

## Diego Velazquez



*Prince Baltasar Carlos on Horseback*, 1635  
oil on canvas, 211.5 x 177 cm  
Museo Nacional Del Prado, Madrid



Self-Portrait, 1643  
oil on canvas, 70 x 58 cm  
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

## The Artist

### Diego Velázquez

Born in Seville, Spain 1599; died in Madrid, Spain 1660

Diego de Silva Velázquez was born into a noble family who brought him up to be a pious young man. Diego lived during Spain's Golden Age of art and literature. Beginning at age 11, Diego studied painting in Seville for six years under the Francisco Pacheco. There he learned the techniques of painting and drawing still life and portraiture. Soon Diego picked up on the modern techniques and incorporated them into his pieces. In 1617, Velázquez opened his own studio after his apprenticeship ended and married Pacheco's daughter only a year later. Juana and Diego had two daughters together by 1621. Two years later, he was asked to paint the portrait of the young King Philip IV. The positive response led to his appointment to being one of King Philip IV's court painters. This appointment allowed him access to study the royal collection of art, which included great Italian works of art. The King allowed Diego leave to travel and study painting in Italy, as well as to purchase new works for the royal collection. By 1636, he was made the Assistant to the Wardrobe. Seven years later, he was appointed Gentleman of the Bedchamber and superintendent of the palace works. Diego was constantly receiving commissions to produce paintings as well as being appointed with modernizing certain palaces. On his second journey to Italy in 1649, Velázquez fathers an illegitimate child and paints multiple portraits while studying the new developments on Italian art. During the time that Diego was painting, religious and political wars drained the Spanish economy, while outbreaks of plague reduced Spain's population. As he rose in rank, Diego found less time to paint and allowed his son-in-law to help make official copies of his paintings. Two years before his death, Diego was made a Knight of Santiago, an honor he had desired his whole life.

## Art Movement

### Baroque

From 1585 to 1730 is often called the Baroque era. The word "baroque" derives from the Portuguese and Spanish words for a large, irregularly shaped pearl. This period of art began in Italy and spread. Work from the Baroque period is stylistically complex and desires to evoke emotional states by appealing to the senses in dramatic ways. Qualities seen in artwork of this period include grandeur,

sensuous richness, drama, vitality, movement, tension, and emotional exuberance.

## The Artwork

### *Prince Baltasar Carlos on Horseback*

This equestrian portrait of Prince Baltasar Carlos shows the Madrid Mountains in the background, showing the symbols of royal power. The Prince was the son of Philip IV and Isabella of Bourbon. He was the first son and sole heir to the monarchy until his untimely death that left Spain without an heir until Charles II was born. This portrait was painted for the Hall of Realms of the Buen Retiro Palace. The painting was placed on a door between equestrian portraits of his parents. The original location of the portrait explains the strange perspective of the painting. It was designed to be seen from the bottom up. This can be seen from the anatomical composition of the horse. Diego's loose technique is illustrated in the boy's face.

## Discussion Suggestions

### Discuss the Painting:

- *Describe how the prince looks to you. What can you tell about the Prince from the portrait?*
- *Where are the diagonal lines in the painting?*
- *Why do you think Velázquez used so many diagonal lines in the composition?*
- *What difference does it make to look at something at eye level or below eye level?*
- *Where can you see a dark colors gradually get lighter? What did the artist do to make it look that way?*
- *Are the colors in the painting cool or warm? Hard or soft? Noisy or quiet?*
- *How did Velázquez make the trees look far away?*
- *How does Velázquez show the weather of the day, is it sunny, cloudy, calm, windy?*
- *Notice what is in the background of the Prince's portrait, what do you see?*

## Activity Idea

### Portraits of Kids:

Pre-Activity Brainstorming:

- What would you have in your portrait? What would you hold, wear, ride, etc.

### Activity:

- Take a photograph of each child and print it, have them pose for it like it's their portrait
- Have them decide what they would want in their portrait, for example driving a cool car, riding a horse, etc. What would they want in the background? Prince Baltasar Carlos had mountains and rode his horse.
- Have each student cut out his or her body from the picture and draw or use cut outs from magazines to set up their portrait. Once it is all set up have them glue it all down and share their self-made portraits with the class.

### Materials Needed:

- Camera & printer
- Photos of each child
- Colored pencils & pencils
- Glue
- White paper/construction paper