

VELÁZQUEZ REDISCOVERED

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REDISCOVERED

Introduction by Keith Christiansen

Essays by Jonathan Brown and Michael Gallagher

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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FRONT COVER

Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, *Portrait of a Man* (detail). Oil on canvas, 27 x 21 3/4 in. (68.6 x 55.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Jules Bache Collection, 1949 (49.7.42)

BACK COVER

Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, *Surrender of Breda* (detail), 1634–35. Oil on canvas, 10 ft. 7/8 in. x 12 ft. 1/2 in. (307 x 367 cm). Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

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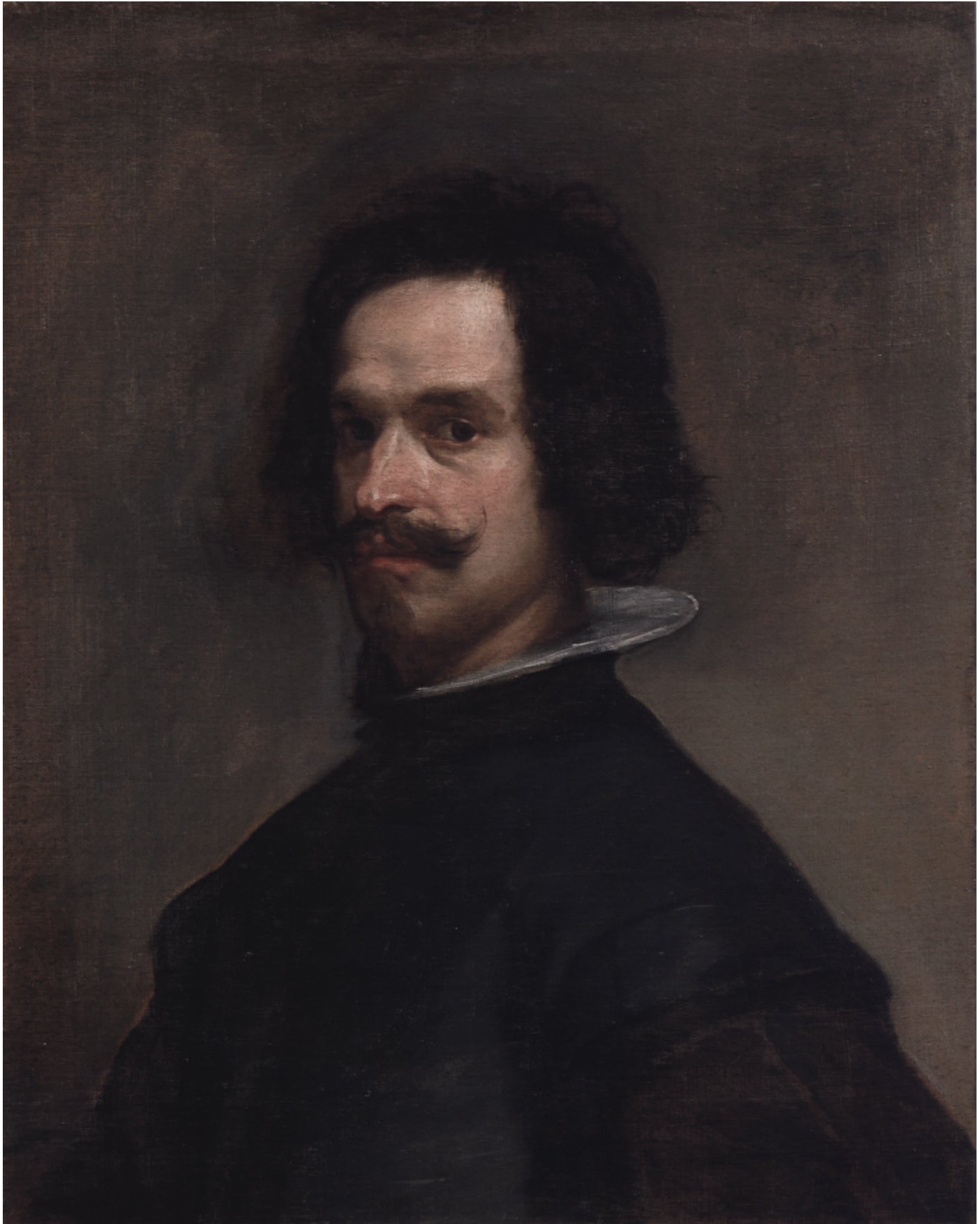


FIG. 1 Velázquez, *Portrait of a Man*. Oil on canvas, 27 x 21 3/4 in. (68.6 x 55.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Jules Bache Collection, 1949 (49.7.42)

It is always a pleasure when we can dip into the riches of our own collections and, through the expertise of our conservation departments, rescue from neglect a major work of art. Seldom, however, are the transformations as radical and exciting as those recounted here. Last summer, the *Portrait of a Man*, a fine painting long relegated by scholars to the workshop of Diego Velázquez, was taken to conservation for examination. The subsequent removal of layers of yellowed varnish and disfiguring repaints revealed a masterwork by this extraordinary seventeenth-century Spanish artist—one of the greatest painters of all time. The announcement to the press this September created something of a sensation. Indeed, in Madrid I was obliged to hold a special press conference to answer questions.

So great has the interest been in this discovery that we decided that instead of merely placing the picture back on the wall where for years it has hung, we should give visitors an opportunity to consider the past history of the painting and the steps leading, first, to its declassification as a work by Velázquez and then to its transformation through cleaning. This publication, which accompanies an exhibition organized by Keith Christiansen, John Pope-Hennessy Chairman of European Paintings, is intended to take the reader through those steps. We are very grateful to Prof. Jonathan Brown, the leading authority on the artist, for providing the main essay. I am sure, however, that he would be the first to give credit where credit is due, and that is to Michael Gallagher, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge of Paintings Conservation, who wielded swab and brush with the skill of Merlin's wand.

But let us not forget the person to whom we owe the presence in the collection of this marvelous painting: Jules S. Bache, one of the great benefactors of the Metropolitan Museum. Born in Germany in 1861, Bache was in New York by the time he was a teenager, working his way up the ladder in the stockbrokerage firm started by his uncle. He was appointed a minority partner in 1886 and in 1892 took over the firm, renaming it J. S. Bache & Co. It became one of the top brokerage houses in the country.

Bache was a passionate collector and over the ensuing years amassed a remarkable group of old master paintings. In 1937 he opened his house at 814 Fifth Avenue to the public for four days a week, free of charge. It was his intention to form a museum on the model of the Frick, which had been established two years earlier. Fortunately for the Metropolitan, Bache later reconsidered this plan and a year before his death made the following statement to the *Herald Tribune*: "After mature consideration of the future, I felt I'd like to know where the collection would be 100 years from now. After keeping a private museum for several years I realized there is no great future for a small, private museum. I felt that the collection should be made more convenient to a growing public." When he died in 1944, he named as beneficiaries of his residuary estate his three granddaughters. His personal effects went to his daughters, but the works of art were bequeathed to the Jules Bache Foundation, with the intention that they come to the Metropolitan, which they did in 1949.

And what a collection it is! Included, among much else, are Petrus Christus's *Portrait of a Carthusian*, Filippo Lippi's *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Two Angels*, Carlo Crivelli's exquisite *Madonna and Child*, Titian's *Venus and Adonis*, Van Dyck's self-portrait and his superlative portrait of Robert Rich, second Earl of Warwick, Hans Holbein's portrait of Derek Berck, Watteau's *French Comedians*, a portrait by Frans Hals, three works by Fragonard, Goya's *Don Manuel Osorio*—one of the most popular paintings in the Museum—and two works by Velázquez, a small portrait of the Infanta María Teresa and the picture that is the subject of this publication. Bache's paintings have brought immense pleasure to generations of visitors, and on this singular occasion, we recognize our indebtedness to his acumen as a collector and his public-spiritedness in leaving the collection to the Metropolitan.

