



**Enough is Definitely Enough**  
General Practice, Lincoln



## Enough is Definitely Enough

30 March – 13 April 2019  
General Practice,  
25 Clasketgate, Lincoln, LN2 1JJ

Open Friday and Saturdays  
11am - 4pm  
[www.general-practice.net/](http://www.general-practice.net/)

A huge thank you to all the artists for their generosity of entering into the spirit of the show, as well as for their amazing minds and hands that allowed their artworks to enter the world.

Thanks to Rob Britt and Ross Oliver for technical mastery.

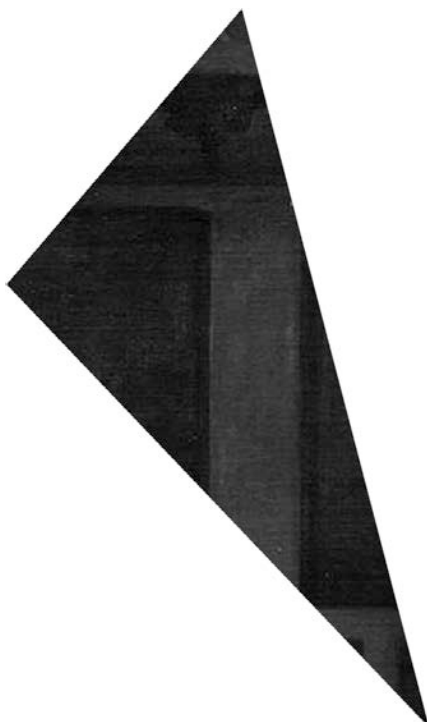
And of course the biggest thanks to Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez.

**Artists:** Euripides Altintzoglou, Tristram Aver, Maggie Ayliffe, Sarah Bennett, Juan Bolivar, Andrew Bracey, Louise Bristow, Kate Buckley, Louisa Chambers, Fiona Curran, Gordon Dalton, Karen David, Annabel Dover, Leo Fitzmaurice, Rebecca Fortnum, Rachel Goodyear, Simón Granell, Tom Hackney, Sharon Hall, Lesley Halliwell, Simon Harris, Ilona Kiss, Geoff Diego Litherland, Alison Lloyd, Cathy Lomax, Rachel Lumsden, Danica Maier, David Manley, Enzo Marra, Andy Pepper, Yelena Popova, James Quin, Daniel Rapley, Lucy Renton, John Rimmer, John M Robinson, David Ryan, Nick Simpson, Stephen Snoddy, Soheila Sokhanvari, Annabel Tilley, Alun Williams, Gerard Williams

**Enough is Definitely Enough**  
Curated by Andrew Bracey



The exhibition is curated by Andrew Bracey and forms part of his PhD research at the University of Lincoln. He is exploring how contemporary artists have used and appropriated existing paintings by other artists, through a position of using the metaphor of the parasite and symbiosis in connection with painting.



## Introduction

Forty three contemporary artists have made new artworks in response to a postcard version of Diego Velázquez's, *Las Meninas*. The exhibition, 'Enough is Definitely Enough'<sup>i</sup>, features a huge variety of different artistic responses to the Spanish painter's masterpiece - arguably the most widely interpreted of all paintings.



Art Historian Daniel Arasse has reflected many people's view that enough has been said about Velázquez's painting. "Las Meninas! Oh no not again! For pity's sake! Enough already! Everything's been said about it! Everything? Or nothing? What's the difference, enough is definitely enough!<sup>iii</sup>. The artists in the exhibition build upon previous interpretations by renowned artists including, Francesco Goya, Pablo Picasso, Richard Hamilton and Eve Sussman. Artists have long been actively influenced by historical paintings in numerous ways, from copying to learn their craft through to critique through appropriation and other tactics.

It can be argued that the best of these artistic responses, in turn, offer influence back to artworks they use, by allowing new interpretations and readings to be formed. In this particular case, *Las Meninas* has the potential to be altered in our minds, through the encounter with one, some or all of the responses by the contemporary artists in 'Enough is Definitely Enough'. There is potential for new relationships with Velasquez's original painting to open up.

As part of the research methodology, each artist was asked to answer two questions. These give insight into individual thought processes about both Velázquez's original painting and each artistic response. The questions were:

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you? and What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

These have been collated in these pages, and together with the artworks, form a retort to Arasse and other peoples' views. There would appear to be plenty more to discover and find in *Las Meninas* and perhaps artists are the best placed to do the unlocking. Enough is definitely not enough.

Andrew Bracey

<sup>i</sup> Some might draw parallels with the title and the date of the exhibition's opening, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2019, the original date for the UK's exit from the EU as a result of Brexit. In a quirk of fate, at the time of writing, the new date to leave the EU (if the UK parliament cannot agree a course of action) is set to be 12<sup>th</sup> April 2019, meaning the exhibitions closing party, or finissage, will more resemble a wake.

<sup>ii</sup> Arasse, D., 2013, *Take a Closer Look*, Princetown, Princetown University Press.







## **Forward**

As a student at The Royal Academy I befriended that rarest of people a Romany Gipsy called Clive, who unbelievably was also student there. He was the most gifted and talented painter I ever knew but was also a deeply unpleasant person not unlike the stories one hears about Soutine; spitting on the floor, stealing from friends' houses, lying for lying's sake. Nevertheless we got along and one summer went to Spain to drink red wine and look at Goya who we were both obsessed by as

well as take in a few other painters on the way.

An adjunct to this story is that we had saved money by working on building sites as labourers. One morning, after a few hours graft we stood and watched a huge Plant Hire low-loader back onto the site and the driver unchain and shunt into place a digger, a cherry picker, a monster shovel and a crane. I said 'Shall we help him? and Clive – older and more sage than I – said "fuck that – it's his job" As the enormously fat driver, sweating and red in the face, secured his rig, re-fastened his chains and out his paperwork Clive wandered over with his hands in his pockets and said 'Ey Mate – you ain't half got some fucking Plant!' The driver swung a meaty fist and puchned it into Clive's face, knocking him senseless, and stomped off to the foreman's shed.

A month later we were in The Prado. After about ten minutes Clive looked at me as we stood before *La Meninas* and said in a low voice 'Fucking Hell - Velazquez had some Plant' I was the only person in the world who would get the joke, but it was a

joke that resonated then and now. Velazquez has some Plant: Heavy, powerful, dirty and unstoppable – the loaded low-loader of all paintings from the container driver of Art History.

To describe the painting here might be superfluous – there are reproductions aplenty, transcriptions and variations from what has been reasonably described as 'The Theology of Painting' in which every aspect of visual literacy can be seen. Every crumb of the painter's art, every particle of philosophical enquiry.

The mirrors, *Spiegel Im Spiegel* no less, have that compressed power we find in the black obsidian mirrors of the Maya. From its madder canopy of artists black we see an impossible carnival of characters looking at us, looking at them, looking at us.

At the epicentre the King and Queen. We imagine the same approving nod as from George ii at Handel's Zadok. It's not about *him* and yet it is all about him. His court painter, his chattels, his performing dwarves and his attack dogs all subdued to his presence glimmering in the half-light.

About its nuanced and manifold meanings no single theory, however, has found universal agreement. The subtleties of Spanish allusion are lost to us and aside from the bricks-and-mortar of art historical facts we are left with an enigma as puzzling as The Sphinx, staring out into the sandstorm of the future – looking at us, looking at it, looking at us, looking at it.....

Alan Parker Feb 2019.



### **Euripides Altintzoglou**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

Velasquez's 'masterpiece' is the perfect encapsulation of the consistent relegation of women in the arts as objectified subjects rather than active creative individuals. Moreover, it expands on further divisions between artist and subject, artwork and viewer, art and the world.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

The initial curatorial encouragement to work with the postcard highlighted the multi-

layered semantic distancing embedded in serial reproductions of artworks, and by extension gave prominence to the internal divisions of the work. The minimalist treatment of my reworked version emphasizes this divide, also present in Velasquez's original between the stretcher and his subjects, in an attempt to address the persistence of these issues in the recent resurfacing of the just call for equal professional rights and inclusive opportunities for female artists, and other discriminatory socio-cultural tendencies. The abrupt cropping in the reworked painting suggests a clear distinction between art, its subjects, and the world, forcing the realization that *all* of us stand where the ladies once stood: in waiting.



### **Tristram M Aver**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

I have only ever seen it as a reproduction, so my relationship to it has been exclusively via the printed page or computer screen. I find it quite a jarring, complex and deceptive painting, yet read lots to understand its compositional merits or those

clever things that warrant its 'masterpiece' status. But at 9ft by 10ft in real life, my experiences are a little distant and cold when presented with much smaller counterparts.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

Firstly, I transferred a copy of the postcard as a cyanotype onto canvas, then placed large sampled composite of trees - found within 16th century Spanish war paintings within Velazquez's lifetime - into the centre, rising above Margaret Teresa's head. Only five out of the six figures who are looking directly at us (you) remain. Velazquez breaks the 'fourth wall' by making his figures look directly out into the picture plain - at the viewer themselves - as if they are judging, knowing.

Velazquez was royal artist to King Philip IV of Spain, reigning monarch during the Thirty Year War (1616 to 1648). Considered one of the most destructive conflicts in human history, it resulted in eight million civilian and soldier fatalities throughout Europe, not only from military engagements but also from violence, famine, and plague. As with my *Native British Trees* series, the trees within this painting form the outline of an explosion, bursting from the scene. This is a visual game I play

to expose the hypocrisy of war (and those who deal in arms) and those who take patronage from those who profit from it.



