



The talk today is about the Spanish artist Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida. He was the most famous artist of the early part of the twentieth century and they queued round the block for his exhibition in New York in 1908. After his death in 1923 he went out of fashion and disappeared from view. The exhibition of his work at the National Gallery, London, in 2019 signals his reappraisal as one of the great Spanish artists.

Bio: Sorolla

- Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (pronounced Sir-roy-a, 27 February 1863 – 10 August 1923) was a Spanish painter. Sorolla excelled in the painting of portraits, landscapes and monumental works of social and historical themes. His most typical works are characterized by a dexterous representation of the people and landscape under the bright sunlight of his native land and sunlit water.
- He was born in Valencia, Spain, the eldest child of a tradesman and his wife Concepción Bastida. His sister Concha was born a year later and in 1985 both children were orphaned when their parents died possibly of cholera. They were cared for by their maternal aunt and her husband who was a locksmith.
- Sorolla was first trained in art when he was 9 and had a number of teachers until he travelled to Madrid when he was 18 to study the masters in the Prado. Following military service he obtained a grant to spend four years studying in Rome. He then travelled to Paris where he encountered modern painting. Jules Bastien-Lepage was a particular influence. In 1888 (aged 25) he returned to Valencia to marry Clotilde García del Castillo, whom he had first met in 1879, while working in her father's studio. She became his muse and the subject of many of his

paintings. They had a passionate relationship and a happy marriage. When they were apart, he would write every day often enclosing a flower in his letter. He wrote, **“All my love is focused on you. Despite my great love for our children, you are more, much more than them for so many reasons that there is no need to mention. You are my body, my life, my mind, my perpetual ideal”**. By 1895, they would have three children together: Maria, born in 1890, Joaquín, born in 1892, and Elena, born in 1895. In 1890, they moved to Madrid, and for the next decade Sorolla's efforts as an artist were focussed mainly on the production of large canvases of orientalist, mythological, historical, and social subjects, for display in salons and international exhibitions in Madrid, Paris, Venice, Munich, Berlin, and Chicago.

- Sorolla other great love was Valencia where he returned every year to paint beach scenes and captured the blazing Mediterranean sunlight. He painted outside and many of his canvases still have grains of sand embedded in them.
- *Self-Portrait*, 1908. Note the intensity of his gaze. He only paints what he sees. He has been described as the Spanish artist with a photographer's eye and as the artist who depicted his country.
- His exceptional artistic talent was recognised very early on and he exhibited in Madrid in his early teens and his first large history painting was bought by the Spanish government in 1884 before he was 21. He had an extraordinary technical ability and can represent any figure, texture, object or fall of light that he wants. Photography played an important role in the way he saw the world although he painted direct from nature rather than from photographs.
- *Another Marguerite!*, 1892, 129.5 x 198.1, Mildred Lane Kemper Museum (Washington University in St Louis). His first striking success. It derives from Goethe. Sorolla saw a woman being taken to prison the Goethe connection came later. So, it is based on experience. He saw her in a train station with many others milling around. Note the shackles on her wrists. An image of suffering and despair. Exhibited in Madrid where it was awarded a gold medal and it was then sent to Chicago to the World Fair in 1893 where it won first prize. It was bought by the Washington Museum, St. Louis. He soon rose to general fame and was regarded as the leading modern Spanish painter. He had decided early on that he wanted to be famous not just in Europe but around the world. So he paints big ambitious painting on modern themes and exhibits at world fairs. From the 1890s his career was established and became an endless series of international exhibitions, commissions for portraits and showers of honours and almost ceaseless travel. By 1900 he was considered the most famous of all living Spanish artists.
- *“Still they say the price of fish is too high!”*, 1894, 151.5 x 204 cm, Prado. A young fisherman is badly injured. Like a Christ figure.
- *The Return from Fishing*, 1894, 265 x 403.5, Musée d'Orsay. Exhibited in Paris and immediately bought by the French state. Two oxen are life-size and are shown pulling a fishing boat ashore. Note the way he paints, water, sky and sunlight.

