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## Essential Insights from 7 Landscape Painting Pioneers

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### **Sell Traditional Art** in Modern Ways

How Product Knowledge  
**Improves Your Pastel Painting**

The **ONLY**  
Watermedia  
Rule You Need  
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**Create Bold & Direct**  
Still Life Paintings



COVER:  
Secluded Cove, (detail)  
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New York City artist **Yuka Imata** used a travel grant she won at the Art Students League of New York to travel to Madrid and copy two pieces by Diego Velázquez. Here's what she learned from the experience. | **by Bob Bahr**

**F**or Yuka Imata, there's no better way to learn from an Old Master than to copy a painting firsthand. This conviction was central to her recent trip to Europe, and its ramifications will evidently have an impact on her paintings for years to come.

"There were a lot of things Diego Velázquez did in his paintings that I wouldn't have done, and after doing two copies from his work, some of his methods have become part of my own technique," says the New York City-based artist. "I had previously seen the two paintings by him that I copied, but the level of understanding I had of them after painting them was totally different. As much as you think you know a painting, you don't unless you paint it."

For centuries, artists have understood that a very useful way to round out one's education is to travel abroad to see faraway paintings and experience alternative methods of creating and learning art.

Despite advances in global communication and the easy sharing of information and high-resolution images, this still holds true. There is no substitute for standing in front of a Sargent painting, for example. Additionally, copying a painting from a reproduction in a book or a poster is an inferior approach. Imata knew this, and it's one of the reasons she seized an opportunity to pursue a travel grant that she heard about while taking classes at the Art Students League of New York, in Manhattan. As a



# Copying Velázquez



ABOVE

**Los Borrachos, After Velázquez**

2008, oil on linen, 51¼ x 70¾. All artwork this article collection the artist unless otherwise indicated.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Imata copying Velázquez's *Los Borrachos* in the Prado Museum, in Madrid. The artist copied the painting on halves because the museum prohibited copyists from painting on canvases larger than 130 centimeters. Imata had to carefully plan the seam between the two parts of her diptych so she could match them up back in the United States.

# at the Prado

BELOW

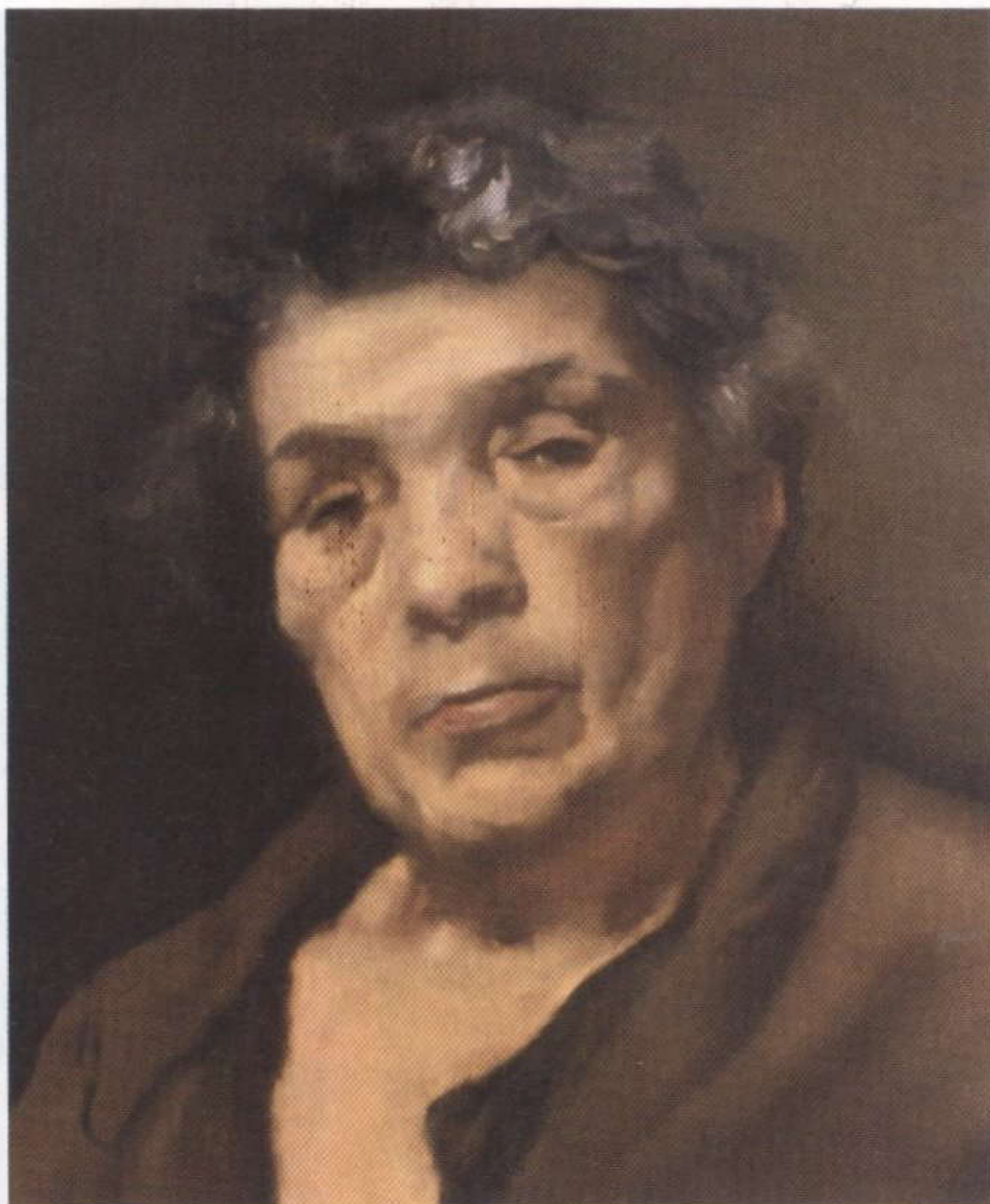
Imata traced the composition of *Los Borrachos* from a souvenir poster and gridded the tracing paper to allow her to accurately capture the proportions of Velázquez's figures.

