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PRESS RELEASE

Kulturforum, Gemäldegalerie

Matthäikirchplatz, 10785 Berlin

Tue, Wed, Fri 10 am–6 pm, Thu 10 am–8 pm, Sat + Sun 11 am–6 pm

El Siglo de Oro. The Age of Velázquez

1 July – 30 October 2016

An exhibition by the Gemäldegalerie – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin in cooperation with Kunsthalle München

The exhibition falls under the joint patronage of His Majesty Felipe VI, the King of Spain and Federal President Joachim Gauck.

The *Siglo de Oro* – the Golden Age of Spanish art – remains one of the most important chapters in European cultural history. Prominent painters of the era such as Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Diego Velázquez and Francisco de Zurbarán belong to the ranks of the greatest masters of art history just as much as do the sculptors Gregorio Fernández, Pedro de Mena and Juan Martínez Montañés.

This summer, for the first time, 17th-century painting and sculpture in all its fascinating variety can be comprehensively explored outside of Spain: From 1 July 2016, the Gemäldegalerie, which itself holds one of the most important collections of Spanish painting in Germany, will be dedicated to the Golden Age with a large-scale exhibition featuring over 130 masterpieces from 64 international lenders, including the Museo del Prado in Madrid, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Louvre in Paris and the Museo Nacional de Escultura in Valladolid.

Paradoxically, the Siglo de Oro evolved during a time marked by profound crisis: epidemics, famines and armed conflicts were causing upheaval throughout Europe. At the beginning of the 17th century, Spain was still the most powerful country in the Western hemisphere, ruling a territory that spanned five continents. However, King Philip IV, who ascended the throne of the Spanish Empire in 1621, struggled to combat continuous decline and an increasing loss of territorial and political hegemony. Against the sombre background of societal reality, art became the most important political medium for simulating would-be stability and power.

El Siglo de Oro. The Age of Velázquez shows the artistic opulence of the era between 1550 and 1680, taking into account the political and geographical conditions of the time. Employing the most important art centres in Spain as examples, the exhibition depicts, in chronological order, the general development of Baroque painting and sculpture during the reigns of Philip III, Philip IV and Charles II. Thus, visitors are taken through different artistic regions, of which the most important cities are Madrid, Valladolid, Toledo, Valencia and Seville. Special attention is paid to concrete topics such as portrait painting and still life as well as the close relation-

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Die Ära Velázquez

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www.elsiglodeoro.de

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ship between painting and sculpture, which is given particular expression in the form of masterful polychrome wood sculptures. One room of the exhibition is devoted exclusively to the art of Spanish drawing, with singular Baroque drawings from the Kupferstichkabinett of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin which will be on view for the first time.

Under Philip III (1578–1621, king from 1598), surprising diversity and strong foreign influences shaped the Spanish arts. Originally from Greece, Domenikos Theotokópoulos (the highly original artist otherwise known as El Greco) worked in the city of Toledo. In his work he combined Italian and Spanish pictorial traditions with those of his homeland, developing his own distinctive style that influenced many of his contemporaries. The artist Juan Sánchez Cotán also lived in Toledo. Together with the Madrilenian Juan van der Hamen y León, he played a significant role in the development of a typical Spanish still-life genre, the *bodegón*.

The port city of Seville, rich and cosmopolitan at the time, was Andalusia's artistic heart. Religious works destined for America were also created here. The most important representative of the Sevillian school of sculpture is Juan Martínez Montañés, whose sculptures are characterised by profound realism and lifelike renderings.

The second section of the exhibition focuses on the artistic peak of the Baroque period's great masters, contextualised by political and religious elites of their day. Philip IV (1605–65, king from 1621) was a great lover of the arts. Together with his favourite, the Count-Duke of Olivares, he fashioned art in the midst of economic and social crises into his primary instrument of political propaganda. The enormous number of artistic initiatives he sponsored for this purpose ultimately established Madrid, the seat of the court, as Spain's most important artistic centre.

The capital attracted many artists, including the Sevillian Diego Velázquez, who at the age of 24 took a court position and was soon appointed court painter—the highest royal office obtainable by an artist. As a painter, Velázquez distinguished himself in the field of portraiture in particular. His position meant that he was responsible for the creation of official portraits of the monarch and his family. The empathy and interest in the psychology of his subjects that is so keenly palpable in these works also influenced his numerous other portraits of personalities of the court and its surroundings.

During the Counter-Reformation, the Church was the most important commissioner of works of art. In Valladolid an independent school of sculpture committed exclusively to religious subjects emerged. Gregorio Fernández was its dominant figure and became the most successful Spanish sculptor of the century. His *Cristo Yacente of El Pardo* (1627) is an exemplary masterpiece of polychrome carved wooden sculpture and one of the most representative creations of Spanish Baroque sculpture. The artist adorns this life-sized, recumbent statue with additional elements such as ivory teeth and nails fashioned from bull's horn to achieve a more

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realistic effect. The carefully executed polychroming is attributed to the painters Diego de la Peña and Jerónimo de Calabria. Deeply dramatic sculptures such as this one express a religiosity that was newly emerging at the time, which can be understood as a reaction against the Counter-Reformation. They were meant to strengthen the viewer's religious faith, leaving a lasting impression. Another example of polychrome sculpture, a group comprising life-size figures that portray a cross-carrying Christ and the attendant scene (after 1610), is still used to this day as part of a yearly procession in the streets of Valladolid. Now, for the first time in history, it will be on display in Germany, in the Gemäldegalerie.

Art in Valencia, too, was steeped in a deep sense of religion and spirituality. In part thanks to its distance from Madrid, Valencia, the birthplace of Jusepe de Riberas, evolved into an independent artistic centre with its own presentational style. In Ribera's *Madonna with the Christ Child and Saint Bruno*, reality and hallucination are masterfully folded in on one another. Another impressive example from Seville is Francisco de Zurbarán's *St. Francis of Assisi in His Tomb*. In Zurbarán's painting, which is life-sized and painted head-on, the border between natural and supernatural dissolves; the viewer is confronted with a miraculous event.

As the seat of the court, Madrid was one of the largest cities in Europe towards the end of the century, while many other cities in Spain were experiencing an ongoing demographic decline. The heir apparent to Philip IV was Charles II, his son (1661–1700, king from 1665). As a result of Madrid's centralisation, all artistic activity became focused on the capital and a lively exchange arose between the artists who had settled there. The most significant commissions were fresco cycles for the decoration of buildings and churches.

The artists' work simultaneously shows the influence of their environment and the upheavals of their time. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, next to Velázquez the best-known Spanish Baroque painter of his day, developed a new genre of painting, in which he depicted scenes from daily street life. *Children Eating a Pie* shows two barefoot children in ragged clothes. The cheerful mood and the childlike unselfconsciousness outshines their obvious poverty.

As the century came to a close, so did these artistic golden days; however, they left a significant mark, tangible in the work of generations of artists to come. Concurrent with the turn of the century, the death of the childless king led to the end of the Spanish line of the Habsburg dynasty and the beginning of a new chapter in Spanish history.

Under the title *Reencuentros. Dialogues with the Siglo de Oro*, installations comprising the contemporary Spanish artists Anna Talens, Pablo Alonso and Alex Arteaga will be on view in the foyer of the Kulturforum. The work in these installations deals explicitly with the Golden Age, establishing a dialogue with the current discourse.

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A diverse line-up of cultural programming is planned in Berlin for the duration of the exhibition under the motto 'Golden Summer in Berlin'. A broad network of partners—from the museums at the Kulturforum, to cultural institutions, language schools, bookstores and flamenco studios, to restaurants and tapas bars—are part of a comprehensive programme that includes exhibitions, concerts, lectures, film screenings and many other promotions and specials. The entire programme is available online at www.goldenersommer.de.

A publication from Hirmer Verlag accompanies the exhibition, ca. 336 pages, ca. 280 colour plates, 24 x 29 cm, ISBN: 978-3-7774-2478-1, price: €49,90, price at the museum: €29

El Siglo de Oro. The Age of Velázquez has received generous support from the Kuratorium Preußischer Kulturbesitz, the Sparkassen-Finanzgruppe and "la Caixa" Banking Foundation. The exhibition has received further support from the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein, the Embassy of Spain, Instituto Cervantes and Museum&Location

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