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Diego Velázquez

Portrait of don Sebastián de Huerta, c. 1628-1629

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DIEGO VELÁZQUEZ

(Sevilla 1599 - 1660 Madrid)

PORTRAIT OF DON SEBASTIÁN DE HUERTA, c. 1628-1629

Oil on canvas

121 x 101 cm; 47 5/8 x 39 3/4 in.

Provenance

Sebastián García Huerta (1576-1644), La Guardia, Toledo (commissioned from the artist; kept at the family residence);

Thence by descent to the García de Huerta family, La Guardia until 1929;

Miguel B. Marcos de León, Madrid acquired from the above;

Thence by descent to his heirs until 2013;

Private collection, Madrid.

Literature

A. L. Mayer, *Velázquez: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Pictures and Drawings*, London 1936, p. 103, pl. 192, no. 439 (as Juan de Fonseca y Figueroa).

J. López-Rey & A. Mayer, *Velázquez: A Catalogue Raisonné of His Oeuvre*, London 1963, p. 282, no. 469, pl. 402 (as Juan de Fonseca y Figueroa).

C. Garrido, "Velázquez y el Inquisidor," *Ars Magazine*, no. 17, January-March 2013, pp. 56-68, figs. 1-12.

J. López-Rey and O. Delenda, *Velázquez. L'oeuvre complete*, Cologne 2014, p. 21 and p. 28 (ill.).

G. Kientz, *Velázquez. L'affrontement de la peinture*, Paris 2015, p. 355.

G. Kientz (ed.), *Velázquez*, exh. cat., Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna / Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, 2014-15, Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux - Grand Palais / Louvre Éditions, 2015, pp. 232-233, no. 63.

C. Garrido, *Velázquez. El fluir expresivo de su pintura*, Lleida 2022, pp. 152-173.

Exhibition History

Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, *Velázquez*, 28 October 2014 - 15 February 2015;

Paris, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, *Velázquez*, 25 March - 13 July 2015.

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This striking canvas by Diego de Silva y Velázquez (1599-1660) portrays Sebastián García de Huerta (1576-1644), an ecclesiastic-jurist whose trajectory epitomises the intertwining of clerical, political and familial networks in early-seventeenth-century Castile - eventually becoming the official Secretary of King Philip IV.

Born on 20 January 1576 in La Guardia, a modest Toledan township some 55 kilometres from the archiepiscopal city, García de Huerta was placed under the tutelage of his uncle, the presbyter Francisco de Huerta (d. 1590), senior chaplain of the abbey of Santo Domingo el Antiguo - renowned for El Greco's nine altarpiece paintings. By testamentary provision the young nephew inherited that chaplaincy *ad vitam*. His institutional ascent unfolded under the aegis of Cardinal-Archbishop Bernardo de Sandoval y Rojas (1546-1618), uncle to the royal favourite the Duke of Lerma. In early 1611 Sandoval secured for García de Huerta a notarial post in Toledo Cathedral, which he complemented the following year with the secretaryship of the archbishopric. A licentiate in canon law conferred by the University of Toledo in 1615 further bolstered his credentials. On 12 December 1616 he entered the Supreme Tribunal of the Holy Office as Secretary; the appointment simultaneously placed him within the orbit of Philip III and, on that king's demise, of Philip IV. Even after Sandoval's death on 7 December 1618 - and the consequent re-separation of the archiepiscopal and inquisitorial dignities - García de Huerta retained privileged proximity to power. A royal decree dated 2 December 1629 formally named him *Secretario de Su Majestad* Philip IV, thereby enlarging the remit he already exercised within the Royal Supreme Council of the Inquisition.¹

This heightened status almost certainly occasioned the present portrait, executed in the late 1620s, shortly before Velázquez embarked (August 1629-early 1631) upon his formative Italian sojourn. The sitter's wish to perpetuate his likeness was consonant with his wider commemorative ambitions. During the rebuilding of the parish church of the Asunción de Nuestra Señora - also called de la Concepción - in La Guardia, begun c. 1620, García de Huerta endowed a funerary chapel with an adjoining sacristy, ultimately dedicated to the Concepción de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de México. Architectural completion was achieved by 1631; the Italian-born court painter Angelo Nardi, already associated with Gómez de Mora on Sandoval's projects and appointed a royal painter in 1625, was engaged to execute frescoes and narrative canvases depicting the Holy Doctors and the Life of the Virgin, receiving final payment on 19 January 1633.² Parish accounts record interim disbursements, including a payment on 16 June 1628 for the gilding of the altarpiece, indicating that work was well advanced by that date.³

¹ For more extensive biographical notes see C. Garrido, *Velázquez. El fluir expresivo de su pintura*, Lleida 2022, pp. 153-156.