BOTTOM

Imata takes a break from copying Velázquez's *Esopo* at the Prado Museum, in Madrid. The museum provided a basic easel, and Imata was required to buy the drop cloth.

RIGHT

*Esopo*, After Velázquez (Detail)



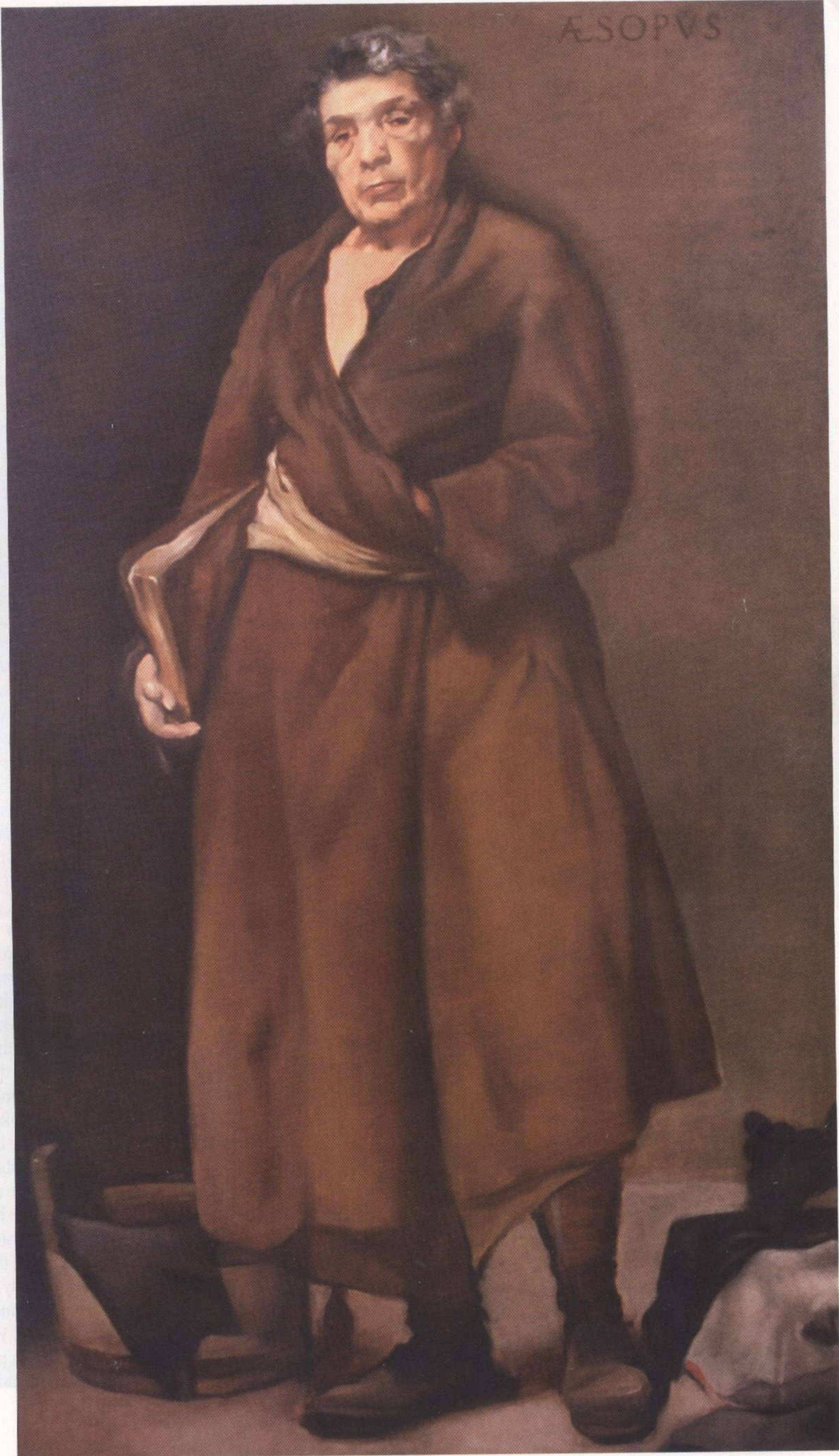
about the benefits of the experience that she contacted *American Artist* to share what she learned.