- *Sewing the Sail*, 1896, 222 x 300 cm, Venice, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna di Ca' Pesaro. 1905 exhibited at Venice Biennale where it is bought by Venice itself and it is still there.
- *Sad Inheritance!*, 1899, 210 x 285 cm, Valencia, perhaps the most astonishing of his early works. Disabled, blind and deaf young boys are being led to the sea by the monk that looks after them. Sent to 1900 Paris Exhibition, won a gold medal, huge discussion at the time. Controversial today. Placed in a church in New York basically as an altarpiece demonstrating an act of charity. A decisive moment in his career. By this time he is happily married.
- *Mother*, 1895-1900, 125 x 169 cm, Madrid, Museo Sorolla. A hugely happy marriage and happy family life with three children. The biographer's curse. This shows mother and daughter in bed. Originally her head was turned away and around 1900 he rethought that and repainted her head to show her looking at the baby. A tender and sweet image. Has been looking at Whistler, all white.
- *Female Nude*, 1902, 106 x 186 cm, private collection. Sees himself participating in the grand Spanish tradition. He went to see the Rokeby Venus which at that time was still at Rokeby. He studied the picture and realised he could take on Velazquez. A symphony of light on the fabric. He never showed this painting as it was modelled by his wife. It was exhibited in 1909 by called *Female Nude* and it was never sold.
- (Spanish headdress, yellow dress and son dressed as an English gentleman. Built an extraordinary house for them, now the Museo Sorolla. (Pictures of the house), three gardens. He designed the house himself.)
- *The Painter Aureliano de Beruete*, 1904, 155.5 x 110.5 cm, Prado. Particularly concerned with his place in the Spanish tradition – naturalistic painting, importance of light. This is a Velázquez and Goya like portrait of the painter he went with to Rokeby Hall.
- *Portrait of Ralph Clarkson*, 1911, Oregon Public gallery, Illinois. A portrait of an American painter. He went to Chicago and was received as a 'prince' of painting. He met Ralph Clarkson he loved Spanish art. He tells us he painted it in two hours. Velasquez also painted some portraits in two hours. Spontaneity to capture the person. Competing with the great Velázquez.
- *Clotilde in a Black Dress*, 1906, 186.7 x 118.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. His wife Clotilde.
- The last exhibition of Sorolla in London was 1908, not a success, not many were sold, no commissions but he met Archer Huntingdon, his father had built a railroad and he wanted to establish himself as an American patron. He invites him to do an exhibition the following year in New York at the Hispanic Society. The exhibition was a sensation, they were lined up around the block in the snow. He sells 195 paintings, receives 25 portrait commissions including being invited to the White House to paint the President Taft. All the museums of America had to have a Sorolla and that year the met bought this painting. He comes back from New York

a very wealthy man.

- *My Children*, 1904, 160.5 x 230.5 cm, Museo Sorolla. He meets Sargent in London friends and friendly competitors as critics are always comparing the two artists.
- *Boys on the Beach*, 1909, 118 x 185 cm, Prado. He leaves London early in 1908 and he says he would go back to Spain to paint scenes for America like this one. Arguably the most famous of Sorolla's paintings, (photograph of Sorolla on the beach painting in a way to verify the reality of his painting from life).
- *The White Boat. Javea*, 1905, 105 x 150 cm, private collection. Ability to capture water, light on water, and bodies under water and the diffraction of light.
- Boy carrying a fish basket, brilliantly use of colour.
- *After the Bath, The Pink Robe*, 1916, 208 x 126.5 cm, Museo Sorolla. Deeply interested in ancient Greek sculptor. He described this as his greatest painting. It has the grandeur and stature of ancient Greek sculpture, a permanence and dignity.
- *Running Along the Beach*, 1908, 90 x 166.5 cm, Museo de Bellas Artes Asturias, Oviedo. In London he went to the British Museum to study the Elgin marbles and this is a reference to those marbles.
- Ever more audacious at painting light and light on water. Fisherman dragging a boat onto the shore A boy looking at people in the sea under an umbrella. Sorolla is under the umbrella shading himself from the glare.
- In 1901 Huntindon and Sorolla meet in Paris and Huntingdon proposes a painting commission, a mural around the walls of the Hispanic Society 210 sq. metres of wall. Sorolla did sketches. It was the largest commission given by an American outside America. You are surrounded by painting showing the regions of Spain and their customs and way of life. (see photograph, one of the wonders of America). It becomes the work of the rest of his life. His vision of Spain, in the forefront of his mind.
- *The Drunkard, Zarauz*, 1910, Daniel Katz Gallery, London. He had been painting light toned painting for the previous ten years. Beaches, happy times, he realises he has to get back to painting peasant life, ancient traditions and to the dark power of Spanish painting. He paints a whole series of dark Spanish scenes, working men enjoying themselves, perhaps a bit too much.
- *Types of Roncal*, 200 x 150 cm, Museo Sorolla. He paints large studies which are the first step towards the murals in America. He travels across Spain with a photographer sometimes. He asks them to pose in the old costumes. He sometimes has to bring the costumes himself. He paints lifesize paintings of them. Salamanca, heavy dress, red headdress, groom beside her. Two female figures, a man and a large pot. He uses these figures in the finished mural but changed, more animated.
- *Burgos Cathedral under Snow*, 1910, 104.5 x 82.5 cm, Museo Sorolla. It is important to him his work is seen as authentic, he paints out of doors, you can feel the authenticity.

