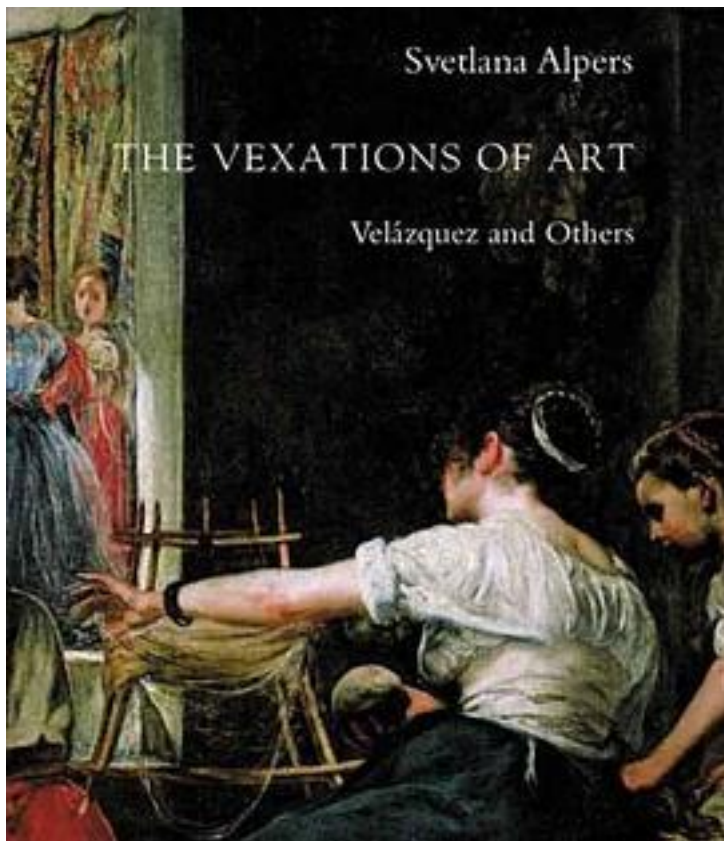


The Vexations of Art



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Velazquez is often considered an artist apart: great, but isolated in Spain. This highly original book sets him in conjunction with certain conditions of painting in his time and after. From the seventeenth century to the twentieth, roughly from Rembrandt and Vermeer to Matisse and Picasso, a succession of European painters has taken the studio as the world; that is, the studio is where the world, as it gets into painting, is experienced. Svetlana Alpers first focuses on this retreat into the confines of the studio,

then looks at the ways in which the paintings of the Dutch masters and Velazquez acknowledge war and rivalry while offering a way out. The final chapters give a new account of Velazquez's "The Spinners", a ravishing painting which has been eclipsed by interest in the enigmas of Las Meninas. Alpers concentrates on the seventeenth century but also looks back to Velazquez's predecessors Titian and Rubens and forward to his modern successors. She discusses Velazquez's resemblance to Manet, whose art also vexes or unsettles, giving us reason to pause and look. The book concludes by asking whether painting continues to do that today.

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