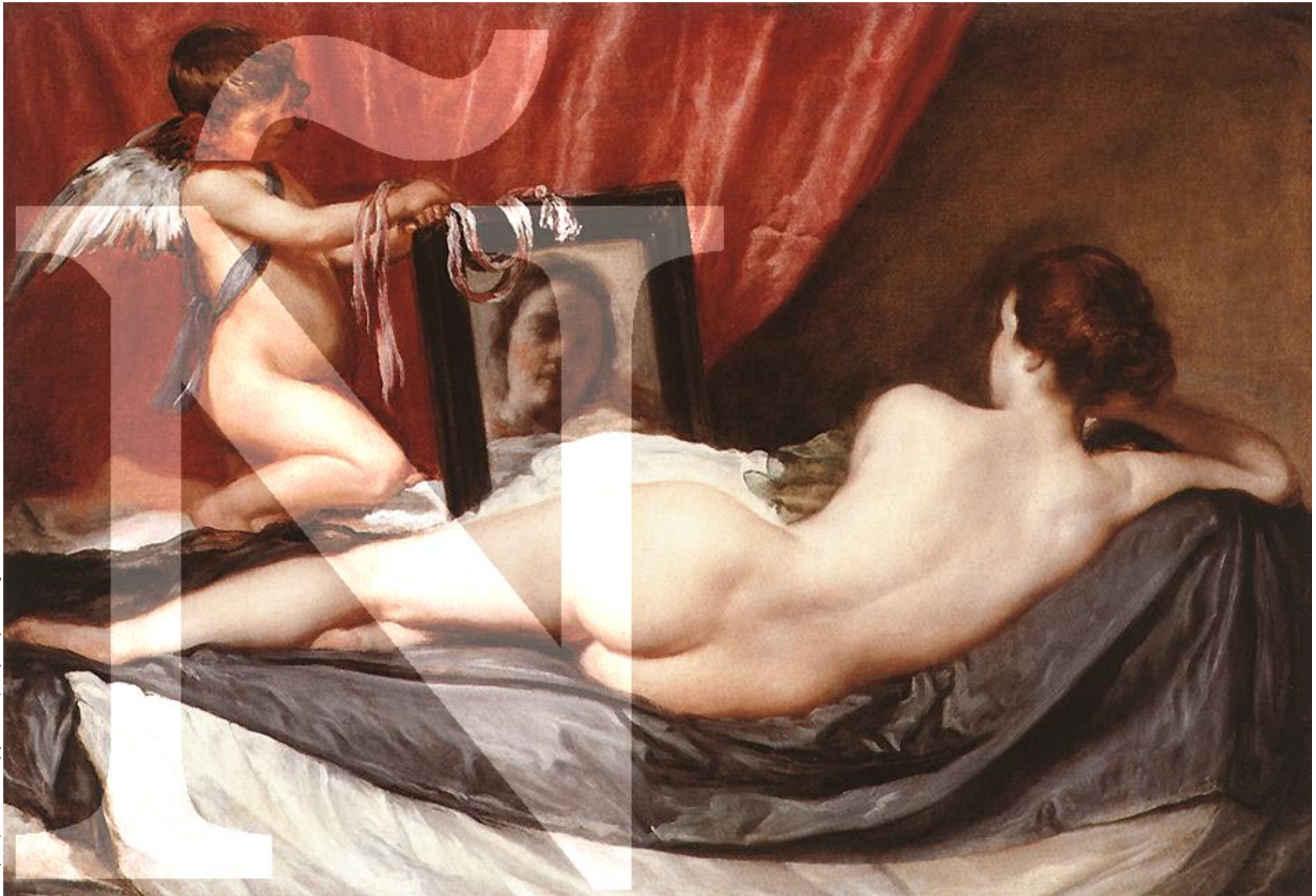


SPAIN



I.E.S. Adaja | Departamento de Dibujo (Informática aplicada) | Arte y Técnica, valga la redundancia... | BT 2002

Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez [b. 1599, Sevilla, d. 1660, Madrid] | Venus at her Mirror [The Rokeby Venus] | 1649-51 | Oil on canvas, 122,5 x 177 cm | National Gallery, London

The Rokeby Venus is widely regarded, along with Titian's Venus of Urbino, as one of the most beautiful and significant portrayals of Venus in the history of western painting. Yet it is virtually impossible to explain the magic of this painting. The consistent reduction of colour to lucid red, gentle blue, clear white and a warm reddish-brown allows the skin tone of Venus - blended, incidentally, only from the other colours in the painting - to emerge as an independent hue whose sumptuous sheen dominates everything else.

Venus is presented in a sensually erotic pose, and yet she seems chaste and is so completely merged with the overall image that she cannot be touched. Cupid, disarmed, without his bow and arrow, is holding a mirror, his hands bound by fragile pink fetters, condemned to do nothing and completely immersed in contemplation of the beautiful goddess. The mirror image - in defiance of all laws of optics - does not reveal the other side of Venus, but only permits a vague and blurred reflection of her facial traits. This may in fact indicate the underlying meaning of the picture: it is not intended as a specific female nude, nor even as a portrayal of Venus, but as an image of self-absorbed beauty. The goddess of love appears here as a mythical being with neither aim nor purpose, needing no scene of action, but blossoming before our very eyes as an image of beauty itself.

During the Inquisition pictures were censored and artists who painted licentious or immoral paintings were excommunicated, fined very heavily and banished. Rather than punish so notable an artist as Velázquez, his Venus was accepted. Cupid and the face to be seen in the looking-glass were, in all probability, strongly overpainted in the eighteenth century.

Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez
[b. 1599, Sevilla, d. 1660, Madrid]