Imata was impressed with the relative ease with which she arranged to paint the two Velázquez works—*Los Borrachos* and *Esopo*. She investigated the rules at the Prado regarding painting on the premises, then made most of the necessary arrangements in advance of her trip. The Prado required her to fill out their application and submit her résumé, two letters of recommendation from art teachers or art-school administrators, and a letter of recommendation from an embassy. Once accepted, which happened within a week, she merely had to choose the painting she wished to copy and pay 60.10 euros, and she could immediately begin painting. *Copyistas*, as painters making copies of the museum's holdings are called, cannot copy a few of the most notable masterpieces in the Prado's collection nor can they work on canvases larger than 130 centimeters. *Copyistas* cannot block traffic in congested areas, and there's essentially a limit of one per room. Imata walked through the museum's galleries and considered which pieces were situated in a good spot in terms of pedestrian traffic, lighting, and other aesthetic considerations, including subject matter. The artist explains that *Los Borrachos* appealed to her because of the facial expressions on the figures' faces. "It's rare to see someone smiling and having fun in a painting," says Imata. "I definitely see *Los Borrachos* as a celebration of life."

She had come to Madrid hoping to copy a Velázquez, but Imata didn't count on the Prado accommodating her wishes. No worries—her requests were granted, and Imata began planning how she would tackle the large painting,

result, she found herself traveling to Spain in February 2008 to copy Velázquez (1599–1660) paintings in Madrid's Prado Museum, courtesy of a Xavier Gonzalez and Ethel Edwards Travel Grant given by the school. Having just finished a six-year stint at the League, she wasn't interested in enrolling in an art school. But she eagerly embraced the possibilities of independent study and the chance to paint in a different landscape and society. She felt so strongly

ÆSOPVS



RIGHT  
**Esopo, After Velázquez**  
2008, oil on linen,  
51½ x 28½.

BELOW

**Silent Scream,  
Ascoli Piceno**

2008, oil on linen,  
14½ x 10¾.