² A. E. Pérez Sánchez, *Borgianni, Cavarozzi and Nardi in Spain*, Madrid 1964, pp. 35-36.

³ J. López de Ayala, *Catálogo Monumental de la Provincia de Toledo*, Madrid 1919, p. 198.

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It was therefore during the biennium 1628-29 - at the apex of his ecclesiastical and political career - that García de Huerta commissioned Velázquez, the principal portraitist of the Madrid court, to fashion the likeness destined for the new sacristy. The painting thus formed an integral element within a carefully orchestrated programme of self-memorialisation, aligning the secretary's image with both the architectural fabric of his native parish and the institutional loyalties had sustained his remarkable advancement.

From a very early date, documentation attests to the existence of two virtually identical likenesses of Sebastián García de Huerta. One - apparently intended for private devotion - remained in the family residence at La Guardia until its sale in 1929;⁴ the other, marginally larger, was displayed in the sacristy of the patronal chapel until the upheavals of 1936-40. This duality is noted by every author from Ponz to Tormo, each reiterating that 'a portrait of the founder [hangs in the sacristy], while the original (an early work by Velázquez?) is preserved in the Huerta household at La Guardia'.⁵ A manuscript memorandum in the *Catálogo Monumental de la Provincia de Toledo* - addressed by Romero de Castilla to the Marqués de Lozoya - makes the same distinction between the picture 'still in the sacristy of the chapel of the Foundation' and another, 'somewhat smaller, portrait of the same personage', recorded as sold by the heirs in 1629. In the printed *Catálogo Monumental* the Conde de Cedillo remarked that the work 'immediately suggests Velázquez, though certain circumstances of execution militate against the attribution'.⁶ Cedillo's scruples were chiefly chronological: he misdated García de Huerta's birth to 1566 (it was in fact 1576, as confirmed by baptismal and death registers stating that he died aged sixty-eight)⁷ and, judging the sitter to be around forty, proposed 1606 as the *terminus ante quem* - thereby placing the portrait in a year when Velázquez was only seven. Allowing, instead, that the sitter's visage belongs to a man of roughly fifty, the year 1628 accords both with García de Huerta's age (fifty-two) and with Velázquez's documented manner on the eve of his first Italian sojourn. García de Huerta died on 10 August 1644, having stipulated that his body be interred in the chapel of the *Virgen Santísima de la Concepción* that he had erected in his native La Guardia.

⁴ See J. M. Mora Ontalva, 'Sebastián García de Huerta', in *Diccionario de historia eclesiástica de España*, supplement I, Madrid, 1987. The García de Huerta family sold the portrait that was kept in the family home to a well-known antiques dealer in Madrid in 1929, as stated in the purchase receipt, for the sum of 41,000 pesetas (Fig. 1). Over time, it reached its current owners.

⁵ See A. Ponz, *Viage de España*, Madrid 1791, vol. XVI, p. 14-22 and E. Tormo, "De Madrid a Valencia", *Boletín de la Real Academia de Historia*, vol. XCIV, notebook II, 1929, p. 409.

⁶ J. López de Ayala y López de Toledo, Conde de Cedillo, *Catálogo Monumental de la provincia de Toledo* (ms.), 1919, p. 198; printed ed., Toledo 1959, pp. 140 ff.

⁷ Baptismal certificate. Archive of the Parish Church of La Guardia (Toledo).

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A century and a half later, the picture is conspicuously absent from the enormous inventory compiled in 1840 by José Bueno - court painter to Ferdinand VII and restorer at the newly established Museo del Prado - at the behest of Vicenta García de Huerta. Bueno listed 1,037 paintings destined for immediate disposal, many acquired by Vicenta's father through the *desamortización* of Mendizábal (1836). Masters of the first rank abound - one Bosch, five El Grecos, six Caravaggios, two Riberas, nine Brueghel the Elders, six Rubenses, six Carreños, six Murillos and seven Goyas - together with sixteen works catalogued as Velázquez (half acknowledged as copies).⁸ The omission of Sebastián's portrait confirms that the family withheld what they regarded as one of the collection's most distinguished items.

