

*Artist Statement: Fantasia Las Meninas*

Gesture is life force. When making art, I pay attention to the proportions of composition (relating to form in music), and color combinations, particularly transitions between color and form (relating to the aural journey between chords and patterns). But most importantly, I pay attention to mark making, or gestural quality. My childhood background in western classical music provided a fertile ground for my art making. Classical music focuses on sounds without words. The arrangement of these sounds creates tension and drama. The impulse to strike or yell into an instrument creates forward momentum. The speed and pressure of the bow pulls and pushes against the violin propelling the sound into the universe. Without that gesture or movement, the piece falls flat.

While working on *Fantasia Las Meninas*, reflecting on sound and gesture led me to remembering Spanish, my first language. My mother spoke Spanish to us (my siblings and I) before I was 6 years old. She stopped speaking to us exclusively in Spanish so as to protect us against a hostile outside world. She feared what could happen to us if we spoke Spanish in public. She prayed with us in her native tongue. I spoke The Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary in garbled Spanish. Outside of the house I tried to camouflage myself with the right clothing and pop cultural references learned from school bus rides. I intuitively knew I was not going to fit into the neighborhood's social norms. I didn't speak Spanish in public again until a forward-thinking violin teacher in 6th grade had me memorize Spanish children's poetry as part of the music lessons. By that time, I couldn't speak Spanish because I didn't know it anymore. My assimilation into the dominant culture was complete.

I drew a lot of princesses as a small child. I read fairy tales and watched the Disney movies *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. My mother asked me, "Do you want to see a painting of a *real* princess?" She opened one of her art books to a reproduction of the famous *Las Meninas* painting by Velazquez. She said this painting was considered one of the most perfect paintings in the world. She pointed out that Velazquez painted the princess (*la infanta*), her friends, her parents and even included himself into ONE painting. I remember being aware of the painting as a thing, that the princess dress looked shiny because white paint made the highlights. It made the dress three dimensional. I was excited. I didn't realize at the time, but Velazquez planted a seed into a complex world of art making.

*Las Meninas* returned to my consciousness in the form of umbrellas. I wanted to make a dress sculpture from an umbrella and connected it to the Baroque dress forms in *Las Meninas*. Unlike the austere masterpiece, my *Meninas* would be garish and full of competing patterns. It would reference social class, culture and female gender role expectations through masquerade and camouflage. I wanted to play with it the way a child plays dress-up, with whatever materials she finds in her house. No object is off limits. My 8-year-old self is delighted with my rendition of *Las Meninas*. I created an alternative world for *la infanta* and her maids. They are using camouflage to dazzle and deflect attention rather than trying to blend in.