**Maggie Ayliffe**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

*Las Meninas*, as you rightly point out, is a much-analysed painting, but it is often a formal analysis in which the spatial complexities and the symbolic hierarchies

embedded into the composition seem to dominate the personal dynamics of the space and people portrayed.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

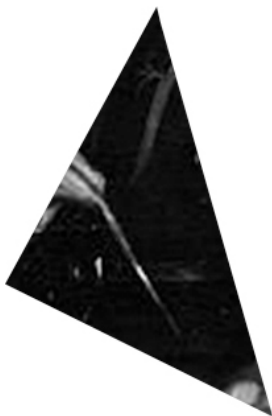
I've always tried to link my practice as a painter to my lived experience and I've been thinking a lot about how, in my current job, the lived experience of our staff and students is so often reduced to sets of data - a different sort of formal analysis. There seemed to be a tenuous link here between the analysis of my work life and the narrative of the painting.

My first instinct was to reduce the painting to a grid of data - a kind of spread sheet - in which the narrative/human content is nullified. I cut the painting down into small regular strips of data and fixed them to the edge of the canvas. But it was the space between these fixed points that I then had to re-imagine.

Over Christmas, I read *The Vanishing Man* by Laura Cummings in the hope of finding a different / more intimate story of the painting, the life of the painter, the court of Philip IV and most of all the little Infanta and her friends - who seem to be caught in a moment of jest - naughtiness even. The book was quite frustrating to begin with - it

seemed to avoid pinpoints of fact or clear story telling. But what gradually emerged was the dark and shadowy space of the court, a dangerous, organic space that counters the geometric grid-like box of the painter's studio. I have tried to introduce this contradiction into the space of my painting that sits somewhere between geometric and organic, safety and danger.

The much sort after child of the king, the supposed focus of the painting has a symbolic importance - if security for the nation/court was not to come from a male heir to the throne then it would be the daughter's role to marry into another political dynasty and procreate - the painter's job was to capture and sell her 'feminine charms' through portraits sent around Europe. I wanted to bring to the fore the Infanta's sexuality that is at the heart of the painting and seems to defy and reflect her birth role. I focussed on the Infanta's boutonniere as a symbol of an untamed femininity that in this 'snapshot' by Valazquez is more playful than composed, more social than formal and just slightly out of control.



### **Sarah Bennett**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

I made a small fabric doll version of the Infanta Margarita Teresa de España when I was 10 or 11 but did not see the actual painting until I was 40.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

What I did: I wanted to draw particular attention to the maid of honour - Doña Isabel de Velasco - so used two magnifying devices, a camera, and the x2 magnification of the viewfinder. It is all about looking...



### **Juan Bolivar**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

Velazquez' 'Las Meninas' is in my top five if not top three favourite paintings of all time. It seems silly to think that such a list could exist given that so many great works in the 20th century alone have been made, so why then place this painting made during the Spanish 'Golden Age' in this hypothetical podium?

The reason for me, is because the dialogue this painting generates is light years ahead of its time and is only matched by the devices and imaginations of modern cinema where time and space are able to escape normal convention. Think 'Proto-Cubism' or 'Proto-Conceptual Art', meet Ridley Scott's Blade Runner 'Enhance Scene', where Deckard - the film's hero - employs futuristic technology to twist space; penetrating a photograph with the aid of computer wizardry and finds a key clue in his hunt for 'replicants'. This in 1982 (or Cubism in 1910) is groundbreaking, but imagine tapping into this notion of quantum time and space in 1656.

It is ridiculously good. 'Las Meninas' stands over three meters tall and through its scale and proportions it resembles a large mirror such as those found in

dance studios - and as we stand in front of this painting - the illogical notion of its reading as a mirror reflecting an imaginary scene we can weave in and out begins to unfold. The game being played never ceases or offers resolution: Velazquez, depicting himself as the artist within this painting stares directly at us, he is in a sense making a portrait of us but we clearly know that not to be the case. The canvas he is working on (the painting within the painting), references through its own scale, the actual object we are standing in front. The illusion is thus that the painting being made by the artist is the very painting we are witnessing in actuality. It defies the logic of representation. It is time travel. We stand in the same space, but different time to that occupied by the painting's protagonists. We are the courtiers, the 'meninas', the dog, the King and Queen. The shadows, mirrors and other paintings we see before us.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

Two thoughts went through my mind when given a postcard of this painting. The first was to echo the paradoxical space depicted by Velazquez' painting, so I decided to make a painting showing the back of the postcard being given. As the back of the postcard offered very little information, and

in order to highlight what could ostensibly be read as a white rectangle, I painted adding tromp l'oeil suggestions of tape to pin down the physical object being referred to.

The second thought was an anecdote I once heard describing when Francis Bacon travelled to see Velazquez' famous Portrait of Innocent X (which inspired his 'screaming popes' series'), and how upon reaching the room displaying this work, Francis Bacon decided to turn away and not see this work afterall. In a sense part of me also regards 'Las Meninas' as a kind of 'listed building' and that nothing should ever be done to its facia, choosing therefore to represent the postcard's verso instead.



### **Andrew Bracey**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

The extraordinary book, *The Sight of Death*, charts two months of T J Clark attentively considering two Poussin



paintings; followed by two years of thoughts, primarily arising from looking at reproductions. What starts (and there are parallels here with sentiments associated with *Las Meninas*) as “just looking”<sup>i</sup> at paintings that “are best left alone”<sup>ii</sup>, grows into 242 pages narrating how time can change a painting and a true insight into what painting can give back to the viewer. Clark writes that “astonishing things happen if one gives oneself over to the process of seeing again and again: aspect after aspect of the picture seems to surface, what is salient and what is incidental alter bewilderingly from day to day, the larger order of the depiction breaks up, crystallizes, fragments again, persists like an afterimage.”<sup>iii</sup>

Rosalind Krauss has written about an instance of a student asking her and Michael Fried what was so good about a Frank Stella painting? She recounts how Fried replied by saying, ““There are days when Stella goes to the Metropolitan Museum. And he sits for hours looking at the Velázquez’s, utterly knocked out by them and then he goes back to the studio.

What he would like more than anything else is to paint Velázquez. But what he knows is that that is an option not open to him. So he paints stripes.”Fried’s voice had risen.” He wants to be Velázquez, so he paints stripes.”<sup>iv</sup> Krauss states that Fried meant “that Stella’s need to say something through his art was the same as a seventeenth-century Spaniards: only the point in time was different.”<sup>v</sup>

I wish I had two months to spend studying *Las Meninas* in the Prado, and to be able to articulate half as precisely as Clark does. I wish I had the confidence and belief of Stella. Instead I am privileged to have been able to have spent time looking attentively at this painting of all paintings.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?  
I made a stamp with the following signed statement: ‘I am in awe of Las Meninas’. A stack of blank postcards have been left with an invitation to imprint the phrase on them and take away one of an unlimited edition. The signature is a poor copy of my own, like the postcard of *Las Meninas* is a poor copy of Velázquez’s painting. The

financial value of my artwork is the same as the price of postcard of *Las Meninas* for sale in the Prado gift shop. This value should never change. The value of *Las Meninas* itself is beyond price.

<sup>i</sup> Clark, T J, 2006, *The Sight of Death*, Yale University Press, London, p1

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, p3

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid, p5

<sup>iv</sup> Krauss, Rosalind, 2010, *Perpetual Inventory*, Cambridge, MIT Press, p115

<sup>v</sup> Ibid, p116



### Louise Bristow

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

Velasquez's *Las Meninas* is a painting I know only through reproduction, having never seen it in the flesh. As a young art student

I became aware of it as a painting with secrets, a work to be unpicked and solved. I knew about other artists' fascination with it, particularly Picasso's, and, perversely, this probably put me off looking at it properly until now.

To me it stands for the self-awareness of the artist. Velasquez draws my attention to the artifice of the artwork he has made, and by extension, the artifice of all art. For me the painting symbolises art looking at art, art talking about itself, and this is only reinforced by knowledge of how many artists have been preoccupied with it, and the many re-workings and acts of homage it has provoked.

The limited colour, dark tones and enigmatic space draw you deep into the picture. It becomes confusing when you realise that what you're looking at is actually what would be behind you; the painting depicts the reflection in a large mirror, as seen by the artist. Or, it puts you in the position of whoever/whatever the artist is painting – presumably the couple who are glimpsed in the reflection of the small mirror in the background. And although this couple cannot be seen by me, they are watched by several of the figures in the painting – Velasquez himself, one of the ladies in waiting and the Infanta Margaret Theresa – who are also staring

directly at me when I look at the painting. It really breaks the fourth wall!

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

I had planned to include the intact postcard in an arrangement of collage elements and models, and use this set-up as the basis for a painting (following my current working process). In the end, however, I had to cut up the postcard because I found it was impenetrable as a complete image, I couldn't do anything with it. Maybe it is too iconic, just too recognisable. I made a couple of cardboard cubes and covered two of the faces of each cube with sections of the postcard, and applied other found papers to the remaining faces.

That was the postcard dealt with, but I still needed to amass the other elements of the set-up and arrange everything. I had several false starts, perhaps because I was trying to address *Las Meninas* too directly. At one stage I considered including a self-portrait, as a nod to Velasquez's self-portrait, but it all became too contrived and figurative.

Eventually, as I was searching through a plan chest drawer fishing out possible bits and pieces to use, some coloured papers and a section of a booklet cover caught my eye – they were

arranged by chance, but in an exciting configuration. Something clicked into place, this arrangement of colours and shapes was something I could work with and ended up forming the background of my painting, as well as directing the colour palette.

