



## IN ICTU OCULI IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

*Transience and Eternity in the Spanish Golden Age*

Adam Lowe and Charlotte Skene Catling

*'We reached this most glorious Toledo of England  
this morning... What treasures are hid in England!'*

- Richard Ford on his visit to Durham and Auckland Castle, 1851<sup>1</sup>

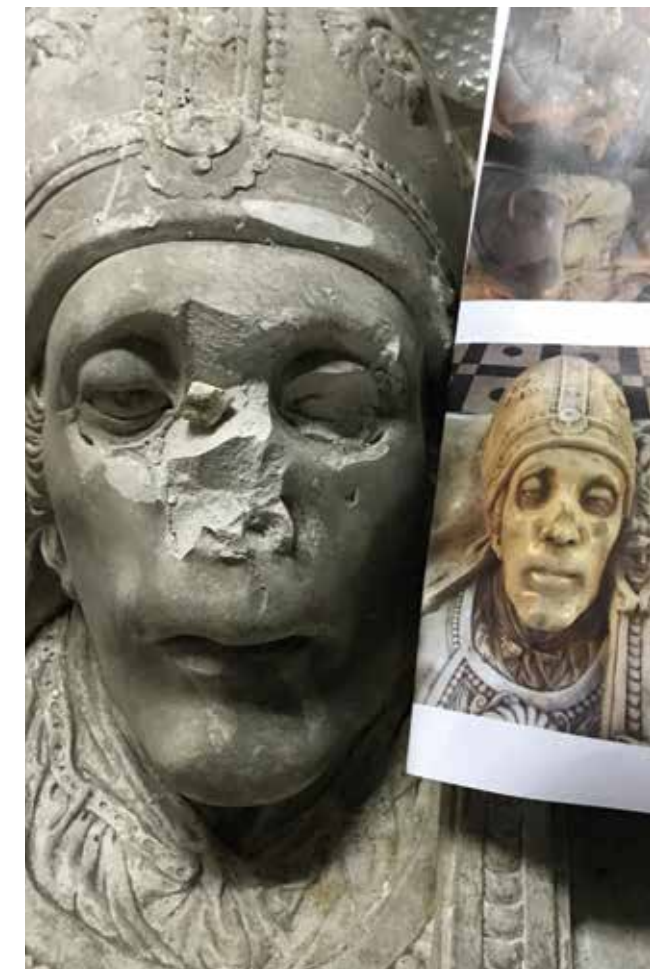
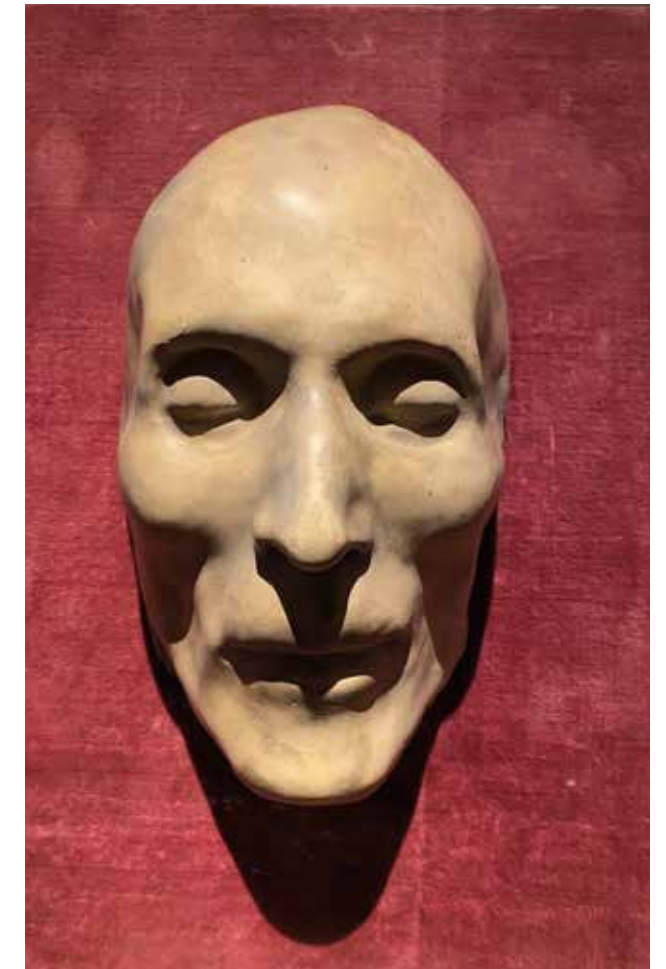
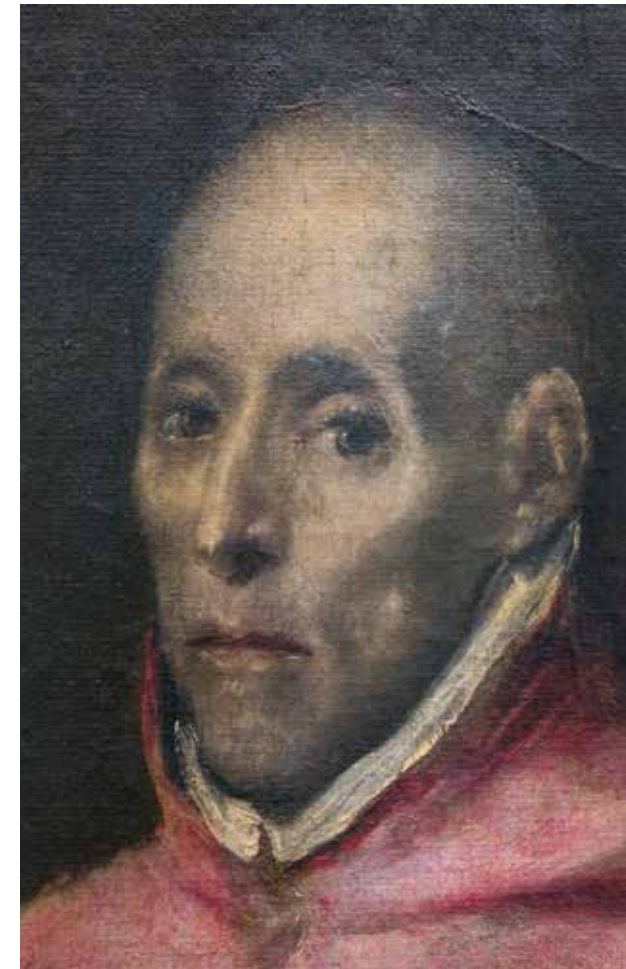
### AN IBERIAN ALLIANCE

England and Spain have a long and complex history together. Jonathan Ruffer's vision to create a gallery of Spanish art in the North of England was inspired by the historic, and somewhat unlikely, presence at Auckland Castle of Francisco de Zurbarán's mid-seventeenth century life-size portraits of *Jacob and His Twelve Sons*. Twelve of the thirteen portraits were bought in 1756 by Richard Trevor, the Bishop of Durham, an Anglican liberal who supported Jewish emancipation and for whom the paintings became a symbol and gesture of religious tolerance. The Bishop designed the Long Dining Room at the Castle specifically for them and they have hung there ever since. One imagines his bemused guests in the cold north encircled by the twelve brothers in their vermilion tunics, striped culottes, indigo and burnt orange damask cloaks; pale pink shot silk, ermine trim, stamped leather sashes; embroidered, knee-high, suede sandals; ribbons, bows and Baroque borders; a tunic of pale silver fish scales - *fleur de lys* embossed - under purple satin sleeves; gold chains, pearl-studded diamond brooches, knotted turbans, twisted wraps and headpieces, all radiant with the exotic brilliance of another place and different time. They were nearly lost in 2011 before Ruffer stepped in to secure their future and open them to the public. This reiterated symbol of tolerance, in an increasingly intolerant world, is at the heart of a much bigger project around Spanish art and how we see, experience, communicate and preserve our cultural heritage.