Thomas P. Campbell

DIRECTOR
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

INTRODUCTION

Keith Christiansen

How does a picture transform itself from a dubious Van Dyck to an indubitable Velázquez, from a Velázquez to a workshop piece, and from a workshop piece back to a Velázquez? How does a portrait of an unknown man—"Ein männliches Porträt," as it is described in 1818¹—come to be identified as a self-portrait of one of the most celebrated masters of European painting? What, in short, is the basis of an attribution, and what are the criteria for the identification of a sitter in the absence of firm documentary evidence and the unpredictability of those physiognomic changes to which all of us are susceptible over time? This publication attempts to answer some of these questions insofar as they relate to a picture that entered the Metropolitan Museum in 1949 as part of the bequest of Jules S. Bache, a prominent financier and collector. Acquired by Bache as a self-portrait of Velázquez and viewed as one of the most important works left to the Museum, the picture failed to convince later scholars and eventually dropped out of the literature, only to emerge from a recent cleaning, phoenixlike, as a painting of astonishing freshness and striking presence. One hopes that it will now permanently join the ranks of autograph works by Velázquez and that, eventually, some of the mysteries that still surround it will find a definitive resolution.

The picture cannot be traced back prior to the early nineteenth century, when it belonged to Johann Ludwig, Reichsgraf von Wallmoden-Gimborn, the illegitimate son of King George II of England and his mistress, Amalie von Wallmoden. Raised at the Court of St. James, Johann Ludwig made the Grand Tour in 1765 and then settled in Hanover, where he built a castle, the Wallmoden-Schloss, to house his collection of antiquities. Was it during this trip or at a later date that he acquired the Velázquez? We simply can't say. What we do know is that the picture was thought to be by Van Dyck, which makes it unlikely that we will ever be able to reconstruct its earlier history: there are

simply too many portraits of anonymous men ascribed to that artist. Johann Ludwig's son, an outstanding general in the Napoleonic Wars, sold the picture in 1818, and we are able to trace the vagaries of its ownership, as well as the changes in attribution, during the next hundred years (for this information, see the Attributional Time Line).

The first modern Velázquez scholar to give the picture serious consideration was August Mayer in an article in a German periodical of 1917 (fig. 2). Mayer came upon the painting in the Provinzial-Museum at Hanover, where it had been put on deposit by the Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg. It hung among Dutch paintings from the circle of Rembrandt, despite the fact that in the mid-nineteenth century a succession of British connoisseurs had recognized the picture as the work of Velázquez. Mayer, too, felt the picture was by Velázquez, identifying it as a self-portrait on the basis of the resemblance of the sitter to a figure standing at the far right of the *Surrender of Breda* (see fig. 8), which at the time was often thought to be a depiction of the artist at the age of thirty-five. Importantly for the later critical history of the painting, Mayer noted the mitigating factor of a problematic restoration carried out at an unspecified period.

It is one of the lessons of life that our responses to works of art can change over time, sometimes radically. This happened to Mayer, who seven years after publishing the picture revised his opinion, tentatively suggesting that Velázquez's pupil and son-in-law, Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo (ca. 1613–1667), was the author as well as the subject of the painting. This now seems like a rather whimsical idea, based on no hard evidence and an overly optimistic appraisal of Mazo's ability to emulate the technical brilliance of his mentor, for what Velázquez achieves seemingly effortlessly, with minimal means, is in Mazo's work the result of studied effect. Mayer had, in fact, allowed his judgment to be swayed by a conversation

with his friend and fellow Velázquez scholar Juan Allende-Salazar. Just a year later, in 1925, he was to do another about-face and return—this time with total enthusiasm—to his original idea.

The circumstance for Mayer's new reconsideration was provided by the sale of the picture to a German art dealer, Leo Blumenreich, and the relentless machinations of Joe Duveen, one of the legendary figures of the art market. Duveen, who wanted to purchase the picture and sell it to one of his clients, realized that his plans would be spoiled unless Mayer could be convinced to abandon the attribution to Mazo, and he used every inducement imaginable to coax Mayer into recanting. At first, Mayer seems to have resisted, realizing that to change his mind again after only a year would compromise his reputation and credibility. But in November 1925, he finally relented and came to Paris to view the painting, which Duveen had had, according to a cable, "cleaned up [a] little, as [I] think it would give [a] much clearer effect for discussion with Dr. Mayer." He was right, and on November 20, a cable was sent to New York triumphantly announcing to Duveen, "Mayer passes Velasquez."²

It would be naive not to be somewhat cynical about Mayer's change of mind, given the financial stakes involved (he, of course, was paid for his trouble and pressed to write an article). But the recent restoration of the painting suggests the degree to which the picture Mayer studied that November really did look utterly different from what he had previously known, justifying his exclamation that seeing the cleaned picture was "one of the most delightful surprises which I have ever had in my life. . . . The modelling is simply marvelous; the painting is like a flowing water color; the tints of the faces [sic] look like mother-of-pearl. It has come out most splendidly. The picture lost all the dimness and shows now the characteristic silver-gray tone of the works of these years."³ Mayer wrote these lines to W. R. Valentiner, the director of the Detroit Institute of Arts and the editor of the journal *Art in America*, in which Mayer would publish his views in 1926. (Valentiner had wanted to purchase the picture for his institution but came up short of funds.)

What a shame, then, that instead of being left in this state, the picture was, through extensive retouching, transformed into a more formal, finished portrait (fig. 3) such

FIG. 2 *Portrait of a Man*, as reproduced in August Mayer's article in *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* (November 1917)

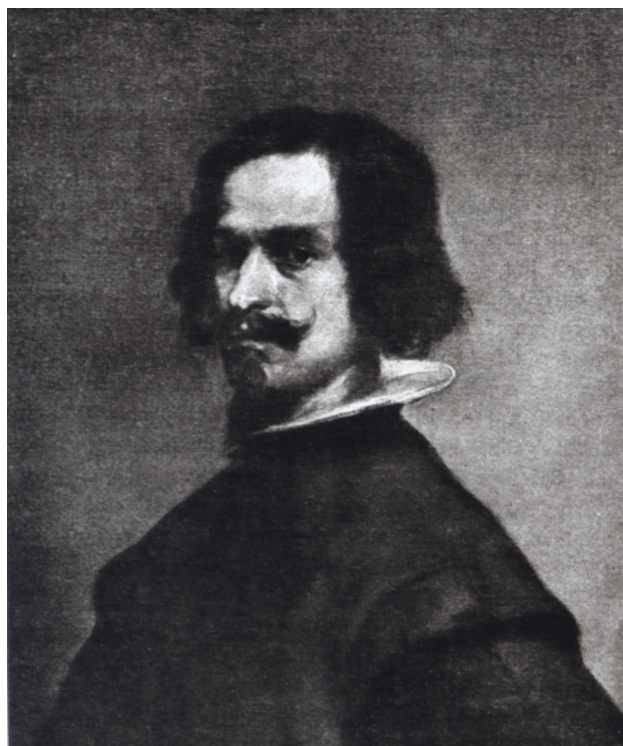
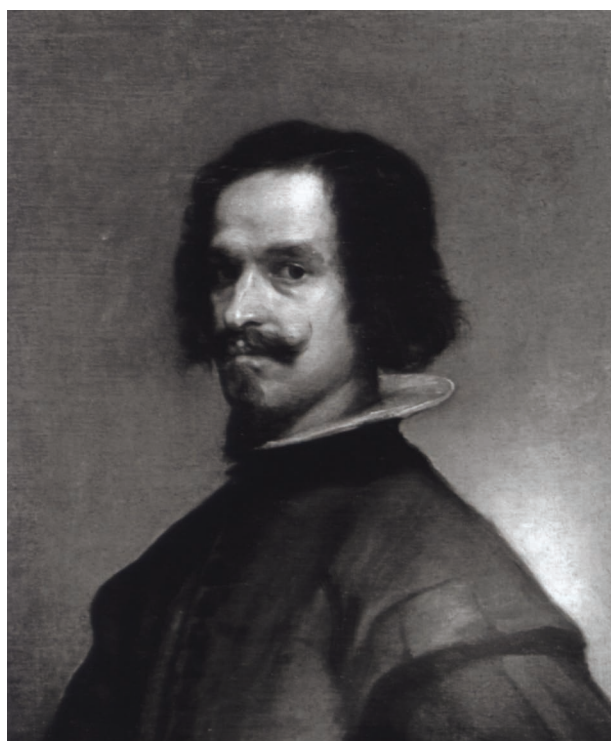