I cut the image of the figures wearing big masks out of an old guidebook about Spain. The bright orange and orange/brown collage elements come from the cover of a booklet about the Spanish Inquisition. I didn't consciously choose these things because they relate to Spain, so it's intriguing that they do. Clearly the masks belong to a Spanish tradition and sensibility, and thus share an ancestry/heritage with Velasquez. But they also connect, in my eyes, with the mood in *Las Meninas* of veiled meaning and symbolism.



**Kate Buckley**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

*Las Meninas* is so very familiar and yet impenetrable somehow... a bit like *A Day in the Life* or *Blue*

Jay Way by The Beatles... complex and catchy, and with a dreamlike quality that seems to point to something beyond itself.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

I wondered if something might be revealed through playing with the piece in a direct and formal way. By digitally collaging the image in semi-transparent layers decreasing towards a central vanishing point it became apparent that the only face in the painting that didn't become disrupted or corrupted by the process was that of the artist himself.



### **Louisa Chambers**

What, if anything, does Las Meninas mean to you?

Las Meninas means to me- seeing the painting for the first time in 2006 on a RCA Painting trip to Madrid. I remember going up close, looking at the broken applied brush strokes and then going further back and seeing the painting merge. It was a revelation that paint could do this!

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

I used the postcard as a reference point - to structure / compose the painting. It was stuck on the right hand of the painting on the studio wall. However, when I was struggling with painting the background - I hid the postcard because I felt that the original Velazquez painting carried too much historical weight making mine seem meaningless!!



### **Fiona Curran**

What, if anything, does Las Meninas mean to you?

I can't honestly say that the painting had any great meaning for me before I embarked on this project. It may however, turn out to have more significance for me in the future as this project has instigated a new body of work.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

I looked at Velazquez, I looked at Picasso looking at Velazquez, I looked back at Velazquez. I looked at Foucault looking at Velazquez, I looked at Velazquez again. I looked at what I was working on in the studio - at the time I was drawing and making

collages in response to looking at Vuillard's interiors, I thought about artists looking at other artists and about the significance of looking, of taking the time to see the detail. I thought about how paintings and fragments of paintings linger in the memory, at the edges of consciousness, and how they surface at different times in relation to different bodies of work. I cut the postcard up into fragments to collage into a painted sketch. In the fragments the figures from *Las Meninas* are caught in various moments of looking – at us, at each other, at other parts of the painting.



### Gordon Dalton

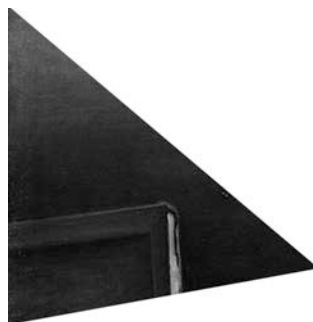
What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

As painters, there is a lot of what, where, why and when, combined with even more contradictions,

mistakes, misnomers, spontaneity and happy accidents. *Las Meninas*, and the various interpretations of it have all of that in spades.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

Maybe because of the above, I almost had to ignore the postcard. After a quick look it had to go away and just start painting. It's the most obvious figure I've put in a painting, situated somewhere between the studio, local fishing lakes, the North East of England and Southern California.



### Annabel Dover

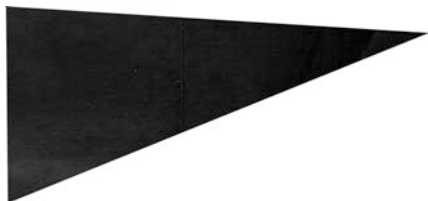
What if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

It reminds me of Art History lectures at university and the thrill of seeing the real thing in Madrid and it being completely different: a live thing, moving and much more impressionist close up than

I'd realised. I saw Goya's dog in the sand on the same day and together they're linked in my mind. I saw Carob seeds on the ground of the sandy park and got sunburnt on the back of my neck. All of these memories live next to one another.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

I made a very loose copy using watercolours and pigments I made during my time at the British School at Athens. The mica in the watercolours comes from a rock I stole from The Ancient Agora, Athens and asked a local lapis lazuli jeweller to grind it down.



**Leo Fitzmaurice**

What, if anything, does Las Meninas mean to you?

I hadn't come across this work before and didn't know anything about the work.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

For this work I responded to the 'sitters' in this group portrait. They all appear to be focused on the same thing - and as though they were staring into a mirror. I have

no idea if this were the intention of the artist, but it got me thinking about mirror images, and also processes I had deployed in the past where I cut printed material and rearranged the material to create a mirror image



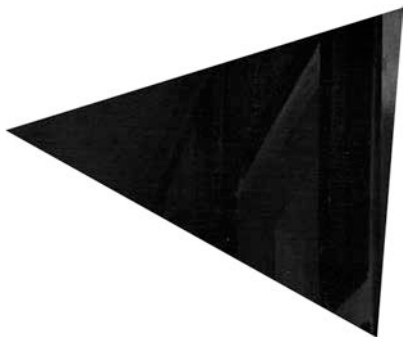
**Rebecca Fortnum,**

What, if anything, does Las Meninas mean to you?

I have only seen Las Meninas three times, around 1993, then again around 2010 and most recently in 2014, and each time it has been the reason for my visit to Madrid.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

For me, Las Meninas is a reflection on looking and sustains extended viewing and this is what I have alluded to in my postcard intervention. I also find it hard to look at all of it at one time.



## Rachel Goodyear

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

The direct stare of the young princess in 'Las Meninas' demands attention - she is the central focus and glows amongst her counterparts who seem to recede into the shadows. Scholars have understood this is an imagined scene - each part studied individually to create a collaged narrative, offering a fictional snapshot in time. These are two aspects that immediately pull me into this painting and set my curiosity at play.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

This relates directly to my own practice of placing female figures at the forefront of my works, often extracting them from cuttings throughout history and offering them a new context in my own visual world. My drawings often offer an ambiguous captured moment where the 'before and after' is imagined.

I placed an imagined landscape between the protagonist and her original background; the walls of her palace room transformed into dark skies. Her entourage are now replaced by standing stones, including the dog and the figures reflected in the mirror. Her self-assured posture does not speak of a 'little girl lost', she has a confidence over her domain and the dream-like ambiguity can suggest other-worldly powers.



## Simón Granell

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

I have read every word ever written about *Las Meninas*. Can you imagine saying that? Which would surely be followed by, "but am none the wiser".

I grew up with dual nationality, the youngest of three sons to a Spanish father and English mother. In 1982, at the age of eighteen, I had three choices, two of which meant I would have had to do national service in Spain. I elected to have a British passport. A choice that I would review now.

As a first-year undergraduate painting student at Falmouth School of Art in the mid-80's, I was searching for something to make work about and what presented itself was an evaluation of this dual nationality. At home large leather-bound volumes of *Don Quijote*, Unamuno and Lorca were on bookshelves. As I grew older, I gradually began to remember these books and started to read them for myself. Early student paintings were clumsy and literal representation of various stages of bullfighting, informed by Michel Leris's autobiography *Manhood: a journey from childhood into the fierce order of virility* and box ticking against Jungian archetypes and entries from dictionaries of symbolism. A lot of work was made, but I didn't learn much about painting or myself, apart from, of course, that this was always going to be a bad idea. At home *Las Meniñas* was always present in some form; as an image in a black and white glossy magazine, a postcard, an overly saturated pinkish-red slide from the Prado itself, or as the subject of parental conversations that suggested that *it*, was as good as it gets. None of these are recalled in any sort of context; having a void as background. Thankfully, bullfighting, Jung and symbolism have all now gone.

I have seen the painting twice in the flesh, which doesn't seem very

much compared to how often other people say they have seen it or familiar they are with it. I think I cried on one of these occasions, not because of finally getting to see this great work, but because of something quite unexpected. Subsequent experiences indicate that this was the uncomfortable and unexpected business of being faced with myself, and not looking at *Las Meniñas* as something other. Rather, being it. Feelings often persist and this one has never gone away. We have all experienced such moments; looking in a mirror and not recognising the person in it, that interval on a flight just before the plane lands on the tarmac, during meditation and so on.

What does it mean for me? I have been drawn into this or that narrative for years, formed parings, focused on key characters in the painting, and so on. At times, I am confounded by the technique, the application and surety of execution. I simply cannot believe what I am looking at. The economy of it all, the light, expression, balance, temperature, skin or fabric. Add to that, the conditions under which much of Velázquez's work was made, with so many eyes upon him. I struggle to make work if there is anyone else around. My interpretation of the painting is similar to those of Michael Jacobs (2015)<sup>1</sup> and Palomino in that we are indeed



standing in the place of King Philip IV and Queen Mariana, and that the reflection is of us, but is of our image on Velázquez's large canvas. It is as if we assume the position of white in a game of chess with the Queen on the left and the King on the right. We are in daylight, opposite the black space of the painting. It follows that the King is the first person that Velázquez and the assembled party would see as their eyes move from left to right. We are invited to make the first move and the painting waits. What the Foucault<sup>2</sup> account achieves in precision only serves in reminding me what damage misreading such thinking did along with Derrida in many art schools in the late eighties and early nineties. In short, students thinking themselves out of making anything, and worse still, not having the joy or guts to speak about what they'd done. An ignorant silence rather than wisdom of knowing when to speak. Arseholes.

Velázquez sets out traps for my binary tendency to analyse and describe. Everywhere I go, falls short. Exhausted by this process, I realise this and after initial frustration or embarrassment, am left with "what else?" Viewing the painting as posing any questions only results in limited answers. I know this in principle but forget. *Las Meniñas* is a problem, a visual

koan and as such does not have a corresponding answer. Trying to 'understand' it, is therefore, a matter of self-understanding. All is at stake at this moment. It is about everything and not just painting. It requires of me an openness that can't just be switched on and off. Awareness, without judgement. A glimpse here is a reminder of my role in the Universe. Enter, and be transformed, or leave, and go to the shop and buy the postcard to remind me of that awkward, "what the fuck was that?" experience that I had in Room 12.

