for all of humanity.

This central and elevated purpose of the artist is clearly illustrated, not only in the relative foreground of the painting where the *canvas of the creator artist is the largest object in the room* (More about this shortly), but—as already discussed—by the two large paintings in the deep and shadowed background; originally already done by Reubens, *Minerva Punishing Arachne* as well Apollo's *Victory over Marsyas (Pan)*.⁵⁴ These two paintings illustrate artists in the midst of their strenuous artistic contests with the Greek Gods over who creates the better art; in choosing these painting to hand in his studio and be the barely lit background to his canvas, Velazquez is clearly paying homage to the divine inspiration and origins of artistic creation; he is also highlighting and honoring the contests, travails and rivalry of mere mortals, Velazquez's “fellow artists,” in trying to match the immortal art of the Greek gods.

So, these paintings in the back of his studio provide the essential background theme of Velazquez *Las Meninas*; namely, that the artistic gift of mere mortals rivals the very best, and some even better (if the myth of *Arachne is to be believed*), the best creation of the classical gods. In other words, Velazquez's is presenting *Las Meninas* as a very special self-portrait—as well as a portrait of the royal family whom he loved and admired-- to illustrate and announce a much greater truth than reproducing the mere moment, namely that the artist in his studio is the Creator-King whose life long training and full ground synthetic sight gives him the powers and abilities to CREATE and thus recreate and preserve this fleeting moment with almost divine like artistic powers for all of prosperity. He may even be suggesting that creation itself is almost a divine act.

In this regard, Velazquez may be adding a secondary though subtle symbol concerning the fragility and precarious nature of the creative process; if one looks closely at the towering canvas in his studio, one can easily see that the visible edge of the canvas is barely covering the wood; in some areas, the edge of the canvas is not visible at all! We strongly suspect that, in real life, the back of this canvas is actually nailed down to its wooden frame like most other canvases constructed then and now. (All Artists who have actually nailed a canvas to a frame know what we mean; those art critics who have never done so or created a painting will only think they know what this means.) As any artist working in this medium knows, the canvas usually must be fully stretched over the wooden frame and *hammered securely into place* if the artist is to use its taunt surface to paint firmly and accurately what he intends to portray. Yet, this is obviously not *how Velazquez portrays the canvas* that he is working on in *Las Meninas*. As a result, defying gravity, the canvas literally seems to float on air...

Furthermore, the edge of the painting is highly irregular and uneven which would make it seem –to any experienced artist—as *an almost impossible surface to paint on*, especially a painting with such precise proportion, people and other profiles; the artist here seems to be visually adding this seemingly untethered edge to emphasize the improbability and fragility of the creative process inherent in the visualization and painting of a great masterpiece. This interpretation, as an experiment, could be duplicated on a very large and unattached canvas and the findings would suggest, or even confirm, that it would be almost impossible to create such a magnificence painting on any such unfastened and uneven surface. Such an experiment could only heighten appreciation for the act of creation that is the basis of Velazquez's gifts to the world. Velazquez is the true aristocrat of art caught in the very act of making his creation.

⁵⁴ See *Supra*, notes 25-28. Link analysis suggests an intimate interrelationship between these paintings, clearly painted in the background and the full ground of *Las Meninas*. ⁵⁴ See note 16 *supra.*, as an intro into Link analysis: <https://freeali.wordpress.com/2008/09/04/link-analysis-at-the-fbi/> Or: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/link-analysis>. There are many other metrics and methodologies used in constructing a variety of types of actual profiles, but this is a very preliminary profile, so we are simply using one or two such public methods here, such as link analysis.

In short, in our judgment, Velazquez is trying to say in a whimsical yet profound way that the process of painting great art is highly precarious, fragile and almost impossible act of creation; if we add the canvases in the background of this studio, Velazquez is emphatically saying that such artistic activity and creation rivals the artistic powers and gifts of the gods. In doing so, Velazquez is paying deep tribute to his chosen craft and ultimate homage to his art as an immortal creation.

