

Vasari als Paradigma
Rezeption, Kritik, Perspektiven

The Paradigm of Vasari
Reception, Criticism, Perspectives

hrsg. von / edited by
Fabian Jonietz
Alessandro Nova

Marsilio

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THE CONTROVERSY OVER VASARI AND THE BEGINNING OF THE ART HISTORICAL DISCIPLINE IN SPAIN. 1775–1829

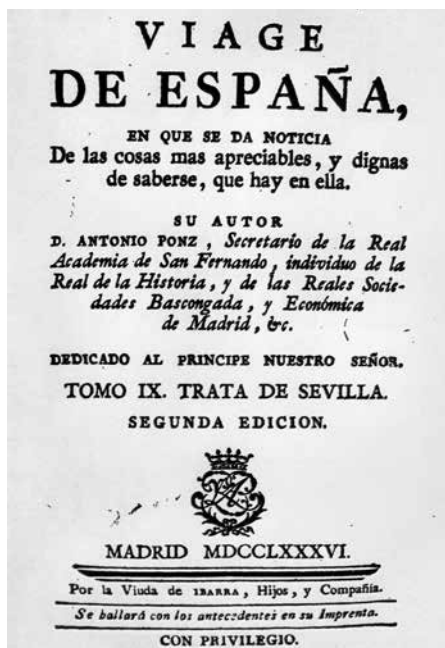
David García López

Giorgio Vasari's writing on the lives of artists was widely read in Golden Age Spain and was extremely influential in the perception of art, and even artists' self perception. The first edition of Vasari's work, published in 1550, quickly became well known in Spain. The work was translated into Spanish in the 1560s by Alvar Gómez de Castro, a humanist who formed part of a group of scholars in Toledo interested in art and antiquity collections¹. The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were marked by profound changes in Spanish art and the study of artistic activity. Painting was increasingly defended as a liberal art and the first art academies in Spain were created, modeled after the Italian academies. As was aptly articulated by Gaspar Gutiérrez de los Ríos, one of the most important writers to defend painting as a liberal art, El Escorial was the Trojan horse of Spanish art's renovation. This renewal was due not only to the arrival of new artistic forms, thanks to the numerous foreigners working there, but also because of a new and more sophisticated consideration of the art imported from Italy². By the final decades of the sixteenth century Vasari's book had made its way into the hands of artists in Spain, primarily by way of Italians working in El Escorial and at the court of Felipe II in Madrid. These artists included Pompeo Leoni, Jacome da Trezzo, Patrizio Caxesi, and Federico Zuccari. In addition, the book was likely in the libraries of Spanish artists linked to El Escorial, such as Juan Bautista Monegro, or the architect who designed the monastery at El Escorial, Juan de Herrera³. It is telling that the early circulation of Vasari's text in Spain took place among this nucleus of artists, given that, as the theorist Antonio Palomino wrote, Spanish artists who read Vasari's work were encouraged to follow the example of the artists' biographies they read. One of the artists who arrived from Italy with a copy of Vasari's book was Federico Zuccari, who gifted the copy to Doménikos Theotokópoulos, better known as El Greco, during a visit to Toledo in 1586. El Greco annotated the copy extensively, leaving us with an extraordinary historical document which, in this case, also serves as a powerful critique of Vasari's book, in that El Greco's annotations reveal him to be a faithful follower of Titian and in disagreement with Vasari's assessments⁴. If for a large part of the sixteenth century Spanish artists had been considered inferior to the Italians peers, by the

end of the century various authors had begun to assert that Spanish painters were equally sophisticated, if not superior to their foreign counterparts. For example, in his description of El Escorial published in 1605, José de Sigüenza suggests that some artists, like Fernández de Navarrete, "el Mudo", were of a higher caliber than Italian artists such as Federico Zuccari, whose work on the El Escorial monastery was disappointing⁵. It was thought that Spanish artists lacked only the support of literature in order to match the caliber of foreign artists. At that time, it was widely believed within artistic circles that the Spanish fine art world was plagued by a dearth of authors capable of tackling theoretical discussions: «a lack of people curious about writing», as Juan de Arfe put it, one of the most important Hispanic theorists of the sixteenth century⁶. This scarcity was particularly evident in the case of artists' biographies, reinforced by Gutiérrez de los Ríos' comment on Spanish artists: «as soon as they're dead we forget about them»⁷. Francisco Pacheco, Velázquez's father-in-law, insisted on this idea in his *Arte de la pintura*, published posthumously in 1649. He claimed that Spanish artists were in dire need of a written record of their lives, just as had been done in Italy with Italian artists, declaring Spain to be the only nation lacking this kind of biographical documentation⁸. Yet, when such an attempt was made at the end of the seventeenth century by Valencian Vicente Victoria, a scholar and longtime court painter for the Duke of Florence, he described the available information on Spanish painters as «so limited [that] we barely know their names»⁹.

