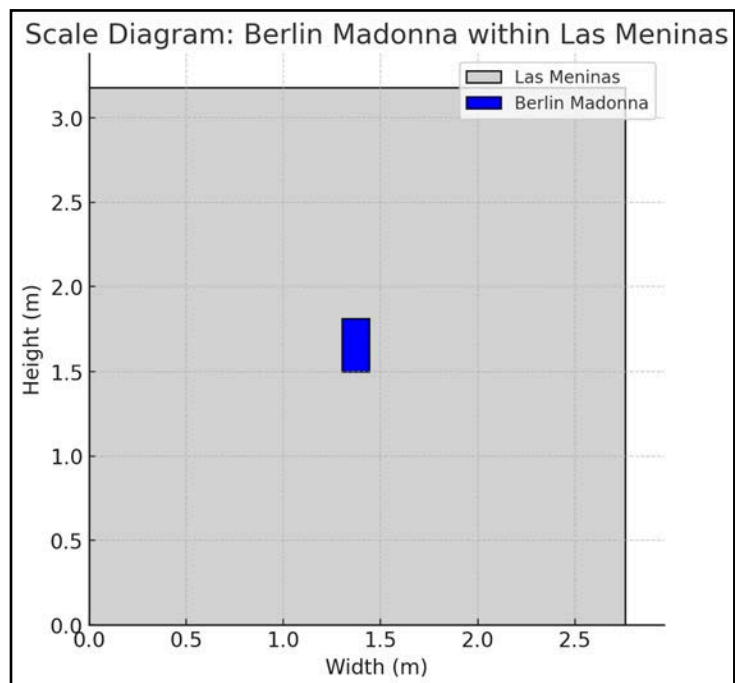


# The Virgin and the Infanta

## A Dialogic Reflection on Velázquez's *Las Meninas* and Van Eyck's *Madonna in a Church*

### Introduction

I hesitated before committing to writing about two paintings that have been so extensively studied. Much of what could be said about them has already been explored in countless ways. One has been the focus of lifetimes of study and writing; the other, only slightly less so. I'm referring to Velázquez's large oil painting *Las Meninas* and Jan van Eyck's small panel, *Madonna in a Church*, which I'll also refer to as the *Berlin Madonna*. Despite the extensive scholarship on these works and their creators, surprisingly little is known about the lives and personalities of either painter. Van Eyck was active from approximately 1432 to 1440,



primarily in Flanders, especially Bruges. Velázquez, born in Seville in 1599, became court painter to King Philip IV of Spain in 1623. *Las Meninas*, painted by Velázquez in 1656, 216 years after Van Eyck's panel, measures 318 cm × 276 cm, while the Berlin panel is much smaller at 31 cm × 14 cm. This size difference alone can obscure any obvious parallels between the two works. Honestly, were it not for chance, I likely would never have thought to compare them. I collect postcards of artworks that catch my

attention during museum visits, and I like to pin them to the wall in my study for continuous reference and reflection. In a recent move, I rearranged them. By coincidence, Velázquez's picture ended up directly above the *Berlin Madonna*. There they remained for weeks, until one

morning, for reasons I couldn't put my finger on at the time, I suddenly noticed a striking similarity between the vanishing points of both paintings, and the corresponding placement and poses of the Madonna and the Infanta, not only in relation to their respective compositions, but also, intriguingly, relative to each other. The more I examined the two works, the more an enthralling and enriching dialogic relationship between them seemed to surface.