I think that despite this toing and froing, that what is left is recognition. We are the work. Not in, or the subject of the work, but are it. So overwhelming is this empathy, opening the door to it, makes me feel a bit scared. Not of the painting of course, but of myself, as I am not who I thought I was. Why does it take *Las Meniñas* to do this, you might ask? Surely, anything can do this? Well yes, but generally we are too busy, stupid, distracted to get this in the every day. *Las Meniñas* brings with it expectation. After all, it is the greatest painting in the history of art.

Despite depicting a given space, in its own time, Velázquez's genius is in creating a painting that is always destined to be current and relevant to us as individuals regardless of any

broader themes that may be cause for connection. This painting makes us acutely aware of our nature; always on the edge, in the now, reflecting back on us. Being with *Las Meniñas* is to open the door wide to all possible values, rather than to partial, this or that descriptions and specificities. To do this is to be accepting of all that may arise without judgement. These things happen anyway, so why all the fuss? Accepting that we are complicit in the making of this work may sound arrogant since Velázquez has done all the hard work, but it isn't. His skill has been to create a work that will always promise, but ultimately disappoint unless we let go of these pursuits. So much art criticism has busied itself around an axis of constancy, i.e. the vertical homo sapiens, looking out at the world. Perhaps Leo Steinberg's 1972 essay *The Flatbed Picture Plane* with its exploration of a 'tilt' from vertical to horizontal went some way to getting us involved.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

Coincidentally, when I received the invitation to participate in this project, I had been working on several drawings of postcards that included *Las Meniñas*. These were comprised of a selection of real and fictionalised postcards of works by favourite artists. I had

also been thinking back to a talk I had given in 2009 where I had used a series of blank slides in place of digital reproductions of works being discussed. When preparing the talk, I realised that there was such variation in colour and cropping of images in books and online, that it made selecting the 'right ones' impossible. I, therefore, decided not to use an image at all, and be done with having to choose. *Las Meniñas* is so well known that mere reference to it was enough, and surely allow each member of the audience to conjure up their own version. It then followed that if each person could do this with something they knew, then they could do this in response to anything that I proposed. So, as well as real references such as "this is a poster for the film *The Sacrifice* by Andrei Tarkovsky" or "this is a photograph of the poet Federico Garcia Lorca with his friend Pablo Neruda", I chose to make up images, such as "this is a picture of my two brothers and me in matching paisley shirts, standing in front of Napoleon's Tomb in Paris in 1971", or even, "Sorry this one is upside down!" Once the audience realised what was going on, it worked.

Each postcard image is individually drawn and then transferred onto the final drawing, creating a slippage and impermanence of the original

keepsake or souvenir as an aide-memoire. The mass-produced image though rendered as an original, a one-off drawing feels once-removed. The drawings are presented here alongside a painting entitled *Aug 07 - May 09*. The date range used for the titling of these works suggests the duration of a diary, a period of time being with the work, and as such 'contain' reflections, thoughts or opinions. This painting offers an alternative proposition; a one off, the result of slow, daily turning up and doing the same prescribed activity. The parameters for many of these paintings are established before each one is started, and performed until there is some unpredicted transformation of the surface, or in this instance, until they arrive at their pre-determined conclusion. It is often a matter for waiting for many months and at times, this 'something' never emerges and the work is discarded. A consistent thread is work that mimics dynamic systems such as chaos theory, involving processes that are similarly highly responsive to initial conditions, small differences in initial conditions resulting in widely divergent outcomes, despite the adoption of the deterministic nature of the systems. They are bodily, visceral, and appeal to the gut. They contain my attention, my *ki*<sup>3</sup>.

All painting is energy, potential, waiting to be felt, encountered. The colour in this painting is drawn from an interest in the 'temperature' of Spanish portrait and still life painting, an interior or bodily space, reminiscent of Lorca's *La Casa de Bernarda Alba* or *Yerma*, the background in a Meléndez or *cantarero* by Cotán. Each molecule, atom and electron that makes up the paint, sits where it will, nudged by the magnetism of its neighbour and its author's mind, which is not always on task as intended. A mind of short bursts, then longer bursts, then lapses, forgetting, only to remember where it was up to. Then it begins again, remembering, forgetting, and occasionally just painting; *this*, then *this*, then *this*.

Our bodies are made of the same matter as the rest of the Universe and are therefore able to act with it. This relationship is empathetic. Commonly we are unaware of the information or signals that they offer up, or the Ego chooses to ignore it. This empathy is an act of alignment with the Universe, that we feel as a kind of 'rightness', a recognition. The ultimate lesson of *Las Meninas* is therefore not about learning new knowledge but is about human acceptance and recognition of what is already known. Recognition, because we have been here before but have

unlearned. Ludovica Lumer (2017) says that we

“might be aware bodily. It is like an embodied feeling/knowledge. In fact, it is popularly said to be a gut feeling. We feel that something is right, but don’t know what it is, and this is, in fact, the visceral part of our psychological system.”<sup>4</sup>

This bodily knowing is wordless. It is the original nature of the Universe or the Chinese notion of Nature (*Ziran*, that which is of itself). What is left is us and at this moment of writing is

dust

stillness

heat

Between the drawings and the painting, the viewer has the opportunity of exploring being with or without the work, to think of what constitutes the nature of, or is intrinsic to something.

<sup>1</sup> Jacobs. M., (2015). *Everything is Happening: Journey into a Painting*. Granta Books

<sup>2</sup> Foucault. M., (2001). *The Order of Things: Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Routledge

<sup>3</sup> *Ki* 気 (Japanese) or *Qi/Ch’i* 氣 (Chinese) can be used to convey a wide range of meanings, including, but not limited to heart, spirit, mind, nature, mood or intention.

<sup>5</sup> Vervoordt. A., & Ferretti. D., (2017). *Intuition*. Axel & May Vervoordt Foundation in association with MER. Paper Kunsthalle, Ghent (BE)



**Tom Hackney**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

It’s probably the first painting I studied in depth as an art student, along with the subsequent series of variations by Picasso. Through this, *Las Meninas* introduced me to the idea of how painting can function as a model and a historical node, something that became key in my own approach to painting. Within the Velázquez composition, the complexity of the refracted and returned gaze and how the painting oscillates between what is visible and invisible are elements I find very satisfying - something that keeps

the painting as open as it was when I first set eyes on it.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

The white border was removed and the postcard cut into five equal strips, with the placement of the cuts determined by the dimensions of the wooden beading on to which the strips are mounted. As such, the divisions within the picture are a matter of chance rather than design. The mirrors are attached to the alternate faces of the wooden beading at right angles to the postcard strips, which has the effect of looping the pictorial space and extending the image beyond flat frontality.



## **Sharon Hall**

What, if anything, does Las Meninas mean to you?

I first encountered the painting through the eyes of Picasso. In the 1980s I was in Barcelona and there at the museum there was a roomful of all the Las Meninas variations which Picasso had made, as well as his Dejeuner sur

l' herbe and Frans Hals' "Cavaliers"-parodies' as I thought of them at the time. They were some of his best later works and they left a huge impression on me which I translated into my own paintings in the 80s.

My second encounter was in the 1990s in the Prado when I was leading a group of BA students from Manchester School of Art. I saw the painting across and through two galleries looking at me. Of course, the scale and impact were a very different experience from the Picasso's and also the various reproductions. One has an individual encounter with it as a viewer.

This was echoed with a conversation I remember having with Bernard Cohen at Wimbledon school of Art in the 1980s when I was teaching there with him. Bernard asked me who was the most important person in the painting. We might think the Infanta, the artist himself looking at us and the scene, but of course the triadic relationships that are formed are consummated in us, the viewer- we are the most important person in the painting.

Later in that decade I was working on a series of appropriational paintings that were in part influenced by the thinking of Berthold Brecht. They explored the idea of alienation effect (Verfremdung) which aims to

activate a non-passive and critically alert awareness of work of art through various aesthetic and formal devices -the engagement is thereby problematised and made more self-aware.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

I took, as I had above, a somewhat oblique starting point – one which was of course made necessary by the need to work from a colour reproduction, postcard size of the original art work. I extracted what appeared to be three key colours that were most evident in the bad colour reproduction that we had to work from. These were literally measured and matched as close as was possible to the post card reproduction. They were then reduced to three simple bands of equal proportion.

The card itself is within the painting and acts as a snag or interruption to the otherwise physically applied brush and palette knife bands stroked horizontally and vertically across it.

The colour and its burial are physically re stated in a reference to the painting's materiality, without its virtuosic, illusionistic games.



**Lesley Halliwell**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

Although I have not thought about *Las Meninas* for many years, it is one of those familiar images from art history that is etched on my memory; an image to study at art school to better understand the relationship between reality and illusion for example. I remember being really interested in the characters. Who are they? Who is that little girl in the middle? What are they saying to each other? What has just happened? What is about to happen? The unravelling of a story that grows the more you look. Although I have seen *Las Meninas* reproduced in many different places and forms, I have never seen it in real life. Maybe it is time I did.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

Echoing the grandeur and opulence of the Baroque era I

have added a copper leaf pattern to the surface of *Las Meninas*; a veil through which glimpses of the postcard can be seen. Like the original painting itself, which has apparently lost texture and hue over recent years (particularly the once vivid contrasts between the blue and white pigments of the dresses), the copper leaf will also tarnish and discolour over time. A living surface that carries connotations of its past heritage yet is always moving forward.



