

Rediscovering Moya's Velazquez

Fran Cappelletti, Jose Moya del Pino Library/Ross Historical Society

At the Jose Moya del Pino Library in Ross, we maintain a small library of books, photos and art dedicated to Moya's memory. We recently received a most interesting donation, two very large paintings by Jose Moya del Pino in the early 1920s. This is the story of those paintings, their many travels and their uncertain future.

Legitimate Copies

As a young artist in the early 20th century, Moya distinguished himself in his studies at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes (Royal Academy of fine Arts) in Madrid and the Academie Colarossi in Paris, but he struggled to support himself as an artist. He came up with an ambitious plan as described in his oral history.

"I got tired of that precarious life and was always trying to find some scheme for living. I got the idea of copying Velazquez. I copied all the work of Velazquez in the Prado, spent more than five years at it, and the idea was to bring all these copies to America for exhibit, with lectures written by a Spanish writer of popular culture. It was to go to North America and then Mexico, Cuba, from Cuba to Brazil and Argentina... as a contribution to popular culture."¹



Diego Rodriguez de Silva y Velazquez enjoyed fame and privilege in 17th Century Spain while building a remarkable portfolio of work, including *Las Meninas*, a portrait of the Spanish Royal Family. This work was notable for its complex arrangement of figures and perspectives.² While his fame waned after his death, he remained influential, inspiring 19th century artists, including Manet, Whistler and Cassatt. Many Velazquez works are featured to this day in galleries at Madrid's Museo del Prado.³

Just what does 'copying Velazquez' mean?

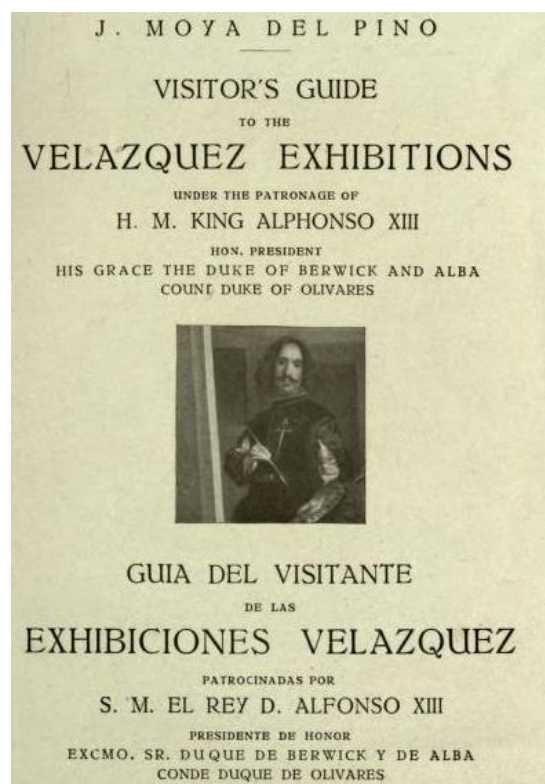
This was no counterfeit operation. Moya's intent was to study every minute detail of the originals so he might understand every aspect of them. He produced 41 exact reproductions, using the original dimensions, materials and techniques. The effort and resulting exhibition was sponsored by King Alfonso XIII and the Duke of Alba.

¹ Oral history interview with José Moya del Pino, 1964 Sept.10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

² Susie Hodge, *Velazquez, His Life and Works in 500 Images*, Lorenz Books, 2012.

³ See Museo Nacional del Prado web site at <https://www.museodelprado.es/en>.

The Paintings Go On Tour



Copy of Exhibition Guide, Jose Moya del Pino Library

The paintings travelled to Philadelphia, Brooklyn and Washington before coming to San Francisco, but the tour ran into problems,

“ I had thought that working independently I would be free economically and could paint. But then I found that in America you could not charge admission to the museums without imprearios and many complications. So when I came to America, the whole thing was sponsored by the Spanish government, by Alfonso XIII. I painted his portrait, which I still have. All the other paintings, the Velazquez copies were given to the University of California at the end of the exhibit in America.”⁴

The exhibition ended at the DeYoung Museum, as part of the San Francisco Diamond Jubilee in 1925. The San Francisco Chronicle estimated a half million visitors, but the works were not intended as a permanent exhibit.⁵

Complicating matters, the paintings, and Moya, could not return to Spain. In 1923 there was a military coup there and the *de facto* dictator General Primo de Rivera was in charge. The funds that had been agreed upon never arrived. Moya and Antonio Martin, who managed the

traveling exhibition, received no response to their many attempts for instructions on how to proceed. They could not even afford to store the paintings.

The Move to Berkeley

Fortunately, local patrons came to the rescue. In 1926, the paintings were installed in the Doe Library at the University of California, Berkeley. The unveiling was witnessed by an opening celebration crowd of 200 at the library, including W. W. Campbell, University President. The project was underwritten by a local committee, including Edward J. Hanna, Archbishop of San Francisco. The reported value of the paintings at the time was \$100,000.⁶

The paintings now had a home, but Moya still had the challenge of providing for himself as an artist in San Francisco. He would make ends meet by painting portraits and teaching at the California School of Fine Arts. Over time, he produced a large body of work. To this day, you can view his panel at Coit Tower and his Post Office murals in Redwood City, Stockton and Lancaster, California. He painted a large mural for the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition at San Francisco's Treasure Island and a multitude of portraits for families and social clubs. He later served as President of the Marin Society of Artists, Vice President of the Marin Art and Garden Center and on the faculty at the College of Marin.

⁴ Oral history interview with José Moya del Pino, 1964 Sept.10, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 2.

⁵ “76,523 Visit Park Museum”, San Francisco Chronicle, September 14, 1925, 4.

⁶ “Art Devotees See Copies Of Velazquez At U.C. Library”, San Francisco Chronicle, March 2, 1926, 3.

Over the years, the Daily Californian wrote about the paintings, providing descriptions and even claiming that the copies were part of a plan to preserve them in the United States in case the Spanish originals were destroyed.⁷ A 1930 photo from the University archives shows the paintings on display.



Doe Library, 1930, University Archives, UARC PIC 09:31(C). Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



Close up of Paintings donated to Jose Moya del Pino Library, Doe Library, 1930, University Archives, UARC PIC 09:31(C). Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

⁷ “Duplicates of Velasquez’ Works Featured in Library Exhibit”, The Daily Californian, December 8, 1943, 6, and “Velasquez Duplicates Now Hang On Walls of Periodical Room”, The Daily Californian, October 1, 1947, 6.

In 1932, the paintings once again faced an uncertain future. It was reported that the paintings, held as collateral, were to be sold at public auction over a debt of just over \$1,000. Earlier that year, Edmond T Osborne, who held the paintings as security for a mortgage, obtained a judgment and Judge Ames ordered the paintings sold to satisfy Osborne's claim. The sale date was November 18, to be held on the steps of Doe library.⁸ It is unclear when or if the auction actually took place as the paintings remained in place at Berkeley and no stories of any auction were uncovered.

Decades passed, but a 1959 editorial in the Daily Californian requested better lighting on campus, specifically pointing a to the theory that “we have long been convinced that the lighting in the Main Loan Hall is expressly designed to discourage students from paging library books.”⁹ True or not, a highly-illuminated drop ceiling was installed soon after and the paintings were taken down. Though some works would come out of storage, much of the collection remained out of sight, with custody passing to the University Art Museum. Over time, the family became interested in taking the paintings back if Berkeley was not interested displaying them. Yet interest remained to eventually restore and display.

In 1975, thanks to fire sprinkler regulations, another remodeling removed the drop ceiling in the room, now called the Heyns Reading Room, exposing a long hidden, elegant ceiling by John Galen Howard. The Daily Cal reported the 1959 ceiling installation and 1975 remodel as an example of poor design, but gave some credit to William Wurster for a design that enabled the restoration.¹⁰ With the encouragement of architect Theodore Bernardi and others, the beautiful ceiling was refurbished and restored to full view.¹¹ A plan was also considered to restore the Moya paintings. In the end, university administrators decided not to return Moya's work to the library walls and the paintings were to be returned to Moya's family.¹²

Several of the paintings were sold at auction. The family negotiated the transfer of others to Moya's daughter in Italy, but the shipment never arrived. They reported the incident to the police, but the investigation was limited due to intense attention to the 1978 kidnapping and murder of the Italian Prime Minister.

In early 2016, two of the auctioned paintings were donated to our library in Ross. They were damaged and worn, but not beyond rescue. With the assistance of art conservator Anne Rosenthal, known for her restoration work at Coit Tower, the two paintings were properly rolled for storage and await their next destination.



Fran Cappelletti, 2016

⁸ “41 Paintings On Public Sale”, Oakland Tribune, November 6, 1932, 57.

⁹ “LIGHTING”, The Daily Californian, September 24, 1959, 8.

¹⁰ See Benjamin Clavan, “Restoring and Defacing A Beautiful Ceiling”, The Daily Californian, October 31, 1975, 11.

¹¹ Larry Spears, “Ceiling Liberated at U.C.”, Oakland Tribune, August 31, 1975, 25.

¹² Larry and Cathy Dinnean worked for many years at the University and still remember the paintings. Larry compiled a timeline of the paintings from their creation until their return to the family in the 1970s.

About The Paintings

The first reproduction, *Furnaces of Vulcan*, was originally painted by Velazquez in 1630, during his first visit to Rome. It depicts the mythological visit to Vulcan of Apollo during which he informs Vulcan that his wife Venus has been unfaithful to him with Mars. This recent photo of the painting clearly shows the need for repairs and careful restoration.



Photo of Moya reproduction by Gary Scales



Photo of portion of reproduction by Gary Scales

The second reproduction is *The Surrender of Breda*, often called *The Lances*, originally by Velazquez from 1634-5. It depicts the exchange of keys to the victorious Spanish commander Ambrosio Spinolo from Dutch governor Justin of Nassau at the end of a long siege in 1625. Breda was an important, strategic city in Low Countries, now in The Netherlands. There is much to see in this painting, from the colors to the expressions to the overall composition. Notice the Dutch soldier staring out at us, the faces of man and animal, and the texture of the clothing.¹³ It is a famous work, especially for the message of surrender with magnanimity and respect for the defeated. It does not celebrate the battle itself, but the beginning of a peace.¹⁴ The photo of the reproduction only shows half of the huge canvas.

What Next?

Can the funds be raised to restore? If so, can a proper home be found for these large paintings? And what of the others? Is it too much to hope that any of the other reproductions may show themselves again? Only time, and further travels, will tell.

¹³ Susie Hodge, *Velazquez, His Life and Works in 500 Images*, (Lorenz Books: 2012), 146-149.

¹⁴ For a more detailed analysis, see essay by Javier Berzal, "Velazquez, *The Surrender at Breda*" at <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/monarchy-enlightenment/baroque-art1/spain/a/velzquez-the-surrender-of-breda>.