

## HABSBURGS & BOURBONS CONNOISSEURS' MADRID & TOLEDO

SUNDAY 14 – SATURDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2021 (7 DAYS)

LECTURERS: TOM DUNCAN & MAURICIO MACARRÓN

£2835

- Visit focuses on one of the greatest collections of paintings ever formed
- Three guided early morning visits to the Prado, all timed to begin before the museum opens to the public
- Two of the most important Royal Palaces also included, the Escorial & Aranjuez
- Day spent in Toledo
- Comfortable city centre 5\* hotel, close to the Prado & the Thyssen Museums
- Ample free time for private explorations



Velázquez, detail from *Las Meninas*

### OVERVIEW

Madrid came to prominence in the sixteenth century when Spain emerged as a nation under its Habsburg king, Phillip II, son of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V (who in Spain was known as King Charles I). Toledo has a much longer history than Madrid: Romans, Visigoths (who made it their capital), Moors, Jews and Christians have all left their mark. Visually it sits strikingly atop its craggy outpost, memorably so in the paintings of El Greco.

The Habsburgs ruled Spain and its many dominions until the male line of this branch of the family died out in 1700 when Charles II left Spain to his French kinsman, Philip of Anjou. This inheritance was challenged by the rest of Europe, leading to the War of the Spanish Succession. Philip's claim prevailed, thus initiating several centuries of Bourbon rule, which continues today under the Bourbon-Parma family.

Over four centuries these two dynasties accumulated one of the finest collections of works of art in Europe, particularly rich in paintings and tapestries, the two 'must have' art forms for Europe's royal elite. These were housed in a series of palaces in Madrid and the surrounding countryside. Though not all of these royal dwellings have survived, we shall visit the most important, supported by a series of related collections.

Phillip II inherited many works of art from collections formed by the various families whose blood flowed through his veins: Isabelle of Castile and her husband, Ferdinand of Aragón; the Dukes of Burgundy; and the Habsburg Archdukes of Austria and Holy Roman Emperors. When eventually inherited by Phillip, they provided an extraordinary foundation on which he and his successors built. Our visit will trace the formation of the Spanish Royal Collections, much of which is now in Madrid's fabled Prado Museum, which we shall visit on three mornings *before* it opens to the public, a wonderful opportunity to see remarkable paintings at close quarters.

Like his father, the Emperor Charles, Phillip was a major patron of Titian and consequently the Prado contains more masterpieces by the Venetian genius than any other collection. He also collected Flemish paintings on a large scale, ranging from Rogier van der Weyden to Bosch – indeed it is here that you will find the finest collection of Bosch's surviving works. Later generations were no less acquisitive, particularly Philip IV, for whom Velázquez created so many memorable images such as *Las Meninas*, (the Maids of Honour). Philip IV was also lucky as he was able to acquire wonderful paintings from the collections of England's Charles I and the Duke of Buckingham, dispersed as a consequence of the English Civil War. Finally, from the later Bourbon period we shall see the greatest group of paintings by Goya in the world.

Beyond the Prado there are remarkable royal palaces which we shall visit such as El Escorial and the delightful eighteenth century Palacio de Aranjuez. Other visits, including the Thyssen Collection, will also feature. Finally, we have been fortunate to secure access to the finest private art collection in Spain, that of the Dukes of Alba.

Led by Tom Duncan, with highly regarded local art historian, Mauricio Macarrón, we shall be based at the comfortable **5\* Hotel Villa Real**, a short walk from the Prado and many other important museums. The pace of this visit will allow time to explore the sites included and there will also be time set aside for private discoveries.

## ITINERARY OUTLINE

**Day 1:** Sunday 14 February – We fly from London Heathrow on British Airways arriving in Madrid late afternoon. We transfer to our city centre hotel, the **5\* Hotel Villa Real**, for six nights. Later that evening dinner will be in our hotel - wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

**Day 2:** Monday 15 February – We drive out to **Toledo** where this morning we have an introductory walking tour of the city. Literally stuffed full of historic buildings, this will necessarily have to be highly selective. However, we plan to concentrate on two themes - the wonderful tradition of medieval and later church buildings and the life and work of the renowned painter, El Greco. We break for a group lunch after which we continue our explorations before returning to Madrid and a free evening.

**Day 3:** Tuesday 16 February – This morning we walk the short distance to the **Prado Museum** for the first of three visits, entering each day at 9.00 am before it opens to the public. The bulk of the many masterpieces from the Spanish Royal Collection are housed in this wonderful museum and this first visit will be devoted to the Italian and Flemish pictures from the early Renaissance period up to the late sixteenth century. From Italy there are paintings by Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Raphael and their contemporaries but the dominant theme is Venetian art; above all the most important group of works by Titian housed in a single gallery in the world. From Flanders, they range from the profoundly moving religious works of Rogier van der Weyden to the highly eccentric visions of Hieronymus Bosch. After some free time for lunch in the museum (not included), we drive out of Madrid to visit Phillip II's great palace-monastery of **El Escorial**, the most important intact royal palace in Spain. Planned to resemble in plan the grid upon which its patron saint, St Lawrence, was martyred, behind its austere façades lie a wealth of fine spaces full of great works of art. We return to Madrid and the evening will be free.

**Day 4:** Wednesday 17 February – We return to the **Prado** and this morning we concentrate on the works chosen from the later Italian, Flemish and Spanish paintings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Several artists stand out – above all Rubens and Velázquez and we shall see their most important masterpieces. After some free time for lunch in the museum (not included), the afternoon will be devoted to a visit to the nearby **Thyssen Collection**, one of the greatest art collection formed in the twentieth century - indeed outshining the Prado in some areas. We return to our hotel and the evening will be free.

**Day 5:** Thursday 18 February – Our third morning visit to the **Prado** will be devoted to the eighteenth and later centuries, especially the work of Goya, one of the greatest of European painters of the Romantic period. This will help prepare us when after lunch in the museum (not included) we have an early afternoon visit to the **Museo Sorolla**, devoted to the work of the man described as 'the painter of light', which was once his family home. We return to our hotel and the rest of the afternoon and evening will be free.

**Day 6:** Friday 19 February – After breakfast we visit privately the **Palacio de Liria**, the Madrid home of the Dukes of Alba. The most titled family in Spain, the collections reflect their varied history as patrons and collectors. We continue to the **Reina Sofía Museum** with its renowned collection of modern paintings, including Picasso's *Guernica*. The rest of the afternoon will be free for independent exploration and later we have our second group dinner in a local restaurant.

**Day 7:** Saturday 20 February – On our last morning we drive out of Madrid to the south to visit the **Royal Palace of Aranjuez**. This delightful palace and its surrounding gardens were designed to recreate a mini-Versailles for the recently arrived Bourbon dynasty. It has a lovely combination of baroque and rococo interiors and the gardens are a delight. After a group lunch we depart for the airport and our flight to London Heathrow.

## PRACTICALITIES

**Price** £2835    **Without Flights** £2695    **Deposit** £425    **Single Supplement** £395 (Double for Sole Use)

**Hotels** 6 nights at the 5\* Hotel Villa Real, Madrid

**Flights** British Airways

Outward: **BA460** Departs London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1255**, arrives Madrid **1615**

Return: **BA461** Departs Madrid **1745**, arrives London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1905**

**Price includes** 2 dinners & 2 lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, City Tax, entry fees & gratuities, the services of Tom Duncan, Mauricio Macarrón and our local tour manager David Sketchley.

**Not included** Travel to/from Heathrow, 4 dinners & 4 lunches



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