The Zurbarán portraits also radiate symbolic meaning onto the core of Jonathan Ruffer's collection: the Spanish Golden Age. Jacob, Patriarch of the Israelites, is a key figure within the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam as are his sons, the heads of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. The Spanish Renaissance and early Baroque coincided with the end of the relatively tolerant co-existence in Spain of Jews, Christians and Muslims that began in the early eighth century when the Muslims from North Africa unified the Iberian Peninsula, establishing Al-Andalus. Although there are ideological disputes over just how peaceful this long co-existence - *'la Convivencia'* - really was, the cultural exchange and the lasting impact it had on the Spanish character and on the art, architecture, music, literature, song and food of Spain, is unarguable. During hundreds of years of living in such close proximity, many qualities of life and culture quietly merged; Mosques, Synagogues and Churches shared architectural details<sup>2</sup> and, even today, traditional Spanish dance and song remain a hybrid. But tolerance was eventually stifled by intolerance. The Reconquista moved steadily south. The Spanish Inquisition was established in 1478, and all Jews except those who had converted to Catholicism (the *'Conversos'*), were expelled in 1492. Muslims faced the same fate: conversion or death. Finally, between 1609 and 1614, the entire population of converted Muslims, (the *'Moriscos'*), was also forced to leave.

English interest in this period of Spanish art has other precedents: at the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle, not far from Bishop Auckland, are paintings by El Greco and Goya. Rokeby Park in Yorkshire was once home to the only surviving nude painting by Velázquez - *'the Rokeby Venus'* - which was sold in 1906 to the National Gallery in London where it now hangs, and where, in 1914, it was violently slashed by a suffragette for its sensual realism.<sup>3</sup> One hopes these pictures carry the ghost of tolerance with them despite having been painted when England and Spain were at war. Ironically, The Spanish Gallery opens in the year that the UK leaves the European Union, with the world in the midst of a pandemic and undergoing deepest change.

As part of Ruffer's expansive reimagining of the town of Bishop Auckland, he commissioned Factum Foundation and Skene Catling de la Peña to rethink the concept and role of a museum for the top floor of the Spanish Gallery.



Above Left - Doménikos Theotokópoulos, known as 'El Greco' 1541-1614 *Portrait of Cardinal Tavera* (facsimile)

Above Right - *Death mask of Cardinal Tavera* (facsimile)

Below Left - *Silicon mould from 3D print of the face of Cardinal Tavera*

Below Right - *Damaged plaster cast of the face of Cardinal Tavera*



The result, *'In the Blink of an Eye, Transience and Eternity in the Spanish Golden Age'*, is a space filled with great objects, all with their own specific history, biography and meaning in their original location, but with the potential to unlock a profound understanding of Spanish art when put together in dialogue with each other. The original pieces were all chosen, digitally recorded and re-embodied as physical facsimiles for installation in Bishop Auckland to reveal some of the defining characteristics of this period of Spanish art and its context. A New World vellum map, paintings - portraits, biblical scenes, two vanitas 'warnings' and a baptism - sit alongside Renaissance wall tiles, carved architectural plasterwork or *yasería*, elaborate, geometric-patterned timber ceilings, sculptures, a tabernacle and a tomb. All have been made in Madrid over three years of delicate negotiations and intense digital and physical work. The outcome is a portal into Spanish Renaissance and early Baroque thinking and a collection of mutually beneficial collaborations that redefine sharing, connoisseurship and preservation.

## TRANSIENCE AND TRANSFORMATION

Looking is an active process. The title of the exhibition, *'In the Blink of an Eye'*, is taken from one of the extraordinarily visceral paintings on display, a vanitas by Juan de Valdés Leal. *In Ictu Oculi* speaks of the transience of life - that momentary flash between birth and death - but also of transformation and, as beautifully transposed into a seventeenth century sermon by John Donne, of resurrection. Paraphrasing the original 1 Corinthians 15:52, Donne wrote, "we say there shall be a sudden death, and a sudden resurrection; *In raptu, in transitu, in ictu oculi*, In an instant, in the twinkling of an eye."<sup>4</sup>

Rapture, transience, transformation and resurrection are at the core of this exhibition. It is also designed to provoke questions. What is the function and purpose of art? What does it reveal? Where does its value lie? What is the relationship between the original and an authentic copy? Are these copies new works of art enabled by technology? Why are they made physical? Why visit a museum that puts preservation and communication before ownership? What can Spanish art contribute to a former mining town in the north east of England? Why open a museum at all in the twentieth century? What can an 'offline' experience deliver that cannot be gained 'online'? Hopefully the answers will be diverse and surprising. The selection of works displayed is intended to raise more questions than it answers while

Above - Juan de Valdés Leal 1622-1690 *In Ictu Oculi* (detail of the facsimile)

Below - Juan de Valdés Leal 1622-1690 *Finis Gloriae Mundi* (detail of the facsimile)



generating a sense of wonder and empathy. One of the aims is to create a new narrative through juxtaposition by which objects can be seen as if for the first time. Great art grants the power to see through the eyes and perceptions of others. *'In Ictu Oculi - In the Blink of an Eye'* celebrates a uniquely Iberian view of the world, and the ability of art to compress and transcend time and place.

## MUSEUMS AND COPIES

Museums are not new. The first collectors sought out rare, often bizarre, natural objects and human creations which they displayed in 'Cabinets of Curiosity', *Wunderkammer*, or 'Wonder Rooms'. These were 'magic boxes', filled with intrigue, that made no separation between art and science, the found or the manufactured. They presented fact and fiction alike, aiming to stimulate a deeper understanding of the world around us. The Ennigaldi-Nanna Museum in Ur, Mesopotamia is believed by many to be the first. It was created nearly 2,500 years ago, at the end of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, a time of nostalgia for a dying culture and dynasty. The Priestess Princess Ennigaldi, daughter of the last King<sup>5</sup>, assembled a large number of objects which she housed next to the palace in a temple used for learning. Excavated by Sir Charles Leonard Woolley in 1922, most of the contents are now in the National Museum of Iraq. Their discovery was initially met with confusion: how could objects from such different regions and epochs - some separated by over a thousand years - be found

carefully arranged together? It revealed itself as a curated collection of cultural heritage partly through the cylinder seals found alongside the objects. The seals held information - or 'metadata' - about the ancient artifacts, written in three languages including Sumerian: among everything else, Woolley had discovered the first museum labels. Equally remarkable, some of the objects were copies from originals.

Museums as we now know them emerged in the seventeenth century from an Enlightenment desire to classify and catalogue knowledge. Museums preserved, collated, described and displayed to form a bedrock of solid understanding from which future generations could build, re-describe, appropriate and create. Museums reflect the values of their age. Through them we understand what mattered in different places at different times. Although we are often not immediately conscious of it, museums continue adapting to reflect current concerns and the things we care about in the present. In England they have provided free access and a social space in which objects can be engaged with, discussed and shared.

## COPIES AND ORIGINALS

In the twentieth century copies fell out of favour. Owning the original became more desirable than sharing and understanding it. Complex subjects became discrete objects displayed for aesthetic appreciation. Important collections of plaster casts and copies - designed to give access to those who weren't

able to travel to see the originals - were thrown away. Fortunately, a few survived. The Cast Courts at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London are unusual today for containing a collection made entirely of copies. They are finding a new relevance in an age of 'digital materiality'. The V&A plaster copies were made using the technologies of the nineteenth century, by taking impressions directly from the originals (in some cases harming them in the process). Today these copies often contain more detail than the originals they were taken from, originals damaged by pollution, aggressive restoration or just the passage of time. The copies are a 'snapshot' of the original object at the time the cast was made. In some cases, the original has been destroyed altogether, for example, the nineteenth century plaster cast at the V&A is all that remains of the late sixteenth century relief of *Christ Washing the Feet of His Disciples*, from Lübeck, Germany.