Twentieth-century scholarship first addressed the painting when the Golden-Age specialist August L. Mayer catalogued it - erroneously - as a likeness of *Sumiller de Corte* Juan de Fonseca y Figueroa, supposedly the courtier responsible for introducing the youthful Sevillian to Philip IV.⁹ Mayer's misidentification was repeated by José López-Rey in collaboration with Angelika Mayer;¹⁰ yet when López-Rey issued his definitive *Velázquez: Catalogue Raisonné* (1996), the picture was omitted altogether, and has since languished in undeserved obscurity. As Bartolomé Bennassar has recently observed, the painter's first Madrid period (1623-29) is poorly documented and incompletely preserved, rendering every securely datable work from those years crucial to any discussion of his stylistic evolution.¹¹ Consequently, the technical study of this portrait is imperative to address this dearth of knowledge.¹²

Most striking, however, is the presence - up-ended beneath the portrait - of an abandoned composition, apparently a *Mater Dolorosa* or *Virgen de la Soledad*, indicated by summary blocks of head, cloak and hands and by faint delineation of the features (Fig. 2b). The initial scheme was left incomplete; the canvas was inverted and pressed into service for García de Huerta's likeness. Velázquez recycled supports on other occasions: beneath the *Cardinal-Infante don Fernando in hunting dress* (Madrid, Museo del Prado, P.1186) lies an inverted sketch for the same sitter, and, after his second Italian journey (1649-51), he famously overpainted an early-1630s portrait of Philip IV to create the official image of Queen Mariana.¹³ In the present instance the earlier motif was suppressed with broad, high-contrast strokes before the cloth was turned and the new design begun.

⁸ See J. López-Rey, *Velázquez: Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. II, Cologne 1996, pp. 261-262, 304 and 323.

⁹ A. L. Mayer, *Velázquez: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Pictures and Drawings*, London 1936, p. 103, pl. 192, no. 439 (as Juan de Fonseca y Figueroa).

¹⁰ J. López-Rey & A. Mayer, *Velázquez: A Catalogue Raisonné of His Oeuvre*, London 1963, p. 282, no. 469, pl. 402 (as Juan de Fonseca y Figueroa).

¹¹ B. Bennassar, *Velázquez, vida*, Madrid 2012.

¹² For a complete technical study see C. Garrido, *Velázquez. El fluir expresivo de su pintura*, Lleida 2022, pp. 158-170. The pigment analyses were carried out by Dr Enrique Parra (Madrid) and the technical documentation was created in the laboratories of the Max Doerner Institute (Munich) under the direction of Dr Heike Stege, to all of whom goes our gratitude.

¹³ See C. Garrido Pérez, *op. cit.*, pp. 527-537.

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Illumination falls from left to right. The background - an irregularly worked grey with ochre-green undertone - is compounded of charcoal black, white lead, ochreous clay and calcite, its tonality comparable with other portraits of c. 1627-30; the unfinished lower register of the *Joven noble español* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek, inv. AKG 308673, Fig. 5) demonstrates an identical build-up. X-ray and infra-red reflectography show minor adjustments (Fig. 2a-3).¹⁴

The sitter wears clerical habit and mantle over a thin linen camisa. The radiographic examination discloses the pronounced cavities formed by the cascading folds of fabric as it descends from the sitter's right shoulder - a structural motif likewise observable in the full-length likenesses of the *Count-Duke of Olivares* and in Velázquez's earliest standing portraits of *Philip IV* and the *Infante don Carlos*. In Sebastián García de Huerta's robes, the incisive, forthright contours bear witness to the painter's resolute draughtsmanship, while the velvety passages of dense black pigment - so characteristic of Velázquez's oeuvre - recur throughout his career. Comparable handling is manifest in the *Portrait of the Sculptor Juan Martínez Montañés* (Museo del Prado, P.1194), and in the emphatic, sketch-like black strokes that articulate the unfinished bust of the ageing Philip IV (c. 1655-60, Museo del Prado, P.1185).