### Simon Harris

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

For me, *Las Meninas* embodies a visual enquiry into the relationship between subject and object; viewer and viewed; surface, deep and doubled pictorial space. Subsequently, by acknowledging representation as an illusion how this can now be explored. This has greatly informed what I did with the postcard.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

I used the postcard to make a silk screen. Within a scaled canvas I screen printed the postcard into where the mirror is represented in *Las Meninas*. So instead of King Philip IV and Queen Mariana staring out, replacing the viewer as the object of representation in the unseen painting. Now the screen print of the painting is folded into the pictorial plane in a continual oscillation between viewed and viewer.



### Ilona Kiss

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

I've never seen the original painting, but I recall, that I encountered an image of it as a child and found the girl incredibly posh and pretty (yes, I was the little princess!).

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

I decided not to alter the postcard, but to make a new one – it's a

kind of 'aftermath' or 'how the story unfolded'! I gave it the title 'And Then She Went up in Flames' which is a bit weak...but maybe a little bit funny, too? I kept the proportions, colour scheme and highlights pretty much the same.



### **Geoff Diego Litherland**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

It's the ultimate meta painting, a painting about painting like a 17th century *Inception*. My recent work which involves weaving my own patterned canvas has led me to research any historical precedence for this, and guess what Velasquez often painted on patterned canvas for prestigious commissions. The canvas was heavily primed so no trace of the pattern could be seen.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

I used the postcard to plot where the mirror image of the King and Queen in the framed mirror (the actual painting that Velasquez is painting in the painting) in relation to my canvas and primed that area.



### **Alison Lloyd**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

I think I must have come across the painting via Picasso's version. I do remember the importance of the artist giving equal weight to the ladies in waiting rather than only concentrating on the child of the Spanish King and Queen. If it means anything to me it is the inclusion of the artist in the image and it is that which I have played with.

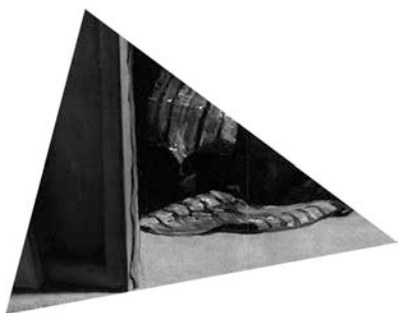
What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

I have used a photograph taken in 1976 at Cardiff College of Art. I am in my first month as an art student/trainee artist. I am posing for the camera and holding a bin bag close to my body as though it is a small party dress. I have put myself in the image as proof that I am hoping to become an artist. If I had not been asked to consider how I would use the post card I probably would not have reflected on my intentions back in the 1970s. As soon as I looked again



at *Las Meninas* I thought of this image of myself with my work.

Initially I was going to cut out sections from the post card and make a collage. When I finally reprinted the black and white photograph I realised that I would prefer the reference to the painting to be implied by association.



### Cathy Lomax

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

I have always found it fascinating - particularly the reality / illusion aspect of it, the use of point of view and in particular the mirror. I am also a sucker for paintings of girls and am intrigued by the young Infanta's ornate costuming. Sadly I have only seen the painting in reproduction and not in the flesh.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

I have been making paintings featuring mirror images. My imagery is taken from films where mirrors are often used to indicate

that a character is contemplative or duplicitous. I'm especially interested in women's film and melodrama where mirrors are often gazed into wistfully, a portal into an internal world of femininity.

I've used the *Las Meninas* postcard in a new painting called *I Don't Want to Stay Here (Las Meninas)*. The postcard becomes a painting on the wall of a hair/beauty salon where a small girl is being groomed for stardom. The image is snatched from the film *Bellissima* (Luchiano Visconti, 1951). There seemed to be an analogy between the Infanta in *Las Meninas* and the small girl from *Bellissima* - both caught up in circumstances beyond their control.



### Rachel Lumsden

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

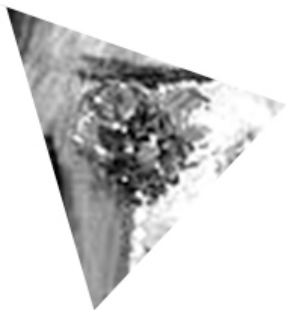
Look at me. I'm on stage.

While the leading lady, supporting characters and extras arrange themselves - the audience quietly sneaks away unnoticed through the back door, leaving them all posing by the easel. Look at me,

they all think, isn't it a lovely dress? A bit tight, though.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

Postcard still in transit.



**Danica Maier**

What, if anything, does Las Meninas mean to you?

*Las Meninas* it's one of those well-known historical paintings I learned about in my art history class very many years ago during my BA course. There were many things taught to us about the work such as; its historical importance and position; important formal considerations of layout, structure, content; plus its subsequent examination through reinterpretation by Picasso's 58 paintings in 1957. As memory serves, we learned it is a curious work mostly due to the questions over focus(es) - where and on whom the viewer is intended to focus.

I'm sure I would have seen it on a trip to Madrid many years ago, but

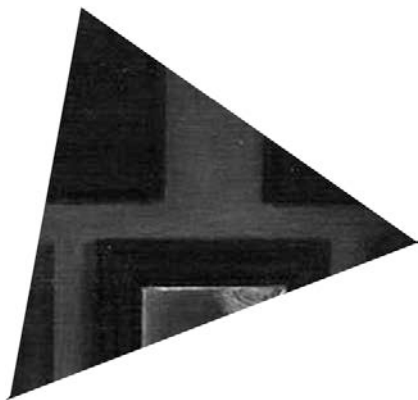
I don't really have any memory of viewing it in the real. I know *Las Meninas* mostly through reproduction and these long-ago memories of a projected slide in a warm and dark seminar room. For me it is one of those works on the periphery, I know it but haven't really given it too much thought over the years. However, it has been a very nice privilege to be asked to re-engage with the work, focus on it anew, research further about it and draw out aspects that catch my particular attention.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

Looking at the postcard of *Las Meninas* I first focused on it at as a whole - scouring through details found within it that connected to my own interests in pattern and repetition. At first, I focused on patterns found on the dresses worn by the girls. Upon further inspection - through blowing the image up digitally (or through looking at it in the real if one is lucky enough to be there) you can see the utterly abstract painterly-ness found within these details. Looking closely at these details within the image/painting, I became interested in the brooch the Infanta Margarita Teresa is wearing. When you look at it enlarged on its own - you find that it is a wonderfully painted bit of abstraction.

Through online research, I found another painting by Velasquez of the Infanta Margarita Teresa in which she is wearing the same exact dress. This painting known as *Infanta Margarita Teresa in Silver Dress* was also painted in 1656 by Diego Velázquez. In it the dress and brooch are more realistically depicted – my assumption (as there is little information found online about it and I've not been given the budget to travel to Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vennia where it is housed) is that this was a precursor or perhaps almost a test for when he painted her in *Las Meninas*.

My interest is in these two representations of the brooch. Both are by the same artist, in the same year, on the same girl, wearing the same dress; yet when placed together they are quite differently treated. They are the same, but they are very different.



## David Manley

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

*Qua ?* - As for so many others it's the many mysteries contained within it. Perhaps the first painting to be profoundly, even essentially, *about* painting. Until post-modernity I can only think of a handful of others where such questions are evident; for me perhaps only *The Bar at the Folies-Bergère* matches it for puzzlement at every juncture.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

*Pulp Friction* - I chewed it over, metaphorically and then actually, and could only think to set it at what seems to me to be the centre of the work - that curious mirror image the hazy portrait of Philip & Mariana set in the shadows. In doing so a goodly part of the composition is swallowed up but perhaps a little reminder of its enduring enigma is the residue...



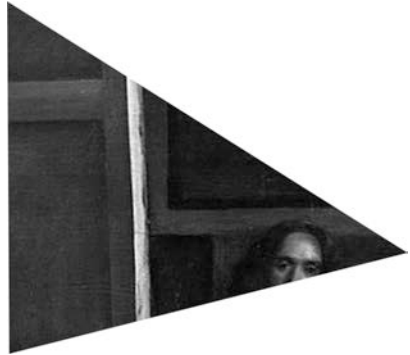
## Enzo Marra

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

*Las Meninas* is a painting with a psychological draw, somewhere concealed within the applied paint are the inherent ingredients for that pull. The mastery in applied brush, the piled levels of reading for the assembled subject matter, the hours that could be spend stood in awe in-front of it. Its mere presence on wall something that inspires wonder, something which all painters hope to one day achieve.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

I executed an image that explores the concept of the copy or the imitation. The restrained palette allowing the textural application to have equal relevance to the figuration explored. The whole impossibility of capturing what is alive within a painting, in a response or direct copy, makes the enterprise seem both brave and foolish. The linear approach which I have utilised, in retrospect informed by a fascination that is burgeoning in me of medieval and outsider artists, their directness of action and sureness of execution, a quality seen in *Las Meninas* and hoped for in my interaction with it over panel.



## Andy Pepper

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

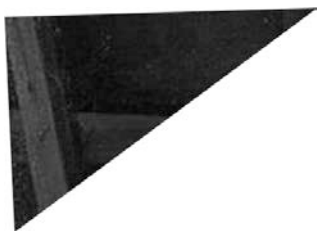
Where are the openings into other spaces? Which are present/real? Which are painted? Which are described by the gaze of the depicted?

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

The large canvas (on the extreme left of the painting) has always fascinated me. Its stature, its angle directed into the room. Its promise of another depicted space. The possibility that it is a visual doorway into another set of constructs.

I removed the entire back of the canvas, leaving the edge-lit side of the rectangle, and replaced it with a reflection hologram of marks and suspended particles. This 'actual' space (a holographic one) is not a depiction but the actual light which came from the particles originally recorded

several years ago in another city - another time. As an observer shifts in front of the postcard, they automatically animate the holographic volume which now makes up the large portal on the left of the scene. A real space within a depicted space, located in a real space. We can only see any of this because of light falling onto the postcard - and we already have our vision impaired within the painting. What are those images on the back and side walls - not enough light to know for sure?