Writing at the height of the popularity of cast courts and plaster architecture, Marcel Proust took the dichotomy of the copy vs. the original to its conceptual extreme. In his subtly layered composite of reality and fiction, *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Proust describes Marcel's disappointment at finally seeing the original 'Virgin of the Portal' in the (invented) town of Balbec which he had known until then only through reproduction. As a boy, the plaster copy represented abstract perfection and immortality while, 'the church itself', 'the statue itself' was diminished for being subject to all the mundanities of everyday life. 'Chained to the square' it had to withstand 'the gaze of the café and the omnibus office, receiving on its face half the ray of the setting sun and soon - in a few hours - from the light of the streetlamp... the whiff of the pastry chef's kitchens'. It was all 'too real'. The memory of the copy transcended the 'tyranny' and fate 'of the Particular', the original.<sup>6</sup>

Today the facsimiles by Factum Foundation are made using contactless scanning and photogrammetry techniques that leave the original untouched. The original and the copy, conservation, restoration and provenance, the aura and authenticity are all subjects that are being re-thought.

Material evidence and original objects are still fundamentally important as the 'source', the 'evidence' and the direct connection to the past providing privileged access to diverse experts. But originality is a process. It is dynamic and requires constant attention. Like us, objects reflect how they are cared for and valued. Anti-ageing treatments can both rejuvenate and alter, conceal and mislead. Restorations also reveal the values of their time and of the places where they were



carried out. One of the primary goals of connoisseurship, both philological and through the close study of material evidence, in physical and digital form, is to gain a deeper understanding of the people who made the objects. Ironically, given today's veneration of the original object, art historical study is very often dependent on reproductions in books, usually at a different scale and lacking any physical presence. It would be impossible to tell whether, for example, the reproduction of the detail of the Valdés Leal painting in this book was made from a photograph of the original or the facsimile: both are reproductions.

The objects in the installation at Bishop Auckland have all been selected because of their ability to reveal the complexity that underlies Spanish art; the philosophical and religious constraints imposed on the makers, the craftsmanship and material transformations that were developed to high levels, the aesthetic and financial values and many other ingredients that make a work of art specifically what it is.

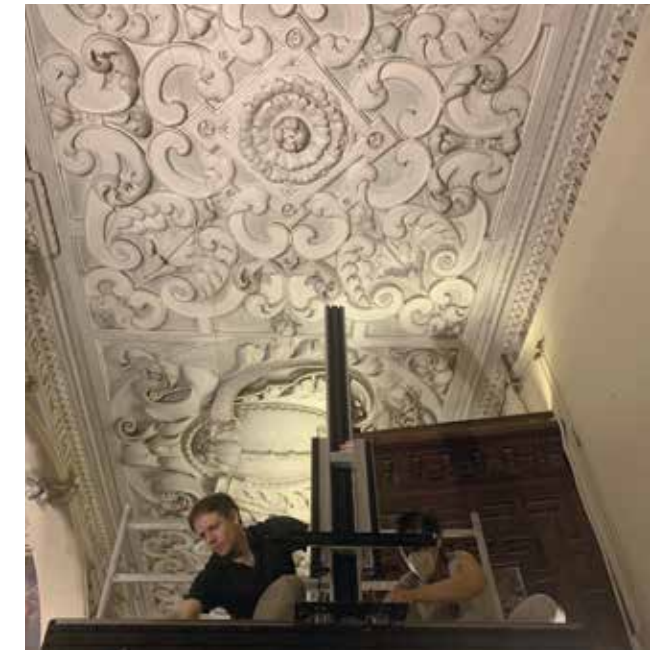
## THE EVIDENCE OF THE PAST

Museums are, at least in theory, publicly owned collections displayed in public spaces that serve a social function. Private collections play a different role and often project singular visions and personal passions or interests. Money talks and has provided various people with the voices through which to assert their cultural perspectives. Sir John Soane's Museum in London, Horace Walpole's collection at Strawberry Hill House, the Museo Cerralbo in Madrid are all examples of private collections with particular 'voices', as is the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford which is currently the focus of much attention and controversy. But material evidence is significant precisely for providing a physical presence that can be seen, revisited and understood. As the perspective of the visitor changes with time, different narratives emerge which nourish new audiences. Removing the evidence of the past is filled with all the dangers of rewriting history and taking away the possibilities of learning from it in its unadulterated form. Understanding different historical perspectives has great and important value, however unpalatable they may sometimes be.

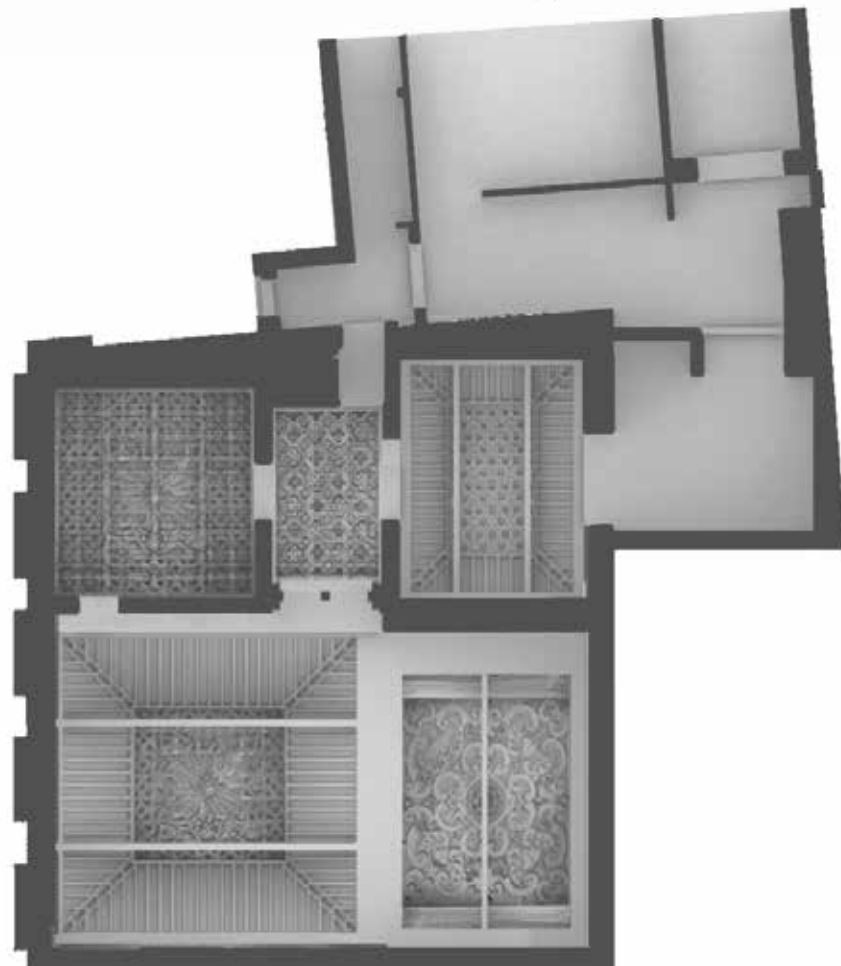
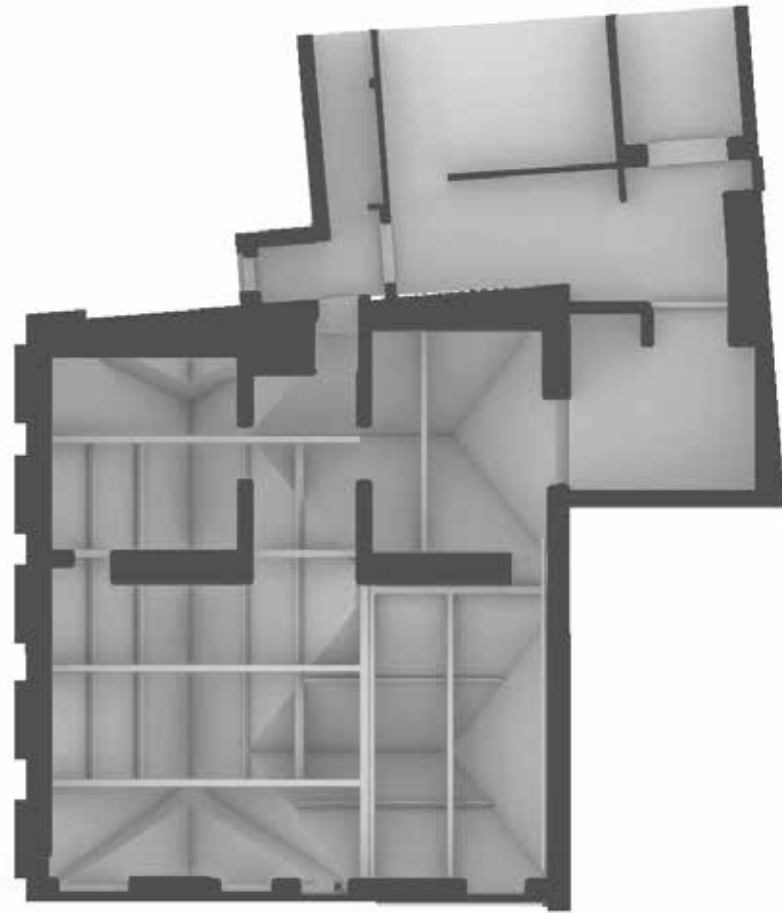
The alternative to breaking up museum collections is to rethink ownership and display. Of the artifacts now on exhibition at Strawberry Hill House, thirty-eight of them, including drawings, paintings and sculptures, are facsimiles made by Factum Foundation as the originals were auctioned off and dispersed in the nineteenth century. For *In the Blink of an Eye*, both the architectural space and the content are facsimiles that were made in collaboration with some of the great Spanish collections for display at Bishop Auckland. The approach has been to flood the site with evidence of the past, inviting sensual and intuitive understanding as well as providing a context for Ruffer's collection and the Zurbarán paintings that have been here for nearly two and a half centuries. In addition, the material collected and produced in the making of this exhibition will provide an invaluable and evolving resource for scholars working in the Zurbarán Centre, a research institute dedicated to Spanish art, run in collaboration with Durham University and supported by Banco Santander.

## RE-MATERIALISATION

The real challenge faced by Factum Foundation and Skene Catling de la Peña, was how to insert a curated collection of exact facsimiles of the Spanish Golden Age to create an immersive narrative. The site, in the North of England, on the top floor of a late nineteenth century former bank building in



Stages in the process of making different ceilings for *In the Blink of an Eye*



Renders of the roof layout before and after the Skene Catling De la Peña redesign



the Gothic Revival style, was a cacophonous crashing together of different roof geometries that reflected the ways in which the building had been used and adapted over time. Because the building was Grade II listed, very little could be altered or removed. To overcome this, it was decided to rationalise the space through the insertion of five different Spanish ceilings, each that represent Islamic, Christian or Jewish iconography, or a hybrid of them. The floors were lined with antique chestnut boards, green and white ceramic 'herringbone' and cast facsimiles of terracotta tiles. The windows were fitted with carved timber screens to obscure views of the very English town square beyond. Factum's facsimiles grew to an architectural scale to create beneath them distinct, discrete spaces in which different elements of Renaissance Spain could be explored and understood.

The architectural elements themselves become as much a part of the exposition as the artworks they contain. Brushstrokes of Velázquez paintings are mapped onto cornices, friezes and pilasters of grotesque arabesques to create the wall coverings in the first room. The second is lined with facsimiles of the gleaming, immortal and unchanging ceramic tiles of the Casa de Pilatos, whose painted surfaces and games of figure ground and pattern make them appear alive, animated and curiously modern. A 'lapidarium' of *yaserías* follows, where the intricate lace-like plaster panels, carved in light and shadow, reiterate how interwoven the cultures of the Jews, Muslims and Christians became, with relationships as delicate and complex as these frozen geometries. The fourth room presents religious ritual and ecstasy through a gilded automaton where El Greco's polychrome Christ is raised and lowered as sacred spectacle,

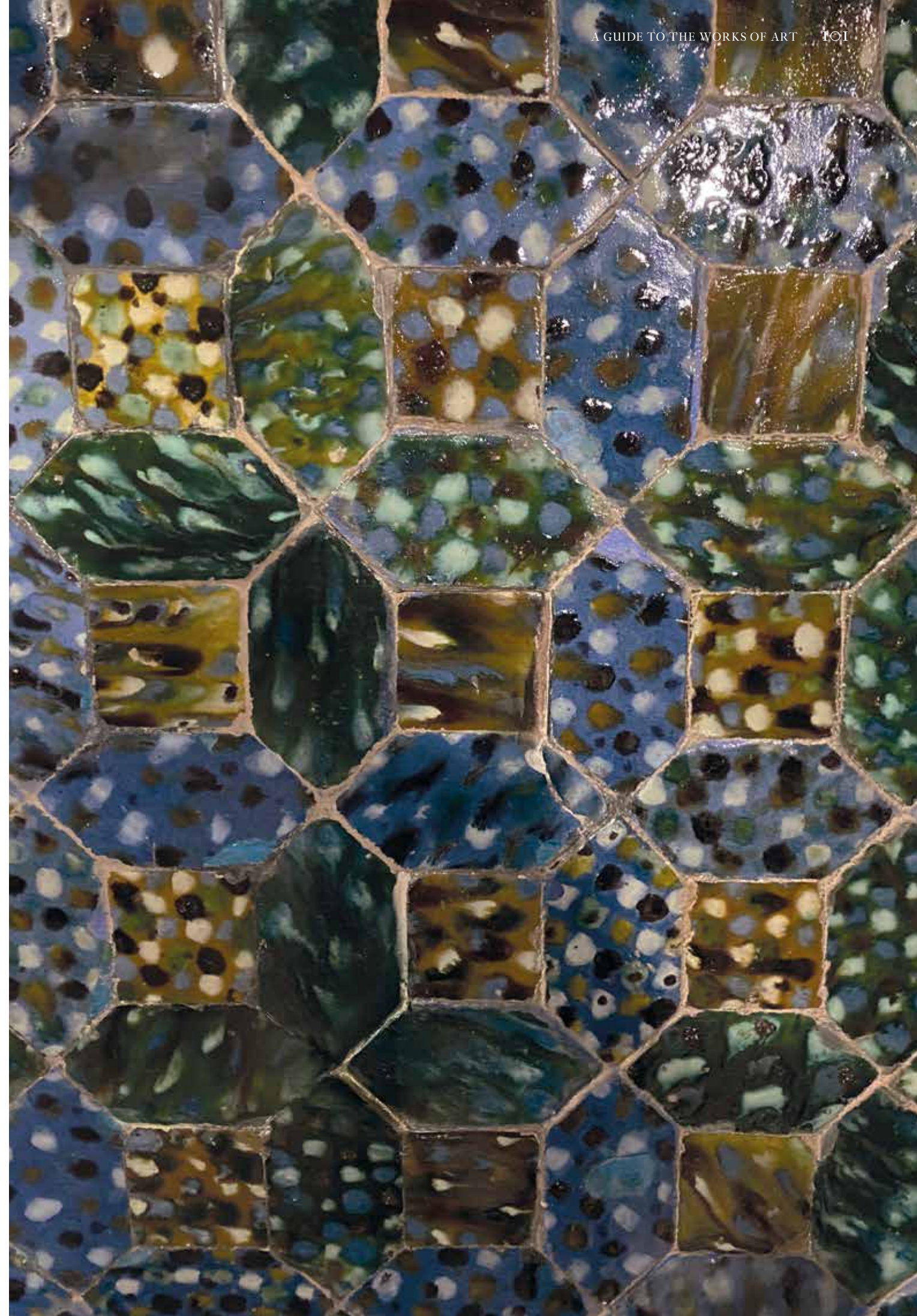
Making of the floors in Factum's workshop and comparing the floor tiles by Cerámicas Fombella to the originals in Casa de Pilatos

literally playing out the dramatic vertical split between reality and visionary experience demonstrated in his painting, 'The Baptism of Christ', opposite. Death is the subject of sombre celebration in the room that follows, where Alonso Berruguete's magnificent 'Sepulchre of Cardinal Tavera' is coolly observed by his own death mask and two portrait paintings of him. El Greco's portrait - brutally decapitated during the Spanish Civil war - used the mask as model, painting from 'death' rather than life. Death is followed by Valdés Leal's 'hieroglyphics of the afterlife', vanitas reminders that life is fleeting, and earthly glory ultimately meaningless. On one side the Bishop, with his rictus grin and rotting flesh, stares back through eyeless sockets that writhe with maggots and scavenging beetles. On the other, the grim reaper straddles the globe with scythe and coffin, fixing the viewer with a penetrating, hollow glare as he snuffs out life's brief light under the words, *In Ictu Oculi*.

## A NEW APPROACH TO SHARING AND OWNERSHIP

The collaboration between Factum Foundation, Jonathan Ruffer, The Auckland Project and the partner organisations in Spain, is a bold and inspired cultural initiative that is without precedent. It also mutually benefits all. The following institutions granted access to their extraordinary and diverse collections; the *Fundación Casa Ducal de Medinaceli* to their *Casa de Pilatos* in Seville, the source of the wall tiles, ceilings and sculptures, and the *Hospital of Cardinal Tavera* in Toledo home to the Sepulchre of Cardinal Tavera and several El Greco paintings; the *Hospital de la Caridad* to their biblical compositions by Murillo, the vanitas paintings of Valdés Leal and their Baroque chapel plasterwork ceiling; the Museo Naval to 'one of the most important of all cartographic records of early European exploration of the Americas'; the *Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica* (CEEH) to the intricate *Artesonado* ceilings and carved plasterwork or *yasería* at the Casa de Mesa in Toledo. *Yasería* were also recorded in the *Sinagoga del Tránsito*, (now the Museo Sefardi), the *Convento de Santa Clara la Real* in Toledo and the *Real Alcázar* in Seville. Many others have contributed and continue to do so.

Each organisation allowed Factum Foundation to record its artworks (and in some cases, the buildings in which they are housed) and from these recordings to make facsimiles for *In the Blink of an Eye* in Bishop Auckland. Through this collaboration, the institutions gained ownership and control



of the resultant high-resolution digital data which will play an important role in the long-term preservation of both their objects and architecture. The institutions will be the sole beneficiaries of any commercial exploitation of this data, which can further support and maintain their collections. Meanwhile, the public gains access to great works of art, while the digital data can be made freely available to enable in-depth academic study of the material.

The artworks recorded by Factum remain in their original locations displayed as they were designed to be seen<sup>8</sup>. It is both revealing and moving to see artworks as originally intended when they are well cared for. But often they can be hard to see, to focus on or get close to. They can be unapproachable for a number of different reasons. Access might be restricted because of conditions placed by, or on, their guardians, through fear of damage to the original, or they could simply be physically 'out of reach'. Low light levels required for conservation can alienate artworks behind glass and, in some cases, will make a meaningful understanding of the work's material qualities, and all this reveals, almost impossible. When hung in an elaborate or historical context, the detail of individual artworks is sometimes overwhelmed or lost as they become elements of larger compositions. Guided tours, crowds of visitors and the way objects are displayed can prevent contemplation. There is a multiplicity of ways to experience artworks, all that fulfil a function. Facsimiles can contribute through the return of artworks to their original intended locations<sup>9</sup> by allowing artworks too precious to move to exist in alternate sites thereby facilitating a new approach to exhibition and display (as at Bishop Auckland), by reuniting artworks or collections that have been broken up and scattered<sup>10</sup>, as well as by providing the means for preservation, close proximity and study. The copies being made now are an addition to supplement the originals, not replace them.

Frescos, architecture and embedded artworks don't move location often or easily<sup>11</sup>. Easel paintings, by their very nature, do. It is remarkable that the original paintings by Valdés Leal and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, present as facsimiles in Bishop Auckland, remain in the space for which they were originally commissioned in 1672<sup>12</sup>. The Church of the *Hospital de la Caridad* is an intact Baroque masterpiece, looked after impeccably, with almost all its contents in place. Furthermore, it continues to function as a charity hospital. Valdés Leal's *In Ictu Oculi* hangs in the church above the side entrance and under the balcony of the narthex, while *Finis Gloriam Mundi* is directly opposite. Both are meditations on mortality, transience and the ephemeral nature of power, but at high level their

elaborate, compelling detail is difficult to see. Their location in the chapel was part of the carefully choreographed unfolding of a tripartite theme; first the visitor would be presented with Valdés Leal's gruesome vanitas paintings before being shown the route to salvation through Christian charity and humility. But the two vast paintings by Murillo, (each three by eight metres), are also mounted very high in the nave of the Church at a distance that resists any kind of scrutiny.<sup>13</sup>

As part of the elegant arrangement devised with the guardians of the *Hospital de la Caridad*, Factum Foundation is making an additional facsimile copy of each the Valdés Leal and Murillo works to remain in Seville. These will be donated for permanent display in a dedicated visitors' centre in a currently under-used part of the seventeenth century hospital. The original paintings will remain in the Church where they have always been, while visitors and scholars will gain the same intimate and privileged access to the paintings as those in Bishop Auckland. Visitors to *In the Blink of an Eye*, will find the Valdés Leal vanitas paintings placed opposite each other, as the originals, but hung just above floor level, unframed and without glass. They sit under a ceiling of deep carved baroque plasterwork, a facsimile of that above the originals in the narthex of the *Hospital de la Caridad*. Benches in front of each vanitas will allow the visitor to linger - pondering transience - studying the detail of the paintings with the same proximity to them Valdés Leal would have known in his studio.

## EDUCATION AND APPLICATIONS

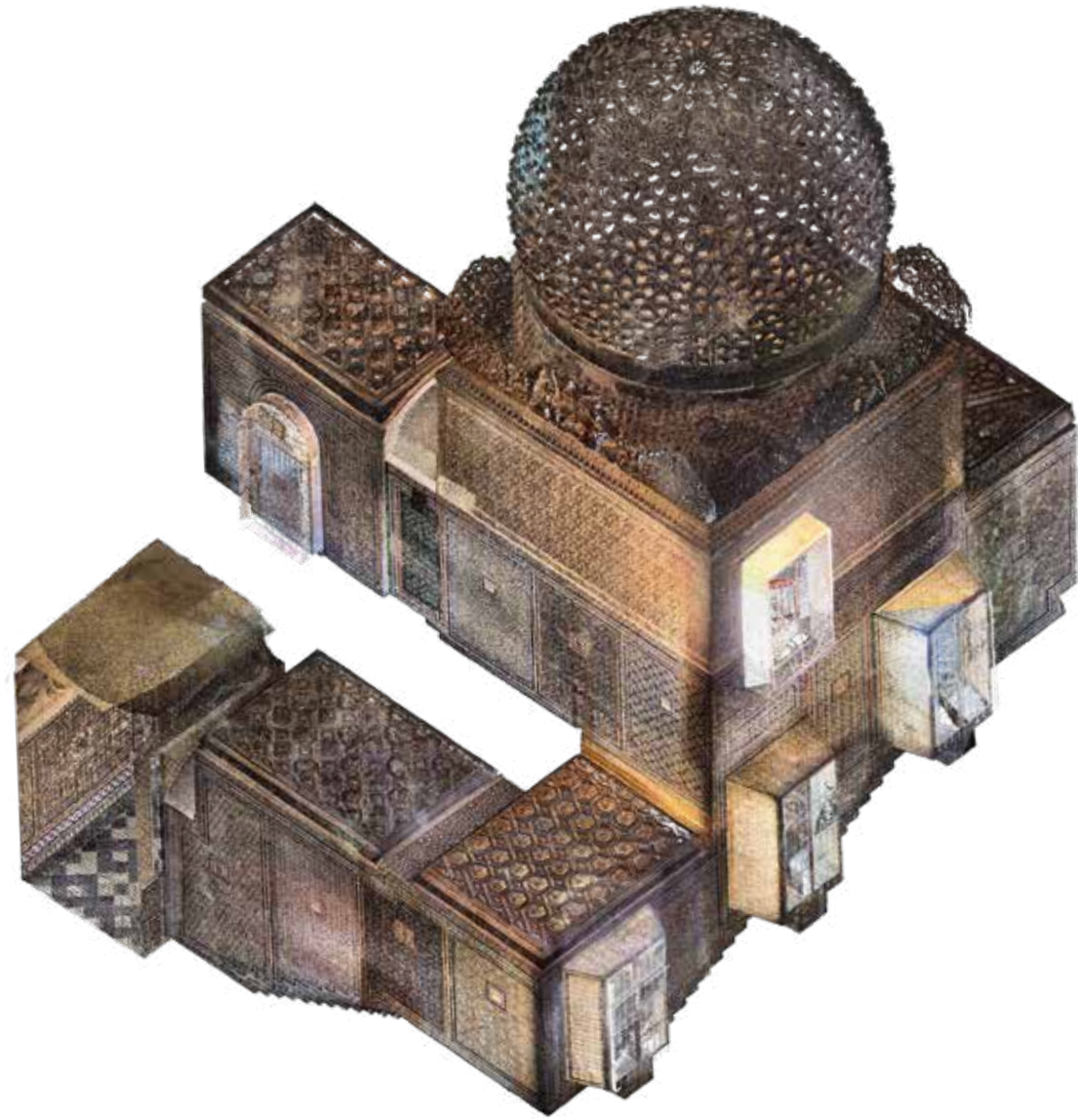
As part of Factum Foundation's Master's programme at *Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation in New York*, students have already been engaged in the study and documentation of the Casa Pilatos. The many different Renaissance tile designs have been recorded in ways that allow them to be exactly replicated, as evidenced in the Bishop Auckland display. The capturing of the colour and three-dimensional surface of the restored *Retablo del Maestro de Perea*, also in Casa Pilatos, means that its condition can be monitored, and its iconography compared in microscopic detail with other works by this painter. The accurate 3D recording of the main staircase and its *murquana* has informed a detailed study of the component elements of the composite pattern whose complex geometry defies easy comprehension. In the Hospital of Cardinal Tavera in Toledo, Michelangelo's only sculpture in Spain is kept in a small room. The exquisite *John the Baptist* was badly damaged during the Spanish Civil War, its body smashed into several parts