Viewed unaided, the sitter's head already commands attention. A single pinpoint of light at the apex of the upper lip - a typical Velázquez signature - reappears decades later in works from the second Italian sojourn, notably the portraits of *Juan de Pareja* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1971.86) and *Ferdinando Brandani* (formerly The Pope's Barber, Museo del Prado, P.7858). This calculated luminosity, rooted in Velázquez's Sevillian apprenticeship, enlivens the countenance and endows it with palpable presence (Fig. 4).

The modelling of the ear resonates with that in the putative *Portrait of Francisco Pacheco* (Museo del Prado, P.1209). The sitter's heavy, curved eyelids and the chromatically sensitive eye-rims - often lightly glazed in crimson - recur in numerous contemporaneous canvases: *The Nun Jerónima de la Fuente*, the *Young Spanish Nobleman*, the sovereigns Philip IV and the Infante don Carlos, the full-length *Count-Duke of Olivares* (Fig. 6), and even in *Luis de Góngora y Argote* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 32.79). The visage anticipates the painterly finesse later lavished on *Diego*

¹⁴ The right-hand drapery was initially broader; the left sleeve was raised to overlap the table corner; the fore-edges of the books were trimmed. Both hands were first blocked in with brisk strokes of black; the right was subsequently refined with layered colour, whereas the left, initially more pendent and sketch-like, was shortened when the sleeve was lowered and the modelling intensified. Analogous "half-resolved" hands appear in the Munich portrait, in *Don Juan Mateos* (Dresden) and - in a more advanced state - in *La costurera* (Washington).

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del Corral y Arellano and on *Antonia de Ipeñarrieta y Galdós* with her son Luis, while its subtle grey modulations convey the sitter's age. Highlights of vermilion enliven ear, nose, eyelids, and lips; translucent glazes dignify the physiognomy with quiet authority. The treatment recalls the flesh of *Vulcan's Forge* (Museo del Prado, P.1171; Fig. 7), of *The Crucified Christ* (Museo del Prado, P.167), and of the sitter's own right hand.

The spatial schema of Sebastián García de Huerta's portrait conforms to Velázquez's established format. At the left, a cabinet draped in threadbare crimson velvet - its red conveyed by a thin organic glaze scarcely visible in radiography - supports the sitter's rested hand and two volumes. The larger, parchment-bound book, with limp covers and protective flap, bears spine inscriptions and is fastened by ties typical of Spanish notarial and ecclesiastical bindings. Above it lies a smaller, leather-covered tome, its gilt edges suggested by scant, dragged strokes; double braided clasps, probably silk given their reddish hue, secure the boards. The minute slip of paper interleaved in the larger volume - a Velázquez hallmark - creates a perceptible gap in the pages. Similar bibliographic still-lives appear in *Democritus, or The Geographer* (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen, Inv. 822.1.16; Fig. 8), in *The Temptation of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Diocesan Museum, Orihuela, Inv. 1), and in *Buffoon with Books*. The sitter's grip on a blank sheet, index finger extended, echoes the contemporaneous full-length of *Philip IV* (Museo del Prado, P.1182) and *Diego del Corral y Arellano*; where inscriptions are essential - as in the *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (Galleria Doria-Pamphilj, FC 289) - Velázquez adjusts the hand to present the text legibly.

The right hand clutching the *mozzetta* directly recalls the *Infante don Carlos's* gloved hand (Fig. 9), including the rendering of the white shirt cuff. Velázquez habitually wiped excess pigment or cleansed his brush upon the canvas itself, leaving tell-tale marks: they surface in the *Cardinal-Infante Ferdinand in Hunting Dress* and, later, in *Mercury and Argus* (Museo del Prado, P.1175).

Owing to its unbroken provenance and meticulous care, the portrait has survived in remarkably fine condition. These technical considerations, and that Sebastián García de Huerta occupied a position of real consequence at Philip IV's court reassert the substantive historical and artistic weight of the present painting within Velázquez's corpus a work, firmly dating it to the brief but crucial interval of 1628-29 immediately preceding the master's Italian interlude.

