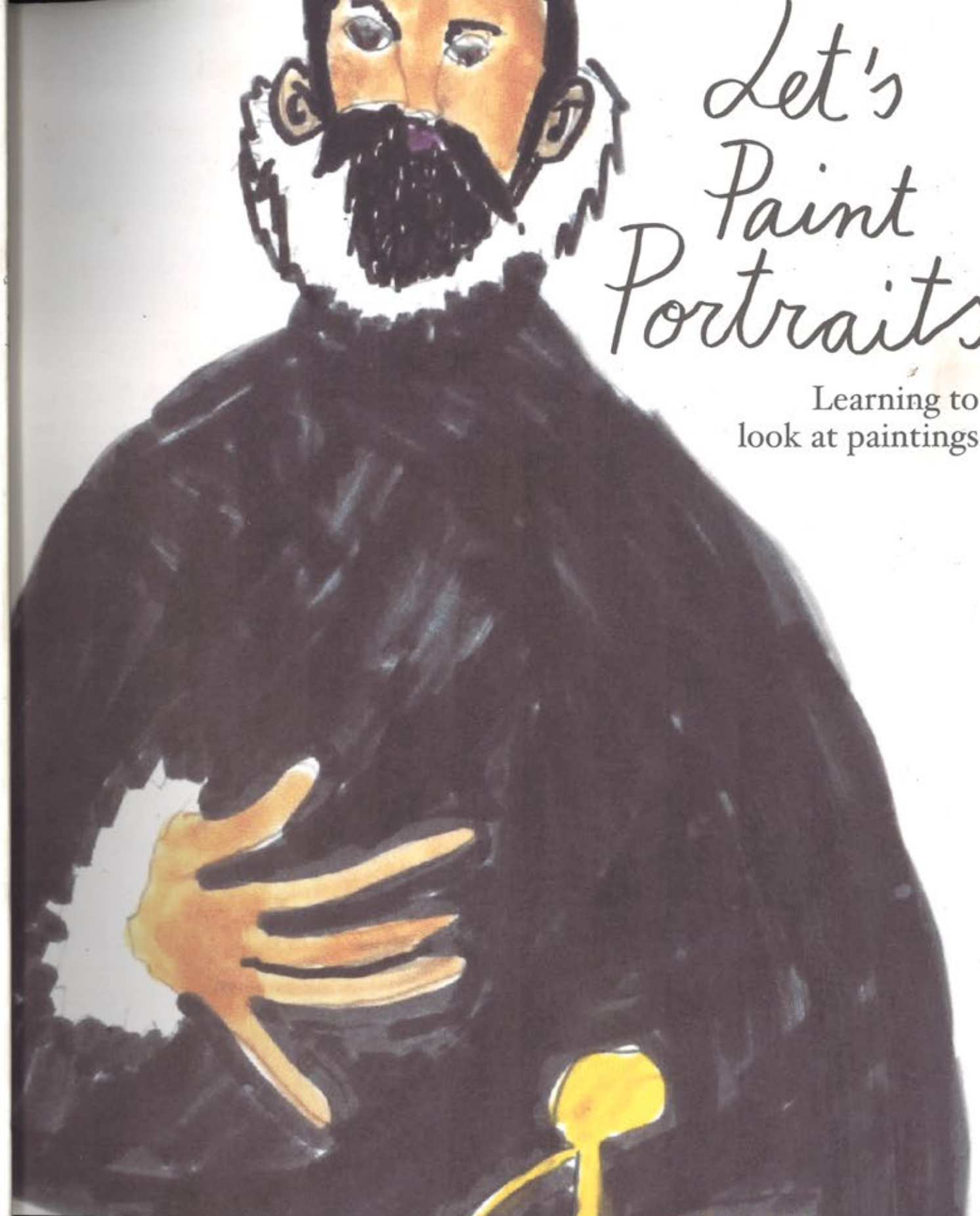


Let's Paint Portraits

Learning to
look at paintings



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The history of painting is filled with portraits. This may be because for many years painting and making a portrait were one and the same. The Ancient Greeks thought that art was first invented when a potter's daughter made a portrait of her beloved on the wall by drawing round the shadow of his face. The young man was about to travel abroad, so by copying him she could keep him near to her.

Portraits act as reminders of how someone looks, and also mean that we can see how someone's appearance changes over time. Creating something so difficult has brought fame to many artists, who seem to have almost magical powers. Before the invention of photography only painters and sculptures could create portraits, generally depicting the rich and famous.

Portrait of an Infanta

At the end of the fifteenth century, the king and queen of Spain, known as the Catholic Kings, commissioned a portrait of their daughter Catherine from the painter Juan de Flandes. The artist painted her on a small panel which could be easily carried around and shown to people such as her future husband, Henry VIII of England.

Although Catherine was a princess the artist does not paint her as a remote, powerful figure, but with a sense of warmth and closeness, paying great attention to details such as the folds in the white material, the delicate lace, the gold embroidery, her hair and hair ribbons. He used the recently-invented technique of oil paint to full advantage in the plump rosy cheeks. Oil paint allowed artists to paint rich, glowing, transparent layers of colour. All the outlines are very well drawn, reminding us that painted portraits were sometimes based on drawings. This meant that the model did not have to sit for so long and get tired. The young girl is painted face-on but her eyes are not looking at us, and this portrait reveals more about her outside appearance than what she was like as a person. Some of the objects also have a symbolic meaning, such as the rose.



Portrait of the Infanta Catherine of Aragon (?)
Ca. 1496. Juan de Flandes
Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum



Teresa Brock



The Infantas Isabel Clara Eugenia and Catalina Micaela
1575. Alonso Sánchez Coello
Prado Museum

The Infantas Isabel Clara Eugenia and Catalina Micaela

Almost one hundred years later, Alonso Sánchez Coello painted Clara Eugenia and Catalina Micaela, the daughters of king Philip II. His intention was to make it clear that these

young girls are princesses. The sisters are depicted as almost identical, posed stiffly side by side looking more like adults. Again the artist is not interested in their characters but rather



Lucía Alonso

in depicting the two royal children of a powerful monarch. For this reason he placed more emphasis on the richness of the clothes and objects such as the pearls in their hair,

the pearl necklaces and the embroidery on the clothes rather than the girls' gestures or expressions.

Gentleman with his Hand on his Chest



Gentleman with his Hand on his Chest
Ca. 1578-1580. El Greco
Prado Museum

El Greco's portrait of a *Gentleman with his Hand on his Chest* also emphasises the model's hand, as we saw in the portrait of the young Catherine. However, El Greco's work is totally different: it really is amazing how an artist can paint the same

subject in so many ways! The brushstrokes are extremely free and give the impression of having been rapidly painted. Through them, El Greco creates numerous different tones of black in the clothes, the hair, the beard and the eyes. All these contrast with the white of the collar and cuffs, which only looks like lace if we stand back, as El Greco painted it more like foam.

In his portraits El Greco did not aim to make perfect copies of his models' clothes and bodies, and in this painting what we cannot see is also extremely important. Although we do not know this gentleman's name, the artist helps us to get to know him, emphasising elements in the painting that bring out his character. Firstly the head, which is the location of our thoughts, then the hand, which we use to carry them out. Through the intelligent, confident gaze and the presence of just one hand, El Greco creates a portrait of one of the highly educated noblemen whom he knew in Toledo. This famous portrait is considered a perfect evocation of the typical Spanish aristocrat. Other clues to his noble status are more hidden, such as the medallion just visible under his jacket or the sword in the corner.



Teresa Brock

Saint Elizabeth of Portugal

In Zurbarán's portrait of Saint Elizabeth of Portugal we also need to look very closely to see that the shiny object over her head is the halo normally worn by saints in paintings. Saint Elizabeth was a 13th-century queen who gave everything she owned to the poor, even though her husband forbade it. One day he nearly caught her, but when he asked her what she was hiding under her clothes a miracle took place and the gifts for the poor turned into roses!

Zurbarán painted his idea of how Saint Elizabeth would have looked, but she is not a complete invention as he used a woman from his native Seville as a model, dressed in 17th-century clothing. He thought that women would find it easier to imitate the saint's good deeds if they saw her painted as someone they could identify with. Portraits can act as examples, and here Zurbarán paints Saint Elizabeth as if she were walking along and had stopped for a moment to look at us. Zurbarán painted other saints like this one, to be hung on the walls of churches as if in a procession. This painting would have been hung in such a way, and the background is therefore plain and empty while the strongest light falls on the costumes.



Saint Elizabeth of Portugal
Ca. 1635. Francisco de Zurbarán. Prado Museum



M^a Eugenia Albi

Prince Baltasar Carlos in Hunting Dress

Over the course of his life, Diego Velázquez painted various portraits of Prince Baltasar Carlos, son of Philip IV and Isabel of Bourbon. Here we see the prince aged six. Baltasar was heir to the throne and was much loved as he was the first male child to be born after four girls. He is dressed here as a hunter with his dogs at his side, holding a weapon known as an arquebus. Hunting was not just one of the royal family's favourite pastimes but also formed part of a prince's education. Young princes learned to handle arms in preparation for their role as the leaders of armies. Baltasar Carlos never became king as he died very young, but we see him here as he came to be remembered: the young heir with rosy cheeks and high forehead, acquiring the special education of a prince.

Velázquez portrayed the prince in a unique way, demonstrating his masterly powers as an artist. He painted one of the dogs, the mastiff, with thick, heavy strokes to convey the idea of his size and also the fact that he is asleep, while the other one, the grey-hound on the right, is painted lightly to suggest a tense, alert quality. We only see a small amount of this dog, which has actually been cut off, as the painting was originally wider than

it is now. Velázquez also took advantage of the fact that he was painting the small figure of a child, which left him considerable empty space in the rest of this large canvas in which to depict the outdoors, creating a "portrait" of nature with trees, bushes and mountains. He also conveys the sense of air and the clouds. This is not an invented landscape but a real one as it depicts the area known as El Pardo near Madrid. This was the location of the so-called La Parada Tower, a hunting pavilion in which this painting and other portraits of the royal family were hung.

Painting figures standing outdoors is not easy and Velázquez knew that he had to give them volume so they did not come out looking flat. He also had to stand them firmly on the ground, mix areas of light and shadow and calculate their size carefully in relation to the other objects around them. In this painting, for example, the oak tree which protects the prince also helps to give us an idea of his height in comparison to the landscape background.



Prince Baltasar Carlos in Hunting Dress
1635-1636. Diego Velázquez. Prado Museum



Lucía Alonso

Self-portrait in the Artist's Studio

Artists' portraits of themselves are known as self-portraits. Despite its small size, in this painting Luis Paret has depicted himself in his studio surrounded by the objects which he liked to have at hand when he was working. By looking carefully among this confusion we can work out who he was and what he was like. The palette with the colours on it indicate that this artist is a painter; the wide-brimmed hat shows that he was an elegant, refined man who followed the fashion of the day. Other details point to his wide-ranging interests: the sculptures, for example, show that he was interested in antique art, while the books, folders and maps indicate an artist who travelled and studied.

Although he is shown here taking a break, Paret has included behind him one of the paintings that he was working on. It is practically finished and depicts cliffs, a rough sea and a boat that seems to be in trouble. If the painting were not round and resting on an easel we might think it a view through the window. Paret certainly was a clever artist: by looking at his self-portrait we actually end up seeing another of his paintings!



Self-portrait in the Artist's Studio
Ca. 1786. Luis Paret
Prado Museum



Teresa Brock



The Family of Charles IV, 1800-1801. Francisco de Goya. Prado Museum

The Family of Charles IV

Goya's painting *The Family of Charles IV* reflects the power of the Spanish monarchy through the uniforms, medals and jewels, also suggesting the idea of guaranteed succession to the throne. Each member of the family poses in their appropriate position, with Queen Maria Luisa in the centre and

the King slightly in front. The monarch stands in line with the heir to the throne, Prince Fernando, on the left, dressed in blue and more strongly lit. However, the painting is not totally solemn and also functions as a record of a modern royal family, who hold their children by the hand or carry them.



Lucía Alonso

Goya's approach is also modern and sincere. We can identify each realistically painted figure, with their pointed noses and beauty spots. They stand separately but are linked together by the positions of the arms. Goya has painted them close to the viewer rather than further back in the room. The

artist is the only figure who stands behind, recording himself for posterity as royal painter in the same way as Velázquez (one of Goya's favourite painters) in the painting known as *Las Meninas*, but here in shadow.

Portrait of the Countess of Vilches

By the time the Countess of Vilches asked Federico de Madrazo to paint her in the mid-19th century, photography had been invented and it was relatively easy to obtain exact images of people. Madrazo knew this so here he aimed to achieve an effect not possible in a photograph. Unlike photographs at that period, paintings could be very large and use numerous colours. Portraits of this type were used to decorate drawing rooms in wealthy houses. They cost a great deal and were a sign of prosperity and nobility, in the same way as rich upholstery on armchairs, costly dressmaking materials just arrived from Paris, feather fans and jewels.

In addition, at that period, photographs did not tend to be flattering as the sitter had to stay very still for a very long time before the photographer could take the shot. In contrast, the artist here shows how a painting can emphasise the charms of a beautiful woman. The Countess looks at the artist in a tranquil, confiding way with a knowing smile. Madrazo paints her as a healthy, intelligent and flirtatious woman. She seems to enjoy the fact that we are looking at her, and we in turn are equally captivated by her charming smile.



Portrait of the Countess of Vilches
1853. Federico de Madrazo
Prado Museum



Teresa Brock

Choose and Paint

other paintings

Queen Mariana of Austria, ca. 1652-1653. Diego Velázquez. Prado Museum

The Duke of Pastrana, ca. 1666. Juan Carreño de Miranda. Prado Museum

Self-portrait, 1815. Francisco de Goya. Prado Museum

The Countess of Santovenia, ca. 1872. Eduardo Rosales. Prado Museum