Juan de Valdés Leal 1622-1690 *Finis Gloriarum Mundi*



Juan de Valdés Leal 1622-1690 *In Ictu Oculi*



and the head thrown into a fire which turned the marble into a darkened and fragile form of plaster. The figure was reassembled by the *Opificio delle Pietre Dure* following the conservation guidelines of the time, but the result is that neither the parts nor the whole can really be appreciated. A virtual restoration will be carried out by Factum using high-resolution scans of the parts and historical photos of the piece in Úbeda before it was destroyed. This approach to digital restoration is done without ever touching the original parts and is one of the most important contributions of technology to preservation.

The potential applications for high-quality recordings of colour, surface and the traces that lie under the surface are growing exponentially. More and more areas of research and experimentation are emerging in the rapidly growing field of 'digital humanities'. The recordings do not replace the function of the original, but they can add to the deep scholarship that exists; there is still so much information embedded in the material evidence of the past that needs to be accessed and discussed in order to understand its complexity. The dynamic nature of originality is most visible at times of change - both technological, social and political. Digital data can be studied and analysed in great detail, shared around the world and made available in different forms. Virtual - and Augmented-Realities now sit alongside a diverse array of 3D output technologies. The more types of 'correspondence' that can be recorded, the closer the representation can be. The reproduction of a painting in a book might have a degree of correspondence



Above - Isometric projection of Casa de Pilatos from LiDAR data

Below - Students of Columbia University's GSAPP recording the tiles with the Lucida 3D Scanner



Left - The tomb of Cardinal Cisneros, after the bombing of Alcalá de Henares in 1936  
Photo credit - Fototeca del Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural de España

Right - El Greco's Risen Christ from the Hospital Tavera was heavily damaged during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39)  
Photo credit - Toledo Olvidado by Eduardo Sánchez Butraqueño toledoolvidado.blogspot.com

in terms of colour, but none in relation to its surface texture or scale. Digital data is inherently synaesthetic; information is abstracted and described in code which means that the different senses - hearing, sight, touch, smell and even taste - can all be addressed using the same encoded means. In an unexpected area of collaboration, the dynamic levels of realism demanded by the computer gaming industry have led to significant investment in the software to process and display data. Now, as multiple players inhabit the same space, each can experience the game from their own viewpoint, in real time, at levels of realism that were impossible to imagine a few years ago. The mixture of 3D modeling and hyper-real renderings that respond instantaneously to changes of light and perspective is transforming the ways in which we think about, represent, and engage with our environment, with profound implications for the online display of cultural information.

## THE PHYSICAL AND THE ETHEREAL

The ability to re-materialise digital information at high-resolution is essentially what has made *In Ictu Oculi - In the Blink of an Eye* possible. A real, physical object is very different to a virtual one. One is visible in the presence of light and the other is light; a display of light, either viewed on a screen or projected. The digital is normally associated with the virtual and generally thought of as ephemeral, screen-based and insubstantial; as lacking in form. Virtual images are clearly distinguished from - and have very different qualities to - the things they represent. Spanish painting of the Golden Age was fundamentally concerned with the means of representation. Recently a major shift has taken place in the field of digital materialisation which allows for the transformation from a physical original (through a 'recording' process) to a digital abstraction and back again to a physical object. As re-materialisation technologies improve, the boundaries between the fleeting material world and visionary experience are blurred.

There are many ways in which the world around us can now be recorded: laser scanning, Lidar scanning, profilometry, RTI, photometric stereo and photogrammetry all 'capture' form and surface from close or long-range at different resolutions. Composite photography has changed the rules of high-resolution recording of images in both visible and invisible frequencies of light. X-Ray and infra-red go under the surface, as do some forms of sonic recording and ground penetrating radar. Each of these techniques provides information about





different qualities of the original - the colour, the shape, the surface and what lies below the surface - the higher the resolutions of these recordings, the closer the correspondence between the original and its doppelganger. This new collection can be visited in Bishop Auckland or accessed online by anyone interested, anywhere in the world. Producing it has required many diverse forms of knowledge and technological mastery. A new digital connoisseurship is emerging that is rapidly changing the way we experience and understand art.

## VISIONARY REALITY AND VIRTUAL REALITY

Exploring the means of seeing and representation in Renaissance and early Baroque Spain is the essential purpose of *In the Blink of an Eye*, and through this, revealing the

underlying thinking of that time. By extension, it also questions how we see today, how we represent what we see, and what matters to us by revealing that what we see is limited to our own perspective.

While the Counter Reformation continued the expulsion of non-Christians from Spain a new threat was confronting the church. A form of visionary mysticism sought to reform the church from inside while renewing a spiritual connection to Christ. Simplicity, the everyday, direct experience and a romantic faith in the ability of the mind to transform and transcend triumphed over the hardship and poverty experienced by most people. The mystics established themselves first through visionary literature, painting was enlisted later. 'Vision' can refer either to what the eye sees, or the intellect and imagination perceive, but a spiritual 'vision' is something beyond both and is - according to the Mystics - indescribable and unrepresentable. So how, then, to portray it?



A radical shift in painting occurred in the first years of the 1600s in Rome, Naples and a few years later in Seville. With a new approach of working directly from life, painting people as they really look, in the clothes they wore every day, using a series of optical devices to re-negotiate the illusory space of the canvas, becoming aware of the effects of light and introducing a focal hierarchy with some elements of the composition sharper or more detailed than others - a new relationship was established between the external world and its representation. Caravaggio led the way, but it was the Spanish painters, both in Naples and Seville, who applied the newfound connection between paint and the physical world to both religious and political ends. Juan Bautista Maíno, José de Ribera, Juan Sánchez Cotán, Velázquez and Zurbarán looked at the world with intensity and applied paint with controlled gestural freedom. The potential of their powerful, compelling paintings for spreading 'the Word' was not lost on the Church. The Spanish Inquisition functioned as a surveillance machine to enforce Catholic orthodoxy, but also acted as censor to manipulate how its core beliefs were represented. Not only did the religious authorities have to approve the subject matter, but also the means of its depiction. What emerged was the harnessing of exquisite realism in the representation of the 'unrepresentable' or visionary.

Francisco Pacheco was a Spanish painter who immersed himself in the Italian and Flemish Renaissance masters - learning through copying - before setting up his art 'academy' in Seville. Pacheco was not only a master of the qualities of paint applied either to canvas or sculptures, he was also an official Censor to the Inquisition. His influential theory of painting, *El arte de la pintura*, 1649, contains references to contemporary artists (it includes an account of a visit to Toledo in 1609 to meet El Greco and study his work) and discusses materials and techniques as well as outlining the acceptable orthodox iconography of religious subjects. Through a complex guild system, sculptors and painters worked together to create astonishing three-dimensional, life size simulacrum of the miraculous and the divine. They merge the fleeting world of individual human experience with the imaginative potential of a collective, eternal and unchanging ideal. As altar pieces, or objects to be carried through the streets in celebration, the real and the visionary co-existed, a world view beautifully presented in Xavier Bray's exhibition at the National Gallery, *The Sacred Made Real - Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600-1700*.



## THE POLYCHROME PROMETHEUS

Polychrome figures constructed from sculpted hardwood appear alive: they bring saints to earth in dazzling techni-colour and transport the faithful beyond the mundane through empathy and passionate belief. Elaborate processes made timber robes seem fluid and embroidered with gold thread. Surfaces were painted with animal glue and gesso, followed by burnished red clay. After water gilding and over painting, the tempera was scratched away in patterns to reveal the gold beneath which was punched for texture, then highlighted and shaded for apparent depth. Flesh tones, the 'encarnaciones' (literally, 'embodiment in flesh'), were formed by a base of chalk and matt gesso, followed by pigments suspended in oil, each vein picked out in blue just visible beneath the 'skin' where layers of translucent paint create optical mixes of naturalistic colour, with blood almost pulsing in fingertips and palms of soft rose. Glass eyes, tears and ivory teeth add an eerie, hyper-realism. The raw sufferings of Christ are made brutally visceral, with shattered bone seen through torn flaps of bleeding flesh, all painted in vibrant, violent detail in a 're-materialisation' of suffering. The figures show the artists' supreme understanding of the relationship between light and form, where shadows are added and enhanced in three dimensions, to reinforce the physical presence of the divine. This artificial heightening has the curious effect of making the real 'realer'.

The Resurrecting Christ from the tabernacle in Toledo is one of El Greco's few polychrome figures. As part of a theatrical automaton framed within an architectural shrine, the figure of Christ was designed to be raised and lowered as a literal re-enactment of the miracle of resurrection, fueling rapture when it was paraded through the streets of Toledo on the day of Corpus Christi each year. During Factum's recording work in the Hospital of Cardinal Tavera, Juan Manuel Albendea Solís produced a photograph revealing that the remaining section of the gilt tabernacle was only part of the whole aedicule. Through painstaking analysis and 3D modelling, the tabernacle has been remade for Bishop Auckland. The facsimile Christ, polychromed using traditional techniques, can now be moved from its invisible position in the sarcophagus base, up through the dome to glorious display in the canopy space at the top. Black and white films of the *Semana Santa* or Holy Week in Spain in the 1950's reveal a living continuum. Candlelight plays on gold diffused through clouds of incense, figures sway in the chiaroscuro around the pale flesh of the resurrected Christ, voices rise in the haunting, emotional singing of *saetas* to an elated, religious ecstasy.

## KNOWLEDGE

Pacheco is now most remembered because of his brilliant pupil and son-in-law, Diego Velázquez. Despite his role as Inquisitorial Censor, Pacheco actively promoted scientific enquiry and open debate. He assembled a diverse group around him that contained every discipline, from artists, philosophers and mystics to scientists and cartographers who met to discuss subjects that included optics and perspective which had the potential to directly influence approaches to representation.<sup>14</sup> As his disciple, Velázquez would have been exposed to this cultivated elite, alive with the potential of the new world, in one of Europe's largest, richest cities.<sup>15</sup> They gathered at the *Casa de Pilatos* beneath Pacheco's painted ceiling, the *Apotheosis of Hercules*, where Velázquez is also likely to have seen a Caravaggio copy and gained an understanding of classical antiquity through the collection of the Duke of Alcalá, the remains of which can be seen there today.<sup>16</sup>

The mimetic nature of sacred Polychrome figures had a Promethean impact on painters working at the time. From a very early age Velázquez mastered a realism based on direct observation from life, with the ability to transform paint into a parallel world. Unlike sculpture, a two-dimensional surface demands a very different sensibility and treatment to convert the fatty mix of pigment, wax and oil into living flesh, lemon peel, glazed ceramic, glass, metal and cloth. Velázquez's *Old woman Cooking Eggs* at the Scottish National Gallery or the *Waterseller of Seville* in Apsley House in London, both painted before he was twenty, merge a directness of observation from life with a natural touch capable of convincing through the most economic means. He was able to effortlessly fuse the movements of the hand and eye, while his intellectual range and poetic precision is unrivalled. His pre-1623 *Portrait of a Man with a Ruff* (which is probably Pacheco), and the *Portrait of Juan de la Pareja* of 1650, reflect Velázquez's extraordinary ability as a painter of people. Of North African descent, Juan de la Pareja was Velázquez's slave and assistant who became a painter in his own right after being freed by Velázquez in 1654. The portraits of Pope Innocent X and Juan de la Pareja were made at the same time and are two of the most penetrating ever painted. The Pope, mottled skin above gleaming pink satin robes, enframed by his gilded chair, stares out of the painting with defensive suspicion. Shape and detail are accurately mapped onto a flat surface, but Velázquez's brush marks catch far more than a likeness - they forensically dissect the emotional convolutions of a politically shrewd ruler. Velázquez seems not only to paint his subject, but also the thoughts that



are passing at that moment through his mind. This contrasts with his portrait of de la Pareja whose expression and posture, simple olive clothes, dark skin and the undefined bulk of black hair, reveal a more noble figure. In response to his portrait, Innocent X is reported to have said, *È troppo vero! È troppo vero!* - 'It is too true! It is too true!'

*Left - The Lucida 3D Scanner recording the surface of Francisco Pacheco's Virgen del Popolo*

*Right - Diego Velázquez The Waterseller of Seville (facsimile)  
We thank Apsley House and Wellington Arch for permission to use the Waterseller of Seville*



## 'É TROPPO VERO!' CONCLUSION

Velázquez was a *Converso* painter working for King Philip II, travelling to Rome with a *Morisco* where he painted one of the most haunting and penetrating portraits of Pope Innocent X, while at the same time working on a deeply observed and generous depiction of 'a subject from the lowest ranks of society', his slave. In the same period, he also produced one of the world's most sensual paintings, the *Rokeby Venus*, and became a father to his only son, Antonio. That none of these statements seems surprising captures the contradictions and complexity of Spain and Spanish art.

Where in the nineteenth century radical Romantics placed their faith in nature, the artists working in Spain in the seventeenth focused theirs on observation and reality. For them, access to the sublime did not lie in the vastness of creation, but in the act of looking and seeing. Velázquez moved to Madrid in 1623 and put his skill and insight to the service of the King and politics. Zurbarán stayed in Seville where he established a thriving workshop and provided the Church in Spain and the New World with the images they required. Victor I. Stoichita describes Zurbarán's '*Verónica*', which shows the direct imprint of Christ's face on a shroud, as '*mystical trompe-l'oeil*'.<sup>17</sup> The spectral face of Christ is made more nebulous because of the undeniable materiality of the cloth, itself an illusion.

From Juan de la Cosa's map in the first room to Valdés Leal's *vanitas* paintings in the last, the aim of this installation in Bishop Auckland has been to provide access, in the North East of England, to a glimpse of the different worlds that can coexist. '*In Ictu Oculi - In the Blink of an Eye*', is a reminder that national borders can change, and identities alter, religious power comes and goes, wealth exists and evaporates, but people always need to share and communicate. Both their similarity and difference.



## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Ford, author of *A Handbook for Travellers in Spain*, 1845, describing his visit to Durham and Auckland Castle in a letter to William Stirling-Maxwell, 22 September 1851. From, *Collecting Murillo in Britain and Ireland*, edited by Isabelle Kent, published by Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, CEEH.

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<sup>2</sup>See for example, the *Ibn Shushan Synagogue* in Toledo, which was turned into a Catholic church, *Santa María la Blanca*, in 1405 (or 1411) and remains under ownership of the Catholic Church today. Stylistically unique for being built by Islamic architects for Jewish use under Christian rule (the Kingdom of Castile), it is a beautiful example of Almohad architecture and Mudéjar construction. Also in Toledo, constructed in 999, is the former Mosque of *Cristo de la Luz*, one of ten in the city built under Muslim rule. An exquisite, eight-metre square structure, each of the four columns have Visigothic (Christian) capitals which subdivide the interior.

<sup>3</sup>It is interesting to compare the *Rokeby Venus* with the bronze copy of the *Sleeping Hermaphroditus* made for the Royal Alcázar Palace in Madrid, and now in the Prado. The sculpture, commissioned by Velázquez in 1654, was cast by Matteo Bonnardelli. The marble original is in the Louvre, lying on a mattress carved by Bernini in 1620. See also the Factum facsimile of Bonnardelli's Golden Lion [factum-arte.com/pag/43/golden-lion-from-matteo-de-bonardelli](http://factum-arte.com/pag/43/golden-lion-from-matteo-de-bonardelli)

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<sup>4</sup>From, *The Collected Sermons of John Donne*, vol. 6, no 2. Sermon XVII, 'Preached at S. Pauls, upon Easter-day, in the Evening. 1624'. University of California Press, 1953, Electronic reproduction.

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<sup>5</sup>Nabonidus, the last independent, native king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, reigned from 556-539 B.C.E.. He has been described by some as the 'first archaeologist'.

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<sup>6</sup>Á la Recherche du Temps Perdu, *À l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs - Deuxième Partie*, 238-39, Marcel

Proust. See also Mari Lending's essay *Returning to Distorted Origins* in Factum Foundation's *The Aura in the Age of Digital Materiality*, 2020, Silvana Editoriale pp. 57-63, her *Plaster Monuments, The Power of Reproduction*, Princeton University Press, 2017 and her paper, *Proust and Plaster*, published by the Architectural Association School of Architecture, AA Files, No. 67 (2013), pp. 46-48.

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<sup>7</sup>Jay Levinson, Director of the International Research Program, MoMA New York, quoted in *Great Maps, The World's Masterpieces Explored and Explained*, Jerry Brotton, Dorling Kindersley, London 2014. Levinson curated *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington (October 1991 to January 1992). See also Levinson's catalogue of the same title.

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<sup>8</sup>There are some exceptions: we don't know the intended location of Juan de la Cosa's map; it is now kept in the Museo Naval in Madrid. The Holy Shepherd is the only object made outside Spain, but it plays an important role in Casa de Pilatos as a remnant of the third Duke of Alcalá's collection. The plaster casts of the virtues from the Sepulchre of Cardinal Tavera live in an underground storage area in Moncloa, Madrid.

<sup>9</sup>Factum Foundation's facsimile of Paolo Veronese's 1563 *Wedding at Cana* is a good example of how an artwork can be returned to its original location and experienced under the same conditions as when conceived. Napoleon's soldiers removed the painting in the eighteenth century and it now hangs in the Louvre, opposite the Mona Lisa. Factum's facsimile was unveiled in the Palladian Refectory on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice in September 2007. Seen in its original location, the way in which the space of the painting extends the architectural space for which it was commissioned becomes clearly legible. Many commentators observed that the experience of the facsimile in Venice is 'more authentic' than seeing the vast original in a gold frame in the Louvre illuminated by light from above.

<sup>10</sup>The *Polittico Grifoni* was the most important altarpiece of the Bolognese Renaissance, painted by Ercole de'



Roberti and Francesco del Cosa. In the eighteenth century it was broken up and sold. Today sixteen different panels exist in nine museums in Europe and America. Factum recorded each of the panels and in October 2017, facsimiles of them were given to the Basilica of San Petronio by Factum Foundation and installed in the Chapel of St Vincent Ferrer on temporary display. This triggered the idea of an exhibition at Palazzo Fava, realised in 2020: The exhibition 'La Riscoperta di un Capolavoro' at Palazzo Fava saw all the existing panels brought together in the same space for the first time since 1725, together with a second edition of the facsimiles. [factumfoundation.org/pag/1283/Recording-and-re-materialisation-of-the-Griffoni-Polyptych](http://factumfoundation.org/pag/1283/Recording-and-re-materialisation-of-the-Griffoni-Polyptych) and [factumfoundation.org/pag/1598/the-materiality-of-the-aura-new-technologies-for-preservation](http://factumfoundation.org/pag/1598/the-materiality-of-the-aura-new-technologies-for-preservation)

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<sup>11</sup>At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, there was a fashion for moving frescos, decorated rooms and even entire buildings, often in the name of preservation. One of the most charged examples is James McNeill Whistler's infamous Peacock Room (painted between 1876-77) which was moved from London to Detroit in 1904 and relocated again to the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington DC in the early 1920's. Whistler is reported to have remarked to his disenchanted client, 'Ah, I have made you famous. My work will live when you are forgotten. Still, per chance, in the dim ages to come you will be remembered as the proprietor of the Peacock Room.' A Smithsonian video about it here: [youtube.com/watch?v=8ATaaVkiYmc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ATaaVkiYmc)

<sup>12</sup>Together Murillo and Valdés Leal founded the *Academia de Belles Artes*, or Academy of Fine Art in Seville on January 1, 1660.

<sup>13</sup>Murillo painted the following four additional scenes: *La Curación del Paralítico*, now in the National Gallery London, UK; *La Liberación de San Pedro*, now in the Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia; *Abraham y los Tres Angeles*, now in the National Gallery of Ottawa, Canada. *El Retorno del Hijo Pródigo*, now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, United States. Each exists in the chapel today as a copy commissioned by the Consejería de Cultura de la Junta de Andalucía and the brotherhood. They were

painted by Juan Luis Coto, Fernando García and Gustavo Domínguez and installed in 2008. If these could be properly recorded in their respective museums and returned to the chapel as exact facsimiles it would enhance both the experience in the Church and the ability to understand Murillo in the forthcoming visitors' centre.

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<sup>14</sup>Philosophers, artists, printers, publishers, musicians, poets, writers and mystics met with opticians and doctors, cartographers, navigators, astronomers, botanists and entrepreneurs in Pacheco's informal 'Academy' at the Casa de Pilatos.

<sup>15</sup>*The Catalogue of Shipwrecked Books: Christopher Columbus* [AKA Cristobal Colón], *His Son, and the Quest to Build the World's Greatest Library*, by Edward Wilson-Lee, describes Hernando Colón's attempt to build a complete printed library of human knowledge in Seville.

<sup>16</sup>J. Brown and R. L. Kagan published the inventory of Fernando Afán Enríquez de Ribera, 3rd duke of Alcalá de los Gazules that includes mention of a painting destroyed by flooding. This was probably a copy of *The Card Players*, by Caravaggio painted in about 1594. The Memoria de 1637 [M.1637] includes a list of the goods accumulated by the Duke on the upper floor of Casa de Pilatos in Seville between 1600 until his departure for Naples as viceroy in 1629. Also included are the works he brought back from Italy in 1632. If the painting was in Casa de Pilatos in 1600, the young Velázquez would have seen it.

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<sup>17</sup>Victor I. Stoichita's *Visionary Experience in the Golden Age of Spanish Art*, Reaktion Books, 1995, has been an inspiration for many years to all those interested in visionary experience.