- *Shadow of Alcantara Bridge, Toledo*, 1906, 66 x 93.5 cm, private collection. You can see him becoming more and more experimental. You are not sure what you are seeing it is a reflection of the arch lying on the water, as soon as you realise it snaps into place. His freedom of paint application becomes greater and greater.
- *Reflections in a Fountain*, 1908, 58.5 x 98 cm, Museo Sorolla. A picture of a reflection but authentic to visual experience.
- *The Smugglers*, 1919, 84 x 167 cm, private collection. Very audacious image of smugglers. He was on top of the cliff looking straight down. He painted it for an American plutocrat who made his fortune in tobacco. Is that the contraband? Sorolla decided to place the figures on the left by extending the canvas to the right.
- *Strolling Along the Seashore*, 1909, 205 x 200 cm, Museo Sorolla, Madrid. His favourite topic is his own family and they are large scale painting, larger than most collectors would but, some over 12 feet high.
- *The Siesta*, 1911. 200 x 201 cm, Museo Sorolla. Again a very large picture. At first a bit difficult to figure out what it is. He is looking down on two daughters and a friend having a siesta. At a distance almost like an abstract painting but once it snaps into place we see how true it is to nature.
- *Skiping Rope, La Granja*, 1907, 105 x 166 cm, Museo Sorolla. Has something to do with photography as before the snapshot it is difficult to think someone would paint someone floating in the air. Kodak cameras were now available and changed out visual imagination.
- *Garden of Sorolla's House with Empty Chair*, 1920, 125 x 103 cm, Museo Sorolla. The vision of Spain almost kills Sorolla. The difficulty, intensity and constant travel from 1910 to 1920 when he has a very serious stroke and he never paints again. The stroke occurs when he is at home and this is one of the last pictures he ever painted. We see the chair on which he often sat and painted. He died in 1923 and was buried like a state hero. His body was transported in a cortège by train to Valencia, where it was greeted by thousands and there, in his hometown, he was buried in full state pomp.
- Now it was over, his work and the great project. His great project was installed in 1926 but was greeted with indifference. The world had changed. In the 1920s you thought of Dali and Miro not Sorolla. After all these decades of ignoring Sorolla we need to reimagine him again to see where he fits into a more complex story of modern Spanish art. He is a great artist of his time and this exhibition allows many people to see his work.



Photograph, Laurence Shafe, 5 June 2016

- Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (pronounced Sir-roy-a, 27 February 1863 – 10 August 1923) was born in Valencia where many of his beach scenes were painted. This is a photograph of his house and museum in Madrid that I took a few years ago and this is where I was first introduced to his work.



Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923), *Self Portrait*, 1904, 66 x 100.6, Sorolla Museum (Museo Sorolla), Madrid

- *Self-Portrait*, 1904 (aged 41). Note the intensity of his gaze. He only paints what he sees. He has been described as the Spanish artist with a photographer's eye and as the artist who depicted his country.
- "Orphaned aged two by the deaths of both his parents in the 1865 cholera epidemic, Sorolla was brought up in the Cuartel del Mar by a blacksmith uncle who recognised his talent and encouraged him to take drawing classes at the local trade school. By the age of 15, he could bash out a *bodegon* (still life) in the style of the masters". (Spectator, 9 March 2019)
- His exceptional artistic talent was recognised very early on and he exhibited in Madrid in his early teens and his first large history painting was bought by the Spanish government in 1884 before he was 21. He had an extraordinary technical ability and can represent any figure, texture, object or fall of light that he wants. Photography played an important role in the way he saw the world although he painted direct from nature rather than from photographs.