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Los que suscriben, como albacea y herederos de D^o Juana Alvarez Fernández de Goria y herederos presentes de Don Faustino García de Huerta Montielino, declarados haber recibido de Don M. B. Marcos de León, vecino de Madrid, la cantidad de cuarenta mil pesetas por un cuadro retrato de Don Sebastián García de Huerta, conosciuto por "Secretario Leigutu" por haber sido Secretario particular del Rey Felipe IV y de la Santa Inquisición, natural de esta villa de La Guardia (Salamanca) a que tiene fundada una Capilla dentro de la Iglesia Parroquial en la qual se hallan enterrados sus restos; además entrega Mil pesetas como donación al Santo Niño Patrón de esta villa y como renuncio por tal compra, de una cantidad de

Cuarenta y un mil pesetas se hace cargo el Albacea que suscribe Don Manuel Palencia García.

Y para que conste expedimos el presente en La Guardia a primero de julio de mil novecientos veintinueve =

Como Albacea de D^o Juana Alvarez
Manuel Palencia

Como Herederos de Don Sebastián de la Huerta
Dominga Cabera
mesiano Diaz
Corte

José de la Montielina
Gonzalo Montielino Luciano Cabera
Antonio Montielino Francisco Montielino
María Lopez

Fig. 1. Handwritten purchase receipt of the 1929 sale by García de Huerta Family to Miguel B. Marcos de León in Madrid, for the sum of 41,000 pesetas.

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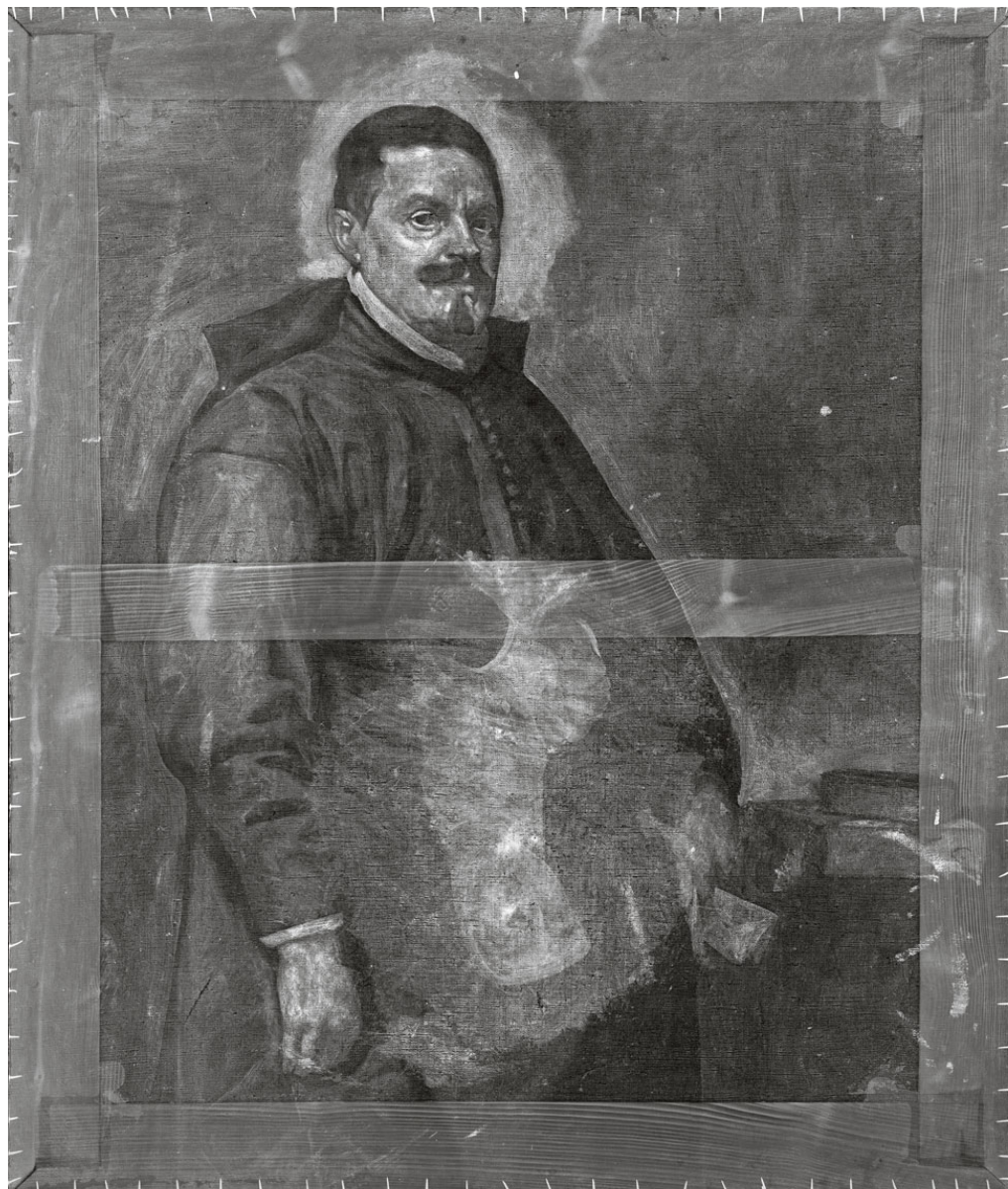