Picasso's Playful Additions:

Inspired by Velazquez's original, Pablo Picasso painted a series of almost fifty renditions of *Las Meninas* which are now all collected together in one place in a museum in Spain. One of the very first of these paintings, Picasso captures the central importance of height in *Las Meninas*; yet, in a playful addition to Velazquez original painting, Picasso portrays *the artist as the tallest presence in the studio*, taller than the canvas that he is working on as well as any other person or object in the studio. In doing so, Picasso seems to be elevating the Artist as Creator King and thus the most important presence in the painting, not the art or canvas-creation. This is an insightful and valuable addition to *Las Meninas* original painting; in truth, it is the dual role of the artist and his canvas creation that remakes the world and thus create a powerful presence that rivals the gifts of the gods.

One can only suspect that Picasso, like his Spanish artistic forbear, knew exactly what he was doing and, thus, the elevation of the artist—not simply the resulting art—was a conscious decision to inform the world of the critical role of the artist in artistic creation. In none of his renditions, (to our knowledge) does Picasso exclude or even minimize the size or importance of the artist, his canvas and the ensuing god-like creation. Even so, Picasso—like Velazquez and many other great Spanish artists certainly enjoys an element of the whimsical in his art;⁵⁵ as such, there is little doubt that Picasso would agree with Velazquez that, by making every choice, even the whimsical, in the process of painting, the Artist is truly the Creator-King. This can only serve as a confirmation from two of Spain's greatest artists of the central role of the artist and his canvas in the creation of enduring beauty and art.

Part III: The Spectator Subject As Co-Creator: Las Meninas As Participatory Art

As an artist of supreme ability and accomplishment, Velazquez is quite capable of embracing multiple subjects and audiences in his art. This is especially true of his masterpiece *Las Meninas* that has, at the very least, three main subjects in his painting. These subjects are, in turn, a clue to his intended audiences in his present moment—1656- and for prosperity.

The first audience is obviously the King and Queen of Spain, King Phillip IV and his Habsburg wife, Queen Mariana. From all reports, Velazquez was a personal friend of Phillip and had a very good and intimate relationship with the king who reportedly simply sat and talked to the artist while Velazquez was working in his studio. This relationship endears Phillip to prosperity whom seemed capable of ignoring the strict code and protocols of royalty to embrace his most talented artist, though almost a commoner, as a friend. No doubt, Velazquez reciprocated this admiration and friendship and the two seemed to enjoy a mutually valued and deeply appreciated friendship.

So Velazquez undoubtedly wanted to paint a picture pleasing to his friend the King and his family. By making it “seem” as though *Las Meninas* was painted from the perspective of the royal couple themselves must have been a source of immense satisfaction and pride for Phillip; as king, the painting—as the his world—seemed to revolve around him and his wife. As a member of the high royal, this was undoubtedly as it should be and placed into perspective his privilege and power as king. As such, Phillip would be more than amply satisfied with his mere representation on a mirror in the back of the room.

As the subject and supposed center of this painting, the King and Queen apparently didn't mind not having a larger role or representation in the painting. They are merely represented in a reflection in the mirror that is off center in the back of the room. For Phillip and Queen Mariana, this must have seen, and rightly so, as an artistic innovation of sublime meaning and mimicry, adding to their reported pleasure in the painting. So, they are undoubtedly subjects,

⁵⁵ Cervantes takes first pride of place in his use of the whimsical in his art; (For instance, for some strange reason the literal meaning of *Don Quixote de la Mancha* is not in the literature, probably because it's so risqué—but just look it up ☺! Quixote or literally “Quijote” in Spanish literally means upper thigh (or groin) armor. “La Mancha” means “stain.” Together, they literally mean “upper thigh or groin stain”—we leave the rest, as Cervantes did, to you, dear reader... Hey, don't blame the authors for this ‘plausible hypothesis,’ we are simply the investigators as “messengers,” of the literal message hidden in plain sight....

as well as an appreciate audience, in the paintings, even though their presence was pictorially represented in the smallest square on the back-wall of Velazquez's studio.....

From the perspective of the classical art, which seems to prize the use of subjects as triangles in the full ground architecture of pictorial design, it is important to note that there is an inward invisible triangle constituting these royal subjects in their relationship with the artist. At the apex of this triangle is the artist himself captured, as we have seen, in the very moment of creation.