References

- <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/14/a-lusciously-perverse-view-of-a-backward-land-sorolla-spanish-master-of-light-national-gallery-review>



Another Marguerite!, 1892, 129.5 x 198.1, Mildred Lane Kemper Museum (Washington University in St Louis)

- His first striking success. Sorolla saw a woman being taken to prison in a third-class carriage between Madrid and Valencia. So, it is based on experience. He first saw her in a train station with many others milling around. Note the shackles on her wrists. An image of suffering and despair.
- Sorolla was meticulous in the detail and hired an actual railway carriage and used models to get the detail right.
- The title *Another Marguerite!* refers to the the woman in Goethe's tragic play *Faust* in which, with the help of the devil, Faust seduces the innocent Marguerite (sometimes abbreviated to Gretchen in the play) and she eventually drowns her illegitimate child and is convicted of murder. Sorolla added the reference to Goethe's play later.
- It was exhibited in Madrid where it was awarded a gold medal and it was then sent to Chicago to the World Fair in 1893 where it won first prize. It was bought by the Washington Museum, St. Louis. He soon rose to general fame and was regarded as the leading modern Spanish painter. He had decided early on that he wanted to be famous not just in Europe but around the world. So he paints big ambitious painting on modern themes and exhibits at world fairs. From the 1890s his career was established and became an endless series of international exhibitions, commissions for portraits and showers of honours and almost ceaseless travel. By 1900 he was considered the most famous of all living Spanish artists.



And They Still Say Fish is Expensive!, 1894, 151.5 x 204 cm, Prado



And They Still Say Fish is Expensive, 1894, 151.5 x 204 cm, Prado

- “*And They still say Fish is Expensive!* shows a scene inside the hold of a fishing boat, where a young sailor, barely a boy, is lying on the ground after an accident at sea. On his naked torso hangs a medallion, a protective amulet to guard fishermen against misfortune. The young man is treated for his injuries by two old fishing companions, both with serious concentration on their faces. One holds him by the shoulders, whilst the other, wearing a traditional Catalan cap, applies a compress to the wound, which he has just wet in the pot of water in the foreground. The three sailors are surrounded by fishing tackle, whilst in the background is a pile of fish, caught during this unfortunate day's work.
- As in many youthful works of similar nature and intent, Sorolla continues to be constrained here by the formal rigours of naturalism in its strictest sense ... The theme and title of the picture are inspired by the final passage from the novel *The Mayflower* which Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867– 1928) was writing at the same time that his fellow Valencian was painting this picture, and was published in 1895. The novel describes the wretched lives of fishermen and ends with the story of an accident suffered by a team of mariners on the high seas and the rescue of the dead body of one of them which is taken into the belly of the wrecked boat.” (PaintingMania.com)

References

- https://www.paintingmania.com/they-still-say-fish-is-expensive-168_14198.html



The Return from Fishing, 1894, 265 x 403.5, Musée d'Orsay



The Return from Fishing, 1894, 265 x 403.5, Musée d'Orsay

- Sorolla was born close to the sea in Valencia and sea and beach scenes were one of his central themes from when he was a teenager. This is one of his most successful examples. It was painted in the summer of 1894 when he was 31. The two oxen are life-size and are shown pulling a fishing boat ashore.
- When exhibited in Paris it won a second class medal, a remarkable achievement for a foreign artist and it was immediately bought by the French state for 6,000 francs. It was an immediate success among conservative critics who admired its technical prowess, commenting on the contrast between the dark oxen and the bright sea, the accuracy of the semi-transparent sail and the wide range of shades in the sea. Although he occasionally uses long brushstrokes such as the sea foam in the foreground it is mostly painted using small comma-like strokes using thin brushes. He follows the academic tradition closes with a well-balanced composition, high finish and restrained colours.
- A number of studies exist that he painted in the summer of 1894 in Valencia.
- “White sails, white shirts, white walls dominate his canvases, catching, reflecting or transmitting the sun’s rays: in ‘The Return from Fishing’, only Sorolla could have achieved that balance between the butter yellow of the white sail with the sun behind it and the dirty blue of the same ‘white’ in partial shade.” (Spectator, 9 March 2019)