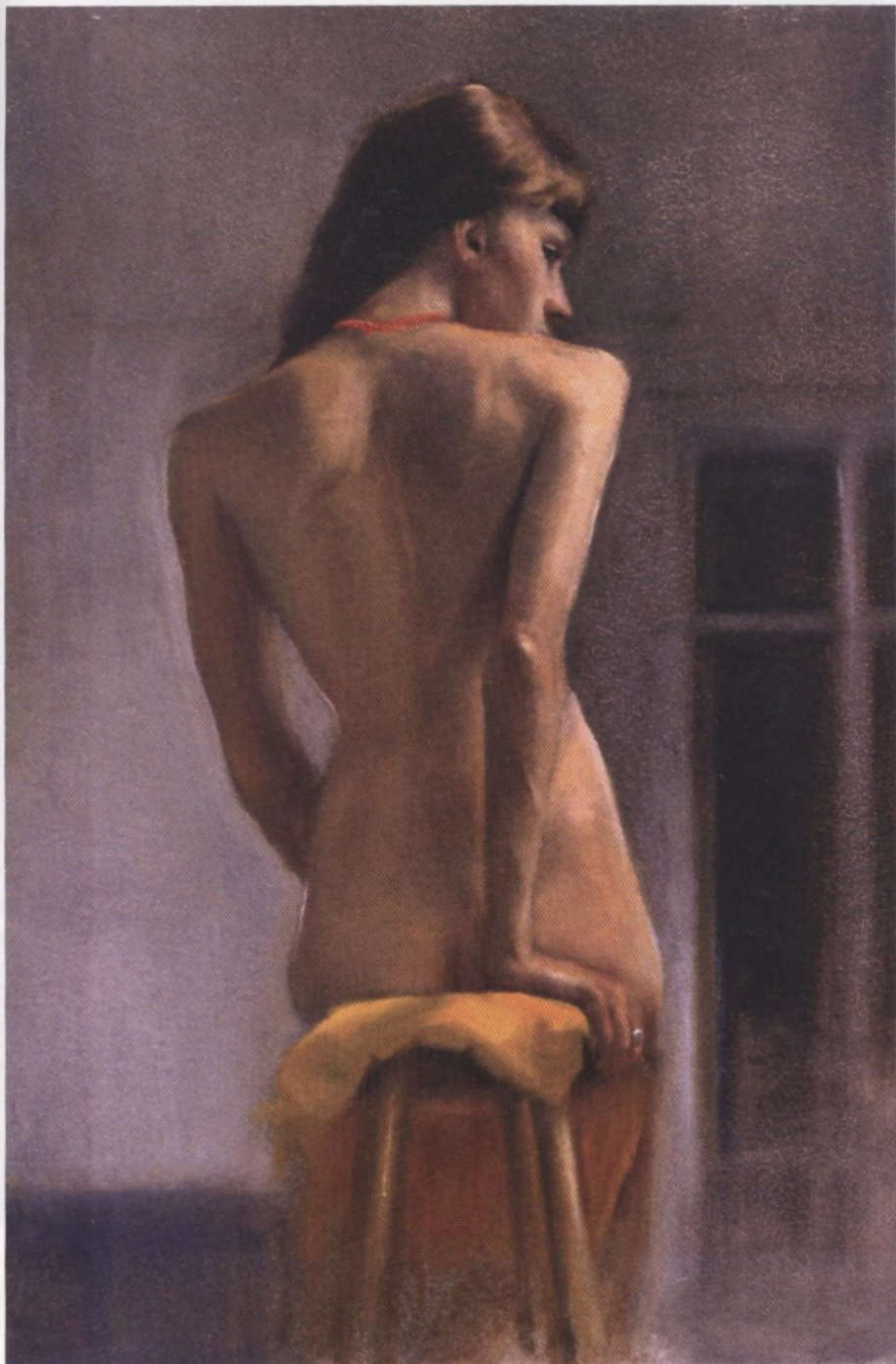


grid to help work out the placement of the figures on her canvases. She made an outline drawing on the canvases, which she toned with red ochre, and showed up one morning ready to get started. The Prado provided a modest easel and asked that she purchase a drop cloth. At the beginning of each week, museum staff would wheel her easel and canvas out, and on Friday afternoon move it back into safe storage. It took Imata four weeks to paint each panel of her *Los Borrachos* diptych copy and 10 days to finish her copy of *Esopo*.

Imata says she was surprised by a few things she discovered through her careful study of Velázquez's paintings. She found that Velázquez left large parts of the canvas very simply painted, saving detail and multiple layers of paint for just three faces and a few hands. "I was amazed at how little detail he used in some places," says Imata. She discovered that some fairly large areas, such as the central kneeling figure's pants, are just one color over the ground, and even the leaning creature assisting Bacchus on the left is loosely modeled in most areas. The prominent nose in bright light on the kneeling figure underneath Bacchus' right wrist is a quick stroke of one color—no modeling at all. The little still life area at the mid-bottom was an area of interest to Imata. Why was this portion outlined so prominently in black? Imata didn't determine the answer to that question, but she did ponder the brushstrokes, which looked hastily and loosely laid down. Some folds in Bacchus' cloak are discernible under the still life objects, indicating that the pitcher and glass object were added after the rest of that section was completed. One thing is certain: Velázquez added the outline to make those objects pop.

The seemingly rough way that the black outline was laid down was not dissimilar to the Old Master's bold application of color in other areas. Imata says she struggled to match the reddish tone in the face of the reveler holding a red cup, then found that Velázquez evidently used almost completely unadulterated red ochre. Contrasting these bold strokes of pure color are many passages that rely on one color lightly glazed or scumbled over the red ground or a subsequent paint layer. "Especially in the backgrounds, Velázquez let undertones show through," says Imata. "In places he laid in the local color and dragged just a bit of another color over that. I

which features a calm and controlled Bacchus dispensing wine to happy revelers. Because of the size limitations the Prado places on copyists, Imata had to split her painting into two canvases in order to preserve the painting's large dimensions. "I wanted to read brushstrokes and learn from what Velázquez did, so not doing it close to life size really wouldn't have made it worth the effort," explains the artist. She made numerous drawings of the composition and bought a large glossy photograph of *Los Borrachos* for study back at the room she was renting. Needing reference of a larger scale, the artist bought a poster of the Velázquez painting and traced it onto a