Fig. 2a. Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of Sebastián don García de Huerta*, c. 1628-1629, private collection. X-Ray.

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Fig. 2b. Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of Sebastián don García de Huerta* (detail of the *Mater Dolorosa* or *Virgen*), c. 1628-1629, private collection. X-Ray.

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Fig. 3. Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of Sebastián don García de Huerta*, c. 1628-1629, private collection. Infrared reflectography.

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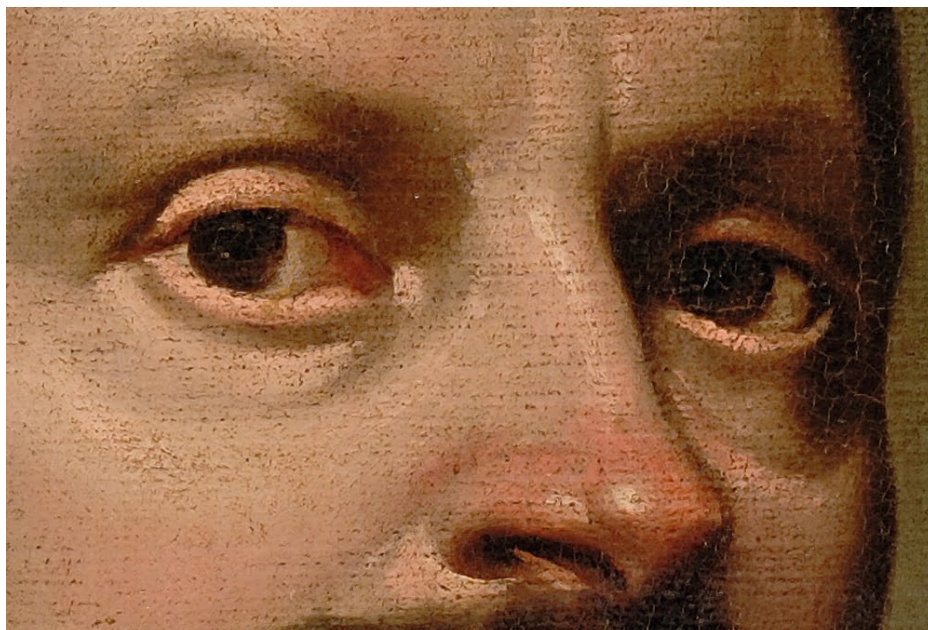


Fig. 4. Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of Sebastián don García de Huerta* (detail), c. 1628-1629, oil on canvas and Diego Velázquez, *Philip IV* (detail), 1623, oil on canvas.

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Fig. 5. Diego Velázquez, *Joven noble español*, c. 1626-1627, oil on canvas. Munich, Alte Pinakothek.

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Fig. 6. Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of the Count-Duke of Olivares*, 1624, oil on canvas. São Paulo Museum of Art.

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Fig. 7. Diego Velázquez, *La fragua de Vulcano* (detail), 1630, oil on canvas. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

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Fig. 8. Diego Velázquez, *Demócrito* (detail), c. 1630, oil on canvas.
Musée des Beaux Arts Rouen.

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Fig. 9. Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of the Infante don Carlos*, 1626, oil on canvas. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

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