

J de pareja

FROM SLAVE TO PAINTER OF THE KING

J de paréja

BY

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FROM SLAVE TO PAINTER OF THE KING¹

The Spanish painter Juan de Pareja (Antequera 1606 - 1670 Madrid) is perhaps best known from the superb portrait painted by his master Diego Velázquez in Rome around 1650 (Fig. 1, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). The portrait was publicly exhibited on the feast of St. Joseph on 19 March 1650, when the *Congregazione dei Virtuosi* held their annual exhibition under the portico of the Pantheon, and it was an immediate and overwhelming success. Antonio Palomino, one of Velázquez's early biographers, recorded the reaction:

[Velázquez] made the portrait of Juan de Pareja, his slave and fine painter, which was so like him and so lively that, when he sent it by means of Pareja himself to some friends for their criticism, they just stood looking at the painted portrait and at the original in awe and wonder, not knowing to whom they should speak or who would answer them. About this portrait (which was half-length and done from life) Andreas Schmidt, a Flemish painter in the Court who was in Rome at the time, used to tell that since for the feast of Saint Joseph it was the custom to decorate the cloister of the Pantheon (where Raphael of Urbino is buried) with famous pictures, both ancient and modern, this portrait was hung there, and it received such universal acclaim that in the opinion of all the painters of different nations everything else looked like painting, this alone like reality.²

Fig. 1. Diego Velázquez (Seville 1599 - 1660 Madrid), *Juan de Pareja*, 1650, oil on canvas, 81.3 x 69.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 2. Juan de Pareja (Antequera 1606 - 1670 Madrid), *Calling of St. Matthew*, 1661, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. (Pareja is pictured at far left. Fig. 3. detail)

As noted by Palomino, Pareja was a slave, and an assistant to Velázquez. Palomino also recounted how Pareja had secretly learned to paint by observing his master and his talents were discovered by the king, who insisted that he be granted his freedom:

He [Pareja] contrived things so cleverly that, by going behind his master's back and depriving himself of sleep, he became able to produce works of Painting that were very worthy of esteem. And foreseeing his master's certain displeasure at this, he made use of a curious strategy; so he had observed that every time King Philip IV came down to the lower rooms to watch Velázquez paint, and saw a picture leaning with its face against the wall, His Majesty would turn it round, or order it to be turned round, to see what it was. With this in mind, Pareja placed a little picture by his own hand casually facing the wall. As soon as the King saw it, he went to turn it round, and at the same time Pareja, who was waiting for this opportunity, fell at his feet and desperately pleaded for protection from his master, without whose consent he had learned the art, and had made that painting with his own hand. Not content with doing what Pareja had begged, that magnanimous royal spirit also turned to Velázquez and said: Not only must you say no more about this but be advised that someone who has such skill cannot be a slave.³





Fig. 4.
Juan de Pareja
(Antequera 1606
- 1670 Madrid),
Flight into Egypt,
1658, oil on
canvas, John and
Mable Ringling
Museum of Art,
Sarasota, Florida.
Bequest of John
Ringling, 1936.

Though highly appealing, Palomino's narrative is nevertheless entirely fictitious. Yet, rather lamentably, precious little documentation survives which allows us to construct a clear history of Pareja's life and career. We do know

that he was born in 1606 in Antequera, in the province of Málaga, three years before the expulsion of the Moors from the city. Pareja was of mixed race: his mother, Zulema, was a Moor, while his father, also named Juan, was Spanish. He was either purchased or inherited by Velázquez, whose family is known to have owned enslaved servants. The ownership of slaves was not unusual at the time, especially given Seville's importance in the slave trade.⁴ Velázquez's teacher Francesco Pacheco, for example, owned a Turkish slave for household tasks, while both Murillo and Alonso Cano had enslaved assistants. In Velázquez's household, Pareja would have chiefly been employed in the artist's workshop grinding colours and stretching canvases, and it is there that he must have formed his ambition to become a painter.⁵

A document of 12 May 1630 in which a Juan de Pareja, "de oficio pinttor" and a freeman, requested permission from the administrative Procurador Mayor of Seville to go to Madrid to study painting with his brother Jusepe has created some confusion around Pareja's formation. Jennifer Montagu has argued that this is likely to be another person of the same name, for when the sitter in Velázquez's portrait accompanied his master to Rome, and is recorded witnessing documents

in 1649 and 1650, he was without question an enslaved person.⁶ Montagu also published the document dated 1650 in which Velázquez granted Juan de Pareja his freedom. This went into effect in 1654; a delay of four years was a standard formula for freeing an enslaved person. It is significant that guild rules restricted membership to freemen, and so Pareja's manumission was not only a matter of personal freedom but also essential to his progress and independence as a painter. The document states:

The most illustrious Diego de Silva Velázquez, Spaniard [...] declares that for many years he has held in his power as captive – that is, as it is commonly said, as slave – Juan de Pareja [...] and wishing to demonstrate to him his gratitude for the previous good service and considering that he can do nothing more pleasing than to grant him his freedom. [...] he voluntarily grants and concedes and in the best way possible as something irrevocable to the said Juan de Pareja in person [...] and to his children and descendants in perpetuity [...] freedom [...]. With power and free, pure and true action he and those subject to him comes to the condition of a free man. In this way, in the future in fulfilment of the above, no service or servitude or captivity to and with Don Diego or his kin will ever be required [...] and Juan will never be enslaved again.⁷

After gaining his freedom in 1654, Pareja continued to work as an assistant to Velázquez and acted in a similar capacity for Velázquez's son-in-law Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo, who succeeded Velázquez as portraitist to Philip IV. It was somewhat unusual that Pareja successfully established an independent career, for, as Luis Méndez Rodríguez has noted: "the greatest difficulty for freed slaves was, above all, becoming a part of a closed society that jealously guarded its privileges; this resulted in many former slaves drifting into a life of alienation and alcoholism, or still worse theft, or dependence on charity."⁸

Only a handful of independent paintings by Juan de Pareja are known today. A catalogue of the artist's works was first attempted by Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño in 1957,⁹ and this enterprise was undertaken a second time by María del Mar Doval Trueba in 2000, resulting in the identification of around thirty paintings by Pareja.¹⁰ The most accomplished, the *Calling of St. Matthew* (Fig. 2, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), includes a self-portrait, and the figure holds a piece of paper inscribed with his signature and the date of the work, 1661.¹¹ Fracchia has argued that in Pareja's picture, he has consciously associated himself with the Apostle who evangelized Ethiopia and who the Afro-Hispanic poet Juan Latino (1518?-ca. 1594) transformed into a biblical Ethiopian.¹² It may also be noted that the painting recalls Caravaggio's picture of the same subject of around 1599-1600 in San Luigi dei Francesi, which Pareja would have seen while in Rome.

Pareja's earliest religious picture, signed and dated *Pareja 1658*, is a charming but somewhat naïve *Flight into Egypt* in the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida (Fig. 3),¹³ suggesting that his advances in painting came quite late in his career, and well after he was granted his freedom. The *Baptism of Christ* (Fig. 4, Museo Artístico y Arqueológico, Huesca, signed and dated *Jv.a de Pareja F. 1667*) shows greater Baroque dynamism,¹⁴ while in the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* (parish church of Santa Olaja de Eslonza, León, signed and dated *Ju.a de Pareja F. 1669*) evidences a new freedom of brushwork due perhaps to the influence of Fray Juan Rizi and Claudio Coello.¹⁵ Other religious subject paintings include *Judith* (Museo Nacional de la Habana, Havana, Cuba, signed *Pareja*)¹⁶ and the *Last Communion of St. Mary of Egypt* (private collection, signed *Pareja P.*).¹⁷

Pareja painted the Immaculate Conception at least three times. There is a canvas signed and dated *JV. De Pareja 16 F 16* (sic?) in a private collection in Madrid,¹⁸ another signed *Jv DE PARE/JA F* formerly in the Ordoñez collection in Madrid,¹⁹



Fig. 5. Juan de Pareja (Antequera 1606 - 1670 Madrid), *Baptism of Christ*, 1667, oil on canvas, Museo Artístico y Arqueológico, Huesca. Inv. 00080. Photo © Fernando Alvira.

and a third in the church of Santa Lucía in El Almiñé (Burgos), signed *Juan de Pareja f (...) 8*.²⁰ The Immaculate Conception – the belief that the Virgin Mary was free from original sin from the first moment of her conception – attracted intense devotional focus in the seventeenth century in Spain, and nearly every painter of importance treated the theme at the behest of fervent patrons.²¹ Although the doctrine was not officially upheld until 1854, Spain was the leading advocate of the Immaculate Conception from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. Demonstrating the extent to which devotion to this dogma had permeated Spanish society in this period, many Spanish professional or municipal corporations required its members to swear a vow of faith to the Immaculate Conception.²²