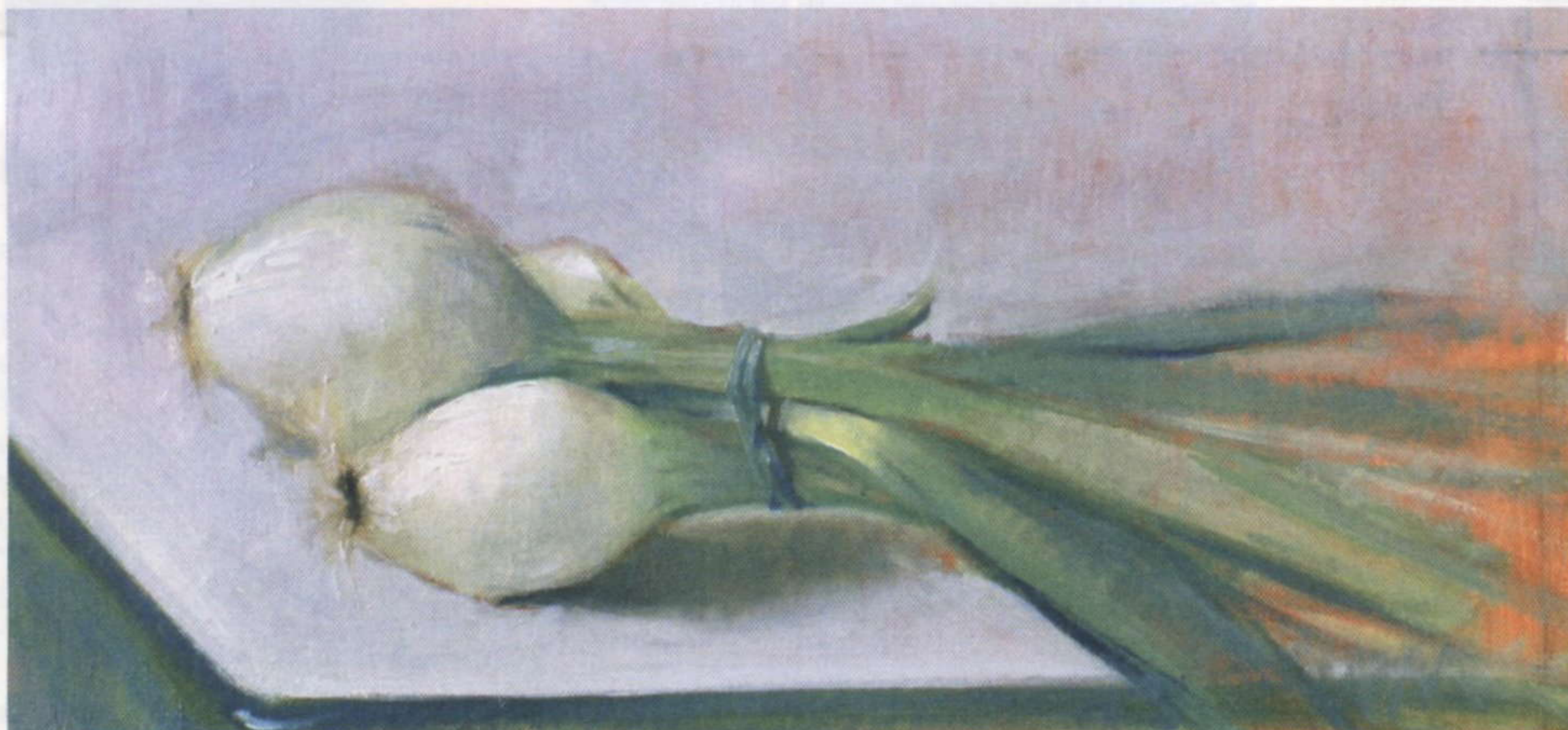
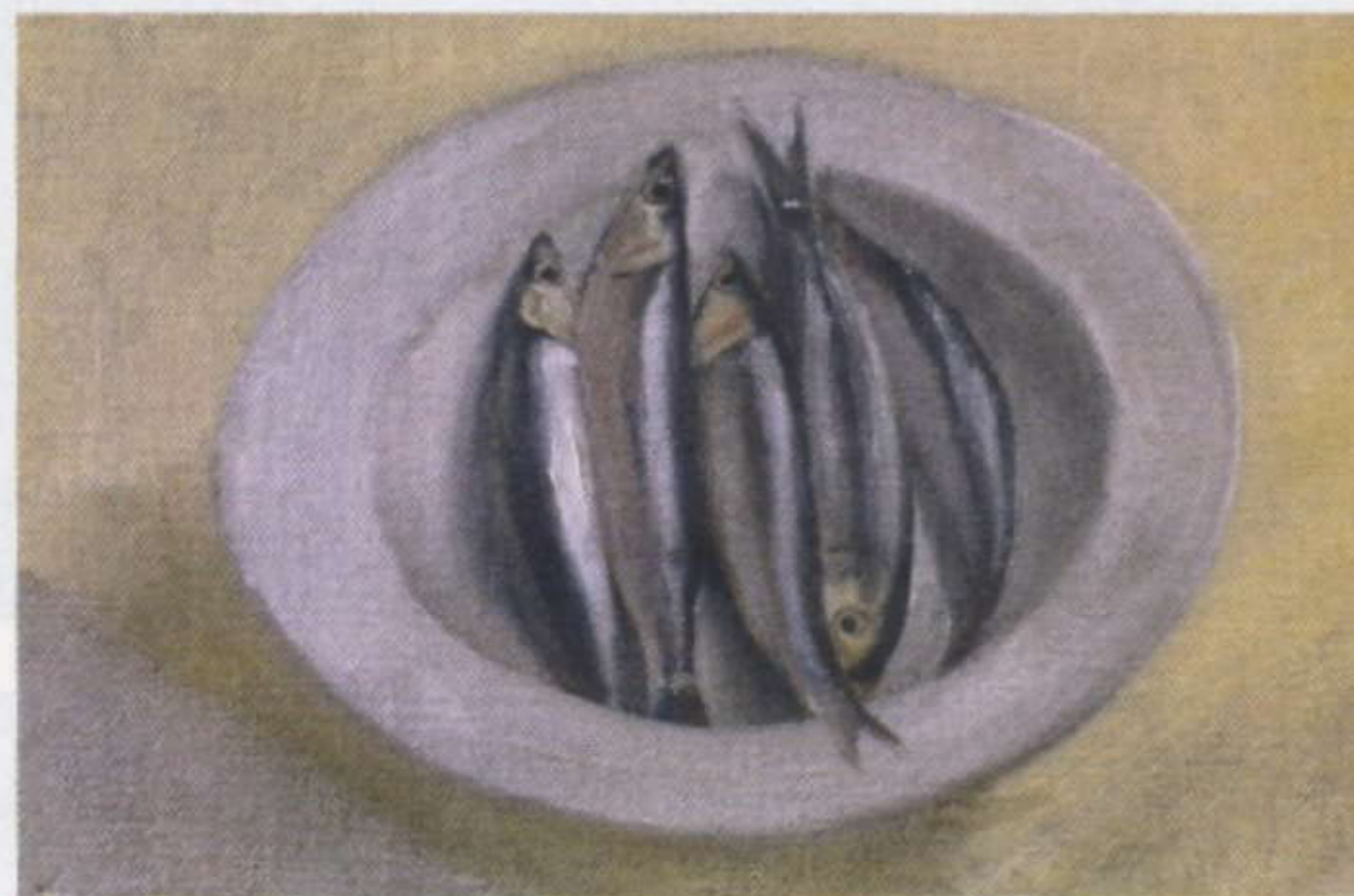


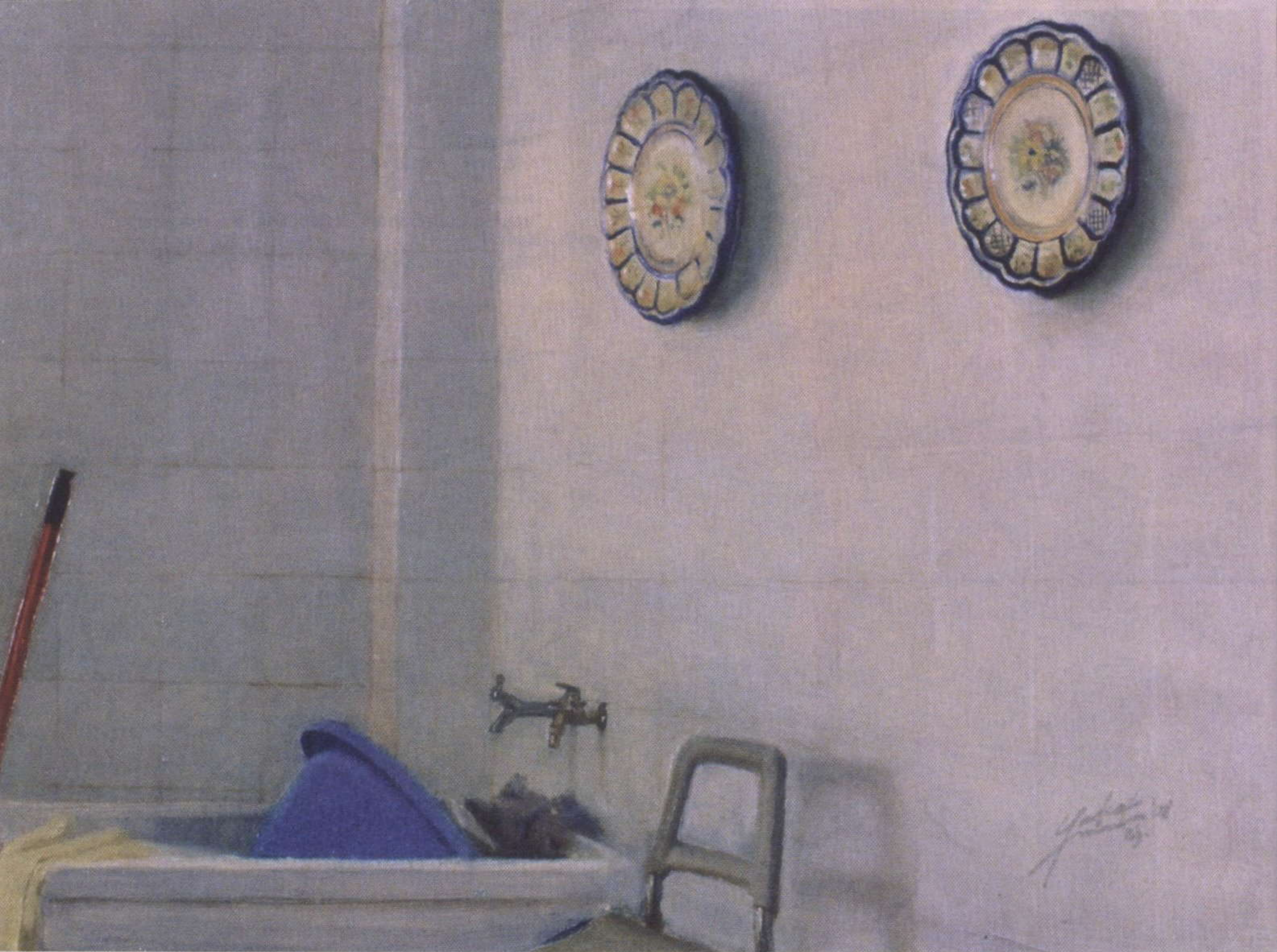
**LEFT**  
**Desnudo II**  
2008, oil on panel, 13 x 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ .

**BELOW MIDDLE**  
**Pescados, Marbella**  
2008, oil on linen, 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ .

**BELOW**  
**Dressed Undressed, Madrid**  
2008, oil on linen, 8 x 10.

**BOTTOM**  
**Cebollas, Madrid**  
2008, oil on linen, 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 13 $\frac{1}{8}$ .





ABOVE

**La Cocina, Madrid**

2008, oil on panel,  
9 3/8 x 12 1/8.

