

Obituary

Jonathan Brown (1939–2022)

As well as bringing many fresh insights to the study of the major Spanish artists from El Greco to Picasso, with a particular focus on Velázquez, Jonathan Brown made important contributions to the study of patronage and collecting and of the diffusion of images and ideas in the wider Hispanic world. Much honoured in Spain as well as in his native America, he will also be remembered as a dedicated and assiduous teacher.

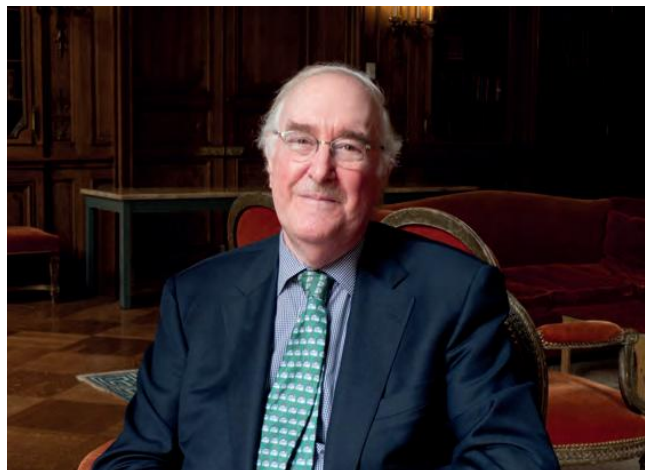
by PETER CHERRY

THE ART OF SPAIN has lost one of its most distinguished scholars with the death of Jonathan Brown on 17th January at the age of eighty-two. Brown began his career in the Department of Art and Archaeology at Princeton, where he received his PhD in 1964 and where he taught from 1965 to 1973. He was Director of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York, from 1973 to 1978 and taught there, as the Caroll and Milton Petrie Professor of Fine Arts, until his retirement in 2017.

Brown addressed the major names of Spanish art – El Greco, Jusepe de Ribera, Francisco de Zurbarán, Diego Velázquez, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Francisco de Goya and Pablo Picasso – and looked at them with fresh eyes. His contribution to the exhibition *El Greco of Toledo* (1982) untangled this Renaissance artist from anachronistic myths and placed him firmly in his time and place.¹ Brown's interest in works on paper resulted in two pioneering exhibitions – *Jusepe de Ribera: Prints and Drawings* (1973) and *Murillo and his Drawings* (1976; the catalogue was revised as *Murillo: Virtuoso Draftsman* in 2012) – which are baselines for much subsequent scholarship.² His European perspective on the art of Spain permitted a new reading of Murillo's genre paintings in the essay 'Murillo pintor de temas eróticos: Una faceta inadvertida de su obra' (1982), which has mostly gained consensus outside the country.³ He enjoyed a fruitful relationship with the Frick Collection, New York, which was the venue for three thoughtful, focused shows: *Velázquez in New York Museums* (1999), with Marcus Burke, and *El Greco: Themes and Variations* (2001) and *Goya's Last Works* (2006), both with Susan Galassi. In *Picasso and the Spanish Tradition* (1996), which he edited, Brown probed Picasso's engagement with these artists.

Painting in Spain 1500–1700, published in 1998, a revision of *The Golden Age of Painting in Spain* (1991), remains a fundamental survey text.⁴ It exemplifies Brown's particular gifts of synthesis and insight, weaving years of reading into an elegant narrative of art and artists in Spain over two centuries. The author's interest in the art of the court is at the centre of the book. However, he was also able to bring to life Hispano-Flemish painting, long out of fashion in the English-speaking world, and the Valencian Renaissance. The complex relationship of Spanish art to that of Italy and Flanders is meaningfully negotiated in terms of the circulation of images and ideas of cultural diffusion. He went on to develop these interests in relation to the art of Latin America in his contributions to the volume *Painting in Latin America 1550–1820* (2014), which he edited with Luisa Elena Alcalá.

Brown will be best known for his work on Velázquez and on the history of artistic patronage and European courtly collecting. His *Collected Writings on Velázquez* (2008) shows a lifetime's engagement with the artist.⁵ *Velázquez: The Technique of Genius* (1998), which he wrote with Carmen



Jonathan Brown, photographed in c.2010. (Photograph N.L. Roberts).