### **Yelena Popova**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

I admire the remarkable (literary?) plot and the labyrinth of view points, which anticipates a structure of a modern novel. The painting brings up the questions of representation and of the role of Painting itself. The masqueraded interplay between the author, the viewer and the subject of this painting is fascinating. The vast empty space above the child's head makes her so very important and special. The viewer in the

doorway is so mysterious. The artist himself is looking straight at us from the shade. The corners and edges are so remarkably boring, which triggers the feeling that most important things happen outside of the picture frame.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

I wrote a text to go on the back of the postcard. The first draft of this text was addressed to my son. It was a postcard from an imagined trip to Madrid in 20 years time. Starting with 'My dear son'. I thought it does not sound right, as there is a daughter on the painting:) Also my son's name is not included anywhere in the show. So I cut out the imaginary trip to Madrid and readdressed it Dear Child and decided to post it to myself at my studio, claiming authorship of the card. I thought about my parent's love and of the infinity spiral that makes you a child and parent at the same time (just like in *Las Meninas*: a viewer, a subject and a reflection). But, then I thought as an artist, I should take a position on the side, just like Velazquez himself. So I decided to post the card to the curator of the show and to every child, who is also a parent. I kept the imaginary treat trip to Madrid, making yet another loop: as a child, one is a receiver of love, treats and care, but later one pays it back. I also hoped it might

Always yours,  
Mama and Papa.

Always yours  
Mama and Papa.

Always yours  
Mum and Dad



The book is an object wherein many, if not most people, first encounter painting, prior to an encounter with the real. This is certainly true for all of my favourite paintings, among which I include Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and Rembrandt's *The Night Watch*, a painting that predates *Las Meninas* by a mere fourteen years and one that will help address the question of what Las

*Meninas* means to me<sup>vi</sup>. Both of these paintings demand time. There is a direct correlation between the painter's ambition – the time taken to produce their images, and the time spent in front of them by their audience, in order to respond to the questions these paintings ask of us. In both paintings, the action, so to speak, takes place in space that resembles a stage. Actors in both paintings have entered stage left and right, and in the case of *Las Meninas*, from a space beyond the stage's far wall.<sup>vii</sup> Both painters puncture painting's equivalent of theatre's fourth wall – the imaginary plane that separates the actors on stage and their audience and vice versa. It is, however, the different strategies that Rembrandt and Velázquez employ toward this goal, which enunciate something of Velázquez's ambition for *Las Meninas*.

In Rembrandt's painting, it is Banning Cocq's extended left hand that ruptures the fourth wall along with the gaze directed by Jacob Dircksen de Roy, an early governor of Amsterdam's theatre, addressed directly to us - and by "us", I refer to the painting's audience across space and time. The remainder of Rembrandt's militia, however, remain oblivious to the existence of an audience beyond the painting's fourth wall. Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, a painting of a painter painting, is,

however, a riot of looking. It is the antithesis of a later painting depicting a painter painting - Courbet's 1855 allegorical painting of the artist's studio, in which the painter paints a landscape (one that we are privy to) in the company of his model who watches him paint. Courbet exists, therefore, in a space 'emptied of any gaze but his own'.<sup>viii</sup>

*Las Meninas*, by contrast, not only contains a painting we are not allowed access to – the one Velázquez is painting - it presents an orgy of gazes. Doña Maria Agustina Sarmiento de Sotomayor gazes at Margarita Teresa of Spain, who gazes at us, as does the dwarf Maribarbola, who stands next to the Italian jester Nicolas Pertusato, who gazes at the dog, and, as mentioned, Don José Nieto Velázquez gazes at Velasquez, Margarita Teresa of Spain and her attendants (*Las Meninas*). Not least of which is the gaze Velasquez directs to us – the painting's audience.

Velasquez also introduces into his painting, what is for me, the device that separates it from Rembrandt's *Night Watch* – the mirror. While pictorial and optical logic might dictate that this mirror reflects the backs of the figures in front of it, it presents instead, the likeness and gazes of King Philip IV and his wife

Mariana, who paradoxically must be standing in the same time, space, and place that we, as the painting's audience must occupy.

Much has been made of what Michel Foucault described as 'uncertainties, exchanges and feints', where the 'observer and the observed take part in a ceaseless exchange'.<sup>ix</sup> This exchange of gazes, for me, affords *Las Meninas* a place among a category of paintings that promote a heightened awareness of the act of looking in concert with an awareness of the fact that we are thinking about our heightened awareness of the act of looking - in and over time. For me, this is *Las Meninas*' unending fascination – an image wherein the powers of representation are employed in the service of a cognitive self-reflexivity.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

In choosing to return, so to speak, the image of Velázquez's *Las Meninas* from postcard format, to that of the book, a site where the seen and the sayable come into contact, I was interested in two things - bringing the image into contact with *trompe l'oeil*, another strategy, that releases, I would argue, self-reflexivity, and secondly, attempt to say something visually about the order in which my eye moved around

the postcard iteration of *Las Meninas*.

Having attempted to record this order as objectively as possible, I first made five small-scale studies on paper, in acrylic and oil, based on those parts of *Las Meninas* that I continued to be drawn back to, including the painting as a whole (figs 1-5).



Fig 1.



Fig 2.





Fig 3.



Fig 4.



Fig 5.

In turn, these images served as the starting point for three oil paintings on board that depict one of the above studies as the page of a book with trompe l'oeil pages, and book-back with concomitant shadow. In this case, the oil painting is taken from study number 1 (Fig. 6).



Fig 6.

I have stated above that I intended to bring *Las Meninas* into contact with trompe l'oeil in order to engender a cognitive self-reflexivity. I will briefly outline here, why I think trompe l'oeil does this. In order to do this I will

outline what I will refer to as the three times of trompe l'oeil.

Trompe l'oeil makes its first appearance as pictorial verisimilitude and its second appearance as such, is one that unmasks the first to reveal its duplicity. Jacques Lacan describes the second moment:

‘For it appears at that moment as something other than it seemed, or rather now it seems to be that something else’.<sup>x</sup>

Another way of approaching this is in terms of a perceptual gap, a temporal delay where the beholder attempts to reconcile her/himself with the difference between the first and second appearance of trompe l'oeil. For many this second appearance results in nothing more than a divided subject as perception perpetually shifts from the first

appearance of trompe l'oeil to the second and back again without end. This second appearance causes, I would argue, a recurring perceptual wobble. As the wobble occurs over time and holds the beholder in front of a painting, it serves to decelerate the embodied gaze and therefore helps move the image towards that of what Mieke

Bal describes as the sticky image. According to Bal, the sticky image is one that makes 'its appeal to an interaction with the viewer; to its own processing in time rather than to representing time in a represented fabula'.<sup>xi</sup>

There is however a third movement of *trompe l'oeil* that decelerates the gaze, and is one that I find critical as a painter. The third movement of *trompe l'oeil*, having exposed its artifice in its second, now focuses our attention on the construction of this artifice, the artfulness of artifice, to arrive at the conclusion that both representation and presentation are illusions constructed in paint on a two dimensional surface. The third movement of the *trompe l'oeil*, unlike other mimetic projects, defamiliarises the gaze, and in doing so forces a visual re-engagement with paint as material process. In this sense, *trompe l'oeil* is not an epistemological loop, but a self-critical process, and is, to adopt a phrase from Caroline Levine, 'the most realist of artistic projects and the most ironic antirealisms'.<sup>xii</sup>

I also stated at the beginning of this section that I wished to say something about how the order in which my eye scrutinised the elements of *Las Meninas* might find its visual equivalence, and that I might do so by switching from *Las Meninas* as postcard, to

elements of *Las Meninas* as a page in a book. To produce a series of paintings from one image is to rearrange the temporality of such a static image. They can be, unlike the single image itself, rearranged in ways that reorder the reading of *Las Meninas*. One way of doing this of course, is to take all of the images above and make a series of paintings that depict the image as a page in a book, one that follows a paratactic logic, and therefore a temporal one.

To leaf through the pages of a book, for example, is to experience the workings of a non-mechanical time keeper. To open the book is to start the clock ticking. Here time is not measured by itself (one second per second) but by the movement of the images as they pass from the present-read into the past-read while building an anticipation for the following image, the not-yet-read. This order, unlike time itself, can be reversed. The reader returning to the book after some time need only remember the last image she/he looked at in order take up reading again, and if asked how much more time they will spend reading, the reader will

often answer, not with "seconds or minutes", but "pages or chapters". To present a *trompe l'oeil* image of a page in a book is

also to suggest that there are other pages underneath it.

By way of a conclusion, I will finish by stating what I believe to be the significance of this apparently banal statement in relation to Velasquez's painting, certain paintings by Chardin and the painting previously discussed by Courbet. In their own way, all of these paintings endeavour, by various means, to remind us that despite the artfulness of painting's artifice and illusion, all is essentially paint held on a flat surface (figs 7 – 9)

Jean Baptiste Simeon Chardin's *Boy Playing with Cards*, circa 1740, despite its apparent subject matter, lets us know that this is a painting about painting. Chardin does this by simultaneously showing us both sides of a book's page – in this instance, two sides of a playing card. The desk drawer in Chardin's painting ruptures the painting's fourth wall to announce a simple truth. The illusion we are enjoying of a young boy playing cards is simply an image made in paint on a flat surface that has a front and a back – a canvas.



Fig 7.



Fig 8.



