

# Venus' mirror: an image of baroque art

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The Baroque period was one of the most colorful periods in European history. It consisted of many changes in the continent such as the development of Martin Luther's reformation, which was the birth of Protestantism. It was also a time when Feudalism was diminishing, leading the way to a government based on a single authority. In Spain, the best Baroque artist was Diego Velasquez.

He was born in June 6, 1599 in Seville and died in August 6, 1660 because of fever. He was an apprentice of Francisco Pacheco, who was a famous disciple of Flemish and Italian realism which greatly influenced his works.

In 1623, he went to Madrid, where he painted a portrait of King Philip IV. Afterwards, he was appointed as the official painter of the royal family for six years. Aside from religious paintings, he also painted works with mythological themes. Velasquez was a true baroque artist. This period of art was used by the Roman Catholic Church as a way to counteract the spreading Protestantism. In Velasquez's works, he served that purpose with his ' bodegones' which focused on subjects that are found in everyday life and combined with religious scenes.

He often used the people of Seville as models for his bodegones. The painting " Venus at her Mirror" is one of the most famous paintings done by Diego Velasquez. Although baroque style originated from the Roman Catholic Church, it also gained attention from the secular side of the society hence, the mythological theme. " Venus at her Mirror" portrays qualities that are found in baroque paintings depicting power, massiveness, and dramatic intensity. It is an image with high contrasts of light and dark colors.

The painting shows Cupid without his bow and arrows and holds a mirror in front of Venus. What is interesting about this painting is that it does not clearly follow principles of optics as Venus' reflection in the mirror seems blurring. This irregularity is one of the main characteristics of baroque art, where the very word itself means “irregular”. It is the very same mirror which catches my attention because it does not reflect the exact details of Venus' face. What the artist is expressing in this painting is that what is seen is not Venus' face but her image.

Its baroque influence tells us that Venus is the goddess of beauty, and the beauty is unsurpassable that Cupid himself surrendered to it, laying down his bow and arrows. It is an exaggeration of beauty portraying dramatic intensity. This painting shows the beautiful body of Venus. However, Velasquez painted it in such a way that the observer's eyes are led towards the mirror and not on the body. Thus, the painting is a reflection of realism. What we see in the mirror is only an image of a beautiful woman, but not Venus herself.

In the human context, we observe that what man sees first is the image of a person and not the person himself. This reminds me of the first day of school of every school year, where students start to introduce themselves to one another. As the days pass, students would group themselves according to their image, creating a status quo. This ‘labeling’ of people according to their general image prevents us from expressing our true selves and our values. Let us take note that in the painting, the mirror shows only an image of a beautiful woman.

Will never know how beautiful Venus really was in the painting. The fact that her beauty is incomparable perhaps makes us look at it in another way. It may also be an indication that perhaps the real beauty is the one behind the image. References “ Diego Velazquez Biography”, (n. d. ). Retrieved May 6, 2010 from <http://www.pish-fiestas.com/art/pish-artists-velazquez.htm>. Fitzpatrick, A. , (1978). The Baroque Period, Minnesota: CreativeEducation, p. 7-12. “ Velazquez Venus at Her Mirror”, (2009). Retrieved May 6, 2010 from <http://www.paintingall.com/articles/velazquez-venus-a>