Garrido of the Gabinete de Documentación Técnica of the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, became a bestseller for the accessibility of the writing and for the quality and eloquence of its illustrations. *Velázquez: Painter and Courtier* (1986) is informed by Brown's deep knowledge of the extensive literature on the artist.⁶ Its title announces its running theme, linking the painting to the artist's court career, and the book rightly culminates with *Las Meninas*. This painting was of abiding interest to Brown and was, among other works, the focus of his impatience with speculative interpretations lacking methodological rigour and historical plausibility. He was concerned too with a perceived relaxation of the criteria supporting new attributions to the artist's catalogue, as can be seen in his disagreement with the attribution to Velázquez of the *Santa Rufina* (c.1635; Fundación Focus, Seville) sold at auction in 1999 (although he subsequently accepted the work) and, more recently, his rejection of *The education of the Virgin* (c.1617; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven). On the other hand, in the case of the *Immaculate Conception* (c.1618; Fundación Focus) his attribution of the work to the young Velázquez, as opposed to Alonso Cano, has now attained consensus. He also supported the attribution to Velázquez of *Portrait of a man* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, on the occasion of its conservation in 2009.⁷

The Institute for the History of Collecting at the Frick was inspired by Brown. His most highly admired work in this field is *A Palace for a King: The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV* (1980; expanded edition

Obituary

2003), written in collaboration with John Elliott.⁸ This work and Brown's *Kings and Connoisseurs: Collecting in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (1995) were translated into important shows at the Prado – *Velázquez, Rubens y Van Dyck* (1999) and *The Sale of the Century: Artistic Relations between Spain and Great Britain, 1604–1655*, curated with Elliott (2002), and both contributed to *Paintings for the Planet King: Philip IV and the Buen Retiro Palace* (2005).⁹ It is a great shame that neither Brown nor Elliott, who died on 10th March, has lived to see the museum's reconstruction of the pictorial decoration of the Salón de Reinos, in which they were so involved.

From the time of his first major publication, *Images and Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Painting* (1978) – the basis of which was his PhD thesis – Brown showed a keen awareness of the historiography of his field and the agents who constructed its major narratives. He reflected on his own position in the autobiographical *In the Shadow of Velázquez: A Life in Art History* (2014), which came out of his tenure of the Cátedra del Museo del Prado (2012). This affords a discreet glimpse of points of friction between conventions within Spain and his vision of the discipline, some of which are still shoptalk among older colleagues with long memories.

Brown often generously acknowledged his graduate students in his writings and much of his thinking evidently came out of the rigours

of teaching. He was a dedicated and demanding professor, who taught the value of studying paintings closely and applying common sense and appropriate terminology to objects of historical analysis. Many of his students have gone into the field as academics and museum professionals, which is fitting testimony. Brown's publications have occupied a prominent position on the bookshelves of the present writer since the beginning of his own career. They have been essential in teaching Spanish art to anglophone students and have offered continual guidance and inspiration in his own research. Erudite, balanced, engaging and witty, Brown's writings have made the study of Spanish art a pleasure, as much as anything, and his voice will be much missed in the field.

Brown received honours in Spain – the Medalla de Oro de Bellas Artes in 1986 and the Gran Cruz de Alfonso X in 1996, and was made Comendador de la Orden de Isabel la Católica in 1986. At home he received the Sorolla Medal from the Hispanic Society of America in 2008 and the College Art Association of America recognised him as a Distinguished Scholar in 2011. He was a Corresponding Member of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando and a Member of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Carlos of Valencia and of the American Philosophical Society.

1 J. Brown et al., eds: exh. cat. *El Greco of Toledo*, Madrid (Museo Nacional del Prado), Washington (National Gallery of Art), Toledo (Museum of Art) and Dallas (Museum of Fine Arts) 1982–83.

2 J. Brown, ed.: exh. cat. *Jusepe de Ribera: Prints and Drawings*, Princeton (Art Museum) and Cambridge MA (Fogg Art Museum) 1973–74; and *idem*: exh. cat. *Murillo and his Drawings*, Princeton (Art Museum) 1976–77. J. Brown: *Murillo: Virtuoso Draftsman* was reviewed by Z. Véliz Bomford in this Magazine, 155 (2013), pp.184–85.