The mirror in the back constitutes the second corner of this triangle; the unseen king and queen in front constitute the third corner of the triangle, presenting an intriguing and invisible completion of the subjects' portrayal in the painting. As we shall see, this is not the only "invisible triangle" that helps to reveal the multiple subjects in *Las Meninas*.

As subjects of the painting, Phillip and Queen Mariana were probably already present and standing in the room; this assertion contradicts the assertions of some of modern commentary on the painting which seems to accept without further thought that the royal couple was in the *act of arriving* in the studio. Upon closer inspection, this limp supposition of the royals' arrival can be easily dismissed as highly improbable by counterfactual evidence provided by the presence of the simple, sleepy presence of the dog wonderfully painted and portrayed in the very front of the painting. Unless the dog was stone deaf, it would have been the very first to notice the rustle and bustle of approaching or entering royalty—his or her literal masters—into the room. If, like most dogs, this dog knew its masters by sound or sight, it would have been, at the very least, awake and alert, even jumping up with anticipation, especially if the royal couple was just then entering the room. (Unless the dog in the painting was actually dead, a mummy inserted later, being portrayed by the artist—lets be real!) The fact that the dog appears sound asleep, or about to fall asleep, strongly suggests that nothing as dramatic and recent as an ongoing or recent arrival of its Masters. So, one can only conclude by this sleeping pet—the closest living being to the royal subjects-- that the King and Queen had been in the room for a while, apparently standing, and enjoying the presence and playfulness of the second subject in the painting, the Infanta and her court.

The painting of the royal couple's daughter, the Infanta Margaret Theresa is simply an extraordinary and adorable representation of their young daughter, who was their first and only child to survive (at this time); as such, this painting must have had immense personal familial and personal meaning to the royal couple. In turn, the Infanta's look at her parents is so spontaneous, appreciative and alive with the beauty and youth of her royal countenance. In painting her, Velazquez seems truly inspired; using the broad brush strokes that he is famous for, Velazquez portrays the luxuriant and supple silks and laces of the Infanta and her entourage in seemingly breathtaking realism—if one is standing six feet from the painting (Up close, his brush strokes look like a pot of vegetable soup—he as a master of anticipating where the eye of the viewer would be, which is not on the surface of the painting, but many feet away; to know how to create this "soupy mix" of colors up close, as the Artist must be, to the canvas and simultaneously know *what it would look like* three feet or more away is simply an extraordinary artistic gift and creation. As such, the extraordinary artistic portrayal of the Infanta and her court is a high moment of Baroque art.

A clue that the Infanta is a key subject of the painting can be found in the presence of the visual triangle of full ground artistic design for the pictorial representation of the Infanta and her entourage of *Las Meninas* and the dwarfs. The triangular order in height of the subjects, used in classical paintings such as as well as modern paintings such as Picasso's *Guernica*, is a pictorial device to provide some artistic sense of order and often priority in the visual importance of the subjects. If Velazquez is using the foregrounded pictorial triangle that includes the Infanta as an indication of his artistic priorities, then the apex of this visual triangular design is the servant girl to the right of the Infanta; if this seems an improbable priority, it is important to remember that the title of the painting itself is *Las Meninas*, even though this title was later bestowed; if Velazquez did not pick this exact name himself, then someone who simply and plainly looked at the painting recognized the obvious—namely, that the servant girl is at the very apex of the subjects presented in the foreground of the painting. If this is accurate— meaning, simply LOOK at the painting (without any preconceived notions) -- then some other consideration obviously seems to be at work here; we will get back to this intriguing possibility when we examine the third and mysterious subject of the painting in the following section. The audience for this almost unparalleled artistic representation of Infanta as subject was first and foremost, her appreciative parents and well as other members of the royal family or court who would have access to the inner chambers of the King and Queen. As such, this exquisite and realistic representation of the Infanta was meant, at first, for a very private and special audience limited to the Spanish royal court.

Yet, Velazquez as a great collector for the same royal court of classical and then “contemporary” art, personally knew and fully appreciated that many of the paintings currently in the possession of the Spanish royal family had at one time been meant for only a private audience. So, he undoubtedly knew or certainly hoped that he was painting for all of prosperity as well.

If this is accurate, then this rather realistic artistic expectation of a great master explains his additional efforts in the painting to represent his third and most mysterious subject, as well as third main and truly remarkable, living audience of *Las Medinas*, a subject to which we now address and study in greater detail.

