



# PRESS RELEASE

from

## THE FRICK COLLECTION

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### SPANISH-THEMED FALL FEATURES A KEENLY ANTICIPATED EXAMINATION OF VELÁZQUEZ'S PORTRAIT OF PHILIP IV

October 26, 2010, through January 23, 2011



Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, *King Philip IV of Spain*, 1644, oil on canvas, The Frick Collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

Since its acquisition by Henry Clay Frick in February 1911, Velázquez's portrait of Philip IV of Spain has been a centerpiece of the collection and the standard by which other portraits by this artist are measured. Although the work has always been rightly admired for its good condition, layers of protective varnish discolored over the years, diminishing the splendid surface effects. In the summer of 2009 the portrait was sent for treatment to **Michael Gallagher**, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in charge of paintings at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, at which time the first technical studies of the work were also undertaken. In the ensuing months, The Frick Collection engaged in fresh research on the history of this iconic painting, and this fall a dossier exhibition organized by **Pablo Pérez d'Ors**, the museum's former Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow, will present findings resulting from both areas of inquiry. Visitors can experience the portrait in terms

of its recent treatment and examination, while learning more about the circumstances under which it was painted and displayed and, above all, consider the reasons for the artist's unusual decision to depict the king as a soldier. *The King at War: Velázquez's Portrait of Philip IV* opens on October 26 and runs through January 23, 2011. This exclusive presentation is made possible by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and is accompanied by public programs as well as a scholarly article in *The Burlington Magazine*, a special offprint of which will be available at

the Museum Shop. Also on view this fall at the Frick is a major exhibition on the broad tradition of draftsmanship on the Iberian Peninsula, *The Spanish Manner: Drawings from Ribera to Goya*.

## **TECHNICAL STUDIES CONFIRM SUSPECTED CHANGES TO THE COMPOSITION AND SIZE OF THE WORK**

This remarkable painting, which received its last major cleaning and restoration more than sixty years ago, was sent for treatment to the Sherman Fairchild Paintings Conservation Center at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in the autumn of 2009. Layers of varnish and wax, applied in two separate campaigns in 1947 and 1970 by a conservator working for the Frick, had discolored considerably, flattening the image and deadening the work's dazzling painterly effects. By 2009 these layers were in need of removal, and the painting was, therefore, cleaned and revarnished.

The treatment provided the opportunity for a rare off-site examination and technical study. Microscopy, X-radiography, and infrared reflectography were used to substantiate the painting's suspected complex history of reworking by the artist and later alteration. It was already known that as Velázquez painted, he made several changes (called *pentimenti*), which are somewhat visible to the naked eye. A more precise understanding of adjustments resulted from the technical investigation. Velázquez raised the position of the king's hat midway through execution, changing the position of the left hand and cuff. The contour of the king's coat was reworked to create a more interesting shape and the artist also lowered the sword and narrowed the sash. These changes may have been a result of Philip shifting position during the remarkably brief sittings (only three were recorded) required to complete the portrait. It seems more likely, however, that they were a calculated reassessment of the composition and its impact upon the onlooker.

X-radiography also confirmed suspected changes made to the dimensions of the canvas itself. It has been assumed for some time that the Frick painting was somewhat larger, perhaps having at one time an inch cropped off of the top and bottom edges. This theory derived, in part, from the visible hint of decoration at the top of the king's boots. Furthermore, for many decades art historians have been aware of a workshop copy of the painting. Its location had been unknown, making useful comparisons impossible. Recently, this enigmatic portrait resurfaced in a private collection in London, and the work was cleaned and subsequently studied. The London work is, indeed, slightly larger than the Frick's portrait, and the depiction of the king's boots extends to include the kind of fringed decoration that may have been visible at one time on the New York painting.

Most exciting of all is the improved appearance of the Frick work that occurred through its treatment at the Metropolitan Museum. With the discolored varnish removed, the colors have regained their subtle variation and vibrancy, and the virtuoso handling of the paint is now clearly visible. A surface that appeared flat and lifeless for decades has become once more a three-dimensional tour de force.



Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, *King Philip IV of Spain*, 1644 (detail), oil on canvas, The Frick Collection; photo: Michael Bodycomb

## **A FRESH FOCUS ON THE HISTORY AND INTERPRETATION OF THE WORK**

Many general facts about the artist and the commission of his great painting were known through documentation. However, inspired by the opportunity to focus further public attention on the work following its treatment, Pablo Pablo Pérez d'Ors, former Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow, chose to conduct further research, delving more deeply into the portrait's story and interpretation, providing the chief focus for this presentation.

Until his auspicious move to Madrid in 1623, Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (1599–1660) had been a promising, provincial artist. But, by a happy coincidence of talent, connections, and good timing, Velázquez came to be the official painter of the most distinguished of his contemporaries, the young King Philip IV, who had succeeded to the Spanish throne two years before. If we are to believe his early biographers, Velázquez's first portrait of the king sealed his fortune as Philip's court painter. Velázquez's role transcended his responsibility to record mere likenesses of the members of the royal family and court; rather, his paintings also were meant to convey visually a number of political and religious messages important to the Spanish monarchy and to the king's official image. In a cultural context in which the concept of kingship was carefully choreographed through rules of etiquette, rituals, and appearances, painted portraits played a key role in providing vicarious access to the king to a broad audience, since the king himself was normally visible only to a select group of family and courtiers. A seventeenth-century Spaniard who looked at a royal image was meant to recognize in it a number of abstract ideas associated with the monarchy and to experience an emotional response to the ruler that could range from awe to affection. For example, the more typical portraits of the king show him in black dress and meant to embody the qualities of humility, sobriety, and restraint. Philip and his court had adopted this understated dress to emphasize their moral steadfastness in the face of the economic and political turmoil of the time, in contrast with the flamboyant ostentation of the reign of Philip III in the earlier decades of the century. Thus, the format of the portrait, the attire, and the demeanor of the sitter are intended to convey inner qualities, while the king's physical features are observed and recorded in a naturalistic way, creating a sense of immediacy. But instead of the usual black, in the Frick portrait, Philip is dressed in showy crimson military attire.

## **A KING GOES TO BATTLE**

For the Frick portrait, Philip IV and Velázquez conceived a timely visual manifesto that expressed the king's response to an extraordinary rebellion. The region of Catalonia had broken away from the crown in 1640 and allied itself with France. In October 1643, a few months before the Frick portrait was painted, Philip IV deployed an army to the border between Catalonia and Aragon. Sometime before the spring of 1644 he made the significant decision to leave Madrid to join his troops at the frontline, something no Spanish ruler had done since the glorious days of Philip II, his grandfather. Philip IV went to the battlefield as a living symbol who represented the ideals of the Spanish monarchy for which the war was being fought. According to recorded observations of the time, the mere sight of him was enough to motivate his soldiers. Velázquez's painting presents the king in the military costume he wore when he reviewed his troops during the campaign. His bright red coat, easily visible from a distance, is embellished with elegant brocades of glittering silver thread; a broad sash, also adorned with silver, hangs diagonally across his chest and supports his sword, the silver pommel glinting at his side. A golden pendant decorated with the chivalry order of the Golden Fleece rests against the soft surface of his cream-colored kidskin vest; he holds a red-plumed black tricorne in his left hand and extends his general's baton with his right.

## **A PORTRAIT PAINTED UNDER UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND NEAR A BATTLEFIELD**

As the campaign advanced, the troops laid siege to the fortified city of Lérida, and the king supervised the operations from the nearby village of Fraga, accompanied by a retinue of around five hundred courtiers. Velázquez was present not only as the official court painter, but as *ayuda de cámara* (assistant in the Privy Chamber), an appointment that granted him close access to the king. The courtiers' lodgings, modest to begin with, were rendered even less adequate by the ongoing conflict. When it was decided that Velázquez should paint the king's portrait, it was necessary to create a suitable workspace in the house where he stayed. A number of bills related to the improvised studio have been preserved in the Archivo de Palacio in Madrid, informing us that the room where Velázquez painted was only "the width of a fireplace," its roof needed repair, and a window had to be cut into the wall. Another invoice records that the king sat for Velázquez on three different days, and each day a fresh supply of dry rushes was brought in to cover the dirt floor. Owing to the atypical conditions under which the portrait was painted, its creation is unusually well documented.

The very appearance of the painting reflects that it was completed in a short amount of time: the brushwork is unusually free and flowing, especially in passages such as the sleeves and the silvery brocade. The compositional reworkings discussed above also suggest that the portrait had to be finished quickly. The time constraints may be explained by historical circumstances: when, around the middle of May, the Spanish made a series of important advances, the command may have become aware that Lérida would surrender shortly. Since the king needed to stay on in Catalonia, he would not be able to attend the triumphal celebrations being planned in Madrid. A painting

was required, therefore, to serve as a proxy in his absence. When the portrait was finished, it was sent to the queen in the capital; we do not know when the canvas arrived or where it was kept until its first public display, on August 10, 1644. That day, the Catalan and Aragonese residents in Madrid celebrated the king's victorious entry into Lérida, which had taken place two days earlier.

## NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE EARLIEST DISPLAY OF THIS PORTRAIT



Juan Bautista Maíno, *The Recapture of Bahia in Brazil*, c. 1635, oil on canvas, Museo del Prado, Madrid; Photot: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

One aim of the Frick presentation is to draw attention to the way in which the portrait was first displayed in Madrid and how it was used in conjunction with in a sermon. According to the official court chronicler, Antonio Pellicer, the painting was solemnly installed beneath a canopy embroidered in gold in the nave of the Church of San Martín, in the center of Madrid east of the royal palace. This display must have been similar to the one depicted by Juan Bautista Maíno in the beautiful *Recapture of Bahia*, now in the Prado, which shows a tapestry portrait of Philip IV being presented to the public. Ceremonial canopies were meant symbolically to protect people or objects of the

highest sacredness. Thus displayed, Velázquez's vivid portrait of Philip IV served as a surrogate for the absent king. It is surprising, in light of this ceremony, that the portrait did not include any symbolic or allegorical elements related to victory; in fact, the mood of the painting is one of restrained dignity rather than triumph. Fortunately, a contemporary text—a sermon recently identified by Pablo Pérez d'Ors as being connected to the Frick's portrait—confirms that the work was intended for display in the church of San Martin as part of a celebration of the Spanish victory at Fraga. This new discovery may help us understand the apparent contradiction that arises from the understated manner in which the king is depicted.

Fray Diego Laynez, a Jesuit priest who served as the king's official preacher, delivered a sermon that was a focal point of the August victory celebration. It was the only part of the Latin service delivered in Spanish and was meant to address the same broad audience as the portrait itself. In order to make a lasting impression on listeners, preachers often used the religious images inside the church as visual aids for their sermons. Although it is not a religious image, evidence suggests that the Frick portrait was similarly employed. (In fact, its three-quarter-length format makes it more suitable for this purpose than the full-length format typically used for royal portraits.) The text of Laynez's sermon was published, which makes it possible to know more about the ceremony's precise agenda and the way the preacher interpreted the painting for its first viewers. The sermon subverts the more likely narrative of the king's victory in several subtle and unexpected ways. At the outset, Laynez identifies the portrait as "a beautiful Mars" that was inspired by its absent original. The Roman god of war, Mars, seems an unlikely role for a Catholic Spanish monarch to assume. Moreover, placing the emphasis on war would seem to stress that the

king was compelled to reinstate his authority over his rebellious Catalan subjects by force. Instead, the preacher states that Philip's victory is the result of divine favor, rather than military might. Laynez compares the Catalan rebels to the fallen angels, who rebelled out of vanity, and to the Israelites who abandoned their loyalty to God and worshipped the Golden Calf. These comparisons cast Philip in the role of a divine agent who is an instrument of God's will. Laynez explains, using several examples, that Philip is a loving father rather than a victorious warrior. The rebellious Catalans, in turn, are characterized as the forgiven, rather than as the vanquished. This discourse served a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it downplayed the undesirable and even shaming connotations of a king who waged war against his own subjects; on the other, it eased reconciliation by treating the Catalan rebels as repentant sinners rather than political enemies guilty of treason. According to the chronicler Pellicer, the portrait was a great success, and copies of it were in demand immediately after the celebration.

Comments Pérez d'Ors, "In the Frick's *King Philip IV of Spain*, Velázquez created an image that was perfectly suited to its purpose; however, the highly specific nature of this purpose is almost impossible to grasp by looking at the portrait alone. Although the painting's understatement is evident to the twenty-first-century observer, it cannot be properly understood out of the context of the ceremony and the sermon that accompanied its first display. The urgency of its making, which left its mark on the painting's extraordinarily free execution, responded to the need for the painting to be in Madrid in anticipation of the impending ceremony; and the combination of military iconography and emotional restraint was meant to present the king as an unusually humble, forgiving, almost gentle Mars. We hope that visitors encountering the work in its special Oval Room installation this fall will appreciate not only the fine results of its recent cleaning, but will also gain a greater sense of the meaning it had for those who first laid eyes on it in 1644, during a time of political strife."

## SCHOLARLY ARTICLE

*The King at War: Velázquez's Portrait of Philip IV* is accompanied by the publication of a scholarly feature article in *The Burlington Magazine's* October 2010 issue, which is dedicated to the arts of Spain. The article was authored jointly by Pablo Pérez d'Ors, the Frick's former Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow, and Michael Gallagher, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in charge of paintings, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. It addresses in detail the results of the technical studies undertaken at the Metropolitan Museum last summer, discusses the unusual iconography and function of the portrait, and considers a group of copies and related works. This well-illustrated article will be available for purchase as a bound softcover offprint (general public price \$2.50, member price \$2.25) in the Museum Shop, on the Frick's Web site ([www.frick.org](http://www.frick.org)), and by phone at (212) 547-6848.

## RELATED EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### Special Exhibition Lecture

**Date:** Wednesday, November 3, 6:00 p.m.  
**Speaker:** Michael Gallagher, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge, Department of Paintings Conservation, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
**Title:** *Privileged Intimacy: Velázquez's King Philip IV of Spain*

Velázquez's magnificent *King Philip IV of Spain* is one of the highlights of The Frick Collection. Michael Gallagher, the conservator in charge of the painting's recent cleaning, will describe its treatment and explain some of the many insights gained into the technique and history of this singular work. *This evening lecture is free and does not require reservations. Doors open at 5:45 p.m. (if those planning to attend arrive earlier, they are expected to pay the regular museum admission fee).*

### Gallery Talks in English and in Spanish

**Dates:** Wednesday, October 27, at 11:00 a.m. (in English)  
Sunday, October 31, at 1:00 p.m. (in Spanish)  
Sunday, October 31, at 3:00 p.m. (in English)  
**Speaker:** Pablo Pérez d'Ors, former Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow, The Frick Collection  
**Title:** *Velázquez: Painter to the King*

With the organizer of the dossier exhibition, study the renowned 1644 portrait of *King Philip IV of Spain* by Diego Velázquez. Pablo Pérez d'Ors will place the iconic painting in the context of discoveries made during its recent cleaning and examination. *At the hours noted above, these gallery talks will be offered in English and in Spanish. They are free with museum admission, but reservations are required. To register, please visit our Web site or call (212) 547-0704.*

## BASIC INFORMATION

**General Information Phone:** (212) 288-0700

**Web site:** [www.frick.org](http://www.frick.org)

**E-mail:** [info@frick.org](mailto:info@frick.org)

**Where:** 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue.

**Hours: open six days a week:** 10am to 6pm on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11am to 5pm on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11am to 5pm) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day.

**Admission:** \$18; senior citizens \$12; students \$5; "pay as you wish" on Sundays from 11am to 1pm

<b>PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection.</b>
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**Subway:** #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; **Bus:** M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

**Tour Information:** included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

**Museum Shop:** the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

**Group Visits:** Please call (212) 288-0700 for details and to make reservations.

**Public Programs:** A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

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For further press information, please contact Heidi Rosenau, Head of Media Relations & Marketing, or Alexis Light, Media Relations & Marketing Coordinator; Media Relations Phone: (212) 547-6844 and E-mail address: [mediarelations@frick.org](mailto:mediarelations@frick.org)