FIG. 3 *Portrait of a Man*, as reproduced in Mayer's article in *Art in America* (April 1926)



as might appeal to Duveen's stable of clients, among whom was Bache, who purchased it shortly thereafter for \$225,000. Over the subsequent years, still more varnish was applied and the qualities of freshness and transparency Mayer had so admired disappeared under the yellowing layers (on this, see the report by Michael Gallagher). Indeed, by 1974, in a catalogue entry written for a graduate seminar, the gray background is described as "greenish."⁴ Small wonder that the picture dropped from serious consideration! Its qualities were literally submerged under discolored varnish and repaint. In 1979 the Metropolitan Museum decided the time had come to downgrade the picture to "workshop of Velázquez."

Scholarship has a way of perpetuating itself, and once a work of art is marginalized, it is very difficult to reverse the process. We are all influenced by received opinion. This is only natural. Few of us can claim to be experts, and when we visit a major museum, we assume that the information we read on a label represents informed opinion. But not, we need to remind ourselves, the last word, and certainly not the definitive judgment: we should never surrender our critical faculties to the status quo. Unfortunately, the lack of scholarly interest in this portrait became institutional, and the picture was not examined with an open mind at the time of the memorable Velázquez exhibition held at the Museum in 1989—precisely the occasion for reevaluating the collection. I wonder how strongly this attitude was reinforced by the acquisition in 1971 of Velázquez's incomparable portrait of his mulatto slave Juan de Pareja, painted in Rome in 1650. Few works can bear comparison with this extraordinary picture, and it is easy to forget that the same artist also painted portraits of a less finished, less calculated nature, with the sitter placed simply rather than in a self-conscious pose, his torso merely indicated rather than fully described with breathtaking bravura.

Precisely this contrast with the *Juan de Pareja* has long intrigued me. I have been looking at the *Portrait of a Man* ever since I began work at the Metropolitan in 1977, sometimes with admiration, sometimes with mere puzzlement. However, it is only during the last twenty years that its attribution to the workshop of Velázquez began to engage me, albeit always as a casual rather than a professional viewer. Not that I had an alternative suggestion or felt in a position to question the judgment of those who have dedicated years to the study of Velázquez. Nevertheless, the picture has always seemed to me to be a work

of considerable quality. My own training is in the art of the early Renaissance, where the matter of attribution looms far larger than it does in the study of the seventeenth century, since documentary evidence is almost nonexistent. Was it really possible that one could not identify the author of something as individual as this?

Over the years I have asked colleagues knowledgeable in the field if they had any suggestions. Occasionally I also pressed on them a rather far-fetched and unlikely idea I had conceived. Since there was general agreement that the picture was not by Velázquez, might it be the work of his contemporary Alonso Cano (1601–1667)? I hit upon this erroneous notion not because of any particular familiarity with the artist's work, but because I knew that he was friends with Velázquez in Madrid and was memorably characterized by Jonathan Brown as "the only artist of Velázquez' generation capable of imitating his style."⁵ In other words, here is a major artist whose work has sometimes been confused with that of Velázquez. Whenever I had occasion to be in the Prado, I would play out this theory—not very successfully, I admit. In 1997 I asked a research assistant who was soliciting comments on the collection from Alfonso Pérez Sánchez to ask the eminent Spanish scholar whether he thought Cano was an idea worth pursuing. His response pretty much settled the matter: "49.7.42 [the accession number of the *Portrait of a Man*] relates very directly with Velázquez, and in the slide [that was sent] I don't see how it can be by Cano. There are very few portraits that are securely by his hand and I cannot establish a convincing relationship with any of these."⁶ Cancel that idea—but not the intrigue.

So when, four years ago, Michael Gallagher arrived at the Museum as head of the Department of Paintings Conservation, we walked around the collection together looking at various pictures that might benefit by being treated. Among the very first I indicated to him was this portrait, which usually hangs alongside the Museum's other paintings by or attributed to Velázquez. The occasion for finally taking the matter in hand was provided by Michael's recent work on the artist's great portrait of Philip IV in the Frick Collection. Why not, I suggested, have the portrait bequeathed to us by Bache in 1949 brought up for examination? After all, it had once enjoyed a very different status. Moreover, my colleague Walter Liedtke was beginning work on a catalogue of the Spanish paintings in the collection. Wasn't this a good moment to look at the picture with

fresh eyes? We examined it together, and Michael then made a small test cleaning along the lower edge of the canvas. This is an area that turned out to be particularly abraded, suggesting that there might be serious condition issues to be confronted elsewhere were the painting to be cleaned. But it also demonstrated that the appearance of the painting was very far removed indeed from what the artist had intended. Here were those pale silver-grays described by Mayer. Who would have guessed?

The decision to clean the picture I left to Michael, who was, after all, the person who would have to confront the various problems that might be encountered. Happily, he pressed on, and the results of this transformative cleaning and his delicate restoration are recounted in his essay. The cleaning generated great excitement among us, and I immediately contacted Jonathan Brown at the Institute of Fine Arts to come and have a look. None of us in the Department of European Paintings can pretend to be

Velázquez scholars, but the quality of this picture seemed to banish all doubt. It was now time to ask the leading scholar on the artist to confirm or deny our response—and to sort out the issues of date and the intriguing identity of the sitter.

- 1 *Verzeichniss der Gräflich-Wallmodenschen Gemälde-Sammlung* . . . (Hanover, 1818), p. 14, no. 43.
- 2 Cable messages of November 7 and 20, 1925, curatorial files, Department of European Paintings, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 3 August Mayer to W. R. Valentiner, as quoted by Valentiner in a letter to Joseph Duveen, December 2, 1925, copy in the curatorial files, Department of European Paintings, MMA.
- 4 A copy of the entry is in the curatorial files, Department of European Paintings, MMA.
- 5 Jonathan Brown, *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier* (New Haven, 1986), p. 272.
- 6 Alfonso Pérez Sánchez, April 27, 1997, to Dulce María Román, curatorial files, Department of European Paintings, MMA.

A RESTORED VELÁZQUEZ, A VELÁZQUEZ RESTORED

Jonathan Brown

Joseph Duveen (1869–1939) is renowned as one of the most flamboyant art dealers of the twentieth century; his ego was even greater than his clients'. Duveen, who handled some of the most important paintings acquired by American collectors, devised a tripartite scheme to woo prospective purchasers, many of whom were ill informed about old master paintings. To meet Duveen's ostensible standards, a painting had, first, to be in excellent condition, with a princely or noble provenance, and then its authenticity had to be guaranteed in a publication, or at least an autograph letter, written by a recognized authority. (The finishing touch was a frame designed by the dealer to create an ineffable aura of grandeur and importance to the work.)¹ In reality, Duveen's interpretation of these conditions was elastic. Paintings could be heavily restored, provenances could be invented or enhanced, opinions could be coaxed from experts who stood to profit from the sale or were in need of money.