Perhaps unsurprisingly for an artist who had worked in Velázquez's studio, Pareja enjoyed a reputation as a portraitist, and examples include the portrait of the architect José Ratés Dalmau (Fig. 6),²³ the portrait of a monk and the portrait of a member of the Order of Santiago in the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg (signed *J de Pareja fecit 1651*),²⁴ *Don Martin de Leyva*, *Don Alonso Mora Y Villalta*, and a copy of his self-portrait the Hispanic Society of America



Fig. 6.
Juan de Pareja (Antequera
1606 - 1670 Madrid),
José Ratés Dalmau,
ca. 1660, Museu de Bellas
Artes in Valencia.

in New York,²⁵ and the portrait of the poet and playwright Agustín Moreto in the Museo Lázaro Galdiano in Madrid.²⁶ Fracchia has noted that Moreto, whose works were performed at the royal court, in 1668 authored a play entitled *La Negra por el honor*, in which

a white aristocratic woman transformed into a black man in order to escape her violent husband, who attempted to rape her before their wedding night, and thus preserve her honour.²⁷ It is worthy of note that Pareja's style relies very little on the example of Velázquez. So too is the fact that his focus on devotional themes marks a departure from the *oeuvre* of his master, who largely set aside religious subject matter for portraits and history painting once he had left Seville for the court of the Spanish king. Pareja, it seems, sought patronage and commissions from beyond the court circles of his master.

In 2000, Doval Trueba identified around twenty documented works by Pareja whose whereabouts remain unknown. These include a number of portraits, one of Philip IV, and various religious paintings.²⁸ Other works are no longer extant, such as a series of saints in the chapel of Santa Rita in the Augustinian monastery of los Recoletos in Madrid, described in 1776 by a traveller.²⁹ Still other works by the artist must surely survive but carrying attributions to other artists. In any case, much work remains to be done to reconstruct more of Pareja's career and *oeuvre*. Undoubtedly, as new focus is brought to this artist, further exciting discoveries, like that of the painting featured in this publication, are bound to be made.

- 1 We would like to thank Carmen Fracchia for her support in attributing the work to Juan de Pareja, and David Pullins for sharing his thoughts and his own recent work on the artist.
- 2 Antonio Palomino de Castro y Velasco, "El parnaso español pintoresco laureado" *El museo pictórico, y escala óptica*, vol. 3, Madrid, 1724 [1724 ed. reprinted in *Fuentes literarias para la historia del arte español*, Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón, ed., vol. 4, Madrid, 1936, pp. 167-68; 1796 ed., pp. 501-2].
- 3 Palomino 1724.
- 4 About 75-80% of these slaves were referred to as "black" while the remainder were mostly North African Berbers and "white Turks" as well as a small number of Arabs; see Luis Méndez Rodríguez, trans. Jeremy Roe, "Slavery and the Guild in Golden Age Painting in Seville" *Art in Translation* 7 (2015), pp. 123-39.
- 5 We know little of Velázquez's attitudes towards the practice of slavery, though on 7 November 1653, he made an official complaint to Philip IV requesting the removal of a chained black slave who served as guard by the door of the king's kitchen.
- 6 Jennifer Montagu, "Velázquez Marginalia: His Slave Juan de Pareja and His Illegitimate Son Antonio" *Burlington Magazine* 125 (1983), pp. 683-88. It is likely that the first record for Pareja's life is the document dating from 28 September 1638 in which Velázquez and Pareja co-signed a power of attorney in Madrid on behalf of Alonso Cano.
- 7 Montagu 1983.
- 8 Méndez Rodríguez 2015, p. 130.
- 9 Juan Antonio Gaya Nuño, "Revisiones sexcentistas: Juan de Pareja" *Archivo español de arte* 30 (1957), pp. 271-85.
- 10 María del Mar Doval Trueba, *Los "velazqueños": pintores que trabajaron en el taller de Velázquez*, PhD dissertation: Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 2000.
- 11 The painting is documented in the Spanish royal collections in by 1746, when it was listed in the holdings of Elizabeth of Farnese in the royal palace of La Granja of San Ildefonso in Segovia. Doval Trueba 2000, p. 235.
- 12 See Carmen Fracchia, "The Fall into Oblivion of the Works of the Slave Painter Juan de Pareja" *Art in Translation* 4 (2012), pp. 163-84.
- 13 Doval Trueba 2000, p. 234; see also Virginia Brilliant, *Italian, Spanish, and French Paintings in the Ringling Museum of Art* (New York and Sarasota, 2017), pp. 383-84.
- 14 Doval Trueba 2000, pp. 234-35.
- 15 Doval Trueba 2000, p. 235.
- 16 Doval Trueba 2000, p. 234.
- 17 Doval Trueba 2000, p. 236.
- 18 Doval Trueba 2000, p. 236.
- 19 Doval Trueba 2000, p. 238.
- 20 First published by René Jesús Payo Hernanz, "Una Inmaculada de Juan de Pareja" *Archivo español de arte* 86 (2013), pp. 60-64.
- 21 Suzanne L. Stratton, *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art*, Cambridge and New York, 1994.
- 22 Javier Portús Pérez, *Pintura barroca española/Museo del Prado*, Madrid, 2001.
- 23 Doval Trueba 2000, pp. 236-37.
- 24 Ludmila L. Kagané, *Catalogue of Western European Painting: Spanish Painting: Fifteenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (Florence, 1997), pp. 173-74.
- 25 Doval Trueba 2000, p. 237, pp. 237-38, and p. 236.
- 26 Doval Trueba 2000, p. 238.
- 27 Carmen Fracchia, "Black but human": *Slavery and Visual Arts in Hapsburg Spain, 1480-1700*, Oxford, 2019, p. 158.
- 28 Doval Trueba 2000, pp. 238-41.
- 29 Doval Trueba 2000, pp. 239-40.



J de pareja

Juan de Pareja
Antequera 1606 - 1670 Madrid
Dog with a Candle and Lilies
ca. 1660s
Oil on canvas
47 x 57 cm

A HOUND OF GOD

At first glance, the recently discovered canvas seems to be a charming and highly naturalistic still life – a small hound holding a lit taper in its mouth, a beautifully rendered stalk of lilies, and a large sliver of a dark sphere frame the fragmentary signature *Jº de Pareja F.*, situated just below the dog's paws. Yet, these still life elements are in fact attributes of St. Dominic, and the picture is most likely a fragment of a much larger painting which included this important figure in Spanish Church history, devotion, and art.

Dominic di Guzmán was born in Calaroga in Castile around 1170. He studied at Palencia and then joined the canons regular (the religious community attached to the cathedral of a diocese) of Osma, and around 1203 accompanied Diego de Azevedo, the bishop of Osma, on a mission abroad. It was on this journey that Dominic first encountered the threat posed to the church in the south of France by the Albigensian heretics, and it was likely at this time that the young cleric felt the importance of what would become his life's mission – the reconciliation of heretics with the Church. To this end, he focussed his energies on founding an order devoted to evangelical preaching, which received the official sanction of Pope Honorius III in Rome in 1216. The new Dominican order spread rapidly throughout Europe, especially in Spain, Italy, and France. Dominic initially placed his two principal houses near the universities of Paris and Bologna and decided that each one should form a school of theology: from then on, the Dominicans would play a major role in university education. In 1221, Dominic died in Bologna, where the first general chapter of the order had been held the year before. He was canonized in 1234, and venerated widely throughout Europe, and later in the New World, where Dominicans played an important role as missionaries.



Fig. 6. Pedro Nicolau (act. 1390 - 1408 Valencia), *Dream of St. Dominic's Mother*, detail from *Scenes from the Life of St. Dominic*, ca. 1400, oil on panel, Museu de Belles Arts, Valencia.

Dominic is typically shown wearing a white habit with a black cloak, with a tonsured (shaved) head.³⁰ He is sometimes shown with a star, usually red, on his brow, for his godmother is said to have seen a star on his forehead during his baptism. Often, he holds in one hand or the other a lily, a sign

of purity or chastity, a book denoting his learning, or a rosary, a devotional practice he strongly promoted. In some cases, he is accompanied by a dog.

According to the *Golden Legend*, compiled around 1260 by Jacobus de Voragine, while she was pregnant, Dominic's mother dreamed that she would give birth to a dog who would hold a torch in its mouth and would "set fire to the whole fabric of the world."³¹ An early, and rather rare, depiction of this event can be found in the predella panels by Pedro Nicolau (Fig. 6, ca. 1400, Museu de Belles Arts, Valencia). This story likely emerged when Dominic's order became known as Dominicans, or, in Latin, *Dominicanus*, giving rise to the pun that they were the *Domini canes*, or Hounds of God. Consequently, a dog is often shown at the saint's feet holding a lit taper in its mouth, sometimes beside an orb or sphere representing the world. Occasionally, the dog has a black and white coat, reflecting the order's attire.

Juan de Pareja would have known many representations of Dominic accompanied by his hound, from sixteenth-century paintings like Ambrosius Benson's *St. Dominic* from the retablo in the convent of Santa Cruz la Real in Segovia (Fig. 7, now Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid) to many more recent examples, like Francisco de Zurbarán's *St. Dominic* of around 1635 now in the Alba



Fig. 7. Ambrosius Benson (Ferrara or Milan act. 1519 - 1550 Flanders), *St. Dominic*, ca. 1528, oil on panel, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



Fig. 8. Francisco de Zurbarán (Fuente de Cantos 1598 - 1664 Madrid), *St. Dominic*, ca. 1635, Alba Collection, Palacio de Liria, Madrid.



Fig. 9. Gaspar de Crayer (Antwerp 1582 - 1669 Ghent), *St. Dominic*, ca. 1655, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



Fig. 10. Claudio Coello (Madrid 1642 - 1693 Madrid), *St. Dominic*, 1670s, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



Fig. 11. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (Seville 1617 - 1682 Seville), *Apparition of the Virgin to St. Dominic*, before 1645, oil on canvas, Palacio Arzobispal, Seville.

Fig. 12. Juan de Pareja (Antequera 1606 - 1670 Madrid), *Immaculate Conception*, oil on canvas, private collection, Madrid.



collection in Madrid (Fig. 8, Alba collection, Madrid) and Gaspar de Crayer's *St. Dominic* of about 1655 from the convent of San Francisco in Burgos (Fig. 9). A later example, executed after Pareja's death, is Claudio Coello's extraordinary *St. Dominic*, one of a series of five saints painted in the 1670s for the convent of El Rosario in Madrid (Fig. 10, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). It is possible that the present fragment was originally a part of a single canvas depicting the saint, which might itself have been a part of a larger series of saints like the one Pareja painted for the



Fig. 13. Diego Velázquez (Seville 1599 - 1660 Madrid), detail of the mastiff from *Las Meninas*, 1656, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

Augustinian convent in Madrid, mentioned above, or indeed Coello's series for El Rosario. Alternatively, it could have belonged to a figure of Dominic featured in a larger narrative or devotional work, as in Bartolomé Esteban Murillo's *Apparition of the Virgin to St. Dominic* (Fig. 11, before 1645, Palacio Arzobispal, Seville).



J de Pareja



Juan de Pareja
Antequera 1606 - 1670 Madrid

Dog with a Candle and Lilies
ca. 1660s

Oil on canvas
47 x 57 cm



Fig. 14. Diego Velázquez (Seville 1599 - 1660 Madrid), *Dwarf with a Dog*, ca. 1645, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.



Fig. 15. Diego Velázquez (Seville 1599 - 1660 Madrid), *Infante Felipe Prospero*, 1659, oil on canvas, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

The signature on the fragment confirms the attribution, while the lilies compare well with ones found in Pareja's *Immaculate Conceptions* (Fig. 12). Meanwhile, the naturalism with which the small hound is rendered, its sympathetic eyes meeting the viewer's own, is highly reminiscent of Velázquez, who notably included dogs in many of his pictures, from the King's mastiff in *Las Meninas* (Fig. 13) to the hunting hounds and lapdogs included in his portraits of princes and dwarves (Figs. 14, 15). Like Velázquez's dogs – and unlike many of the ones in the pictures mentioned above – Pareja's little hound seems to be observed from life, an animal he knew and drew and translated into the present image as a sacred attribute of a significant saint, imbuing that emblem with a warmth and humanity that allows it to transcend the standard status of mere symbol.

³⁰ For the iconography of St. Dominic, see Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien: Iconographie des Saints*, I, A-F, Paris, 1958, pp. 391-98. For the representation of Dominic in Spain, see Domingo Iturzaiz Ciriza, *Santo Domingo de Guzmán en la iconografía Española*, Madrid, 2003.

³¹ William Granger Ryan, *Jacobus de Voragine: The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, Princeton, 2012, pp. 430-44, see pp. 430-31 for the anecdote concerning the dream.





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