Beaching the Boat (Afternoon Light), 1903, 298.3 × 440.6 cm, The Hispanic Society of America, New York

- Its success and the positive critical reaction led him to paint variations over the next few years such as *Beaching the Boat (Afternoon Light)* three years later. Although in this reproduction it looks similar to the previous painting it is a bravura performance of paint dashed onto the canvas sometimes straight from the tube. Sorolla uses a wide variety of colours and employs a variety of brushstrokes from small to broad, which are dabbed, smeared or scrawled onto the canvas. The painting looks like a sketch as in parts the canvas shows through and in other parts there is thick impasto paint.



Afternoon at the Beach in Valencia, 1904, 64 × 97 cm, Arango Collection

Afternoon at the Beach in Valencia, 1904, 64 × 97 cm, Arango Collection

- A final beach scene (for now) where he explores the flickering light around boys playing on the beach. By looking down onto the sea the horizon is moved above the picture which is filled with sea and umbrella. He has used the Impressionistic technique of putting white next to blue and brown without mixing them.
- In the summer the sun was scorching hot and Sorolla painted on the spot under the shade of the umbrella he shows. He has restricted his palette to emphasize the blinding light.
- Sorolla wrote to a friend that this was intended as a study in light. He went on to quote Monet, **“We painters, however, can never reproduce sunlight as it really is. I can only approach the truth of it.”** Monet, Degas and Rodin probably saw this painting when it was exhibited in Paris. Degas stared intently at each of Sorolla’s painting and then left without saying a word.



Sewing the Sail, 1896, 222 x 300 cm,
Venice, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna di Ca' Pesaro



Sewing the Sail, 1896, 222 x 300 cm, Venice, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna di Ca' Pesaro

- It was painted on a patio next to Valencia's El Cabanyal beach. It is perhaps Sorolla's most complex representation of light as it filters through the trellis creating patches of cream and grey. He wrote to a friend, **"I am not sending you any photographs because they do not do justice to its tonal relations."**
- It is a pyramid composition but the sail dominates the foreground pushing the figures into the distance.
- He painted another *Sewing the Sail* in 1904 but the sail is pushed to the side as fisherman sew it on the beach.
- This painting was first exhibited at the Paris Salon and subsequently won first prize in both Munich and Vienna. When exhibited in Madrid it had mixed reviews as some critics felt it did not have a strong composition or a spiritual message. In 1905 it was exhibited at the Venice Biennale where it was so well received it was bought by Venice itself and it is still there.



Sad Inheritance!, 1899, 210 x 285 cm, Valencia

- Perhaps the most astonishing of his early works. Disabled, blind and deaf young boys are being led to the sea by the monk that looks after them. Sent to the 1900 Paris Universal Exhibition it won the Grand Prix (gold medal), initiating a huge discussion at the time and beating Whistler, Klimt and Alma-Tadema. It is still controversial today. It was placed in a church in New York as a form of altarpiece demonstrating an act of charity.
- However, it was not bought by the Spanish state perhaps as it highlights the disabilities of some of its young citizens.
- It was the last of his big paintings with a social theme but young children playing in the sea became one of his favourite subjects.
- A decisive moment in his career. By this time he is happily married.



Mother, 1895-1900, 125 x 169 cm, Madrid, Museo Sorolla

Mother, 1895-1900, 125 x 169 cm, Madrid, Museo Sorolla

- In 1888 (aged 25) he returned to Valencia to marry Clotilde García del Castillo, whom he had first met in 1879, while working in her father's studio. She became his muse and the subject of many of his paintings. They had a passionate relationship and a happy marriage. When they were apart, he would write every day often enclosing a flower in his letter. He wrote, **"All my love is focused on you. Despite my great love for our children, you are more, much more than them for so many reasons that there is no need to mention. You are my body, my life, my mind, my perpetual ideal"**. By 1895, they would have three children together: Maria, born in 1890, Joaquín, born in 1892, and Elena, born in 1895. In 1890, they moved to Madrid, and for the next decade Sorolla's efforts as an artist were focussed mainly on the production of large canvases of orientalist, mythological, historical, and social subjects, for display in salons and international exhibitions in Madrid, Paris, Venice, Munich, Berlin, and Chicago.
- Sorolla has a hugely happy marriage and happy family life with three children and, as far as we know, no mistresses or hidden secrets. The biographer's curse.
- This painting shows mother and daughter Elena in bed. Originally her head was turned away and around 1900 he rethought that and repainted her head to show her looking at the baby. The white bed clothes and grey walls enable Sorolla to experiment with white, perhaps inspired by Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (1861-62). The white and the sleeping baby signify purity and he avoids sentimentality by the unusual