The Viewer as Subject: The Audience as Co-Creators of Las Meninas

If you recall, we began this essay with the seemingly obvious statement that: “every potential subject of the painting also has its representation in the painting.” The importance of this statement can now be seen by the brilliance of Velazquez in artistically portraying in a small back-wall mirror the otherwise totally unseen and normally dominant presence of the King and King in the artist’s studio. We also referred to the first invisible triangle of pictorial design, sometimes used to guide the eye in classical paintings; here, the pictorial triangle consists of a mirrored reflection as a representation of the nominally main subjects consists of the royal couple; this is simple a brilliant artistic rendition of royalty, as viewed from their own eyes! Even so, these subject’s pictorial triangle also consists of the artist as apex, the mirror and then is completed by the otherwise unseen royal couple themselves who are looking out and surveying the picturesque scene before them.

Yet, there is a third invisible triangle often overlooked, not only by art scholars, but even by artists themselves.⁵⁶ To locate this invisible triangle, we first must ask two artistically related questions: First, where is the *geometric and even pictorial center of the painting*? It is certainly NOT the mirror on the back wall containing the fleeting images of the royal couple. Second, besides the foreground, what is the *most lite or lighted area of the painting*? As all artists know, light is usually used to highlight, emphasize, or even foreground significantly visual areas of the painting. [Such bright light opens, obviously highlighting and thus emphasizing an object in the painting as an important area of visual interest; the artist as creator can, first and foremost, control the degree of illumination in his pictorial representation.] So, by answering these two questions, we can begin to locate the third and perhaps most important invisible triangle of *Las Meninas*. In doing so, we have to remember that Velazquez the great artist was also capable of great whimsy and iconoclasm; many of his original masterpieces painted when he was a very young man, were of the most “common” subjects imaginable; perhaps he never lost sight of them—of us—in *Las Meninas*, his subsequent masterpiece on royalty.

The answer to the first question concerning the geometric and even pictorial center of the painting is that it lies at the upper left corner of the open door in the back where the person that we entitle “the stranger” is entering the studio. The second answer to the second question is that is that the greatest burst of light in the painting, besides the foreground (that includes the Infanta and her entourage) is this same doorway through which the stranger enters. This doorway, way in the back and apparent corner of the studio, is lit up like the rising sun and is, in fact, geometrically located *near the very center of the painting*. So, what is Velazquez doing? Why is he highlighting this area to rival a sunrise?

Specifically, what is he trying to say with the entrance of this Stanger? Whatever the answers are, there is obviously something very important going on here—if this was a crime scene, we would give this place a very special prominence in the overall painting; fortunately, it’s a stunning creation, not a crime scene, so we are doubly intrigued by this telling almost overlooked visual aspect of *Las Meninas*. In short, something more here is hiding in plain sight.

A key clue to what this might be is to ask, again, as any good investigator does, the same question, namely: What is Velazquez really looking at?

⁵⁶ Many of the existing interpretations of *Las Meninas* focus almost exclusively on the triangular or proportionate construction for the painting by the artist, as though the inner architecture, alone, explains the meaning or motive that is inspiring or moving the artist to create. This inner architecture is obviously important, but not decisive, especially in our interpretation here. No doubt, some hapless art critic will-well- criticize our interpretation for a variety of banal reasons—rather than develop a new “plausible rival hypothesis” concerning the painting itself – including noting that there are many more “triangles” in this painting than three! True, but we are running out time, and space.

The easy and facile answer is that he is looking at the King and Queen, which is undoubtedly true, to some extent. As such, they are undoubtedly a key subject of the painting. Yet, as an artist, Velazquez is keenly aware of his real and potential multiple audiences. So, who else is he obviously looking at? In fact, he is staring and almost glaring in a very penetrating purview of all that is and will be before him.....

*Velazquez is looking at YOU, us and all who stand anywhere in front of this magnificent and very large creation.*⁵⁷ In short, you and I are his third and perhaps most important subject of the painting. He is saying with his plaintive look, "Hola, my creation is incomplete and, in fact, will be incomplete, until you stand there and stare back. In fact, it exists as though a sleeping dog or being until you arrive and give my creation new life and vitality!"