RIGHT

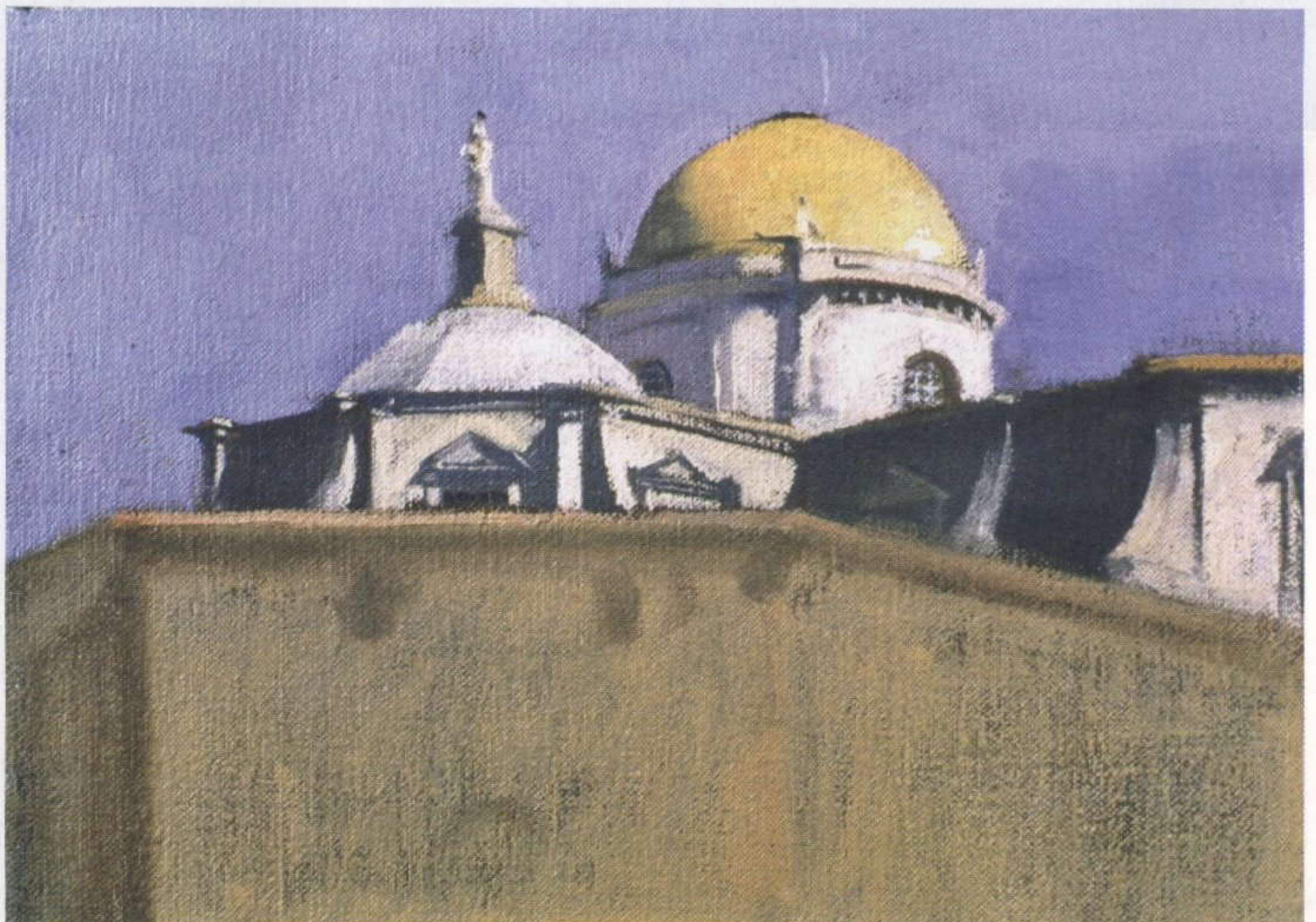
**Catedral, Cádiz**

2008, oil on linen, 7 x 10.  
Private collection.

OPPOSITE PAGE

**Puente Nuevo, Ronda**

2008, oil on linen, 10 3/8 x 7.