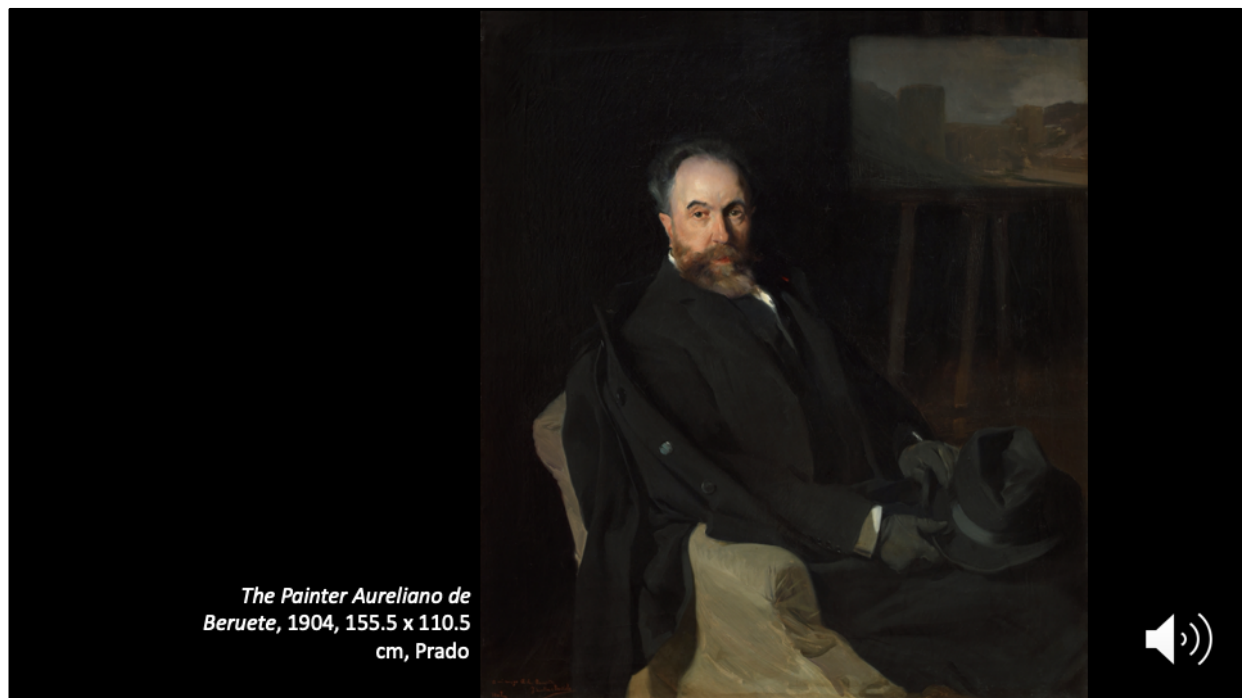
composition and the technical virtuosity of handling so many shades of white.

- Elena (1895-1975) was an early 20th-century Spanish sculptor and painter. She devoted her youth to sculpture, having a brief career that she left behind to dedicate herself to her family after marrying Victoriano Lorente in 1922. She was the youngest daughter.



Female Nude, 1902, 106 x 186 cm, private collection

- Sees himself participating in the grand Spanish tradition. He went to see the *Rokeby Venus* (*The Toilet of Venus*, 1647-51, pronounced 'row-kbee') which at that time was still at Rokeby Park, County Durham. He studied the picture and realised **he could take on Velázquez**. A symphony of light on the fabric. As it was modelled by his wife he never showed this painting in public as a portrait but exhibited it in 1909 called simply *Female Nude* and it was never sold.
- Towards the end of his life Sorolla admitted how tired he felt associating the feeling with wanting to go further and do more, he said "**anxiety is what most consumes me in life. I don't have Velázquez's phlegm, maybe that [is] where his perfection and my lack of it lies.**"



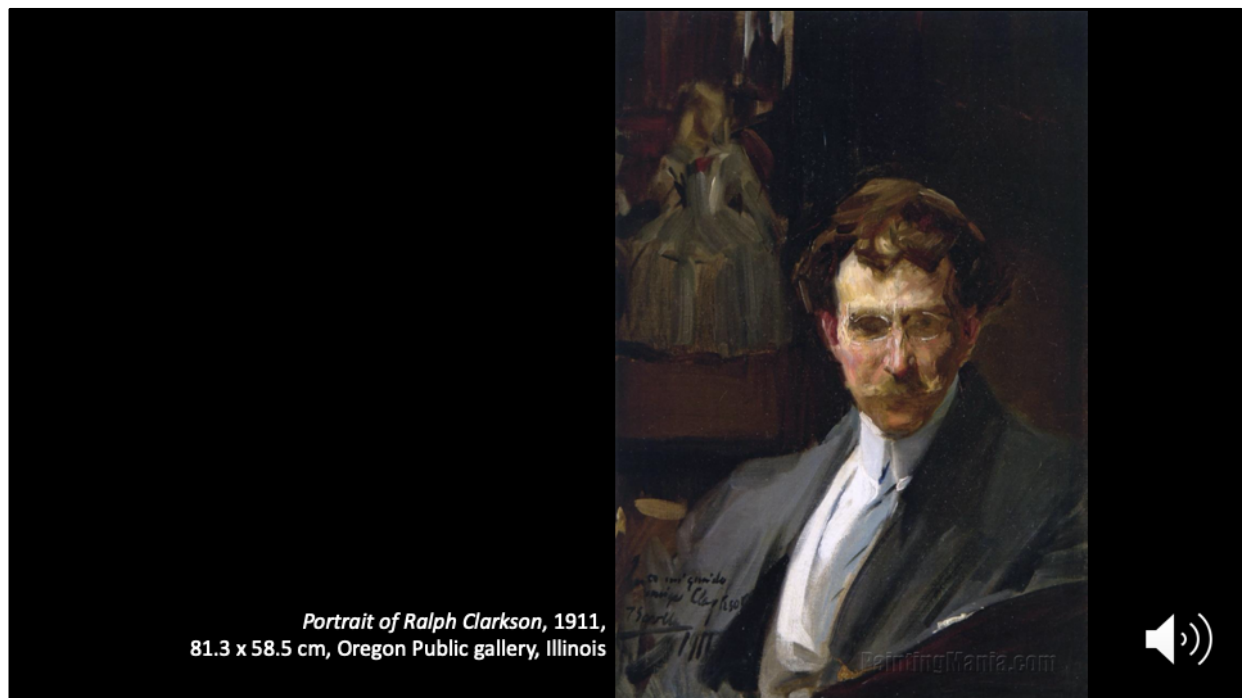
The Painter Aureliano de Beruete, 1902, 155.5 x 110.5 cm, Prado

- The most lucrative and arguably the most competitive genre around the turn of the century was portrait painting. Sorolla painted few portraits before 1900 but it quickly became, along with beach scenes, his signature subject.
- Particularly concerned with his place in the Spanish tradition – naturalistic painting and the importance of light. This is a Velázquez and Goya like portrait of the painter he went with to Rokeby Hall.
- This portrait of Aureliano de Beruete (pronounced ‘bey-roo-et-ee’) was painted from life. He is formally dressed with his gloves still on and holding a hat as if he had just returned from a walk.
- The easel with a landscape is the only thing that indicates his profession. Sorolla described his technique as painting “**from inside out, never seeming to search for the outline or silhouette.**” In other words he builds the face from its parts rather than drawing an outline of the parts and filling them in. Like Sargent he reduced the palette to black, grey and beige.
- “The Painter Aureliano de Beruete is the most outstanding of all the portraits made by Sorolla. In this work he successfully combined the Velázquez inspiration that was a feature of his oeuvre during that period with direct and rigorous painting from the life and a profound and sensitive interpretation of the sitter’s outstanding personality. Sorolla was especially gifted at portraiture owing to the ease with which he captured physiognomies, especially male ones, and here he represented a public figure who was not only an art authority that collected, appreciated, and studied painting, but also a close friend of the artist and an

outstanding painter himself. All of these factors constituted an extraordinary stimulus to create a true masterwork. ” (Prado)