So, *we the living spectators are the third and perhaps most integral subjects of his painting in what we can describe as an extraordinary example of participatory art*, which is an intensely democratic and non-even anti-royal statement. As any great artist knows, it is the artistic judgment and views of posterity that ultimately count and so Velazquez is eloquently and artistically including us as welcomed guests and subjects of his new royal court of artistic creation. We are, in essence, the final subjects of this masterpiece since it is *only* our very act of viewing *Las Meninas* that can only bring the painting, as an enduring and continuing creation, fully to life.

Furthermore, very new spectator or groups of spectators as subjects makes this painting a new creation; *Las Meninas* is thus reborn and renewed with every new viewing and viewer. Yet, if "every potential subject of the painting also has its representation in the painting," where then *are we* in *Las Meninas*? Did Velazquez forget us if we are his most enduring and important subjects?!

Not at all. Velazquez represents us -- the only ones who can totally see and thus bring the creation fully to life -- who are simultaneously his audience and creative subjects; as such, we are the commoner, as the "Stranger" entering the studio through the door that is near the geometric and artistic center of the painting. *As already discussed, only the stranger can see the entire canvas as the Artist.* Like the stranger, *we are the only ones who can view the entire masterpiece at one glance.* Every new stranger today or in the future as viewer thus comes an intimate subject in his painting. We are the ones who are just arriving and stepping into this colorful cacophony of creation.

As such, we complete his royal court and creation as spectators-subjects. To indicate this, Velazquez is leaving other major clues throughout his painting. First and foremost, he presents himself as artist creator as the tallest person in the painting; as we have seen, height has royal stature, especially in his world of constantly bowing to the king or queen so one's head is never higher than true nobles. Yet, who is the second highest? In a direct comparison, or so it seems, between royalty-as portrayed by the reflection of the royal couple in the mirror on the back wall and the stranger, the entering representation of this subject is literally heads and shoulders above the royals. Accident? Coincidence? Really?

This is one of the most carefully calculated, artistically controlled and well-constructed paintings in the history of western art. Are we really supposed to think that an artist as observant, able and gifted as Velazquez left this comparative representation on the supposed back wall to sheer chance?

If we look at the two heads of the *Las Meninas*, they form an artistic subject triangle with *us as viewer and subject*, represented by the stranger in the back. Is the artist actually telling us that this arriving stranger is the climatic subject in the painting? A major clue that this is no accident or coincidence is the amazing burst of sun light that accompanies the Stranger. His entire being and presence is literally bathed in the golden halo of light that surrounds his arrival. Even the door, which is within the geometric center of the painting, is bathed in light as well. Unless we believe that all of this is sheer coincidence, there is obviously something very important happening here as the stranger arrives.

The Stranger, or Nieto, is the only one in the painting besides the artist who can see *the entire canvas, the seemingly divinely inspired artistic creation that rivals the gifts from the gods.* That is, until we arrive *in front of the painting*, as see it in its totality. Thus, the stranger and spectator are one and the same—though the former is an artistic representation and we are the ones who finally bring the painting as an unparalleled creation fully to life.

Of course, other interpretations or "plausible hypothesis" of the painting as a whole are possible and—given the magnitude of this masterpiece-- will be inevitable; many may merely continue to focus on the construction and sight lines used by the Artist in the construction of the painting, or focus on the mirror play in the back.

⁵⁷ Nor is Velazquez the only one looking right at us, the viewers; the Infanta and the Dwarf are staring at us as well. Pure coincidence, no doubt. Or not. After all, it is we the viewers who bring the painting to life.....

Or, future interpretations may add valuable insights or refutations to our own analyses beyond what we have deciphered from the painting itself. In any case, unlike so many other interpretations that we have read, all bereft of any analysis of the actual content of the painting, we have not ignored the evidence literally before our eyes.

The Spectator- Subject As Co-Creator: *Las Meninas* As Participatory Art:

So, as we have seen, the reflection of royalty on the back of the studio completes the *inward yet invisible triangle* between the artist as creator king, the representation of the King and Queen in the mirror and their actual—though imagined—presence in the studio. There is also the triangle formed by the heads of the portrayed *las meninas* in the painting or actual servant girls, the dwarf and her companion in front. Yet, there is a third and comparative triangle here as well, hidden in plain sight. This is an outward triangle created by the artist as the true king of creation, then the very tall stranger in the back—who is taller in presence and hence status in the painting (and hence in the mind of the artist and *his world*)—and us as spectators-subjects; in short, as spectators, we *become the critical subjects in this living Masterpiece and exemplar extraordinaire of Velázquez's modern and participatory art.*

By this time in his life, Velazquez knew that even great artistic works originally seen solely by royalty eventually enjoyed a much greater audience. So, as an Artist of unparalleled abilities, Velazquez was undoubtedly very much aware or hopeful of his ultimate audience—you, I and the literally millions who have viewed this unparalleled work in the history of art.⁵⁸ *In doing so, we are very much an integral part of the new royal court of the true artist as creator-king.*

So, by including us—the viewing audience or as the stranger—the person of “low birth” entering his studio and thus in his work-- Velazquez has created a timeless painting that represents, in our humble judgment, a critically important boundary line and transition between the medieval, if not ancient belief, in the preeminence of aristocracy in human affairs and modernity; he replaces this once ascendant subservience to the new subjects and masters of human fate, the artist and his audience whose abilities, alone, will decide the future.

So, in summary, as spectators of this masterpiece *Las Meninas*, we are included in this new royal court of the artist as Creator King. In this sense, *Las Meninas* is the first of modern paintings in that it gives such preeminence and pride of place to the “lowly” spectator as premier subject in his art as creation; his new royal court includes all peoples as potential spectators and subjects, including the lowly servant girls, dwarfs and a king and queen as the new and central subjects of artistic creation as real life. Of course there are multiple other plausible meanings to this complex and extraordinary painting. Yet, this is not simply a painting about the artist or his manifold subjects or the space that they are occupying in place or paint; in essence, he is *paying deep homage to the royal court of artistic creation*; in turn, he is honoring the almost divine-like powers of artistic creative process. As such, *we as spectators are the critical subjects and audience, in this new royal court of ART*, as portrayed in this extraordinary painting by the greatest master of realist art of all times, the Artist as Creator-King Diego Velazquez.

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⁵⁸ On his travels, Velazquez saw painting once contained only in the very private collections of royalty that later were available to a much wider audience or the public at large. Every artists may harbor a deep hope that his art will eventually be seen by many more, if not all..... If so, we like to think that Velazquez realized this silent wish.

Dedicated to:

Dr. Eugene Boudreau, the greatest grandfather of all time, a pioneer in Neurology and Psychiatry, Portrait and Landscape painter, Friend to Andrei Ibid, and the Artist of my soul.

Biography: Thoma(s) Boudreau has been a bad amateur artist since learning how to paint at nine years old in his Grandfather's art studio, where later he also first learned about the great artistic masters, including Diego Velazquez. His grandfather instilled in him a lasting love of art and the artistic aspiration, giving him the "inner eye" of artistic observation and appreciation that comes from working at the feet of a dedicated and disciplined artist in his own studio. Later, working among the Iroquois Indians who still live just south of the city of Syracuse, the younger Boudreau learned the importance of "observation of the obvious" for tell-tale clues to life, including human tracks and intent. Much later in life, he declined an offer at the FBI Headquarters in Quantico Virginia to profile the written and especially artistic works of convinced serial killers; their art work was simply too horrific to contemplate, let alone analyze, so he left this work to braver souls. Instead, Boudreau indulges in great art to replenish and renew his faith in humanity and the sacredness of life. This explains his continual fascination with the great masters and their all too human creations. In short, he identifies much more with and Arachne than with Athena or Apollo—all depicted in Velazquez's *Les Meninas*. Boudreau currently teaches in Salisbury Maryland and dreams of walking the halls of the Prado in Madrid like the young Picasso to view Velazquez's masterpiece... (and bring it back to his office....)

ANDREI IBID

For security reasons, we can say little or nothing about Ibid. Andrei, the "most quoted author in the English language," who is still engaged in writing profiles in the areas of criminal investigations, Art Fraud and his most distasteful subjects, art critics whom he considers, at best, not the great Don himself but the modern "Quixotes de la Mancha;"