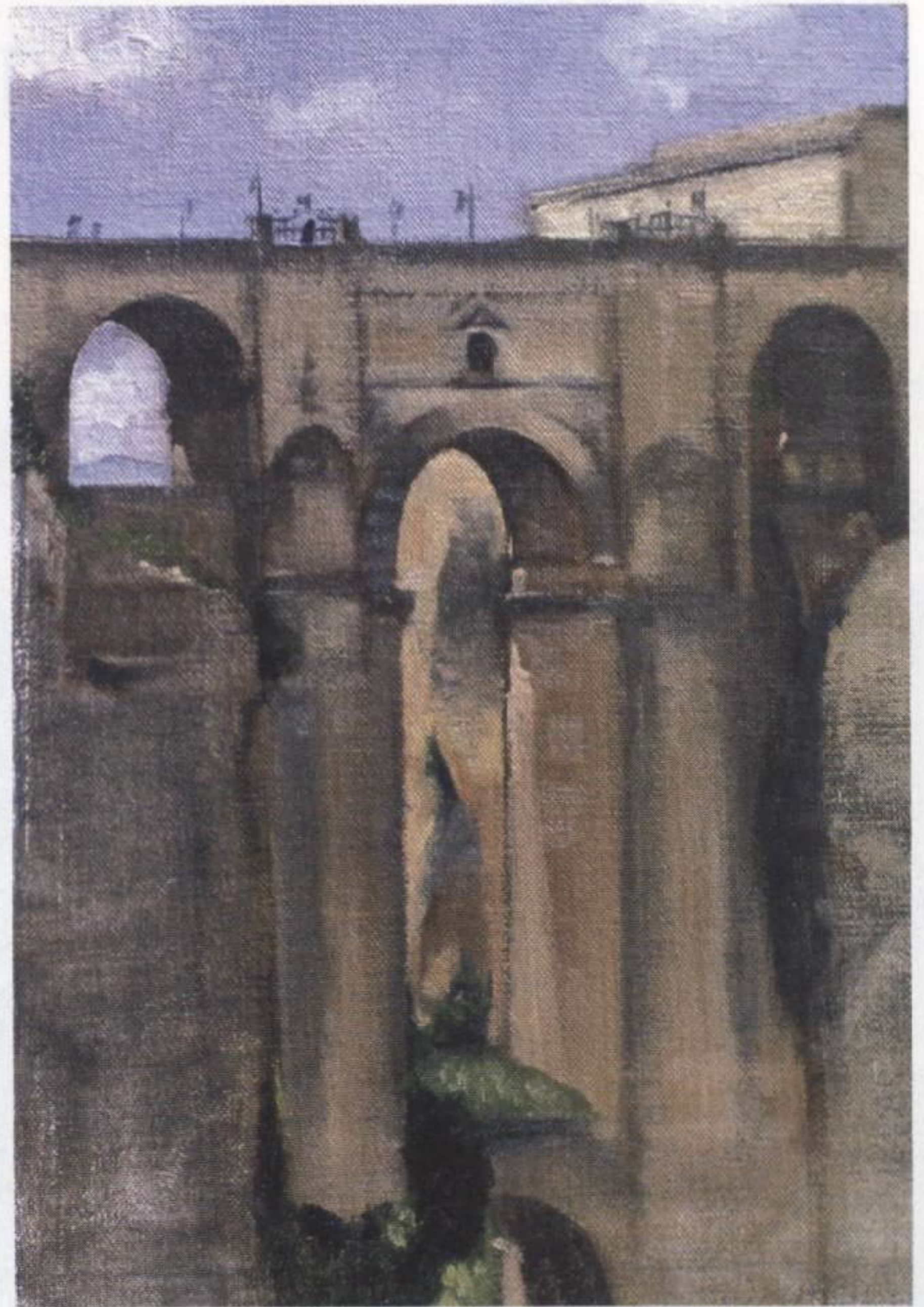




discovered this by accident when I was getting nowhere trying to mix a color I saw on his painting. The answer was that Velázquez mixed a lot of color right on the surface. So in some places I had to put almost pure color, and in others I had to be really careful not to paint over layers that were built up.”

Imata also did a fair amount of mixing on her palette—she was used to having 20 colors squeezed out and ready to go, but she needed to scale that back to 10 hues—most of them natural pigments—in order to properly simulate Velázquez’s technique. “There were no cadmiums back then, and I was unfamiliar with a few of the colors Velázquez used, so color mixing was a bit of a struggle for me,” she says. “But a few of those ‘new’ colors are still on my palette today, including red ochre.” The artist says some other aspects of Velázquez’s painting method have had a lasting impact on her. “I learned to simplify more,” she points out. “Like people say, ‘One brushstroke counts.’ And it’s true—one brushstroke can say as much as 20 brushstrokes. I used to believe in putting in lots of details. Depicting 100 percent of the details is a way to learn, and once you learn that, you can describe everything with less. But it’s a lot harder to simplify and make it look real.” Imata notes that Velázquez sometimes merely painted a line to suggest form, as in the left lapel in *Esopo*. Will this tactic appear in a future painting by Imata? It’s possible—the painter says she sometimes has “flashbacks” when painting a passage that would allow her to employ certain techniques she learned when copying a Velázquez. “The experience I had copying his paintings makes it come naturally—I’m not trying to paint like Velázquez, but when I am painting a part that would benefit from his technique it just comes out. I now have more options.”

In part to satisfy passport agreements in the European Union, Imata traveled to several countries during the trip, and although these segments of her six-month travels were less structured, she seems to have used them effectively, waking up early to start paintings each day at 7 a.m. in Italy and capturing iconic scenes on canvas in Istanbul, Turkey. The artist also made a point to see Lord Leighton’s house in England, as well as a favorite Leonardo da Vinci drawing at the National Gallery, in London. She explored the roots of Western art by taking in some Ancient Greek architecture and sculpture in Athens. Imata’s now back in New York and setting up a new studio, but she reports that there may be one more copy in her future—this one very close to home. “I would like to do Velázquez’s *Juan de Pareja* [at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City],” she says. “Then I think I will be done with copying for a while.” ■



## About the Artist

**Yuka Imata** was born in Sapporo, Japan, and moved to the United States to attend the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, in Boston, where she earned a bachelor’s degree. She studied with Ronald Sherr, Harvey Dinnerstein, Mary Beth McKenzie, and Dan Gheno at the Art Students League of New York, in Manhattan, and studied independently in Spain for six months through a Xavier Gonzalez and Ethel Edwards Travel Grant. Imata has received additional grants and awards from the Salmagundi Club, the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Art Club, the Art Students League of New York, and the Massachusetts College of Art and Design. Her work has shown at the Chelsea Art Museum, the Salmagundi Club, the National Arts Club, Cork Gallery in Lincoln Center, and the Art Students League of New York, all in New York City; the Korean embassy, in Washington, DC; the Copley Society of Art, in Boston, and several galleries in Japan. For more information on Imata, visit [www.yukaimata.com](http://www.yukaimata.com).

Bob Bahr is the managing editor of *American Artist*.