



ERASMUS+ 2017-1-ES01-KA219-038074_1
OUT OF THE DARK: ASTRONOMY AS UNIFYING THREAD FOR CULTURES.



Visiting the Prado

These are some notes about the masterpieces that we saw in the Museum:

1.- The muse Urania. (130-150, Unknown)

There are nine Muses: inspirational goddesses of literature, science and arts. Daughters of Zeus and the goddess of memory (Mnemosyne)

Muses and their domains:

1 Clio: history

2 Terpsichore: dance

3 Calliope: epic poetry

4 Urania: astronomy

She keeps her eyes and attention focused on the Heavens. She is usually represented with a celestial globe to which she points a little staff. She is able to foretell the future by the arrangement of the stars.

5 Erato: love poetry (in the other room)

6 Thalia: comedy

7 Polymnia: hymns

8 Euterpe: music, song and lyric poetry

9. Melpomene: tragedy

2.- The Garden of Earthly Delights Triptych. Gothic. (1490 – 1500, Bosch)

His paintings are full of symbolic elements and have a surreal and burlesque character.

In the center panel of the triptych, Bosch painted the 3rd Day of the Creation of the world, when the waters were separated from the Earth and the Earthly Paradise was created.

At the top left we see God the Father as the Creator.

The inner faces of the triptych were painted in brilliant colours and divided in 3 scenes that share the meaning of the concept of sin, which starts in Paradise on the left panel with Adan and Eva and end in Hell in the right panel. The centre panel represents a false Paradise given over to the sin of lust.

3.- Saturn. Neoclassicism. (1820 – 1823, Francisco de Goya)

His style changes to the rhythm of his life experiences. His works are of varied themes like mythology and history and they are divided in different phases/stages.

This painting belongs to the Black Painting of la Quinta del Sordo phase/stage. In this phase he paints with dark colours and has a pessimistic character.

Rubens also painted this scene so when we see it later on, I will explain you the myth about this painting.

Goya connects the painting with the situation in Spain in these times. Napoleon's brother has the Spanish Crown so Goya reflects it: Saturn is Napoleon and he is eating Spain, who is represented as the kid.

4.- La Meninas. Baroque. (1656, Velázquez)

He always wanted to represent the reality how it is. He is known for being able to "Paint the air", which means he was the master of the perspective (depth). His treatment of light serves to achieve the perspective.

The painting shows a large room in the Royal Alcazar of Madrid during the reign of King Philip IV of Spain. In the middle of the painting, there is the young Infant Margaret Theresa surrounded by her maids of honour. Velazquez portrays himself working at a large canvas.

In the background, there is a mirror that reflects the King and the Queen. Velázquez painted this as if we were Philip IV and his wife Mariana of Austria.

A curiosity about this painting is that if we connect the hearts of the characters in an imaginary line, the constellation of Corona Borealis is drawn, whose centre star is called Margarita Coronae, like the infant than occupies the centre of the painting.

5.- Vulcan's Forge. Baroque. (1630, Velázquez)

Myth: Vulcan (the god of the fire) was the son of Jupiter and Juno. He got married with Venus (goddess of love) but Venus cheated on him with Marte (god of war). The scene of the painting represents the moment when Apolo (god of sun) goes to Vulcan's forge to tell him that his wife had cheated on him.

We can see how the characters are surprised by the announcement. Something to note is the perfection with which Velázquez painted the male anatomy.

6.- The Annunciation. Renaissance. (El Greco).

His painting are usually divided in two parts: earthly part and heavenly part.

He paints the heavenly part with a theological vision instead of a cosmological vision.

The virgin turns in surprise at the arrival of the Archangel Gabriel and the holy ghost dove.

This scene is a passage from the New Testament that tells the annuntiation of the Virgin's motherhood by the Archangel Gabriel.

When Jesus was born, three foreigners, known as the Three wise Men or Kings, followed a star to get to where Jesus was and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

7.- The adoration of the Magi. (1612 – 1614, Fray Juan Bautista)

Every year in Christmas, all the children write their letters to the Three Wise men: Melchior, Gaspar and Baltasar and they tell them what gifts they want. The Three Wise men travel by camel every year from the East to visit all the children. When they arrive in Spain, they go through each of the villages in parades to listen to the children's requests and receive their letters (5th January). The morning of the 6th January the children get up earlier than usual and run to the place where the Wise men have left their gifts.

The star that the Three Wise followed was the Halley comet.

8.- Sight and smell. (1620, Brueghel the Elder)

The science and the arts (1650, Adriaen Van Stalbeemt, Hieronymus Francken (II))

We chose these painting because they both have astronomy instruments like telescopes, compass, etc.

The allegory of the sight is represented by a woman sitting at a table looking in the mirror that holds a Cupid and the allegory of the Smell appears on the same table receiving a bouquet of flowers from another Cupid.

9.- The Birth of the Milky Way. Baroque. (1636-38, Rubens)

He was a Flemish artista.

Dynamism and vitality are really important in his works. His nudes of various biblical and mythological women are especially well-know

Myth: Hércules was born from one of Jupiter's affaires with a mortal. He was repudiated by the latter's wife, Juno. In order to insure his son's mortality, Jupiter placed him in the goddess's arms, so that he could suckle while she was sleeping. Hércules bit her and Juno woke up and brusquely pulled him away from her. The milk spilling out of her breast turned into the Milky Way .

10.- Saturn devouring a Son. (1636-32, Rubens)

Here is an old man sinking his teeth into the defenceless creature who is trying to get free.

At the top there are three stars, the middle one is bigger than the other two. It is not quite clear but when Galileo Galilei discovered Saturn, he believed that the ring was two satellites positioned on either side. So perhaps Rubens used this interpretation for painting the stars.

Myth: Cronos, the youngest of the Titans and his wife Rhea reigned on Earth. To prevent his sons from seizing the throne from him, like he had done with his father, he decided to kill them all by devouring them as soon as they were born. Rhea, when she gave birth to Zeus, she handed her husband a rock wrapped in clothes instead of the newborn. Later, when Zeus was a man, he forced his father to vomit his early victims and expel him from Olympus.

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