The *Portrait of a Man* acquired by the New York financier Jules S. Bache (1861–1944) illustrates how the scheme operated. The painting was purchased by Duveen and sold to Bache in 1926 as a work by the famous Spanish painter Diego Velázquez (1599–1660). Bache bequeathed the work to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1944; it entered the collection five years later. The attribution had been twice verified by the German Hispanist August L. Mayer (1885–1944), one of the most important scholars of Spanish painting.² After the first article, published in 1917 in a German art magazine, Mayer retreated somewhat from his conclusions.³ The second article, which appeared in an American magazine in 1926,⁴ was timed to Duveen's marketing plans and possibly aimed at quelling doubts that might arise by the exclusion of the picture from the 1925 edition of *Velázquez* in the *Klassiker der Kunst* series, then an authoritative source of information about the great old masters of Europe. The extensive footnotes were written by Juan Allende-Salazar, a leading authority on Velázquez.

The provenance for the *Portrait of a Man* reflected a distinguished ownership, beginning with the first recorded collector, Johann Ludwig, Reichsgraf von Wallmoden-Gimborn (1736–1811). He bequeathed it to his son Ludwig Georg Thedel, Feld-Marschall Graf von Wallmoden-Gimborn (1769–1862), who sold it in 1818 to David Bernhard Hausmann (d. 1857), a collector in Hanover. Ownership then passed to King George V of Hanover (1819–1878); his stamp, visible in X-radiographs, is on the verso. George lost his kingdom in 1866 and thereafter styled himself Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg and Duke of Cumberland and Teviotdale. The painting passed to his son, Ernst August, and then to his grandson, also named Ernst August, who sold it to the Berlin dealer Leo Blumenreich in 1925.

As a precaution in securing Mayer's blessing, Duveen had the picture cleaned. This was, however, only the first step in its extensive treatment. Duveen preferred to have his paintings look as if they had just left the artist's studio. No flaws, no losses or signs of damage or abrasion, no imperfections of any kind were tolerated. In his vocabulary, restoration meant repainting, followed by the application of a thick coat of varnish to even the effect and disguise the interventions. These procedures were to have dire consequences for the attribution of our portrait: as the varnish turned more and more yellow over the years, the painting became harder to see and eventually was removed from the catalogue of Velázquez's works. In addition, Duveen had instructed his restorer to complete a painting that we now know the artist intended as an informal portrait, with only the face brought to a high degree of finish. The results of this treatment are visible in the illustration in Mayer's article of 1926 (see fig. 3). Unevenness in the loosely painted background has been suppressed, details in the doublet have been strengthened, and a hard contour to the hair has been created by painting out evidence of the artist's original changes in this area.

The attribution to Velázquez held its ground until 1963, when José López-Rey published the first version of his still-authoritative catalogue. The Spanish scholar included the Bache portrait in a category described as “works whose attribution to Velázquez the author considers tenable though not conclusively demonstrable on account of their state of preservation.” López-Rey appeared to choose his words carefully in this evaluation, but in the entry dedicated to the portrait, he contradicted himself and described the work as a “school piece rather close to Velázquez’s manner.”⁵ His doubts hardened into conviction: in the two subsequent editions of his catalogue (1979, 1996), which contain only pictures that he accepted as authentic, the Met portrait is nowhere to be found. It is also omitted from my monograph (1986), although my seminar on Velázquez in the mid-1970s looked long and hard at it. I will not attempt to excuse my error.

Recently the decision was taken to submit the painting to conservation treatment, which was sensitively done by Michael Gallagher, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge of Paintings Conservation. In late July 2009, I received an e-mail from Keith Christiansen of the

Department of European Paintings inviting me to examine the work, which had then been stripped of varnish and inpainting. Even through the lifeless medium of e-mail, Keith’s excitement was palpable. A few days later, I went to the conservation studio to have a look. The first words out of my mouth were, “It’s a Velázquez!” Despite some surface abrasion, the master’s touch was unmistakable (at least to someone who has spent much of his life trying to understand the art of this elusive genius). Certainly the most momentous change had occurred in the area of the costume. After Duveen’s “finishing touches” had been removed, I could see that, while the head had been carefully modeled, the area of the costume had been left unfinished. The outlines were summarily indicated, but the modeling of the gray garment had been developed only enough to provide a sort of pedestal for the head. The face and hair were executed with the highly diluted colors favored by Velázquez, which allowed him to achieve incredibly soft, subtle effects of light and shadow. With the efficiency that is his hallmark, the artist had incorporated the weave of the canvas as a dynamic ingredient in the painting.

FIG. 4 Velázquez, *Self-Portrait*, 1640s. Oil on canvas, 17 7/8 x 15 in. (45.5 x 38 cm). Museo de Bellas Artes, Valencia



FIG. 5 Velázquez, self-portrait from *Las Meninas* (detail of fig. 6)





FIG. 6 Velázquez, *Las Meninas*, 1656.
Oil on canvas, 10 ft. 5 1/4 in. x 9 ft. 5/8 in.
(318 x 276 cm). Museo Nacional del Prado,
Madrid

OPPOSITE: FIG. 7 Velázquez, *Surrender
of Breda*, 1634–35. Oil on canvas,
10 ft. 7/8 in. x 12 ft. 1/2 in. (307 x 367 cm).
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

A number of portraits were left unfinished by Velázquez, but only a few are strictly comparable to the work in the Met.⁶ Their common characteristic is the inclusion of the head and shoulder; the head is finished, while the body is outlined in black and sometimes partially sketched in. Many depict the royal family and were meant for use as models by the painter's assistants. A well-known example is the *Portrait of Philip IV*, which dates to the early 1650s and is now in the Museo del Prado. However, Velázquez painted at least a few nonroyal portraits that seem to employ this format, one of which is listed in his post-mortem inventory as “otra cabeça de vn hombre baruinegro [sic], por acauar” (another head of a man with black beard, to be finished) and the other, most suggestively, as “vn Retrato de Diego de Belazquez, por acauar el bestido” (a Portrait of Diego de Velázquez, clothes to be finished).⁷

The identification of the sitter as Velázquez himself was proposed by Mayer in 1917 and repeated in 1926.

However, in his catalogue raisonné (1936), he was somewhat less confident and titled the picture as “Self-portrait?” López-Rey was similarly guarded, referring to it as a “So-called Self-Portrait.” He was right to be dubious, because there is no relationship between the sitter in the Met portrait and the painter, whose visage is recorded in a self-portrait now in the Museo de Bellas Artes, Valencia (fig. 4), and, of course, in *Las Meninas* (figs. 5, 6). In the same catalogue raisonné entry, Mayer noted that Allende-Salazar, in a personal communication, had observed a resemblance between the person in the Met portrait and the soldier who appears in the right margin of the *Surrender of Breda*, standing just alongside the mane of the horse (figs. 7, 8).

The identification of sitters in old portraits is fraught with problems. Different painters and different levels of skill may make one sitter look like two different persons. And diverse media—for instance, oil paint on canvas versus ink on paper—have inherent qualities that further

complicate the rendering of a portrait image. Then as now, fashions in clothing and hairstyle (and facial hair, in the case of men) tend to make members of each gender look more or less alike. Another factor would be the purpose or function of the portrait. Formal portraits intended for public display necessarily will require the artist to choose an approach suitable for the occasion. My antidote to this vexing problem is what I call “the five-second rule of portrait identification.” In other words, if you can’t tell at a glance that two portraits represent the same sitter, then the portraits probably depict two different people. Although this rule may seem a blunt instrument, I only wish I had thought of it a few decades ago.

Applying, then, the five-second rule to the portrait in the Met and the gentleman in the *Surrender of Breda*, I believe that they are one and the same person. I would add that the person in the *Surrender* cannot be the artist, for historical reasons. The court of the Spanish Habsburgs was

governed by a strict hierarchical protocol, known as the *etiquetas*. At this point in his career, Velázquez occupied a relatively low position on the ladder to social success. Had he dared to portray himself in the company of the distinguished noblemen on the Spanish side, he would have been ordered to purchase a ticket on the next coach to Seville. Moreover, Velázquez was not present at the surrender, an obvious but crucial point. The *Surrender of Breda* was one of a cycle of twelve works depicting military victories won by the armies of Philip IV.⁸ Commissioned from several artists in 1634 by the Count-Duke of Olivares to decorate the Hall of Realms in the Palace of the Buen Retiro, the pictures were in place by late April 1635, thus establishing the date of the Met painting with unusual precision. Each battle scene assigns a prominent place to the victorious general and his lieutenants—a program that necessarily excludes Velázquez, who was sitting safely in stately Madrid in 1625, when Breda capitulated to the





FIG. 8 Figure at far right of *Surrender of Breda* (detail of fig. 7)

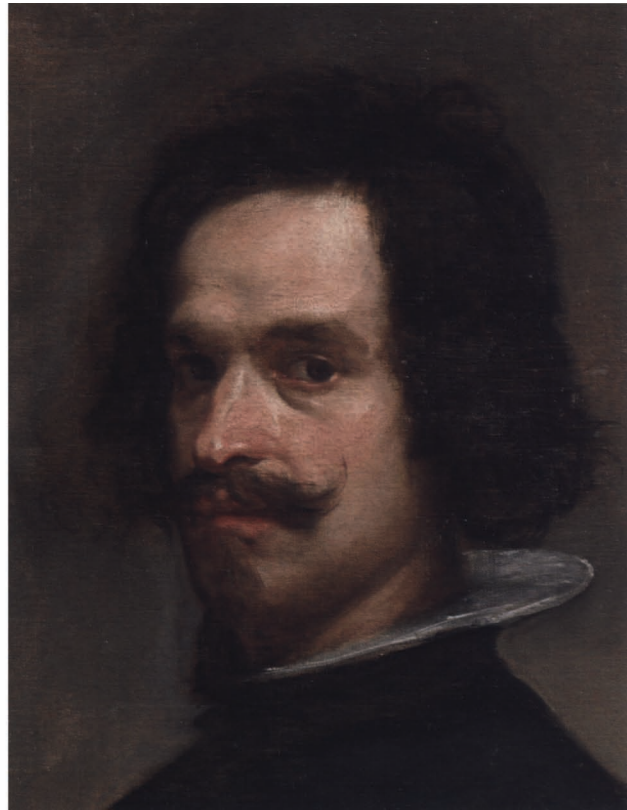


FIG. 9 Detail of *Portrait of a Man* (fig. 1)

Spanish. However, Velázquez was a skillful self-promoter and found a subtle way to wheedle his way into the picture. In the lower right corner is a large, creased white paper, known in art-historical jargon as a *cartellino*, which painters frequently used to accommodate their signature and sometimes the date of execution. Velázquez claims his authorship and mastery by leaving this device blank: who but he among the painters of Spain could have executed such a masterpiece?

Unfortunately the name of the man at the right of the *Surrender* remains a mystery, despite the fact that there are excellent descriptions and depictions of the event. The siege of Breda was a famous military engagement that was believed at the time to have been a decisive victory in the Thirty Years' War between Spain and the Dutch Republic (1618–1648). The siege was laid in the autumn of 1624, but the Dutch tenaciously held their ground until June 1625, when the starving garrison surrendered. The articles of surrender, signed on June 2, permitted the Dutch to retreat in good order and with colors flying (orange, for the House of Nassau-Orange).

The surrender scene as shown by Velázquez is not accurate. According to the sources, the Dutch marched out under the watchful eye of the Spanish general, Ambrogio Spinola, who, mounted on a horse, observed from a distance. Justin of Nassau's delivery of the keys to the city to Spinola is an invention devised by the playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca to glorify the magnanimity of the Spanish and their respect for a worthy foe.

Given the importance of the victory, a lengthy account by the Flemish Jesuit Hermann Hugo was published in Latin in 1626 (English and French translations appeared in 1627 and 1631, respectively).⁹ (Paradoxically, Breda was recaptured by the Dutch in 1637.) Hugo's narrative names the generals, some of whom are included in the painting. Their appearances were recorded in paintings and engravings, providing the artist with reliable models to depict the actors in his painting. Spinola, one of the great generals of the time, had traveled with Velázquez to Italy in 1629 and had also been portrayed by Rubens (see, for example, the portrait of 1625 in the Národní Galerie, Prague, and its several replicas). Count John of Nassau has been identified

as the balding man in armor just behind Spinola.¹⁰ The marquis de Balançon, who had lost a leg in the wars, is probably to be identified with the balding man leaning on a stick. Wolfgang von Pfalz-Neuberg, known through an etching by Lucas Vorsterman after Van Dyck, may be the man in profile between Balançon and John of Nassau.¹¹ Carlos Coloma, also depicted by Van Dyck, is the long-faced gentleman standing just alongside the checkered flag.¹² These worthies wear armor and red sashes to indicate their high rank of captain-general. The troops are in varied garments, for uniforms did not begin to come into use until the end of the seventeenth century.¹³ The figure on the right, one of two who look out at the viewer, is therefore a Spanish foot soldier. He wears what is called a *valona de encaje* (lace collar) and a plumed slouch hat that came to be known as a *chamberg*, which identifies his rank. His feet and legs are covered to the calf with tight-fitting boots, in contrast to the heavy, floppy footwear of the Dutch. He sports an upturned mustache and goatee, standard adornments of the time.

While these data are interesting, they also raise an important question. We know now that Velázquez, contrary to his usual practice, made a preliminary study of a person of no special distinction to appear in one of his most ambitious paintings. Who might he be? My guess is that we will never know. The soldier in the *Surrender of Breda* forms a partnership with the Dutch trooper at the far left, who also casts a glance in our direction. Acting together, they enclose and contain the composition like bookends. Their appearance in a picture that had a quasi-documentary function and was meant to glorify the commanders of the Spanish army virtually guarantees that these are enlisted men or mercenaries. They are nobodies, nonentities, unrecognizable, at least to those in the upper echelons of the court. Nonetheless, Velázquez wanted to make them look like real people. If this line of reasoning is plausible, then the artist would have made an effort to find a model whose face was unknown or unfamiliar. He looks important to us because he was touched by the genius of Velázquez's brush.

The identification of the sitter in the Met portrait as "Mr. Nobody of Importance" seems a very unsatisfactory way to trumpet the recovery of an important painting by a great master. Therefore, let me conclude by quoting some famous lines of poetry by an older contemporary of Velázquez: "What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Welcome back, Mr. Nobody of Importance, to the catalogue of authentic works by Diego Velázquez!

On behalf of several generations of Velázquez scholars, I express my apologies for doubting the opinions of Dr. August L. Mayer, may he rest in peace, and Joseph, Lord Duveen of Millbank, who received his rewards on earth.

- 1 Nicholas Penny and Karen Serres, "Duveen's French Frames for British Pictures," *Burlington Magazine* 151 (June 2009), pp. 388–94.
- 2 Mayer's story is worth a mention. At the time of his second article regarding the *Portrait* (see note 4 below) and as a result of his involvement with the art market, Mayer was subject to an inquiry about his qualifications for his posts at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität and the Alte Pinakothek, both in Munich. Just below the surface was the serpent of anti-Semitism. As the Nazis came to power, his position deteriorated and his property was confiscated. In January 1936, Mayer and his family emigrated to Paris. He had been writing certificates of authenticity for some time; now they became his livelihood. Generally speaking, the certificates written after 1930 are compromised by his worsening political and financial position. In the winter of 1944, the Mayers decided to leave Paris, heading south. His family members were caught near Toulouse, but he escaped to the coast. He was taken prisoner by the Gestapo in Nice, and on February 3, 1944, was deported to Auschwitz, where he died soon after. See Teresa Posada Kubissa, "August L. Mayer: Ein Experte der spanischen Kunst in München," in *200 Jahre Kunstgeschichte in München: Positionen, Perspektiven, Polemik, 1780–1980*, ed. Christian Drude and Hubertus Kohle (Munich, 2003), pp. 120–30.
- 3 August L. Mayer, "Das Selbstbildnis des Velazquez im Provinzial-Museum zu Hannover," *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst*, n.s., 29, nos. 2, 3 (November 1917), pp. 65–66.
- 4 August L. Mayer, "A Self-Portrait by Velasquez," *Art in America* 14, no. 3 (April 1926), pp. 101–2.
- 5 José López-Rey, *Velázquez: A Catalogue Raisonné of His Oeuvre* (London, 1963), pp. 183–84, no. 181; see also p. 121.
- 6 *Portrait of a Young Man* (Alte Pinakothek, Munich) and *Juan Mateos* (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden) are unfinished but to a lesser degree, while *A Young Girl* (Hispanic Society of America, New York) and *Woman Sewing* (National Gallery of Art, Washington) more closely resemble the state of finish of the Met's painting.
- 7 *Corpus Velazqueño: Documentos y textos* (Madrid, 2000), vol. 1, p. 472, no. 166, and p. 482, no. 708, under doc. no. 436.
- 8 This account is derived from Jonathan Brown and John H. Elliott, *A Palace for a King: The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV*, rev. ed. (New Haven, 2003), pp. 185–93.
- 9 Hermann Hugo, *Obsidio Bredana Armis Philippi III* (Antwerp, 1626).
- 10 Marie Mauquoy-Hendrickx, *L'Iconographie d'Antoine Van Dyck: Catalogue raisonné*, 2nd ed. (Brussels, 1991), vol. 2, pl. 38, no. 57.II. Van Dyck is thought to have initiated the series in 1632–34.
- 11 *Anthony van Dyck*, New Hollstein Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 1450–1700 (Rotterdam, 2002), pt. 1, pp. 141–44, no. 34.
- 12 Mauquoy-Hendrickx, *L'Iconographie*, pl. 32, no. 45.II.
- 13 For detailed descriptions of the attire and its contemporary nomenclature, see Maribel Bandrés Oto, *La moda en la pintura: Velázquez; usos y costumbres del siglo XVII* (Pamplona, 2002), pp. 249–66.

A VELÁZQUEZ UNVEILED

Michael Gallagher

Paintings are inherently vulnerable objects. The materials used to create them can change over time, and the works themselves can be damaged by accident or malicious intent or by well-meaning but injudicious intervention during cleaning and restoration. The artist's intention may also be misunderstood or willfully distorted. Deciphering the clues as to whether any or all of the above has changed the appearance of a work of art is complex and, not surprisingly, can sometimes make fools of those who try. Occasionally, however, it can reap rich rewards as a great work of art, previously distorted by inappropriate restoration and consequently misinterpreted by scholars and connoisseurs, is suddenly returned to us, in some ways all the more precious for its years of exile and neglect. Such is the case of Velázquez's *Portrait of a Man* in The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The picture is a study from life. Its energy and commanding presence are the result of a remarkably direct and immediate recording of an individual executed with dazzling virtuosity but without pretension. Looking at the portrait today, this is self-evident. However, it was certainly not the case before cleaning. The painting was distorted not only by degraded varnish and excessive, discolored restoration but also by earlier attempts to change its character (fig. 10). Seeing the paint surface liberated from these effects primes the eye so that if we study the before-treatment photograph, it is actually possible to recognize many of the qualities we now celebrate as newly emerged. We have in effect the benefit of hindsight. Yet when Keith Christiansen first broached the subject of cleaning the picture almost four years ago, I was intrigued but hesitant. In the months and years that followed, I would occasionally stop in the Velázquez gallery and ponder the portrait's murky depths. Perhaps this was a fine picture in poor condition, or perhaps a second-rate effort whose flaws and weaknesses were actually masked by the aging materials used in a previous restoration. Was the old varnish simply hiding the proverbial multitude of sins?

Often it is surprisingly difficult to be sure, and my own confidence in the portrait's merits and the advisability of cleaning it varied each time I saw it. Sometimes I would feel a degree of anticipation and excitement, at other times a sense that this would be a fool's errand and that an intervention would bring little benefit.

In the summer of 2009, the painting was brought up to the Sherman Fairchild Center for Paintings Conservation at the Met, and I made a cleaning test along the bottom edge, opening up a small window through the varnish. Once the level of discoloration and distortion was revealed, I felt that not to proceed with a full cleaning would be an unsatisfactory option. Under the degraded restoration, the portrait had become irrelevant; it did not really matter whether it was on display or in the storeroom. In the galleries most people would pass it by without a second glance. Curious museum visitors might check the label and in a sense be told they were free to ignore it: why linger before a workshop product when there are real masterpieces to be enjoyed? The picture could capture the attention of scholars or specialists, but their judgment would be impaired because of its condition. For these reasons I proceeded with the varnish removal. The change was dramatic: this was neither a fine painting in poor condition nor a second-rate workshop piece but a great work of art.

This change in perception has been a common feature in the fortunes of the *Portrait of a Man*. In 1917 August Mayer published his opinion that the painting, hanging in a Hanover museum among pictures of the Rembrandt School, was in fact an autograph Velázquez. An accompanying photograph (see fig. 2) shows clearly that the picture had been extensively overpainted to create a work that appeared more like a highly finished portrait: refined and polished, a true "old master." This highly subjective fabrication disguised the aspects of the portrait's execution that seemed summary or unresolved, robbed the picture of its unique personality, and undermined its

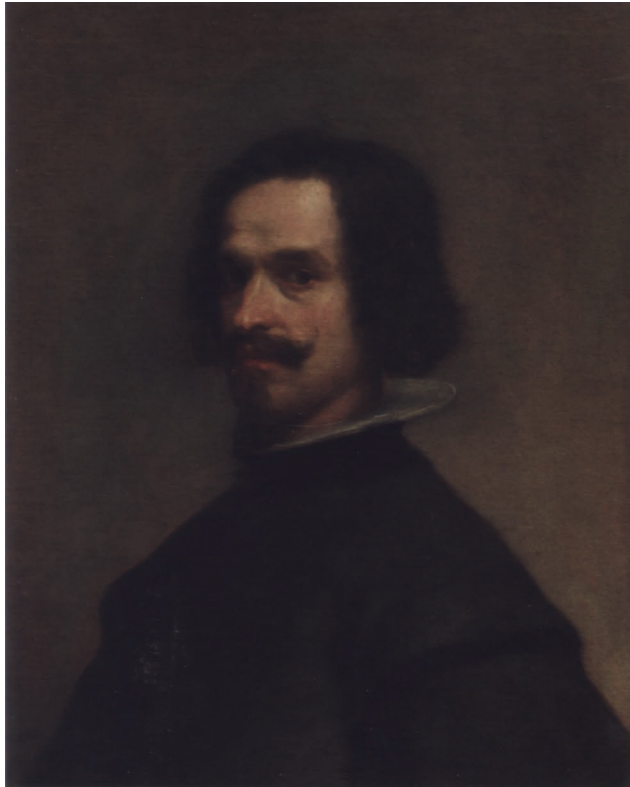


FIG. 10 *Portrait of a Man*, before cleaning

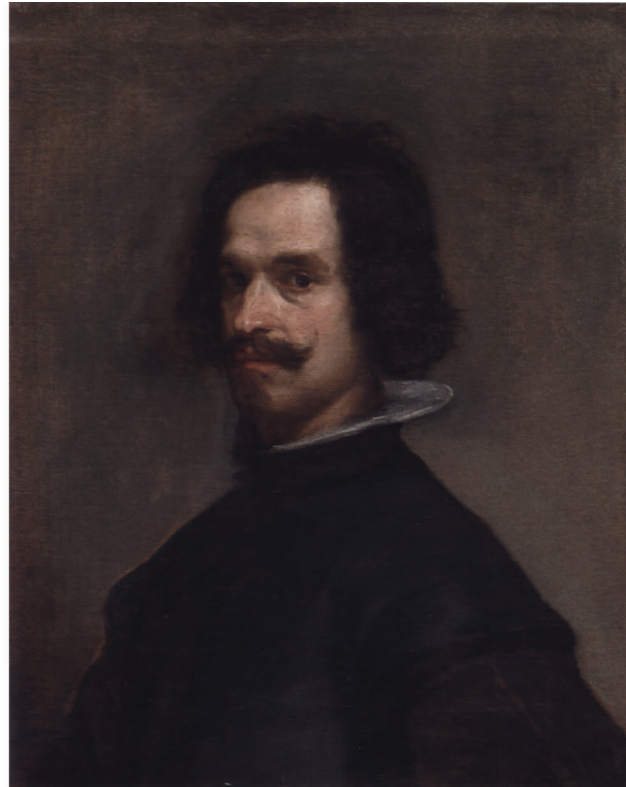


FIG. 11 *Portrait of a Man*, after cleaning and restoration

quality. Nevertheless, Mayer accurately described many of the characteristic features and handling while simultaneously noting that the restoration, which had taken place “some time ago,” was not particularly successful.

When Mayer saw the painting after it was cleaned in November 1925, his response was entirely enthusiastic (see Keith Christiansen’s introduction). However, the restoration that followed this cleaning had the market in mind and aimed once again to suppress those passages in the painting’s handling or condition that could be perceived as unfinished or excessively worn (see fig. 3). This was achieved by the broad toning of thin areas in the background and doublet and by overpainting original changes in the contours of the hair at the left side and top of the head.¹ The natural varnish used at this time gradually degraded, turning brown and less transparent. After the painting entered the Met’s collection in 1949, it was treated twice, in 1953 and 1965. However, the varnish and restoration applied in 1925 were not removed; rather, further coats of synthetic varnish were added. Over time the painting’s qualities, already impaired by the subjective intervention of 1925, were further obscured as these

coatings also degraded. Thus the portrait’s status was diminished until it was regarded as a workshop effort of limited interest and importance.

In the recent intervention the layers of discolored varnish and excessive restoration were carefully removed, revealing a work of quite extraordinary vigor and freshness (fig. 11). Although the painting is worn in places, the abbreviated, loose, and free handling was Velázquez’s intention. Consequently, only a minimum amount of retouching was undertaken: a few small paint losses in the background and some of the more prominent and distracting areas of later abrasion, particularly in the hair. Here the artist had made some significant alterations. The evidence is difficult to interpret with accuracy, but certainly the hair was changed at the top and to the left of the sitter’s head, areas that are now abraded and, in fact, appear to have been scraped. The scraping may have been carried out by Velázquez or, more likely, at a later date by someone else who misunderstood his change of mind. What seems certain is that the previous position and shape of the hair must have been visible to some degree even once the portrait was completed. This was the most challenging area



FIG. 12 X-radiograph

to resolve satisfactorily in the restoration. Completely disguising the changes and subsequent wear was out of the question: it would have resulted in the sort of arbitrary and lifeless contour to the hair that had been such a depressing feature of previous restorations. However, failing to soften the impact of the more strident abrasion would undermine Velázquez's intention by diverting the onlooker's attention from the sitter's penetrating gaze to simple material damage. The approach taken was to respect the intact and dominant brushstrokes, glazing back only the most obvious areas of severe abrasion. This permitted a less rigid interpretation of the contour while retaining the sense that these areas are, to some degree, unresolved.

The portrait is painted on a relatively fine plain-weave canvas support that has been covered with a pinkish, buff-colored ground.² The ground—the preparatory layer applied to the whole support prior to painting³—filled the texture of the canvas weave, made the support less absorbent, and established an overall color and tone that the artist could exploit in the subsequent painting process. In the X-radiograph (fig. 12), random, arcing strokes suggest that the ground was applied with a large, flat spatula or knife, which was typical of Velázquez's working method.⁴

It was common practice to apply the ground layer, and often even execute paintings, while the canvas support was stretched on a loom, a temporary framework used for this purpose. The painting was attached to its final strainer at a later stage, once the dimensions of the image were decided or the picture actually completed. During the application of the ground, the spatula pressed against the inner edges of the loom, resulting in a thinner layer of paint in these areas. This is often visible in an X-radiograph as a sort of "ghost image." In the *Portrait of a Man* traces of the position of the original loom can be observed along the top and the right side, indicating that the canvas was cut from a larger, previously grounded piece of fabric. The painting has been lined, probably in the early twentieth century. During this process, which involves adhering a secondary canvas support to the back of the original in order to strengthen it, the tacking margins of the original painting are usually cut away. Fortunately, in this case they are still intact. It appears that the painting was stretched in its final format only after it had been completed, since paint strokes from the main composition continue on to the tacking margins (fig. 13). The cusping

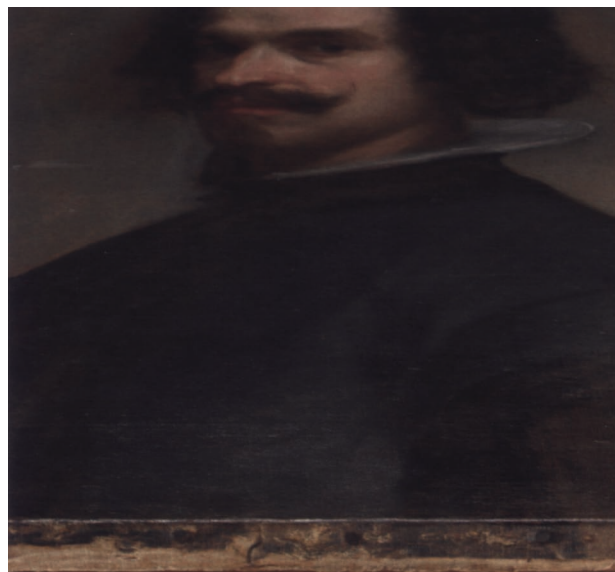


FIG. 13 Detail (photographed from below) showing the continuation of paint strokes along the tacking margins

marks—the garlandlike deviations in the canvas weave induced during stretching—are visible along the margins. This suggests that the portrait was stretched soon after completion when the canvas, ground, and paint layers were still flexible.