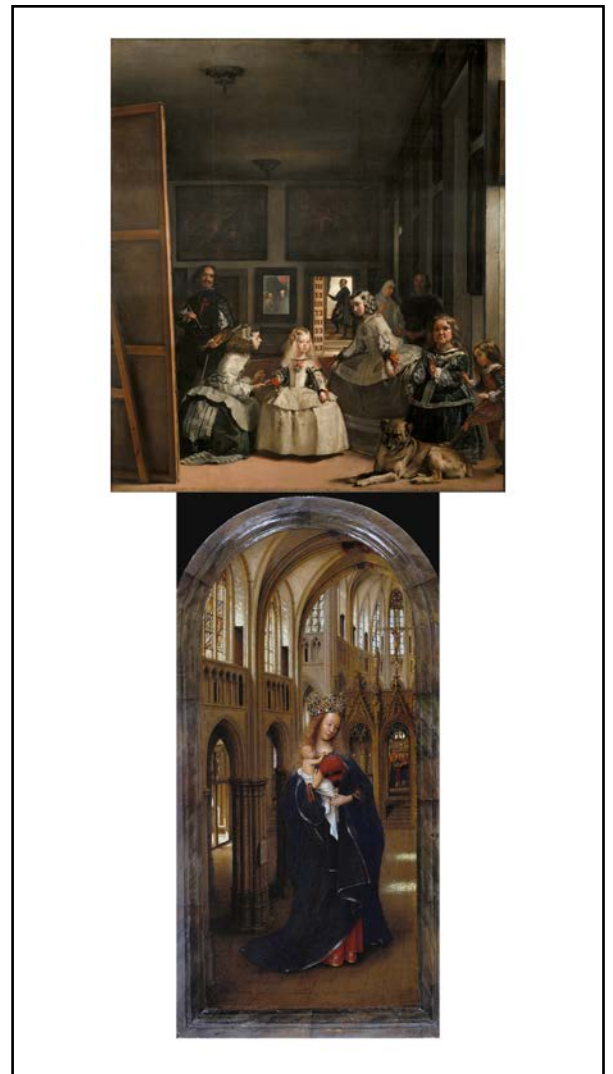
For example, I noticed similar uses of large spaces, architectural alignments, light, and carefully conceived and crafted elements to create a highly convincing sense of reality. The differences are equally significant. Beyond the obvious difference in scale, Van Eyck's small panel clearly serves a devotional function, whereas Velázquez's painting does not. This sacred-versus-secular contrast, however, underscores a shared engagement with the concept of timelessness. It reveals both painters' views on their societal roles and the transcendence of their mastery, even though their skills served very different artistic objectives. What follows is not a technical or historical analysis but a reflection on how the paintings' differences illuminate their shared qualities. Exploring this dialogic relationship reveals deeper insights into both works, with particular emphasis on Velázquez's painting. This essay is largely framed through a retrospective lens, considering Velázquez's perspective as it looks back at Van Eyck's work.

## Resonances

I believe that simply observing *Las Meninas* placed above the *Madonna in a Church* suggests a resonance. At first, any connection between them may be difficult to pinpoint or articulate, but, in fact, I aim to demonstrate multiple resonances. The first one, for me, emerges from the positioning of the Infanta and the Virgin with Child. I believe that they relate both to their respective spaces and to each other. But why would this be, given the apparent differences between these paintings? Furthermore, how does this resonance come about? What compositional elements allow it to exist? Here, I want to make one point absolutely clear: I do not believe Velázquez intended these images to be viewed in this way. My aim is not to uncover some hidden meaning that Velázquez cleverly embedded through the juxtaposition of these two works. Instead, I seek to explore what we, looking back, can learn about both paintings through this juxtaposition.

The second resonance is the use of small architectural spaces as vanishing points; in the case of *Las Meninas* located just behind the Infanta, slightly to her left (our right), and in the

Van Eyck panel behind and to the left of the Virgin (our right). In fact, these vanishing points are a set of elements, and as we shall see, they share an unexpected degree of similarity. The third resonance lies in the expansive spaces that serve as settings to these scenes. The Virgin and Child are set within a vast, cavernous church, while the Infanta and her company are in a large, grand palace room. Then, of course, is the light that fills both of these vast spaces. Although seemingly deployed for entirely different purposes, light acts as a protagonist in both paintings, playing a role that extends beyond mere narrative function, a hallmark of Baroque masters such as Velázquez, Rembrandt, and Caravaggio. One final and notable similarity is how both scenes convey an illusion of reality through a meticulously crafted, fictive precision. In the case of *Las Meninas*, the real life, snapshot-like moment was actually crafted as such while the very real looking church in Van Eyck's painting is a carefully put together ensemble. Let us examine each painting in greater detail to understand this point more clearly.