Fig 9

<sup>i</sup> The painting's original title being -*Militia Company of District II under the Command of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq* (Schutters van wijk II onder leiding van kapitein Frans Banninck Cocq).

<sup>ii</sup> Don José Nieto Velázquez, for example, peers into the space of Velasquez's staged scene from yet another space behind Las Meninas' ensemble.

<sup>iii</sup> Roland Barthes, "The World as Object", in *Calligram*. Edited by Norman Bryson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). P. 114.

Courbet's *The Atelier (The Painter's Workshop. Real Allegory determining a seven-year phase of my artistic (and moral) life)* is held by the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

<sup>iv</sup> Michel Foucault, "Las Meninas", in *Calligram*. Edited by Norman Bryson. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) Pp. 91-105.

<sup>v</sup> Jacques Lacan, "What is a picture?" *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, translated by Alan Sheridan, (New York and London, W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), p. 112.

<sup>vi</sup> Mieke Bal, "Sticky Images: the foreshortening of time in an art of duration", in *Time and the Image*, edited by Carolyn Bailey Gill, (Manchester and New York: University of Manchester Press, 2000), p. 80.

<sup>vii</sup> Caroline Levine, "Seductive Reflexivity: Ruskin's Dreaded Trompe L'Oeil", *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 56, No. 4, Autumn, (1998), pp. 365-75, 365.

#### List of Images

1-5. James Quin. *Repetition from Reproduction (after Velasquez)*. Acrylic and oil on paper. 19 x 15cm. 2019. Exhibited in *Made in Britain: 82 Painters of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The National Museum, Gdansk, Poland. March 14 – June 02. 2019.

6. James Quin. *Repetition from Reproduction (after after Velasquez)*. Oil on board. 28 x 25cm. 2019. (Work in progress).

7. Jean Baptiste Simeon Chardin. *Boy Playing with Cards*. Oil on canvas. 82 x 66cm. C. 1740. Uffizi Gallery.

8. Gustave Courbet. *The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing up Seven Years of my Artistic and Moral Life (L'Atelier du peintre)*. Oil on canvas. 361 x 598cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

9. Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez. *Las Meninas*. Oil on canvas. 318 x 276 cm. 1656. Museo del Prado, Madrid.



#### Daniel Rapley

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

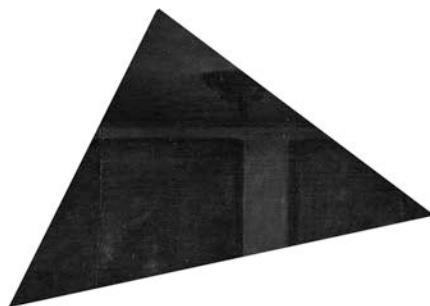
To me, *Las Meninas* represents an unsolvable puzzle.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

I propose to embed my response into the gallery wall. I wish to subject the postcard to a process

of complete dematerialisation and invisibility, the sole function of the work is therefore to be overlooked, paradoxically nullifying its conventional purpose. This theme of simultaneous presence and absence runs through much of my work, but I was particularly interested in making a piece of work that reflected the audience's experience of Velazquez's canvas depicted in the painting, eternally turned away from the viewer, forever shrouded in uncertainty, never really knowable. Present yet absent. The back of a surface of nothingness. No one will ever see my response on the postcard, but it will be there, hidden forever. Audience engagement with this work may vary from complete disinterest to an imaginative enquiry into its location. Perhaps they may search for evidence on the walls indicating its location and wonder what the response is (if it was not exclusively the act of simply concealing it). In terms of its photographic reproduction, an image of a blank, empty wall should be used. I will fully understand if this response is not practical. Compromises could be made...e.g. sticking the postcard face-down to the wall in an unusually high or low position on the gallery wall to become as evasive as possible. In either scenario, I would obviously be

required to install the work as complete secrecy is essential in the work's efficacy.



### Lucy Renton

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) was the iconic image for deconstruction and analysis for a painting student at St Martins School of Art in the 1980's. It had provoked critical writing and visual responses by multiple artists, and our discussions took in critiques by Michel Foucault, John Berger and others, also Picasso's 1950's series of transcriptions of the painting, and Richard Hamilton's 1973 etching, serving as an homage to Picasso's different periods of style.

It seemed a go-to image for talking about the gaze, about the portrait, perspective, the painter as more than just a royal craftsman, and as something that makes the viewer reflect on their own position in relation to the painting and implicate them in the

composition, as they feel themselves standing next to the royal parents that appear only in reflection in the painting.

A bravura performance by the artist that questions the subject and nature of the portrait, and the status of the painter (here given equal standing in an intimate scene of royal family life), *Las Meninas* continues to resist resolution of interpretation even now.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

I thought about the focal point of the painting, the Infanta Doña Margarita Maria of Austria, fourth in line to the Spanish throne, and how the painting is somehow about everything except for her; about space, light, power, multiple viewpoints, reflections, hidden characters and interiors, as well as the presence and gaze of the painter. The painting is a puzzle for grown-ups to decipher; I wanted to give the little girl something that could suggest a child's view. So, to reinsert her perspective while trying to engage with these different ideas, I cut up the postcard and worked with images from the *World of Interiors* magazine to create a mise-en-abyme paper theatre of reflections and dissimulation. This childlike toy also references painted curiosities of the same period, like Samuel van Hoogstraten's *A*

*Peepshow with Views of the Interior of a Dutch House* of 1655-60, which I had seen many times in the National Gallery just down from the old location of St. Martin's.

In my version, as in *Las Meninas*, the viewer is made aware of their own position in the composition, they may catch a glimpse of themselves reflected in the scene, their eye peering through the peephole, looking back.



**John Rimmer**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

My first time with *Las Meninas* was during a trip with the Fine Art department at MMU in the second year of my degree. The actual visit to the Prado was prefaced the day before with the realisation that a bottle of cava and a packet of fags cost peanuts and a visit to a number of bars, which lasted until late into the morning. I was suffering from one of the worst hangovers I can recall – nausea,

dizziness and severe dehydration- in a completely dishevelled state, spending as much time as I could muster trying and failing to take in the literally and metaphorically colossal work in front of me.

I have since seen it, being sober and attentive, and still feel that its size, high position on the wall, and glass covering, make viewing very awkward indeed. It remains time well spent being in front of this wonderful monstrosity and its richness has increased through gleaning some of its historical context of the work.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

As a painter I have spent more time looking at a hi-resolution image of the work that can be found on Google Earth. This image has proved to be a great site for learning and has given me great pleasure once downloaded allowing for examination in forensic detail by zooming in where the canvas weave is evident and brushwork is so evident... The postcard was forsaken for the Google Earth image as inspiration. Las Meninas, is a grand old acquaintance who keeps giving in many different ways...



## John M Robinson

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

I lived in Madrid for 5 years after being awarded the Richard Ford award from the RA in London. I was sent to study and respond to the pictures in the Prado. This painting was a game and a statement about power. Naturally I have used it as a mask.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

I cut three holes in it for eyes and nose in the melancholy space at the top of the picture then painted myself looking down at the figures. The group takes the place of a beard or a mouth. I like the idea of images of power being subjugated to the role of something silly such as a mask. The man in the picture can't see the painting but he is offering his new face for you to look at. It's a painting because there is probably more to look at than a photograph. Painting something is a ritual and a performative act. Much like the girl offering the princess an apple.





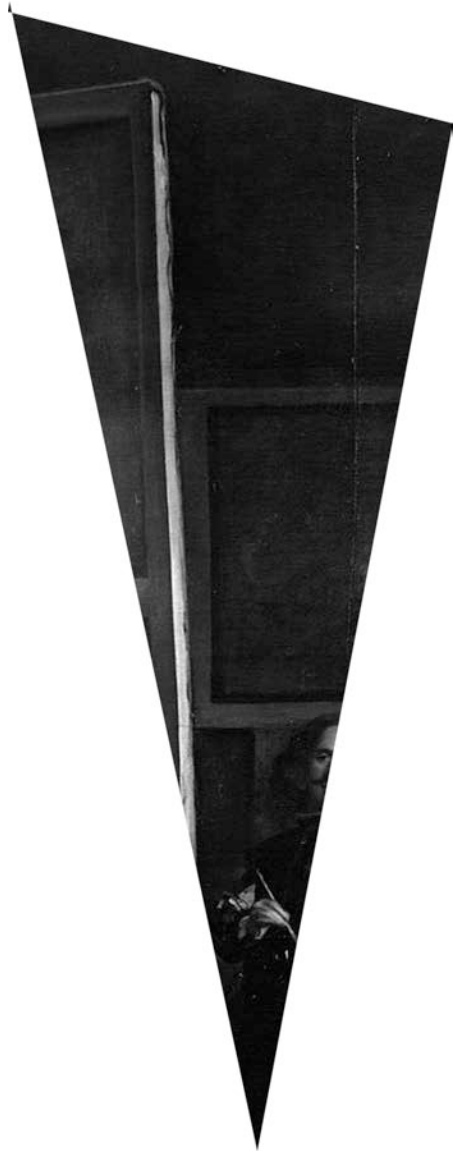
## David Ryan

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

'Las Meninas' is an astonishing painting - the embodiment of a consciousness of the materiality of painting and the complex mechanics of looking and being seen, which has generated numerous aesthetic and social contextualisations of these acts. It remains, because of its eloquence and sheer virtuosity a painter's painting.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

The iconic quality of 'Las Meninas' makes it a difficult piece to respond to, or elaborate upon. Rather like Leonardo's Mona Lisa, its reputation as a 'masterpiece' takes on a mythic, autonomous dimension. One obvious thing that struck me was the nature of the card reproduction; a kind of ghost of a painting, a stationer's rather than a painter's surface. So I wanted to work with this in relation to the essential qualities of mirroring and reflection that can inform painting - the card, a dull bit slightly reflective metal plate and blocks of pigment (their location determined by another drawing) intervening in the reproduced image - simply making up three diverse surfaces co-existing.