The author the Spanish art world had been awaiting appeared in the form of Lázaro Díaz del Valle, a musician for the Royal Chapel and a friend of many highly regarded artists of the seventeenth century, including Alonso Cano and Diego Velázquez. He wrote the first biography of Spanish artists between 1656 and 1659, although his manuscript remained unpublished. Díaz del Valle cited Vasari with great admiration and followed his historical model, applying it to Spanish artists and representing Velázquez as the zenith of Spanish art, just as Vasari had done with Michelangelo Buonarroti in Italy¹⁰.

Lázaro Díaz del Valle's manuscript was cherished by Antonio Palomino, who finally wrote the first published biography of Spanish artists, *El Parnaso español pintoresco*, in the second volume of *El Museo Pictórico*



1. Antonio Palomino, *Museo Pictórico y Escala óptica*, Madrid 1724, Vol. II, Allegorical Depiction of Painting, Madrid, Private Collection

2. Antonio Ponz, *Viage de España*, Madrid 1786, Vol. IX, Frontispiece, Madrid, Private Collection

(fig. 1), although it was printed much later in 1724, more than 150 years after Vasari's book. In the author's words, his mission was to «carry on the memory» of Spanish artists¹¹. Their biographies appeared in the final volume of the text and served as a conclusion to his verbose artistic treatise, *El Museo Pictórico*, quite possibly the work that best condenses and recapitulates the Spanish Baroque¹².

Throughout the eighteenth century Palomino's work was greatly admired as a foundational text for the study of Spanish artists and fine art. Furthermore, it was considered an example of patriotic writing in that it safeguarded the stories of a great number of Spanish artists who would have been lost to history without Palomino's zealous effort¹³. In fact, during the second half of the eighteenth century, there was an attempt to republish the volume and, even more interestingly, to expand it to include artists working after 1724. Consequently, the Vasarian biographical method remained relevant and in effect in 1775, when editor Antonio Sanz contacted the Real Academia de San Fernando to seek assistance in order to obtain the biographies of Spanish artists that had flourished during the eighteenth century and, at the same time, to correct any errors or omissions made by Antonio Palomino in the original version¹⁴.

However, the fine art world had changed profoundly. The new Bourbon monarchy had installed itself in Spain and created the Reales Academias in the French style. Furthermore, the innovation of painting exhibitions attracted new audiences, which in turn established a framework for art criticism as well as other phenomena of modernity. A decisive step in this new direction was the increasing

number of so-called “aficionados” who became involved in the fine art world and, without being artists themselves, were able to write about and theorize it. Numerous controversies of the era demonstrate how, in contrast to previous centuries, the artists themselves were no longer the theoretical authorities. Vicente Carducho, Francisco Pacheco and Antonio Palomino, the most noteworthy theorists of the Spanish Baroque, had been great artists themselves, and even court painters. In many cases the new authors were “aficionados”. And while many of them were amateur painters, painting was certainly not their primary occupation¹⁵. These controversial polemics are eloquently evident in the writing of Antonio Marcos de Orellana, a lawyer who, at the end of the eighteenth century, qualified the publication of his *magnum opus* on the lives of Valencian painters by stating,

[...] having undertaken a subject outside my area of expertise, [...] I realize that this enterprise would certainly be executed with greater precision, ownership and sound judgment by any experienced professor of the noble arts. There is no doubt¹⁶.

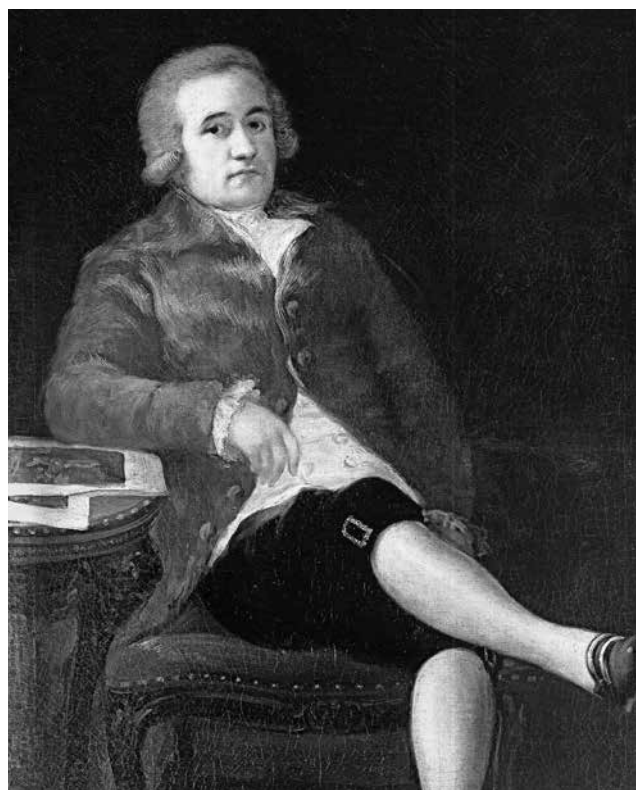
Nonetheless, the eighteenth century was also marked by new hypotheses formed by positivism, in which the critique of sources and the veracity of information challenged the legends and fables that had long imposed themselves on historical narratives. New historiographical methods influenced the scholarly criteria employed in the study of the fine arts. Firstly, historical science based itself on certainties and, therefore, its fundamental support came from the document itself. On the other hand, a new, rigorous criticism directed at artists and their work was essential in the

formation of a rational assessment of their production¹⁷. This renaissance of historical research in the field of fine arts made it evident that a critique of Antonio Palomino's treatise and the Vasarian method was one of its central objectives. While the foundational value of Palomino's work was widely recognized, there were frequent critiques of his use of historiographical methods during the second half of the eighteenth century. The writer Antonio Ponz published the first volume of his celebrated *Viaje de España* in 1772, a fundamental work for the study of fine art in Spain, in which the author analyzes and assesses works scattered throughout the Spanish territory (fig. 2). Ponz had already expressed his disappointment in Palomino's *Museo Pictórico* and commented that the work yet to be done in the study of Spanish fine art was enormous¹⁸. Nevertheless, it was the diplomat and art theorist José Nicolás Azara, the editor of Anton Raphael Mengs' theoretical texts, who more clearly outlined the insufficiencies of Palomino's writings and the Vasarian method when he said:

Palomino was a man of excellent judgment and the nation is infinitely indebted to him for being the first to establish our art history. However, he lacks taste and has been given the same recognition Vasari received in Italy¹⁹.

For these scholars interested in producing an in-depth and accurate study of the fine arts in Spain, Palomino had entertained fables and stories that distorted historical information about the lives of Spanish artists. In his biographies, Palomino often recorded incorrect dates of baptisms or deaths and his texts were rarely supported by further documentation. Furthermore, his assessment of the artists and their work was insubstantial and lacked rigorous criticism or valuation. As Isidoro Bosarte, the secretary of the Real Academia de San Fernando might say, Palomino, like Vasari, had written «un romance», – a novel – and the serious study of Hispanic artists would have to take a very different course²⁰.

Many of these concerns regarding the critical study of the fine arts in Spain reached their culmination in the *Diccionario histórico de los más ilustres profesores de las Bellas Artes*, published in 1800 by the Real Academia de San Fernando and authored by Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez (fig. 3), one of the most important “aficionados” of the fine arts during the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. Ceán Bermúdez spent many years in the service of Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, an important politician and man of letters who held various ministerial positions in successive governments and who had accompanied politicians in various locations, including Madrid and Seville. In 1768 Ceán Bermúdez arrived to Seville and there he began his artistic studies at the



3. Francisco de Goya, Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez, c. 1786, Madrid, Private Collection

Academia de las Tres Nobles Artes in Seville, an institution that he himself helped to found. Some years later, he was also the student of Anton Raphael Mengs during some months in Madrid²¹. Together with other friends, Jovellanos and Ceán Bermúdez attempted to direct their socio-political criticism towards the realm of the fine arts, representing their study as a way of regenerating an important facet of the nation.

In his *Diccionario* (fig. 4), Ceán Bermúdez brought modern, historical criticism to the fine arts, basing his study of painters and sculptors on a thorough examination of archival information throughout the country. Similarly to many of his contemporaries, Ceán Bermúdez believed that Palomino, like Vasari, had done an admirable job, but that their work lacked the application of a positivism that relied on textual research. Yet it is noteworthy that the study of Spanish artists continued to employ a biographical method. Despite these similarities, the structure of the newer texts differed significantly in that the artists' biographies were ordered alphabetically, giving the volume a much more systematic and functional quality in keeping with the utilitarian character of the era, a method clearly indebted to Denis Diderot's *Encyclopédie*.

Despite these differences, Ceán Bermúdez was a faith-

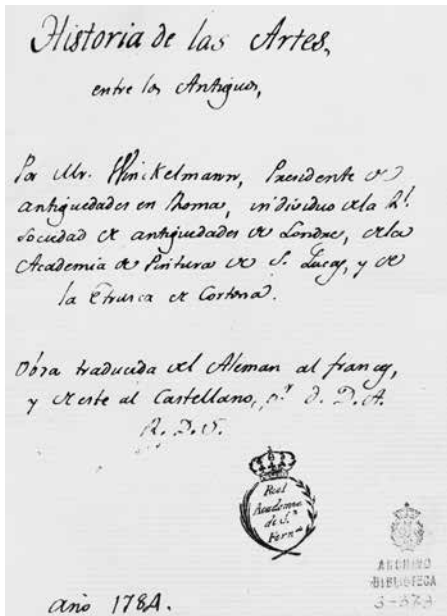


4. Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez, *Diccionario histórico*, Madrid 1800, Vol. I, Frontispiece, Madrid, Private Collection

5. Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez, *Portrait of Leonardo da Vinci*, c. 1797, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España

ful reader of Giorgio Vasari, whose work he frequently referenced in his historical writing. Even in his later publications, such as *Colección lithographica de cuadros del Rey de España* (1826) – an opulent work which included the most important prints of the recently created Museo del Prado with accompanying commentary – he defended the importance of reading Vasari. An authority on Vasari's work, Ceán Bermúdez underlined the differences between successive editions of Vasari's book and boasted that his own library contained the first edition, which was published in 1550, a truly rare volume²². There is no doubt that the authentic bibliophile remained attentive to any new editions of Vasari's work. By 1796 Ceán Bermúdez was awaiting the arrival of the sixth, and last, edition of Vasari's *Vite*, edited by Guglielmo Della Valle (1746–1796), which had been published in 1794 in Siena²³. Years later, all these Vasari editions were effectively at Ceán Bermúdez's Library²⁴. Upon receiving the final edition of Vasari's *Vite*, Ceán Bermúdez did not merely add it to his personal library, but rather relived his youthful stint as an artist and copied a large number of the portraits printed in the book (fig. 5). Moreover, Vasari's influence is evident in the art scholar's choice to include portraits alongside some of the biographies in his *Diccionario*. In order to achieve this, Ceán Bermúdez enlisted the help of his friend, the painter Francisco de Goya, supplying him with portrait drawings from which Goya could paint his own versions, which were intended for later use to make prints for future editions of the book²⁵. The project, however, would remain in the development stages, possibly due to the excessive costs Ceán Bermúdez feared the illustrated edition would incur.

Ceán Bermúdez's patron, Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, was a major contributor to the development of the *Diccionario histórico*, and understanding his ideas about how to formulate the project is essential in order to comprehend the final result. In his 1795 letters to Ceán Bermúdez, Jovellanos offered clear guidelines as to how the biographies should be executed: one should avoid trifling details about the artists' lives and information unsupported by documents in order to focus instead on those elements that stand out in the life of each artist. Jovellanos himself followed the same rigorous principles of documentation and analysis when he wrote the biography of sculptor Luis Fernández de la Vega (1601–1675), which remains an excellent example of the advances that resulted in a new direction for biographies in the field of fine arts during this period²⁶. Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez followed these instructions diligently. He omitted any type of anecdote or myth and replaced them with a new, critical sense that allowed him to distinguish works of great merit. Moreover, and more importantly, he infused the fine arts with a new scientific method that no longer based knowledge on oral accounts, some more legendary than others, but rather on the exploration and interpretation of documents and archives. «It was not difficult to discern», wrote Ceán in the prologue to his *Diccionario*, «that the most significant memories of our artists have slept in the archives of churches, monasteries and government buildings alongside contracts detailing the construction of decorative pieces»²⁷. The memories of these artists slept in the archives and the time had come to awaken them. In addition to the cities and archives Ceán Bermúdez visited personally, he also constructed a web of corre-



6. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Historia de las Artes, entre los Antiguos*, 1784, Madrid, Real Academia de San Fernando

7. Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez, *Historia del Arte de la Pintura. Tomo I*, 1823, Madrid, Real Academia de San Fernando

spondence with friends who could offer him information about artists gathered from archives throughout Spain. In this way, the quantity of information and documents Ceán Bermúdez was able to include in his *Diccionario* transformed the work into a fundamental text for his contemporaries and, undoubtedly, a foundational text for the modern study of Spanish art history. It was impossible for Ceán Bermúdez to record all the noteworthy information that he had encountered since his youth during his numerous travels through Extremadura, Andalucía, Murcia and Valencia. Because of his technical and theoretical knowledge, Jovellanos saw Ceán Bermúdez as the appropriate person to carry out a sorely needed renovation of the study of fine arts that would position the work done in Spain as akin to that being done in other European countries.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, other initiatives provided a more profound critique of the Vasarian method by questioning the validity of the artist's biography as the most legitimate method of studying the fine arts. Antonio Ponz had already expressed his doubts regarding the biographical method and defended his preference for a discourse that established a solid and evolutionary chronology, a sequence that divided the fine arts into periods or styles and revealed the degree of development achieved in a given historical moment²⁸. In other words, it had become increasingly necessary to write art history within the tradition that Johann Joachim Winckelmann had introduced in Europe²⁹. It is significant that in the first translation of the *Historia de las Artes entre los antiguos* from German to Spanish, conserved in the Real Academia de San Fernando, the translator, Diego Antonio Rejón de Silva, underlined Winckelmann's words: «Throughout this work,

my primary objective is the nature of art, the stories of the artists are of little importance. Their lives have already been collected by others, and therefore do not form part of my plan»³⁰ (fig. 6). Art history was no longer a matter of the painters' history, as Palomino and later Ceán Bermúdez had emphasized, but rather a question of the stylistic evolution of the arts in successive historical moments, and that, in a patriotic sense, underlined the development of the fine arts in Spain.

Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos took an early step in this direction when he read the *Elogio de Bellas Artes* in the Real Academia de San Fernando in 1781. Although brief, the *Elogio* can be considered one of the first examples of Spanish art history. Jovellanos was clear about his objective to «paint the immense canvas that represents the destiny of the arts from their origin to their present state». His aspiration was to reveal «a series of causes that have influenced its rise and fall»³¹. In other words, history reveals the nature of the discipline to be studied, in this case the arts, and determines the circumstances under which it was developed as well as the causes of its decline. Considered from this perspective, it does not seem to be a coincidence that the renovation of Spanish art history was stimulated by the institutions and groups dedicated to the definition of a modern artistic language. Any theory of the arts that aims to be complete and universal must include a solid historiographical discourse, one that situates and assesses its past and present production historically in order to explain its evolution. Moreover, Ceán's *Diccionario* was financed by the Royal Academy of San Fernando and Jovellanos was charged to read his *Elogio* by the same institution, an institution that aspired to control artistic activity on a national level; the Enlightenment

mentality and the academy fed the emerging art history. In the academic and scholarly arenas there was a sense that the Spanish fine arts could be analyzed in a coherent and comprehensive way, and that to explain their historical development was an increasingly urgent undertaking. The 1799 educational statutes of the Real Academia de San Fernando urged students to study the history of theory in their respective fields. The painting students, for example, were instructed to study the history of their discipline in order to better understand the genesis of their art. But it was Ceán Bermúdez who, while correcting these statutes, specified that this kind of theoretical work was not available in Spanish and that it would therefore be beneficial to write and publish it in order to instruct the younger generations³².

This was hardly a reckless comment, given that Ceán Bermúdez's *Diccionario* appeared in 1800. Extensive evidence has revealed that his *Diccionario*, like many of his historiographical contributions, was targeted at artist readers. In the pages of his books one can find models, examples and lessons that indicate the path of the beautiful and the good. However, as we have said, his work was also directed at a cultured readership. The Enlightenment contextualized the arts and determined that part of their destiny hinged on the ability of the elite and the historical moment to function as effective stimulants for the arts' development or, on the other hand, its decline. It is no coincidence that the arts were considered a sign of a cultured civilization – just as literature or scientific knowledge were – and an indicator of the character and situation of the country.

A few years later, in his *Viage artístico*, published in 1804, Isidoro Bosarte indicated that he could only offer a first effort, a scaffolding of information around which the yet unconstructed Spanish art history could be written³³.

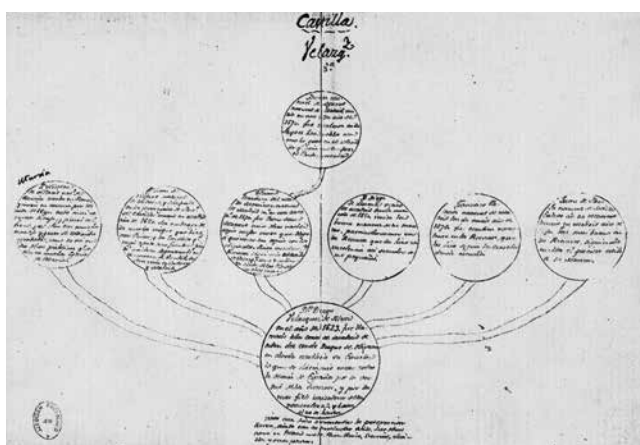
Again, it was Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez who first responded to these demands. After the publication of his *Diccionario histórico* in 1800, he turned his attention to the revision of Eugenio Llaguno y Amírola's *Noticias de los arquitectos y arquitectura de España desde su restauración*, which would not be published until 1829. Llaguno, who held a high position in the Spanish Administration, had bequeathed the uncompleted manuscript to Ceán Bermúdez, trusting in his industriousness to ensure that his great scholarly work on Spanish architecture would be realized. This project encouraged Ceán Bermúdez to continue his tireless work documenting the lives and works of artists. In his *Diccionario histórico* he had included the most fundamental painters and sculptors. Yet, as his office was continually flooded with information about all kinds of artists, he began to center his

work on architects, employing his wide web of contacts to further his research.

Exiled to Seville after the downfall of his patron Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos' administration, Ceán Bermúdez continued to emphasize the importance of chronological development in historical discourse in numerous other writings. For example, in his *Descripción de la catedral de Sevilla* (1804), Ceán Bermúdez took the opportunity to indicate the successive artistic styles evident in Seville's architecture, structuring the discussion with distinct chapters. Another essential contribution was his *Carta sobre el estilo y gusto en la pintura de la escuela sevillana* (1806), which could easily be considered the first monograph on the life and work of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, the most admired painter in the Spanish school of the late eighteenth century, who produced works highly coveted by English and French collectors of the period³⁴. In both texts, Ceán Bermúdez positions his objects of study within a framework of historical progress and supports his claims with first-hand documentation that he had collected during his unflagging research in Seville's archives.

His continuous work to compile information on the fine arts led Ceán Bermúdez to envision a reissue of his *Diccionario histórico*, which would include new additions collected over many years. However, in 1822, at nearly 73 years of age and amidst a delicate political climate, Ceán Bermúdez realized that no one was willing to invest in the reprint. Instead, he decided to begin a new and fascinating project, none other than the *Historia del Arte de la Pintura*, a text that would undertake the study of Europe's primary pictorial schools³⁵ (fig. 7).

Ceán Bermúdez's *Historia* did not limit itself to Spanish painting, but rather encompassed the evolution of art in Europe from antiquity to the eighteenth century. From an Enlightenment viewpoint, it consisted of a universal history. Beginning with the history of Italian painting and the grandeur of antiquity, the work includes eleven volumes that cover the French, German, Flemish, Dutch and English schools, concluding with two volumes dedicated to the Spanish schools. In this way, he included the development of Spanish painting within the European panorama since the advances developed in Renaissance Italy. Ceán Bermúdez's objective was not only to trace the evolution of Spanish painting, but also to insert it within the history of painting since its resurgence in Italy and development throughout Europe. In other words, Ceán Bermúdez historicized the Spanish pictorial school and positioned it alongside its continental contemporaries, comparing and defining the Spanish school as part, with its own particularities, of a European totality that enabled a more comprehensive understanding.



8. Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez, Genealogical Tree of Diego Velázquez, c. 1797, Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional

For Enlightenment Spain, Europe was the measure of comparison in all things³⁶. In fact, Europe was not merely considered a culturally specific space, but rather the very sphere of civilization. Spain considered itself part of this sphere and worked tirelessly to avoid relegation to its margins; hence the opening and continuous attention to goings-on in Europe in an attempt to stay abreast of its contributions, or at least those that were not excessively revolutionary.

This would explain the unrivaled controversies motivated by the European underestimation of Spain, which in turn mobilized the production of knowledge and the government administration itself. In the arena of the arts the outlook was similar. The desire to reclaim the Spanish arts and position them as equivalent to their European counterparts became almost obsessive³⁷. Consequently, the defense of Spanish painting became a central theme among educated Spaniards. In this way, Ceán Bermúdez could break the cycle of ceaseless vindications by definitively locating the Spanish schools and their artists as equal to their European contemporaries. Beginning in 1797 Ceán Bermúdez had worked on a series of genealogical trees that divided the Spanish pictorial schools into groups: Castilian, Aragonese and Andalusian. At first, his intention was to include the genealogical trees as an appendix to his *Diccionario histórico* so that they might link the distinct biographies of each artist to one another, although he ultimately abandoned the idea³⁸. From what has been conserved of these genealogical trees, one can perceive an early attempt to develop a chronology of the history of Spanish painting and its primary artists³⁹ (fig. 8). These ideas were clearly developed in the volumes of the *Historia del Arte de la Pintura* dedicated to Spanish painting and constituted the backbone of each of the Spanish schools, which

grew chronologically from a grand master and his successive disciples.

In his *Diccionario*, Ceán confesses that his ultimate aspiration was to «write an analytical history of the Spanish arts». If, in the end, he opted instead for a different formula it was due to the lack of ability or the necessary time to tackle such a complex endeavor. He justified himself by claiming that in the *Diccionario*'s introduction, which consists of some 25 pages, he had laid down, «the foundation of this great work» by outlining the early evolution of Spanish «painting, sculpture, and other fine arts that arise from drawing and that imitate nature»⁴⁰. Twenty years later he threw himself into the realization of this «great work». Consequently, *The Historia del Arte y de la Pintura* is more than a mere edition of the *Diccionario*. In a sense it was the culmination of the *Diccionario* – and of an Enlightenment era notion of art history itself – in that it managed to achieve what had long been simply imagined, to create not just a compilation, but rather a narration based on scientific explanation.

In order to complete this project, Ceán Bermúdez counted on the indispensable help of his magnificent library where he had accumulated the most important Spanish and foreign treatises of the previous decades, as well as an extraordinary collection of prints, some of the period's finest⁴¹.

However, his work must not be understood as buried in an office, alienated from the realities of the fine art world. Although he had not traveled to Italy, nor left Spain in fact, Ceán Bermúdez had been able to access the Royal Collections as well as other particular collections, many of which had been created by his personal friends and acquaintances. It is also important to remember that the two cities where he lived most of his life, Madrid and Seville, held not only the work of the most important Spanish painters, but also enormous collections of foreign paintings, primarily from the Italian and Flemish schools, which had been collected in Spain since the sixteenth century. Ceán Bermúdez left no manuscript or archive unexplored, nor did he leave any artistic collection unvisited. Even while writing *Historia del Arte de la Pintura*, he did not hesitate to visit the recently created Museo del Prado in order to corroborate his analyses with the originals housed there.

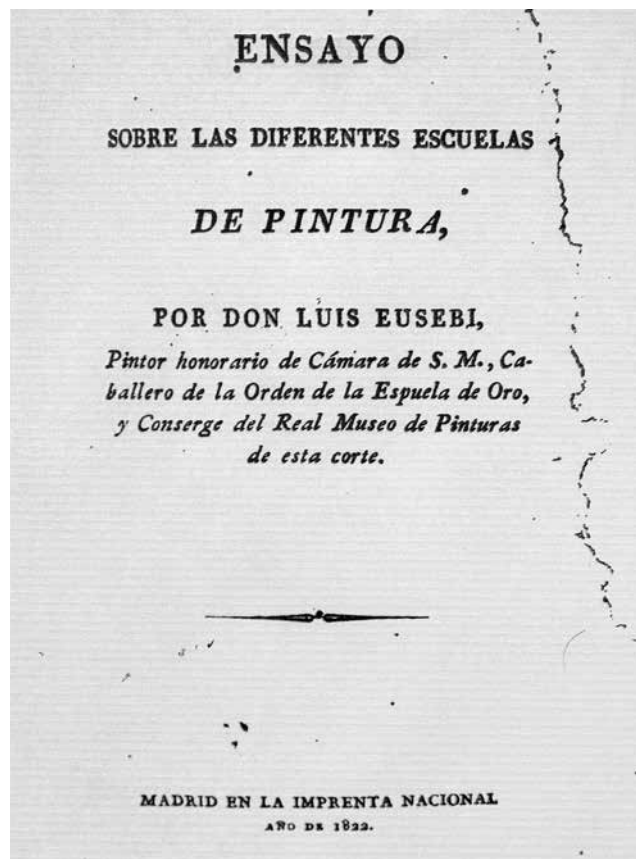
The fact that this research was conducted during the 1820s links it closely to the development of the fine arts in Spain, including the creation of the first Spanish museums and the publication of didactic catalogues. In this context it is necessary to mention the work of Luis Eusebi, a custodian at the Museo del Prado, who pub-

lished his *Ensayo sobre las diferentes escuelas de pintura* in 1822 (fig. 9). The chronological proximity of Eusebi's *Ensayo* and Ceán Bermúdez's *Historia* is significant; one was completed and published as the other was in its early stages. In addition, they are thematically linked. Just as the title suggests, Eusebi's work centers on the European schools' principal characteristics and masters: the Italian – divided, as Ceán Bermúdez would have done, into the Florentine, Roman, Venetian, Lombard, Neapolitan, and Genovese – Spanish, French, German, Flemish, Dutch, and English⁴². The most notable difference is the volumes' length. The *Ensayo* is barely 90 pages, while the *Historia* consists of seven volumes and four appendices. Even Eusebi himself admitted that the *Ensayo* was a summary, and that his intention had been to publish a «small book» that would offer, in a simple way, information expounded upon in other numerous, extensive treatises. The *Ensayo* was intended for a wide audience, and was not focused only on a finite professional readership. And yet, because of its length, the target audience did not consist of grand masters or experts, but rather young disciples who were entering the field of pictorial art, or enthusiasts who hoped to begin a collection or who visited «the establishments and other spaces where the Nation's most significant [paintings] hang»⁴³.

This is particularly relevant given that the *Ensayo* was linked to the Real Museo del Prado, which was inaugurated in November 1819. Eusebi prepared the museum's first two catalogues, one which appeared in 1819, when the museum was only exhibiting works from the Spanish school, and another in 1821, which included Italian paintings. These catalogues were mere lists, by gallery, of the artists and themes corresponding to the exhibited pieces, without any critical or historical commentary. As a result, not only did the Prado's collection illustrate the *Ensayo*, as Eusebi noted, but the reverse was effective as well, converting the *Ensayo* into a kind of guidebook for the museum.

This kind of assessment allowed the viewer to identify the painters and their work, and to situate them and even observe them within a hierarchy, emphasizing some more than others and signaling their most distinctive traits. Moreover, Eusebi included selected anecdotes about the history of the paintings and explained pictorial terms. In this way, visitors to the Prado would find these catalogues to be a compass for their visit, which not only provided information on the author and the theme, but also guided the visitor in how to view and interpret the work.

Ceán Bermúdez was also passionately involved in the inauguration of the Museo del Prado. As was men-



9. Luis Eusebi, *Ensayo sobre las diferentes escuelas de pintura*, Madrid 1822, Madrid, Private Collection

tioned, he participated in the first volume of the *Colección litográfica*, where, in 1826, the museum's most important works were described, accompanied by miniature reproductions. In addition, in 1827 Ceán translated Milizia's work – *Dell'arte di vedere nelle belle arti del disegno* (1781) – which he completed with abundant appendices that he justified to his readership with extremely precise information about each artistic production and, of course, the new museum's collection⁴⁴.

The Museo del Prado's collection was not the only one open to the public in Madrid. Following the Peninsular War, the Real Academia de San Fernando reorganized its collection, which had been obtained from various sources and included not only Spanish masters and those from the academy, but also foreign masters. In 1817 the first catalogue dedicated to the Academia's collection appeared, including pieces added after the disasters of the war, which could be viewed by the public during its annual exhibition. The catalogue was reissued in 1818, 1819 and 1821. Each of those editions, as well as the inventories from the early nineteenth century, confirm that, with the exception of a few galleries – like the assembly room, which contained portraits of the royal fam-

ily – the paintings and sculptures were not distributed by theme, author or school, but rather by the work's recognized merit and size. It was only in the 1821 edition of the catalogue that a few pages of brief comments were dedicated to the works and their authors, highlighting some of their most notable traits and their affiliation with a given school⁴⁵. The most interesting catalogue, in my opinion, was published in 1824. As indicated in the catalogue itself, in anticipation of the public exhibition that was organized for September, at the end of July the Real Academia de San Fernando named Ceán Bermúdez advisor so that, with the help of a group of professors, he could undertake a profound reorganization of the academy's collection. Ceán's intention was to achieve a distribution and arrangement of the works «more complete and in keeping with the merit of each one than what they currently have». Ceán proposed to separate the originals from the copies, order the academy's pieces chronologically and, most importantly, «classify the schools, especially the Spanish school»⁴⁶.

The aspiration to conserve and exhibit the pictorial collections in a manner conducive to an artistic, and not merely ornamental, vision was not new to Enlightenment Spain. The painter and theorist Anton Raphael Mengs – who resided in Spain from 1761–1769 and 1774–1777 – proposed a reorganization of the king's collection: the paintings of the Palacio del Buen Retiro by theme and those in the Palacio Real in a gallery which would include everything from «the oldest painters» to the most contemporary ones. According to Mengs, this kind of classification would allow the beauty and defects of each of these masters to be more adequately deciphered, and would therefore offer an eloquent lesson to the viewer⁴⁷.

Unlike some of his other projects, Ceán's plan for the Prado became a reality. In contrast, Ceán's proposed reorganization of the collection in the Real Academia de San Fernando, which followed an increasingly familiar set of criteria, did not come to fruition. Instead, the author settled for constructing a precise roster of the paintings and sculptures listed in the 1824 catalogue, their tropes and artists, adding an index at the end that included the artists and «aficionados» and incorporated brief comments about the artists' history, place of birth and death, the history of their career, and, in the case of foreigners, if they had spent time in Spain. In fact, this might seem like minimal information for someone who was writing his *magnum opus*, *Historia del Arte de la Pintura*, at the time.

In his *Historia*, Ceán punctuated the biographies of each author with the works that could be viewed at the Real Academia de San Fernando and the Real

Museo del Prado in that period; he even included the catalogue numbers in some cases. He did this to complete or correct the location of paintings described in his *Diccionario* and to offer an assessment of specific pieces. In any case, this technique echoed a new standard for exhibitions in Madrid. Ceán referenced the fact that «the large majority of precious paintings by the great masters» that had previously been located in the Palacio Real or other royal spaces had been moved to the Museo del Prado. He considered this an appropriate measure, given that, as he said, the wonders of Velázquez's work could be viewed at the Real Academia de San Fernando and, of course, at the Prado where they had been deposited on the orders of Fernando VII, «who was generous enough to give them so that artists, enthusiasts and educated citizens might enjoy them in greater comfort and with better light». There is evidence that on a number of occasions Ceán himself visited paintings at the Prado to study them *in situ* before including the works in his *Historia*. In turn, his readers, whether they were artists, enthusiasts or the general public, could make the same journey in reverse. In fact, he expressed a strong desire that galleries dedicated to the northern schools be opened as soon as possible, so that he might visit the collected works of all the European schools. The first large, public art collection shared the globalizing spirit that distinguished Ceán's *Historia*⁴⁸.

To historicize and characterize Spanish painting, to compare, situate, and relate it to the European context by way of a long tradition of the pictorial school – revitalized during this period – was a desire shared by Enlightenment historiography and the artistic academy. The opening of the Real Museo del Prado and the Academia's exhibitions, which hoped to reorganize their collections with the help of Ceán, made the relevance of having information and a deep knowledge of Spanish and continental painting even more evident. Artists, agents, enthusiasts, and even the simply curious comprised a growing audience that embraced works in which they could perceive previously scattered theories on the evolution and nature of painting, and which had developed within a recognizable frame of reference that considered Spanish culture to be European.

With these works Spanish art history entered a period of definitive maturity. Not only had the field achieved a systematic and scientific method of studying documented sources of information on artists and architects, but it did so by way of a historiographical narrative that positioned the development of the Spanish fine arts within a European panorama and adhered to new conservation and exhibition standards that were forming in Spain.

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