## The *Madonna in a Church*

As mentioned earlier, this brief essay does not aim to provide a comprehensive account of the historiography or technical analysis of either painting. For my purposes, it will suffice to follow Stephan Kemperdick, whose work in the catalog for the ill-fated 2020 exhibit *Van Eyck, An Optical Revolution* is likely the most concise and up-to-date published study on the *Berlin Madonna*. As he states unambiguously:

“Almost no other work of European painting captures the expansiveness and atmosphere of a church interior as convincingly as Jan van Eyck’s small *Madonna in a Church* [...] Despite the convincingly real appearance of this interior [...] we are not looking at the reproduction of an existing building.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, the interior must feel convincingly real; otherwise, the entire effect falls apart, despite, or perhaps because of, the deliberately oversized Madonna and Child. Let us now examine some of the details that demonstrate how this illusion of realism is achieved.



First, there is the overall structure of the cathedral. It not only makes architectural sense but, as Kemperdick observes, it appears identifiable within a specific time and place, combining elements from various real buildings that the painter must have carefully studied. In Kemperdick’s words: “The artist exhibits an extraordinary understanding of architectural forms, his imagined cathedral appearing meaningfully structured not only as a whole, but also in [its] details [...]”<sup>2</sup> These details are so precise that they communicate a complex dynamic between the Virgin and Child in the nave, the small statue of the Virgin and Child in the niche behind them, the images of the Annunciation and Coronation of Mary in the gables of the arch at the rear of the nave, the rood crucifixion, and the figures in the choir. This is an astonishingly intricate theological construction for any amount of space—let alone the 31 x 14 cm in which it unfolds! An

essential aspect of this small panel’s virtuosity lies in the fact that the entire space is a composite, assembled from different models to evoke and communicate a very specific devotional message. However, as we shall see, there is more to consider. For now, let us examine more closely the choir with the two figures (one of which is an angel), which plays a crucial role in the composition as a whole, functioning as an “eccentric vanishing point,” as

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<sup>1</sup> Stephan Kemperdick, “Jan van Eyck’s *Madonna in a Church* and Its Artistic Legacy,” in *Van Eyck: An Optical Revolution*, ed. Maximiliaan Martens, Jan Dumolyn, Till-Holger Borchert, and Johan de Smet (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020), pg. 261.

<sup>2</sup> Kemperdick, “Jan van Eyck’s *Madonna in a Church*,” 261. Kemperdick continues: “The picture is thus based on both a precise study of light effects and exact sketches of details of various buildings”.

Kemperdick so aptly describes it.<sup>3</sup> Alongside the horizontal perspective line established by the triforium in the upper third of the picture (on the left of the panel, which we will revisit towards the end), the choir with the figures beneath the nearly intersecting line of the rood adds a pivotal sense of depth to the image as a whole. Unlike the niche with the statue of the Virgin and Child to its left, the entrance to the choir allows the eye to perceive the full dimensions of the space that extends between the viewer and the window behind the figures. The light and color from this window perfectly accentuate the hues of the figures' wings and copes, ensuring that our gaze is naturally drawn there, completing the effect.

This vanishing point is a critical element of the painting, both for compositional and for devotional and theological reasons. Compositionally, removing the vanishing point—by replacing it, for instance, with another closed niche—would cause the eye to crash into a solid wall, diluting both the theological elements emphasized by the niche (addressed below) and the masterful design of the church. It would also disrupt the significance of the patches of light on the floor, which add an almost indescribable sense of sublimity, would have their meaning and purpose obliterated without the vanishing point. Furthermore, the vanishing point itself—containing a singing angel—adds the critical punchline to the painting. The singing angel suggests this isn't actually a man made building, and despite the sunlight, this is not taking place during the day. So where, and when, are they singing? Velázquez, interestingly, employs strikingly similar compositional techniques to evoke comparable questions. In *Las Meninas*, the vanishing point is an open door with a staircase (a similar staircase is part of the vanishing point in Van Eyck's picture), through which light pours into the back part of the room, adding a pivotal sense of depth to the scene. As in the *Madonna and Child*, without this deceptively simple compositional device, the viewer's gaze would collide with a dark, largely undefined wall at the back, altering the painting's entire dynamic.



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<sup>3</sup> Kemperdick, 270

## Las Meninas

As with the *Berlin Madonna*, the scholarship surrounding *Las Meninas* is extensive, and it would serve little purpose to review it in detail here. For convenience, we will follow Jonathan Brown. Although the painting appears to capture a real moment in time, it does not. As Brown states, “*Las Meninas* is purely a product of the painter’s imagination [...] a manipulated interpretation of the reality of life in the royal palace [...] a figment of imagination designed to demonstrate the painter’s unprecedented virtuosity and originality.”<sup>4</sup> It remains uncertain whether any of the individuals in the painting ever posed together—or even whether the depicted room actually existed. Most likely, they were pieced together in much the same way the architectural elements in Van Eyck’s Berlin panel were: Velázquez assembled his figures to create a naturalistic yet scripted scene, just as Van Eyck constructed a cathedral that appeared convincingly real. Despite their differing objectives, the virtuosity both artists employed to achieve these effects is strikingly similar. This shared mastery is a critical aspect of the resonance between the two paintings.

At the center of the picture stands the Infanta Margaret Theresa, flanked by two attendants or *meninas*. To her left (our right) is Doña Isabel de Velasco, and to her right is Doña María Agustina Sarmiento de Sotomayor. The man standing at the top of the stairs in the open doorway is Don José Nieto Velázquez (unrelated to the artist), the queen’s chamberlain. To the left of Margaret Theresa and Doña Isabel are a mastiff, Nicolás Pertusato (who is playfully nudging the dog with his foot), and the dwarf Mari Bárbola. Slightly obscured in the shadows between Doña Isabel and Don José are Doña Marcela de Ulloa and an unidentified man. The figure standing in front of the large canvas is, of course, the painter himself, Diego de Velázquez.<sup>5</sup> Excluding the figures reflected in the mirror, this makes for a total of nine individuals carefully positioned to create the painting’s snapshot-like effect.

Without much effort, when looking at the painting, it is relatively straightforward to perceive an unusual, somewhat unsettling effect created by the fact that six of the nine people

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Brown, “Velázquez: Master and Masterpieces”, April 30, 2014, video, 1:22:34, The Frick Collection, [https://www.frick.org/interact/jonathan\\_brown\\_vel%C3%A1zquez\\_master\\_masterpieces](https://www.frick.org/interact/jonathan_brown_vel%C3%A1zquez_master_masterpieces), 38:52

<sup>5</sup> A very early iteration of this essay was a response of sorts to John Searl’s article, “*Las Meninas*” and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation, from which I used the list of people in the painting though it is in the public domain. See John R. Searle, “*Las Meninas* and the Paradoxes of Pictorial Representation,” *Critical Inquiry* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1980): 477–488, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448060>.



depicted in the scene are looking directly at us, the viewer. It is not without precedent for figures in a painting to engage the viewer in this way; such instances are common. What makes the scene unsettling is the particular *manner* in which they do so in this scene. For starters, who is the painter painting? Is it us? Volumes have been written about every aspect of this painting, including this question. To address all the interpretations and theories would risk digressing to the point of no return.

In my opinion, which is by no means novel, the genius of Velázquez's masterpiece lies in placing the viewer at the center of the painted subjects' attention. This would seem to imply that the subject of the painting is, in fact, us, the viewer. Imagine Velázquez saying to the Infanta: "If you look straight ahead, you will be looking into the eyes of thousands of people for hundreds of years to come." The vanishing point captures the moment José Nieto de Velázquez pauses at the entrance, either on his way out or on his way in. Is he coming or going? We cannot be sure. This ambiguity helps deliver the painting's punchline: in which time does this moment occur? His time, ours, or both simultaneously? In essence, the moment exists outside of time altogether. The instant you meet the Infanta's gaze and feel her looking back at you, a kind of temporal feedback loop is created. Following this logic, it seems as if what Velázquez is truly painting is the viewer's portrait. Knowing, however, that his painting would be seen by countless viewers over the centuries, the scene isn't happening in the now of the figures depicted on the canvas. It's happening in the now of the viewer, whoever and whenever that may be. The painting, then, becomes a "continuous now," a constant, eternal present. In this sense, the real subject is time itself—time as an eternal now. And this brings us back to the *Berlin Madonna*.

## Light

There is no way to fully address Van Eyck's panel without devoting attention to its use of light. At first glance, it might seem that the depiction of light merely adheres to the realism so evidently sought in the artist's virtuosity. Indeed, capturing how sunlight, at a particular time of day, might flood this imagined church is undoubtedly part of what Van Eyck aims to achieve.<sup>6</sup> The virtuosity on display is extraordinary, as evidenced by the two much-celebrated "patches of sunlight on the floor of the nave [...] boldly sliced by the edge of the picture [...]" a

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<sup>6</sup> However, as Kemperdick points out, Panofsky interpreted the light as supernatural, but its realistic depiction complicates this view; the left-side lighting, a recurring feature in Van Eyck's work, may serve a compositional rather than symbolic purpose. See Kemperdick, "Jan van Eyck's Madonna in a Church," 266.

superlative, eye-catching demonstration of artistry [...]”<sup>7</sup> In fact, the use of light in this piece is so masterful that one could reasonably argue it is the true subject of the painting. And, in my opinion (by no means novel), this is true to some extent.

In Van Eyck’s masterpiece, light does not serve as direct a narrative function as it does in *Las Meninas*, where it guides the viewer’s eye from one figure to another or across various focal points of the composition. Instead, light fills the space, enveloping everything and giving it meaning, largely by suggesting what would be lost in its absence. Its significance is closely tied to the spatial dynamic mentioned earlier. Spatially, the focal point is the Virgin and Child. By placing the niche in the rood screen behind them, with its statue of the same scene, Van Eyck creates a complex theological and artistic interplay, a kind of loop. Theologically, this arrangement seems to suggest that the scene in the foreground is an incarnation of the scene in the background. As Kemperdick describes it:

“We might interpret the relationship of the large, ‘living’ Madonna to her representation as a stone figure in the background as signifying that the sculpture has come to life, as it were, and has appeared before the viewer as a touching young mother with her fragile-seeming child. The Virgin thus illustrates the goal of pious meditation: the visualization of the holy figures and events that worshippers wanted to see in living form before them.”<sup>8</sup>

It seems, as others have observed, that in the *Berlin Madonna*, Van Eyck represents the achievement of incarnation through light. The cathedral itself is empty, save for the two figures in the choir. These are not everyday people in an everyday church witnessing the incarnation of the Madonna and Child as a miracle; the angel forces the viewer to instinctively perceive this place as being somehow beyond Earth. I would like to suggest that this small devotional painting is a carefully crafted metaphor for incarnation, where light plays the central role as the agent that brings forth everything. In the painting, light is the force of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Kemperdick, 265



incarnation; this light is God.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, what would this picture be without light? What would the *world* be without light? Furthermore, it seems that Van Eyck, by using light as a metaphor for God in the act of incarnation, simultaneously exalts the artistic skills and techniques necessary to bring abstract devotional images and ideas to life. In this way, painting, when skillfully applied, becomes an act of incarnation itself.

In *Las Meninas*, light is no less significant and operates in remarkably similar ways. What would this snapshot-like scene be without light? Nothing. One only needs to look at Picasso's variations to grasp this. The Meninas room in the Picasso Museum in Barcelona vividly demonstrates the key ingredient of Velázquez's masterpiece. Picasso's works show exactly what happens when you strip it away—the scene becomes flat. The composition of the work clearly depends on how light guides the viewer's eye. Streaming in from the right side of the canvas, it strikes the Infanta directly, highlighting her central role, and from there it distributes layers of depth, importance, and mystery. In my view, Velázquez created a scene that appears to unfold on a specific day while simultaneously depending on the precise moment it is viewed, thus establishing a temporal feedback loop. This effect relies entirely on how he crafted light to function within the painting. The dual sources of light—from the window on the right and the open doorway in the rear—are essential for this loop to manifest. Remove either one, and the entire effect collapses. Moreover, José Nieto Velázquez standing in the doorway is arguably the single most crucial element for both the compositional and conceptual dynamics of the picture, analogous to the choir figures in the *Berlin Madonna*. Imagine the scene exactly as it is, but without José Nieto Velázquez in the doorway. An empty, open doorway? A closed-off wall?

## The Vanishing Points as architectural “sets”

As mentioned above, I don't believe the presence of José Nieto Velázquez in the doorway is due to an aesthetic whim or a political calculation. It plays a fundamentally critical

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<sup>9</sup> “Light was invariably associated with the divine and was familiar to contemporaries from countless images as an emanation of God, even if it had previously only been represented in the symbolic form of golden rays. Just as light penetrates glass without breaking it, so — according to a widespread medieval analogy — Mary's virginity remained intact at Christ's conception and birth.” Kemperdick, *Ibid* and Hanley, *Ibid*. Also, for the role of light in creation in the biblical sense, see Genesis 1:3. In the bible, the creation of light is in fact the second stated thing that God creates, only after the heavens and the Earth.

role, both compositionally and conceptually. Interestingly, however, the architectural space comprising the vanishing point is not solely defined by the doorway. To a large extent, it forms a set with the mirror to the left. Unlike the paintings on the adjacent walls, the mirror is conspicuously bright and prominent. In fact, it acts as a source of light (not unlike the candles in the niche of the panel by Van Eyck) though not nearly as much as the doorway, but a source nonetheless. Without the open doorway to its right, the mirror would seem odd and inexplicably unnecessary, disrupting the image's balance. Conversely, the open doorway without the mirror would allow the picture to retain much of its compositional and conceptual harmony but would create a direct, almost too linear, relationship between the viewer, the Infanta, and José Nieto Velázquez. In this case, the viewer's gaze would crash into the near-solid darkness of the background, save for the light of the doorway. The mirror, therefore, serves as a necessary counterbalance and works in conjunction with the doorway as a set. Remarkably, in the *Berlin Madonna*, we find a very similar set.

Broadly speaking, Van Eyck's panel contains six layers of depth. The first is the viewer; the second, the incarnate Virgin and Child; the third, the nave, accentuated by the two patches of sunlight on the floor; the fourth, the niche in the rood screen; the fifth, the interior of the choir with the two figures; and the sixth, the light from the candles and the rear window behind them. As in *Las Meninas*, the figures within the vanishing point space are not arbitrary. Compositionally, the colors of the copes and wings echo and harmonize with those of the Virgin, providing continuity and balance throughout the image while guiding the viewer's eye along the six layers of depth. Remove the figures or the light in the choir, and the depth and dynamics begin to unravel. More drastically, close the choir entrance and replace it with a sealed niche, like the one adjacent to it, and the result would be the same as in *Las Meninas*: the viewer's gaze crashes into darkness. Interestingly, in both paintings, it is not merely an open door that defines the vanishing point but a staircase leading to an open door. Furthermore, as in *Las Meninas*, the open door in the *Berlin Madonna* is paired with an element to its left that serves both as a source of light (the candles) and as a conceptual focal point, contributing to the conceptual loop-like, projective dynamics present in both works.

In essence, the vanishing points in these paintings are composites made up of multiple elements that, as sets, play a decisive role in fulfilling the artistic objectives of the painters. In *both* cases, the vanishing point sets are composed of stairs (1), open doorways (2), figures in the open doorways (3), light emanating from the doorways (4), darker, closed-off elements to the left of the doorways (5 - containing their own sources of light - 6), and within these

elements, characters of great significance to the paintings' artistic intentions (7). By my count, that's seven significant parallels that make up the main vanishing point sets in both paintings. Simply put, this is an intriguing degree of coincidence.



## Contrasting Artistic Visions yet Similar Artistic Objectives

The design of both compositions points to similar artistic objectives regarding time—or, more specifically, timelessness. In Van Eyck's painting, its Marian devotional intention relies heavily on the enveloping light that glows through the windows and bathes the floor. This light creates a profound sense of stillness and serenity, where nothing, not even time itself, seems to move. In *Las Meninas*, the light behaves almost like the flash of a camera, seemingly arresting what had been in motion just moments before. The pose of every figure, particularly José Nieto Velázquez, appears frozen in mid-air, perfectly still. Yet it feels as though the viewer is witnessing this stillness as it unfolds in real time.

Both paintings draw the viewer into their respective scenes through the complex dynamics we have explored. The longer one observes, the deeper one seems to enter. For a devotional piece like Van Eyck's, this immersive quality is essential, encouraging the deep contemplation the work is intended to inspire. For Velázquez's painting, the reason is less clear, as it does not belong to a specific genre or tradition. Nevertheless, the painting's sense of eternity and transcendence is undeniable. It is in this evocation of transcendence that both

artists and their works converge, employing similar techniques and compositional strategies executed with breathtaking, time-stopping virtuosity. Jonathan Brown's thesis on *Las Meninas*, which we referenced earlier, is worth recalling here:

"[...] *Las Meninas* is purely a product of the painter's imagination [...] a manipulated interpretation of the reality of life in the royal palace [...] a figment of imagination designed to demonstrate the painter's unprecedented virtuosity and originality..."<sup>10</sup>

Van Eyck likely had similar intentions with his small panel, despite its overtly devotional role. As Kemperdick notes:

"In the *Madonna in a Church*, which still exerts a magical effect upon the viewer today, the main figure and the church interior mutually enhance each other: precisely because the interior seems so real, so, too, does the Virgin. But the more our eye is drawn to the myriad details of the interior, the more conscious we become of the painter's mastery [...] The painting thus seems to invite two ways of looking: one a devout meditation upon the Virgin and Child, the other a close-up study of details and breath-taking effects, to a certain extent the approach of the connoisseur admiring the work of the great artist."<sup>11</sup>

Such extraordinary virtuosity in works that *evoke transcendence* suggests that the painters attributed the *power of transcendence* to their skill and their medium. This notion, in turn, heightens the timeless aspect of the works, adding an additional layer of shared meaning. For Velázquez, the artist seems to assert through the temporal feedback loop of *Las Meninas*: "Through this painting, I am here, now—my now and your now as the viewer—and therefore, we both exist now." For Van Eyck, the artist seems to proclaim: "Through this painting, she is before you now, and you are seeing her now, as I have painted her; this now is forever." In essence, both painters use their works to demonstrate the transcendent powers of their medium in their hands.

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Brown, *Ibid*

<sup>11</sup> Kemperdick, 266

## Speculative Conclusion

Did Velázquez ever see Van Eyck's small panel? If so, was he influenced by it when painting *Las Meninas*? For now, there is no way of knowing. However, we do know he had access to at least one Van Eyck masterpiece: the famous *Arnolfini Portrait*, which was part of the royal collection during his tenure as court painter and later as chief curator. While there is no direct evidence that Velázquez studied it, it would be entirely unreasonable to assume he didn't. In fact, it is widely accepted in scholarship that *Las Meninas* was influenced by the *Arnolfini Portrait*, particularly through the use of the mirror.

I'd like to suggest that the analysis offered throughout this essay makes a strong case for extending Velázquez's admiration for Van Eyck beyond the *Arnolfini Portrait*. Given his role as chief curator for a king who prided himself on being a connoisseur, it seems plausible that Velázquez would have sought to acquire other works by the Bruges master for the royal collection. Notably, copies of Van Eyck's painting are documented to have circulated in Italy during the period when Velázquez was there on official business. While we lack definitive knowledge of the original panel's whereabouts at that time, it is conceivable that he and the *Berlin Madonna* crossed paths. After all, few people would have had more interest, prestige, and means to secure a viewing than Velázquez.

## Postscript

As I was completing the first draft of this essay, I noticed another resonance: a shared architectural design that, while subtle, plays a relevant role in unifying the other shared elements between the two paintings. This design may also help explain my initial belief that the placement of the Infanta and the Virgin relates to each other and their respective environments.

In the *Berlin Madonna*, the church's architecture features a prominent straight line—the horizontal perspective line of the triforium mentioned earlier—which leads directly to the center of the composition, where the Madonna's head is positioned. From this central point, another near-intersecting line separates the rood screen and choir from the crucifixion group, organizing the space with clear visual logic. These lines establish the painting's spatial coherence; without them, neither the Madonna's placement nor the vanishing point would hold their visual weight. Interestingly, *Las Meninas* employs a similar system of intersecting lines to structure its space, though in this case, they are placed on the opposite side. To the

left of the Infanta (on our right), the line marking the intersection of the ceiling and wall intersects with the ceiling line of the rear wall, leading to and framing the vanishing point at the back of the room. As in the *Berlin Madonna*, this architectural design is vital for the scene to maintain its visual believability. It is these sets of similar lines, creating comparable spatial frames, that I believe led me to sense that initial, indescribable dialogic resonance.