Using a brush on top of the pinkish buff ground, Velázquez executed a broad line sketch of the principal forms with a brownish black paint. Some of these lines can still be seen around the contour of the sitter's torso, and the long strokes have in places a broken quality where they have been dragged across the canvas weave. In the bottom left corner, a brush line that appears to record a raised position for the arm has been painted over but is still partially visible (fig. 14). If this were indeed a self-portrait, the line may be an inadvertent record of the artist holding up his palette. Following the brush line sketch, Velázquez blocked in the general forms of the figure tonally with a somewhat thinner brownish black paint mixture. He then brushed a warm gray color up and around the figure to anchor its position and provide a greater sense of volume and depth. At this early stage a change was made to the sitter's pose: it would appear that the head was repositioned lower and turned more in profile.

The doublet was given substance with the application of a slightly more opaque gray paint containing a little lead white pigment, which modeled the volumes of the chest, shoulder, and sleeve. Boldly applied black



FIG. 14 Detail showing the possible indication of a raised arm

strokes were then added to indicate the folds, details of tailoring, and the buttons. A cold gray has been pulled around the neck of the sitter, and a few cursory but perfectly placed thin lines of white paint brilliantly evoke the orientation and rigidity of the collar (fig. 15).

Framing the face, the hair is treated in a similarly loose and spirited manner. In contrast, the face itself, though still displaying a virtuosity of handling and sureness of touch, has been observed with a searing intensity and concentration. The brownish black tonal blocking-in of the first stage is visible in the half shadows, under the highly distinctive heavy brow and below the jaw. Gradually, more opaque, pinkish layers of paint were added to sculpt the features, often exploiting the optical effects of thinly and thickly applied layers over the initial dark blocking-in to create a wonderful interplay of warm and cool tones (fig. 16). Finally, expertly placed highlights, the thickest areas of paint application, pull portions of the face into focus and provide a remarkably palpable sense of the effect of light falling across the sitter's skin.

Velázquez obviously felt no need to develop the doublet or background further. Perhaps the life study had served its purpose, or perhaps he recognized that, with an audacious economy of means, he had achieved a startlingly direct and unsentimental portrait that would only be diluted by further embellishment.



FIG. 15 Detail of the collar

OPPOSITE: FIG. 16 Detail of the face showing buildup of paint layers



- 1 W. R. Valentiner, the director of the Detroit Institute of Arts and the editor of the journal *Art in America*, had already noted the issue of the changes in the hair in a letter to Joseph Duveen, dated October 9, 1925: "There is a rather dark spot around the head, especially on the upper part, which proves that Velasquez had first painted the head a little higher, and that this correction has come through in time. I think this could easily be retouched if one would cover it with a light gray tone, which would improve the picture." A copy of the letter is in the curatorial files, Department of European Paintings, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- 2 The weave, at approximately 18 by 16 threads per square centimeter, conforms to the relatively finer canvases that the artist appears to favor from 1629. See Jonathan Brown and Carmen Garrido, *Velázquez: The Technique of Genius* (New Haven, 1998), p. 16.
- 3 This ground layer is predominantly a mixture of coarse lead white and red ocher. Velázquez's use of a wide range of grounds during his career has been defined as characteristic of his painting technique (see Carmen Garrido Pérez, *Velázquez: Técnica y evolución*, Museo del Prado [Madrid, 1992]). Garrido notes that after introducing lead white in the ground preparation of *The Forge of Vulcan* in 1630, the artist invariably used this pigment for the preparatory layer, either alone or mixed with other pigments. In our study of the *Portrait of a Man*, all pigment analysis and cross-section investigation were undertaken by Metropolitan Museum Research Scientists Silvia Centeno and Mark Wypyski. Samples mounted as cross sections were examined by polarized light microscopy and analyzed with Raman spectroscopy and scanning electron microscopy-energy dispersive X-ray spectrometry (SEM-EDS).
- 4 For descriptions of Velázquez's working practice and technique, see Garrido Pérez, *Velázquez*; Brown and Garrido, *Velázquez*; and Larry Keith, "Velázquez's Painting Technique," in Dawson W. Carr, with Xavier Bray et al., *Velázquez* (London, 2006), pp. 70–89.

PROVENANCE

Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez
Spanish, 1599–1660

Portrait of a Man

Oil on canvas
27 x 21 3/4 in. (68.6 x 55.2 cm)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
The Jules Bache Collection, 1949
49.7.42

Johann Ludwig, Reichsgraf von Wallmoden-Gimborn (until d. 1811); his son, Ludwig Georg Thedel, Feld-Marschall Graf von Wallmoden-Gimborn (1811–18; sold to Hausmann); David Bernhard Hausmann, Hanover (1818–57; cat., 1831, no. 257; sold to George V); George V, King of Hanover, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, Duke of Cumberland and Teviotdale (1857–d. 1878; cat., 1857, no. 257); his son, Ernst August, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg and Duke of Cumberland and Teviotdale (1878–d. 1923; on loan to the Provinzial-Museum, Hanover; cats., 1891, no. 581; 1905, no. 469); his son, Ernst August, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1923–25); [Leo Blumenreich, Berlin, 1925; sold to Duveen]; [Duveen, Paris, London, and New York, 1925–26; sold for \$225,000 to Bache]; Jules S. Bache, New York (1926–d. 1944; his estate, 1944–49; cats., 1929, unnumbered; 1937, no. 43; 1943, no. 42)



LEFT: FIG. 17 Sir Joseph Duveen (1869–1939), head of the fabled art firm Duveen Brothers (undated photo in the Metropolitan's archives)



RIGHT: FIG. 18 Jules S. Bache (1861–1944), head of the stockbrokerage firm J. S. Bache and Co., collector and benefactor of the Metropolitan Museum (undated photo in the Metropolitan's archives)

ATTRIBUTIONAL TIME LINE

Before 1800 Acquired as a work by Anthony van Dyck by Johann Ludwig, Reichsgraf von Wallmoden-Gimborn (1736–1811), illegitimate son of King George II of England.

1818 Sold by his son Ludwig Georg Thedel, distinguished general of the Austrian cavalry.

1854 First identified as a work by Velázquez by British collector-connoisseur Sir Hugh Hume Campbell.

1857 Sold to George V, King of Hanover, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, and Duke of Cumberland and Teviotdale as a Velázquez self-portrait.

1917 Published by scholar August Mayer as a Velázquez self-portrait; he subsequently revises his attribution, suggesting instead Velázquez's pupil Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo.

1925 Acquired by Duveen Brothers, which has it cleaned and restored. Mayer reexamines it and reaffirms that it is a Velázquez self-portrait.

1926 Purchased by Jules S. Bache, head of one of the largest security firms in the country and a discriminating collector of old master paintings.

1944 Bache dies, leaving his collection to a foundation with the understanding that it will go to the Metropolitan Museum.

1949 The Bache Collection enters the Museum.

1955 Bernardino de Pantorba, a leading Spanish scholar, finds that the picture—by then obfuscated by a thick, yellowed varnish—lacks the artist's rich subtlety and frankness of execution. He questions the attribution to Velázquez.

1963 Prominent Velázquez scholar José López-Rey catalogues the work as a "school piece rather close to Velázquez's manner." The picture gradually drops out of consideration.

1979 The Museum downgrades the attribution to "workshop of Velázquez."

2009 Removal of discolored varnish and extensive retouching from 1925 reveals a picture of great quality, with all the hallmarks of Velázquez's mastery. Velázquez scholar Jonathan Brown examines the picture and confirms the attribution to the artist.



FIG. 19 The portrait, after cleaning and restoration, in the Sherman Fairchild Center for Paintings Conservation, The Metropolitan Museum of Art



THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART