

Diego Velázquez, *Portrait of the Marquesa de Leganés*, 1630
Oil on canvas, 37.3 x 28.5 in. (94.6 x 72.4 cm.)
New York Private Collection

A previously unknown painting by Diego Velázquez has been discovered in a private collection in New York. The portrait is of a sumptuously costumed notable of the Spanish Imperial Court (Fig. 1), signed lower right and dated 1630.

The year 1630 was a period of experimentation and transition for Velázquez. Peter Paul Rubens, a friend and mentor of Velázquez, had only recently left his diplomatic post in Madrid (during which the two spent considerable time together) to return to Antwerp. Velázquez's works began to explore classical and mythological themes. He acquired a renewed interest in the works of Titian, Tintoretto, and other Italian masters, leaving Spain for the first time to study the great collections of the duchies and princedoms of Italy.

This portrait is unusual in that its subject is something of a mystery. Nearly every extant portrait by Velázquez is of an easily recognizable member of the family or court of King Philip IV, or that of his favored minister, the Count-Duke de Olivares. The subject of this portrait is clearly wealthy and of high status. She is dressed in fine satins and lace, and with jewels and accoutrements that suggest the exotic splendor and luxury of the Orient. These ostentatious details make it all the more notable that the subject bears no immediate likeness to a member of the royal family. We suggest that the portrait may be that of Marquesa Polyxena Spinola Guzman de Leganés. A 1628 portrait of the Marquesa by Anton Van Dyck shows a striking resemblance to the full face, large eyes, and slightly curved nose of the subject of Velázquez's painting (Fig. 2).

The Marquesa was the daughter of the famed Spanish-Genoese general, Ambrogio Spinola (himself immortalized in the Velázquez masterpiece *The Surrender of Breda*), and married to the Marqués, Diego Felipez de Guzmán. The Marqués was cousin to the Count-Duke de Olivares. Olivares and Leganés were extremely close, the former often describing the latter as like a son to him.¹ Both Olivares and Leganés were devoted patrons of Velázquez. Indeed, Olivares was responsible for introducing Velázquez to the King and for his installation as the official royal portraitist.

The Marqués and Marquesa were considered the great art collectors of their age—wielding a collection of over 1300 works by the likes of Rubens, Raphael, Holbein, Titian, Van Dyck, and of course, Velázquez. While many of these works now hang in institutions like the Museo del Prado and the Hermitage, many more are lost—known only by saved correspondence of the Leganés family and the periodic catalogues of their collections.²

In 1629 Velázquez traveled to Italy with letters of recommendation from Olivares to study the Italian masters and to tour the courts of Milan, Rome, Parma, and Naples. Surviving letters from the Italian ambassadors to Madrid show that Velázquez traveled in the personal entourage of the Marquesa, who was in turn accompanying her father to his governorship in Milan.³

From Averado Medici de Castellina (Tuscan ambassador to Madrid) to his brother Giuliano, the Archbishop of Pisa on September 22, 1629:

Some time ago I gave letters of recommendation (*lettere di raccomandazione*) to a painter named Diego Velasches who is a favorite of the King and of Count Olivares. **He has gone to Italy with Marchese Spinola and he wants to see Lombardy and Venice before**

¹ Mary C. Volk, "New Light on a Seventeenth-Century Collector: The Marquis of Leganés," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 62, no. 2 (June 1980): 256-68.

² José Juan Pérez Preciado, "El Marques de Leganés y las arte" (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense, 2010), 21.

³ Edward L. Goldberg, "Velázquez in Italy: Painters, Spies, and Low Spaniards," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 74, no. 3 (September 1992): 453-56.

going on to Florence and then Rome [author's emphasis]. When he appears, I don't want too much or too little to be made of him. It would be well for a painter to offer him hospitality, as if he were doing this on his own, and for Their Highnesses and the Princes to show him some favor. Although it is superfluous to remind the Count of anything at all, I would have everyone connected with our Princes address him with a *Voi muy redondo*; as I have said, he is a favorite of the King and the Count, an Usher of the Chamber and these days he is much in evidence here at court. On returning here, I don't want him bragging to these courtiers and even to Their Majesties that our Princes called him *Vostra Signoria* or paid him any courtesy beyond that due to a painter. My suggestion is that the Grand Duke have him paint his portrait and then give him a neck-chain with a medal. All the while, the Grand Duke should comport himself with kingly gravity and treat the painter well in the context of his profession; with low Spaniards (*Spagnuoli bassi*) you lose either way, by showing them too much respect or not enough.⁴

From Flavio Atti (Parmanese ambassador to Madrid) to the Duchess of Parma and Piacenza on July 26th, 1629:

This very day I wrote My Lord the Duke a letter to be brought to him by Diego Velasquez, Usher and Painter of the Chamber to his Majesty. He is going to Italy--he says to improve himself as a painter, bearing letters for Rome from the Nunzio and from all the other ambassadors as well. [*in code*: I say, however, that he is going to spy, just like Carlo Pughin, who is also in the King's service and is going to Milan certainly in the capacity of spy.] **Next Sunday they are both leaving with the Marchese Spinola** [author's emphasis]. Count Olivares wrote a note to Don Giovanni di Vilela so as to obtain letters of favor (*lettere ... a favore*) from the representatives of every ruler for this Diego Velazquez, whom I saw in person. [*in code*: Part of this painter's ploy, I think, is to reap some harvest by getting gifts from everyone. Nonetheless, it is indeed true that] he paints in the King's own apartment and I have seen him painting there many times. He specializes in portraits. In effect, his title "Usher of the Chamber" (*Uscero di Camera*) means little more than porter and signifies less than "Assistant of the Chamber" (*Agiutante di Camera*)-which is not his position nor is it to be. He goes before [*or alternately*: bears] the King's goblet when he wishes to eat or dine and the King often watches him paint. This then is the information that I have for you, so that you will understand how to treat him. I don't know if the painter Amidano knows him and might get on with him, since they are both of the same profession. [*in code*: Amidano, however, should be warned to watch his tongue.]⁵

It has long puzzled scholars that, despite their closeness, there are no known portraits of the Marqués and Marquesa. From the little we know of Marquesa Spinola--her patronage of the arts, and her patronage of Velázquez specifically--it is difficult to imagine she would not have sat for him while they traveled together in the spring and summer of 1630.

Research:
M.S.

⁴ Goldberg, "Velázquez in Italy," 454.

⁵ Goldberg, "Velázquez in Italy," 453-54.



Fig. 1

Velázquez, *Portrait of the Marquesa de Leganés*
Oil on canvas, 1630
37.5 x 28.5 in (94.6 x 72.4 cm.)
New York Private Collection



Fig. 2

Anton Van Dyck, *Doña Polyxena Spinola Guzman de Leganés*
Oil on canvas, 1628
National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Fig. 3

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady* (generally believed to be the Condessa de Monterey)
Oil on canvas, 1630
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin



Fig. 4

Velázquez, *Isabel de Borbón*
Oil on canvas, 1631-1632
Private collection, New York



Fig. 5

Velázquez, *Isabel de Borbón on Horseback*
Oil on canvas, c.1635
Museo del Prado, Madrid



Fig. 6

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
Oil on canvas, 1630
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Fig. 7

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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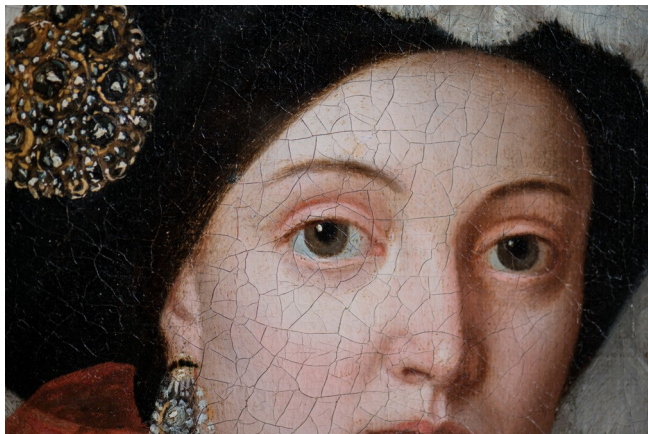


Fig. 8

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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Fig. 9

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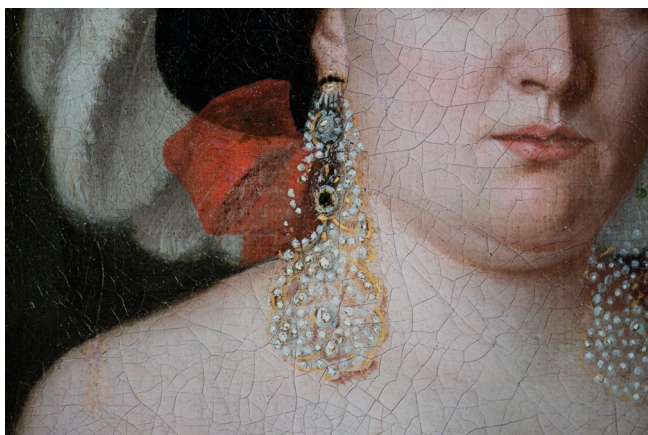


Fig. 10

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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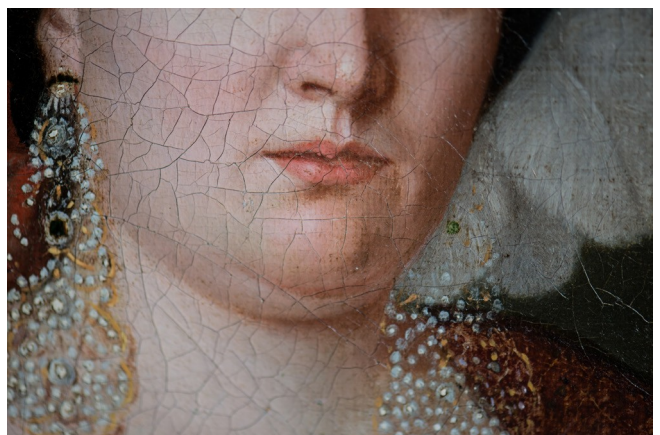


Fig. 11

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Fig. 12

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Fig. 13

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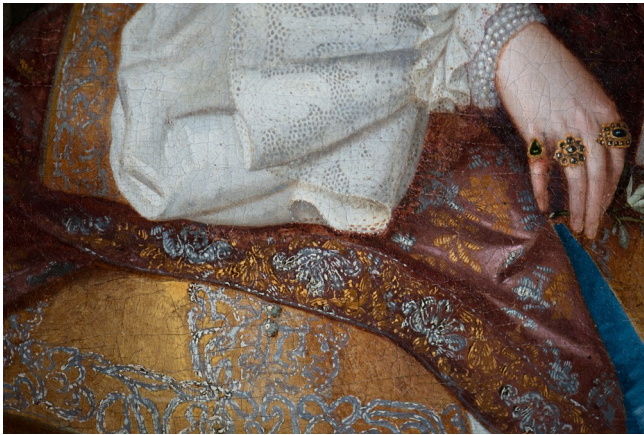


Fig. 14

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Fig. 15

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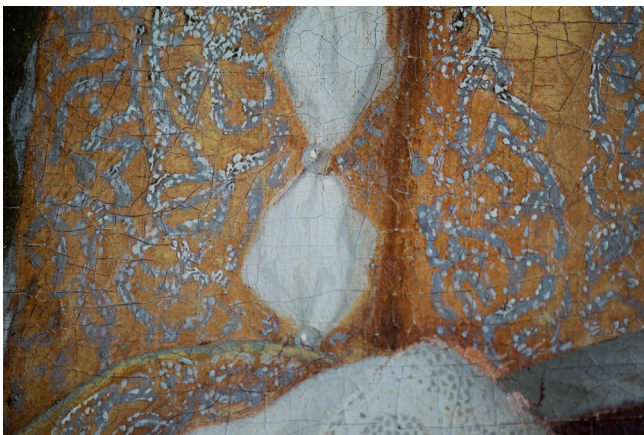


Fig. 16

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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Fig. 17

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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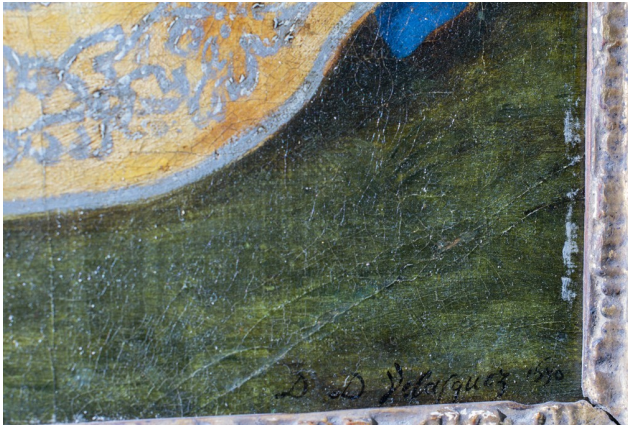


Fig. 18

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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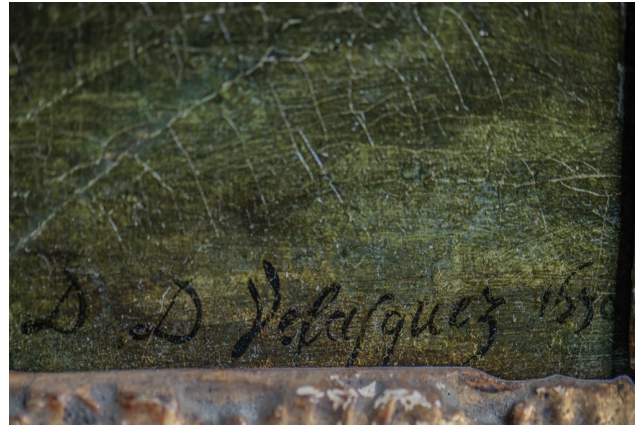


Fig. 19

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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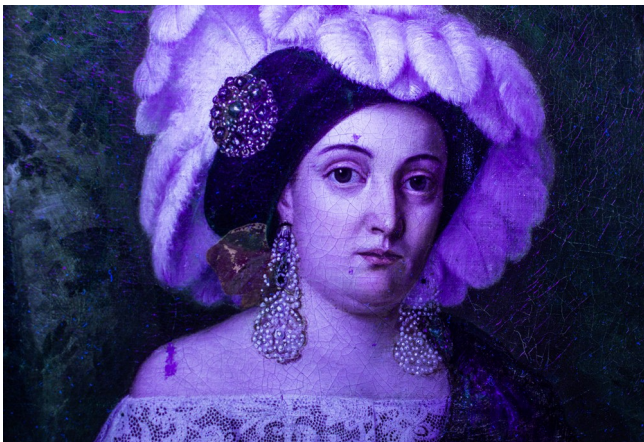


Fig. 20

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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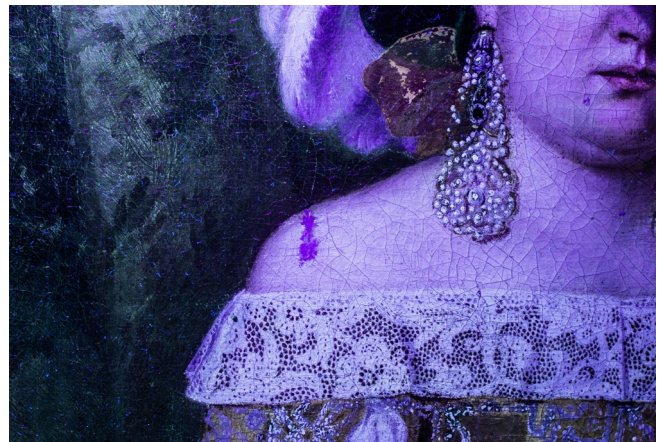


Fig. 21

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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Fig. 22

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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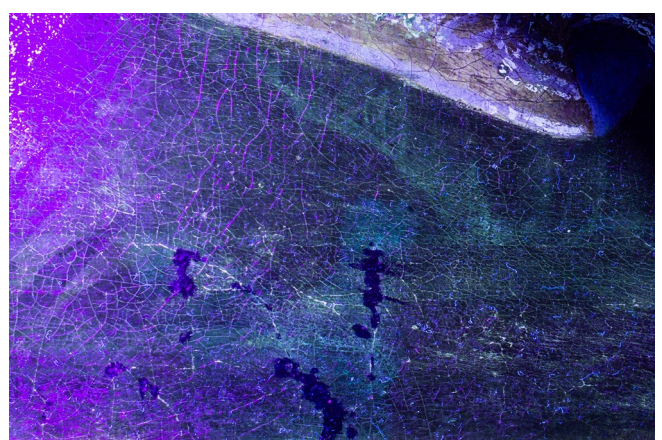


Fig. 23

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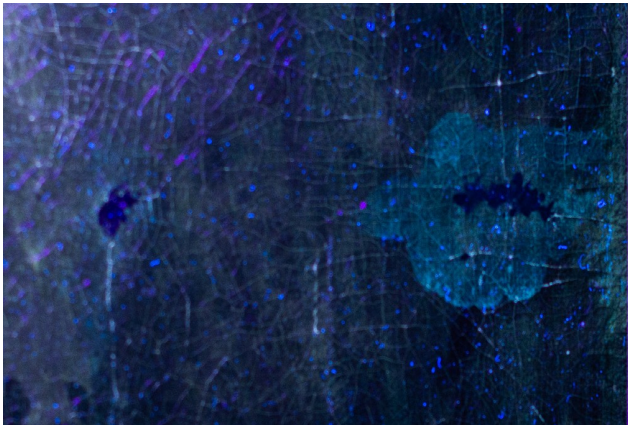


Fig. 24

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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Fig. 25

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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Fig. 26

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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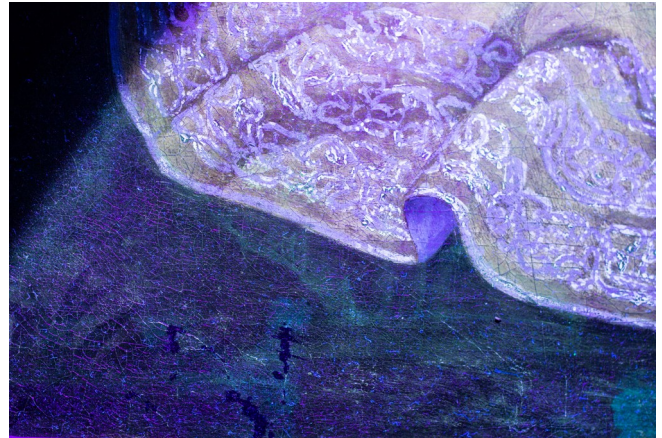


Fig. 27

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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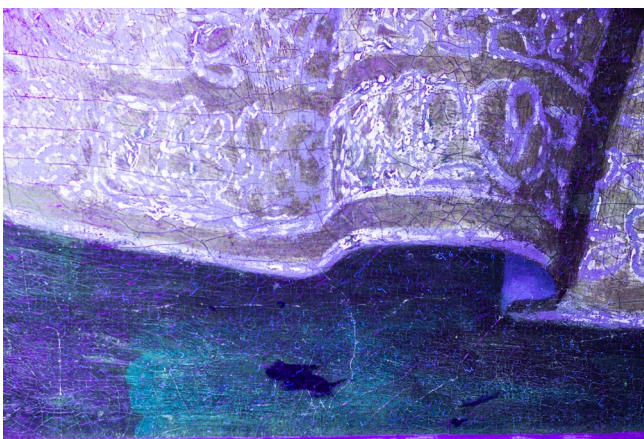


Fig. 28

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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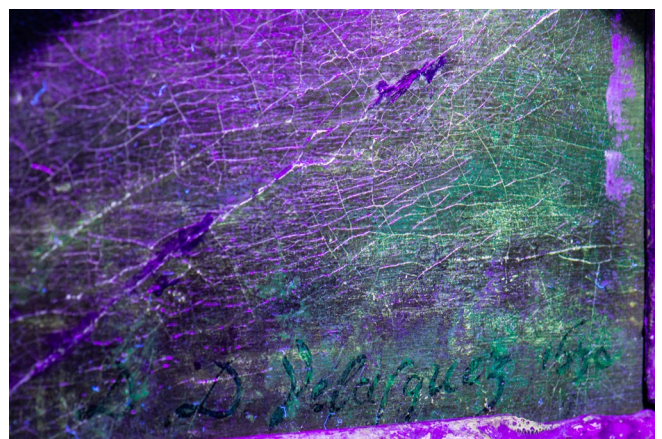


Fig. 29

Velázquez, *Portrait of a Lady*
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