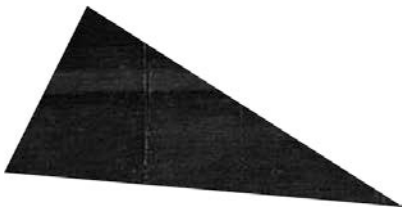
## Nic k Simpson

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

Las Meninas offers the viewer a mystery in paint.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

I have in-cased two of the postcards in wood, glue and wood veneer, with nine and eight randomly spaced viewfinders (holes) to highlight different parts of painting it's my way of reinventing the work by chance and offers the viewer a number of different details at random of the work.



## Stephen Snoddy

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

On first looking it is a large family portrait as a photographic representation of reality. However there is much more to it than meets the eye. The structure and composition (is there a secret code?), the figures appear isolated from each other, the mirror that reflects back, the back of the

canvas and the open door at the back to where? Is this the entry or exit point? It is such a 'modern' picture and is a profound meditation on the relationship between life and art.

What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

In 2015 I painted a version of *Las Meninas* and used the geometry of the composition to make a painting without the figures. I have collaged the postcard to the bottom left hand corner of a reproduction of my painting. A dialogue can then happen between the two.



## Soheila Sokhanvari

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

The first time I saw this painting was in a lecture back when I was doing my art history and fine art degree at Anglia Ruskin Uni and I learnt about the significance of this masterpiece as one of the pivots on which art history turns. Many years later I visited the painting at the Prado Museum and was blown away by the sheer scale, colours and the presence

that I had not expected. Velázquez has constructed an enigmatic configuration of illusion like a master magician with its layered symbolic narrative the meaning of which is impossible to talk about in any succinct and brief manner, much like trying to nail jelly to the wall because so much that is important and imperative to it falls away from my ineffective explanations. However, for me the story happens unusually in the artist's studio with Peter Paul Ruben's paintings hanging in the background telling the story of Ovid's metamorphosis telling the contest between mortals and God's on the subject of the arts, creating a complex painting about magic of painting.

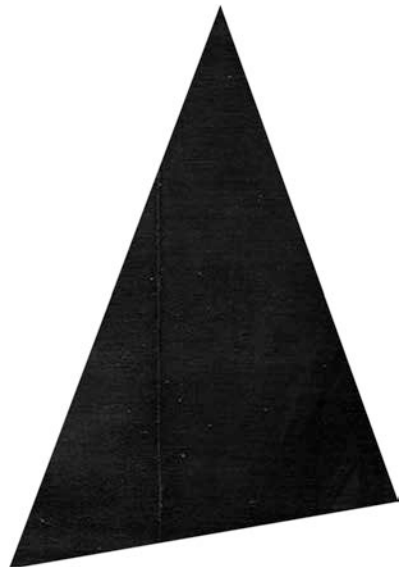
What did you do with your postcard of Las Meninas and why?

I have created a sculpture on a plinth covered in designs that are used in my art. My art then projects an image of Velázquez, from the painting, on the back of the postcard as a way of paying homage to him. I often use found objects in my art and the projection here is from an early 1900's magic lantern slide.

The reason for the projection as an interpretation of the work is primarily because Las Meninas is about reflections, illusion, the play of light, shadows, mirrors and

focal points; all the properties used in a projector.

I was also drawn to the boldness of the artist, he has not only portrayed himself in a royal Portraiture painting as one of the family, but he has painted himself as the biggest figure harking back to the practice in early Christian paintings where the holy family were depicted as the largest subjects in a composition in order to reflect their importance. Here, Velázquez towers over everyone even reducing King Philip IV of Spain and his Queen to mere reflections in the mirror. I have therefore extracted the artist and reflected him as this very important figure in the narrative.



## Annabel Tilley

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

Velázquez's masterpiece became more intriguing to me after I had visited the Picasso Museum in Barcelona and seen Picasso's astonishing and magnificent 1957 homage of 58 paintings to *Las Meninas*. It was my first encounter with the idea of appropriation or transcription (the use of/or reinterpretation of another artist's work).

Soon after, at art school, I would undertake my own transcription project, focusing on Chardin's *The Young Schoolmistress* (1740). It was an exhilarating experience - like being mentored across two and a half centuries of art history - and working from such a master was by no means a limitation but a rich new source of material.

From that point on the influence of art history, museum collections and old art books have contributed, invaluable, to my practice. From George Stubbs and his curious 18<sup>th</sup> century depictions of the 'rubbing down house'; through Cubism and examples of Picasso and Braque's delicate papier collé work; to Brancusi and his *Endless Column*; architectural design, structure and pattern - from the echelons of art history - have found themselves

transcribed or appropriated into my own drawings and paintings.

Thus it was an absolute pleasure to be invited to work on a project featuring such a significant painting from art history by such an illusive artist, and to be forced to look again at the absolute astonishing intensity of Picasso's homage and resulting output of 58 paintings in a single year, 1957. As an artist one recognises those moments of total engagement, exploration and concentration as rare, powerful and wonderful times, and when one takes a moment to look again at Picasso's outpouring one is far from disappointed.

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

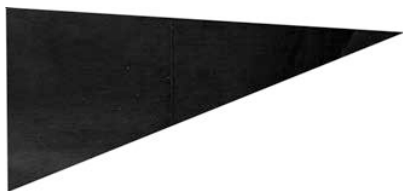
Initially, to become acquainted with the subject matter I made several quick postcard-sized drawings. As I drew the dizzying realisation dawned on me that I was, in essence, making a 'copy' of a copy of a copy! An idea reinforced by Michel Foucault's vertiginous essay 'Las Meninas' in *The Order of Things* (1966).

The drawings were helpful in familiarising myself with the twelve characters that inhabit Velázquez's *Las Meninas*. The notion of recreating *Las Meninas* in pen and ink paper cut-outs arrived almost fully-formed, and before I knew it I was setting the

stage for my Velázquez pinhole drama. It seemed appropriate to place the Las Meninas postcard as a backdrop to the cut-outs, almost as though they form a flag-waving encore to the main event.

I decided on two rules: to draw all twelve characters in one go, and that each character could only be drawn once. This meant one would not become overly preoccupied with the idea of creating a likeness when, for me, the real aim was to merely establish an essence of the original

At first I thought the group of characters should be posed in the open like a miniature stage set, but after seeing the paper cut-outs in a box with a torch and a lid, I decided I liked the idea that the viewer becomes an active participant in the process of viewing the work. They must lean in and place their eye against the spyhole and look hard. It is not easy, your eyelashes catch against the box and you blink, and so it takes a moment to really look, and see, and comprehend what it is you are looking at. Which, of course, chimes with the original.



## Alun Williams

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

For me, *Las Meninas* is the starting point of one thread of enquiry into the possible languages of painting. It's amazing that its complex construction continues to provoke debate, and I find it exciting too, that it has been appropriated many times by other artists. Goya clearly referenced the painting in his *Portrait of Charles IV and his Family*, using the device of including a self-portrait in the act of (apparently) painting the painting from a mirror. This puts the viewer in the frightening position of the mirror, creating all kinds of temporal shivers, while pointing out that the painter is merely copying what is in the mirror – therefore “this is reality”. This is almost in anticipation of our attitudes to photography: “the camera, like the mirror, never lies” though in fact we know that nothing could be further from the truth! In *Las Meninas*, the viewer occupies not only the position of the mirror, but apparently also that of the king and queen, seen in a second mirror in the wall depicted at the back of the scene. Yet, the king and queen only appear in the far mirror, not in the image being “copied” by Velasquez! The viewer, of course, does not appear in the painting at

all – unless he/she is the king or queen!

More temporal shivers!

It feels very indulgent, even pretentious perhaps to seek to participate in that heritage of appropriation that starts with Goya and is pursued by Picasso among others. But why not, especially when a curator offers the opportunity to do so, and especially as, in my own case, I already produced a large painting that appropriated Goya's work, replacing all the characters with my own?

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

I thought it would be interesting to quote from (or reference or appropriate) a choice of the appropriations of *Las Meninas* operated by other artists. I attached the postcard in the centre of the painting, as the "central" point of reference. Clockwise from top left the quotations are *Las Meninas*, after Louis Cane, 1988; *Las Meninas*, after Alberto Gironella, 1968; *Las Meninas*, after Pablo Picasso, 1957; and Alun Williams, after Velasquez, 2019...In my version I wanted to remain closer to the atmosphere and the palette of the original, while allowing the characters to take on the presence of a blob of matter...



**Gerard Williams**

What, if anything, does *Las Meninas* mean to you?

It was a familiar image but not one that I would have been able to name and, whilst I have a huge Velazquez book, I don't think I would have nailed him as the artist!

What did you do with your postcard of *Las Meninas* and why?

The image suggested reflection because the artist and his canvas is included in the painting. Presumably this is the canvas upon which the painting that we are viewing is in the process of being made? (if you get my drift). So, was it painted from a reflected image? Is it a representation in reverse of the situation that it was painted in/from? Also, if the part of the canvas that is shown in the

painting is reflected adjacent to itself, the painting and the artist become central to the scene which extends the disruption of hierarchy that has already taken place because of the presence of the artist in the picture, which is of course not something that convention anticipates. I wanted to find ways of playing with these kinds of questions. The quirky, adapted, repurposed, old bit of woodwork that I've used to set up the reflection seemed to fit aesthetically with the kind of characteristics one might expect in a frame displaying a small reproduction of a famous painting.



[gP]