3 J. Brown: 'Murillo, pintor de temas eróticos: Una faceta inadvertida de su obra', *Goya: Revista de Arte* 169–71 (1982), pp.35–43, reprinted in J. Brown: *Los*

mundos de Murillo, Seville 2019.

4 Reviewed by Peter Cherry in this Magazine, 133 (1991), pp.459–60.

5 Reviewed by Rosemarie Mulcahy in this Magazine, 151 (2009), pp.779–80.

6 Reviewed by Philip Troutman in this Magazine, 130 (1988), pp.777–78.

7 J. Brown: 'A restored Velázquez, a Velázquez restored', in K. Christiansen with J. Brown and M. Gallagher: exh. cat. *Velázquez Rediscovered*, New York (Metropolitan Museum of Art) 2009–10, pp.10–15.

8 Reviewed by J.E. Varey in this Magazine, 123 (1981), pp.556–57.

9 *Kings and Connoisseurs* was reviewed by Jeremy Wood in this Magazine, 138 (1998), p.549.

AMONG THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

Pascal-François Bertrand is Professor of Art History at Université Bordeaux Montaigne.

Lucia Bonazzi specialises in the history of collecting. She teaches art history at the Minghetti High School, Bologna.

Peter Cherry is Lecturer at Trinity College, Dublin.

Edward S. Cooke Jr is the Charles F. Montgomery Professor in the Department of the History of Art at Yale University.

Rebecca Daniels is the Senior Researcher at the Estate of Francis Bacon. She is writing a book on the artist's early career and co-authoring another on his artist materials for the Getty Conservation Institute.

Lucy Davis is Curator of British and Flemish Paintings at the Wallace Collection, London.

Angela Delaforce specialises in the history of art and collecting in Spain and Portugal and their artistic relations with Italy. She is the author of *The Lost Library of the King of Portugal* (2019).

Noémi Duperron is a teaching and research assistant in the Department of History of Art at the University of Geneva.

Peter Humfrey is Emeritus Professor of Art History at the University of St Andrews.

Peter Y.K. Lam is Honorary Fellow of the Institute of Chinese Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Eckart Marchand is an art historian, Assistant Archivist at the Warburg Institute, London, and a member of the International Research Group Bilderfahrzeuge.

Andrea de Marchi is Professor of Medieval Art History at the University of Florence.

Beth McKillop is a Senior Research Fellow at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Natalia Muñoz-Rojas is an independent scholar and former Enriqueta Harris Curatorial Assistant at the Wallace Collection, London.

Margaret A. Oppenheimer researches late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fine and decorative arts.

Nicholas Penny is Visiting Professor at the Chinese Academy of Art, Hangzhou.

Elizabeth Pilliod is Assistant Professor of Art History at Rutgers University-Camden. Her book *Pontormo at San Lorenzo. Art, History, Ritual: The Making and Meaning of a Lost Renaissance Masterpiece* is forthcoming.

Jenelle Porter is a curator and writer based in Los Angeles.

Irene Quadri is Lecturer in Medieval Art History at the University of Lausanne.

Colin Rhodes is Distinguished Professor of Art and Yangtze River Scholar at Hunan Normal University. He is the author of *Outsider Art: Art Brut and its Affinities* (forthcoming).

Larry Silver is the Farquhar Professor of Art History, emeritus, at the University of Pennsylvania.

Timothy Standing is Curator Emeritus at the Denver Art Museum.

Mark Stocker is former Curator of Historical International Art at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington.

Philip Ward-Jackson is an independent researcher and the former Conway Librarian of the Courtauld Institute, London.

Rowan Watson is the former Senior Curator in the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. His catalogue of the library's illuminated manuscripts (2011) includes works from the eleventh century to 1913.

Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen is an art historian specialising in the art of the Middle Ages.

Richard Wrigley is Emeritus Professor of Art History at the University of Nottingham. He is writing a history of the origins of the Parisian *flâneur*.

Eric Zafran is former curator of European paintings at museums in Atlanta, Baltimore and Boston, and retired after fifteen years at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford.