

**ALONSO SÁNCHEZ COELLO**

"INFANTA ISABEL CLARA EUGENIA AND MAGDALENA RUIZ"

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**ALONSO SÁNCHEZ COELLO** was court painter to Philip II and he united two different pictorial styles developed in the mid sixteenth century by Titian and Anthonis Mor respectively. Sánchez Coello's images are austere in their presentation, yet they include certain symbolic elements that place the sitters in a suitable context easily legible to the viewer. The sitters' dress and certain objects -swords, batons, gloves, handkerchiefs, missals, rosaries- serve to signal or reinforce specific aspects of the image. One of the most frequent typologies was the full-length portrait: the figure placed in the foreground, close to the viewer, with a three-quarter view of a clearly illuminated face. Such is the case with this painting of the infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia (1566-1633), Philip's elder daughter and one of the most important women in the dynasty. She wears a formal dress made of white silk, heavily embroidered with gold thread; the high collar with its delicate lace trim and the feathered headdress each correspond to Spanish fashion in the mid to late 1580s. A rich adornment of jewellery completes the breathtaking costume. She is accompanied by Magdalena Ruiz, a faithful family servant since the days of Charles V and his queen consort, Isabella of Portugal. The presence of the servant accentuates the image of majesty that the princess emanates, not only by virtue of the juxtaposition of their figures but also because of the relationship established between them.

Isabella Clara Eugenia contemplates the viewer with a fixed gaze while her left hand rests on Magdalena's head. The servant kneels before her lady, at whom she stares with an intense gaze -or perhaps more accurately an absent-minded one, surely a reflection of the dementia she was suffering by that date. The representation of Magdalena alongside the infanta belongs to a long tradition of portraits in which servants, pages, jesters and dwarfs appear, coexisting in a perfectly ordinary manner with members of the royal family. The most complex and important painting within this tradition is Velázquez's masterpiece *Las meninas* c. 1656.



Alonso Sánchez Coello (Benifairó del Valls, Valencia, 1531/32 – Madrid, 1588)  
***Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia and Magdalena Ruiz***

1585-1588

Oil on canvas

207 × 129 cm

Provenance: Colección Real

Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv. P000861

Another explicit reference to the tradition of the Habsburg court portrait is the infanta displaying to the viewer an image of her father, Philip II. This motif provides a focal point for the composition. It is an image of the cameo bust of Philip carved in alabaster by Pompeo Leoni held in the Prado (E279). Similar formulas of the portrait-within-a-portrait can be found in other images of female members of the royal family.

Elizabeth of Valois and Joanna of Austria, the infanta's mother and aunt, respectively, were both portrayed holding an image of the king—a motif that has been interpreted as indicating the women's dependency on Philip, as husband or brother; the same may be said of this cameo as a symbol of the infanta's dependency on her father. There exists another similar image of Isabella Clara Eugenia, attributed to Juan Pantoja de la Cruz, a work belonging to the Prado that is currently on loan to the monastery of El Escorial (P717).

Magdalena Ruiz partially echoes the gesture of her mistress, for she also reveals a painted portrait (possibly also representing the king) in a medallion hanging from a chain. She wears a coral necklace and holds two small monkeys in her hands, one brown and one cotton-top tamarin. Both species are from Portuguese territories in the Amazon that, at this point in history, belonged to Philip following the union of Spain and Portugal in 1580 (Portugal regained its independence in 1640). In 1581, Magdalena travelled in Philip's retinue to Portugal, where he went to claim the Portuguese throne. It is possible that she received both the exotic animals and the necklace on that occasion and perhaps the medallion itself, a common gift in return for loyal service. One additional reference to Portugal may be observed in the infanta's dress, for she wears white and gold, a characteristically Portuguese style in ceremonial costume.

Alonso Sánchez Coello died in 1588, the year this work is traditionally dated. The overall composition, the finely painted heads and the liveliness and precision of the two monkeys are likely the work of the painter himself, while the minute details on the clothing and the fragment of a canopy visible in the background may have been completed by members of his workshop.

*Portrait of Spain. Masterpieces from The Prado*, 2012. Brisbane, Australia: Queensland Art Gallery, pp. 82-83, nr. 2.

## ALONSO SÁNCHEZ COELLO

(Benifairó, Valencia, 1531/32 – Madrid, 1588)

At the age of ten, Alonso Sánchez Coello moved with his family to Portugal, where he began his first art studies. John III, king of Portugal, was aware of his talent and in 1550 he paid the young artist's trip to Flanders to complete his training. There, Sánchez Coello worked for Cardinal Granvela and was a disciple of Anthonis Mor van Dashorst. After returning to Lisbon around 1552, he probably began working for Prince John Emmanuel of Lisbon and his wife, donna Juana, whose brother was Philip II of Spain. Following the prince's death, Juana returned to Spain to rule the country in her brother's absence. Around 1555, Sánchez Coello traveled to the Spanish court, then in Valladolid, to deliver a portrait of her son, the future King Sebastian of Portugal. Remaining in Valladolid, he painted the first portraits of Philip II's heir, Prince Charles, and around 1560 he married Luisa Reynalte, from a family of silversmiths. That same year, Philip II appointed him chamber painter, a post he held until his death in Madrid in 1588. He had moved to that city along with the court in 1561. Over the course of his career, Sánchez Coello specialized in portraiture, although he also made religious works, including the altarpiece for the church of El Espinar in Segovia (1574-1577) and some pairs of saints for altars at the basilica of El Escorial (1580-1582).

Sánchez Coello is a fundamental figure in the history of Spanish painting. He was the first to bring portraiture to the peninsula, where he followed the model developed by Anthonis Mor in likenesses of the Habsburg family. Some of his paintings were included in the most important portrait galleries developed during the reign of Philip II, including those at the El Pardo and Alcázar Palaces, both sadly lost to fires in 1604 and 1734, respectively. Today, his works hang in the Museo del Prado, in Spain's royal foundations, including the Monastery of the Descalzas Reales and in museums and collections in Austria and Bohemia.

Antonio, Trinidad de, 2012. In *Del Greco a Goya. Obras maestras del Museo del Prado*. Ponce, Puerto Rico: Museo de Arte de Ponce, p. 92.