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<https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-painter-aureliano-de-beruete/0bc4ec93-9594-4fa8-9059-23ea971e457b>



Portrait of Ralph Clarkson, 1911, 81.3 x 58.5 cm, Oregon Public gallery, Illinois

- A portrait of an American painter. Sorolla went to Chicago and was received as a 'prince' of painting. He met Ralph Clarkson who loved Spanish art. Sorolla tells us he painted it in two hours as did Velázquez. This spontaneous approach enables him to capture the person and perhaps compete with Velázquez.
- Sorolla studied the Old Masters in particular Velázquez although he felt that adhering too closely to their style would be detrimental to his art. He said Old Masters painting "**isn't any use for painting today to be honest**" although he made an exception for "**the great things such as *Las Meninas* by the great Velázquez**".
- While in Chicago Sorolla painted high society and established a close friendship with Clarkson who had become captivated by Velázquez's work when he visited Madrid in 1891. On his return he lectured on Velázquez's influence on modern art particularly his treatment of light.
- They probably first met in 1900 when Clarkson was on the jury of the Paris Universal Exhibition where Sorolla exhibited *Sad Inheritance!* Which won a *Grand Prix*. It was following this visit that Clarkson made a large copy of *Las Meninas* on his return to Chicago and it presided over his studio.



Clotilde in a Black Dress, 1906, 186.7 x 118.7 cm,
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Clotilde in a Black Dress, 1906, 186.7 x 118.7 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

- This is his wife and favourite model Clotilde Garcia del Castillo (1864-1929) who he called '**my flesh, my life, my brain**'.
- "Sorolla's wife Clotilde was his confidant, traveling companion, bookkeeper (or in his words, "my Treasury Minister"), and muse. In this portrait, set in their Madrid home, she poses as a Spanish beauty wearing a striking evening dress. Behind her is Sorolla's painting of a female saint, made during the first months of their marriage in 1888 [and the halo so close to his wife's head can be no coincidence]. At far right the artist depicted the edge of another canvas—a conceit recalling the work of seventeenth-century master and fellow countryman Velázquez. The present picture hung prominently in Sorolla's wildly successful 1909 exhibition at the Hispanic Society of America in New York, where the Metropolitan immediately acquired it." (Met Museum)
- The last exhibition of Sorolla in London was 1908, not a success, not many were sold, no commissions but he met **Archer Huntington**, his father had built a railroad and he wanted to establish himself as an American patron. He invited him to do an exhibition the following year in New York at the Hispanic Society. The exhibition was a sensation, they were lined up around the block in the snow. 160,000 visited in a month and he sold 195 paintings, received 25 portrait commissions including being invited to the White House to paint the President Taft. All the museums of America had to have a Sorolla and that year the met bought this painting. He came back from New York a very wealthy man and built the house in Madrid that now holds his museum. In some ways it was the ruin of Sorolla as Huntington, as a result of the success, commissioned a 60-metre mural painting of Spanish

costumes and customs that occupied Sorolla for the rest of his life.



My Children, 1904, 160.5 x 230.5 cm, Museo Sorolla

- When he was in London he met Sargent and they became friends and friendly competitors as critics were always comparing the two artists.
- By 1895, Sorolla had three children: fourteen-year-old Maria (1890) wearing a red dress, twelve-year-old Joaquín (1892) wearing a grey suit and white cravat and looking like an adult dandy, and nine-year-old Elena (1895) who seems bored by the painting session
- X-ray analysis show that he painted his wife Clotilde in front of the children and later painted her out, perhaps to emphasize the children's independence.
- Sometimes the influence of Velázquez was uppermost, as in *My Family* (1901), a reference to *Las Meninas* which grouped his wife and children in the foreground, the painter reflected, at work, in a distant mirror. At other times the desire to compete with his friend John Singer Sargent was evident, as in *Portrait of Mrs. Ira Nelson Morris and her children* (1911). A series of portraits produced in the United States in 1909, commissioned through the Hispanic Society of America, was capped by the *Portrait of Mr. Taft, President of the United States*, This portrait, which was painted at the White House, is on permanent display at the Taft Museum of Art in Cincinnati, Ohio.

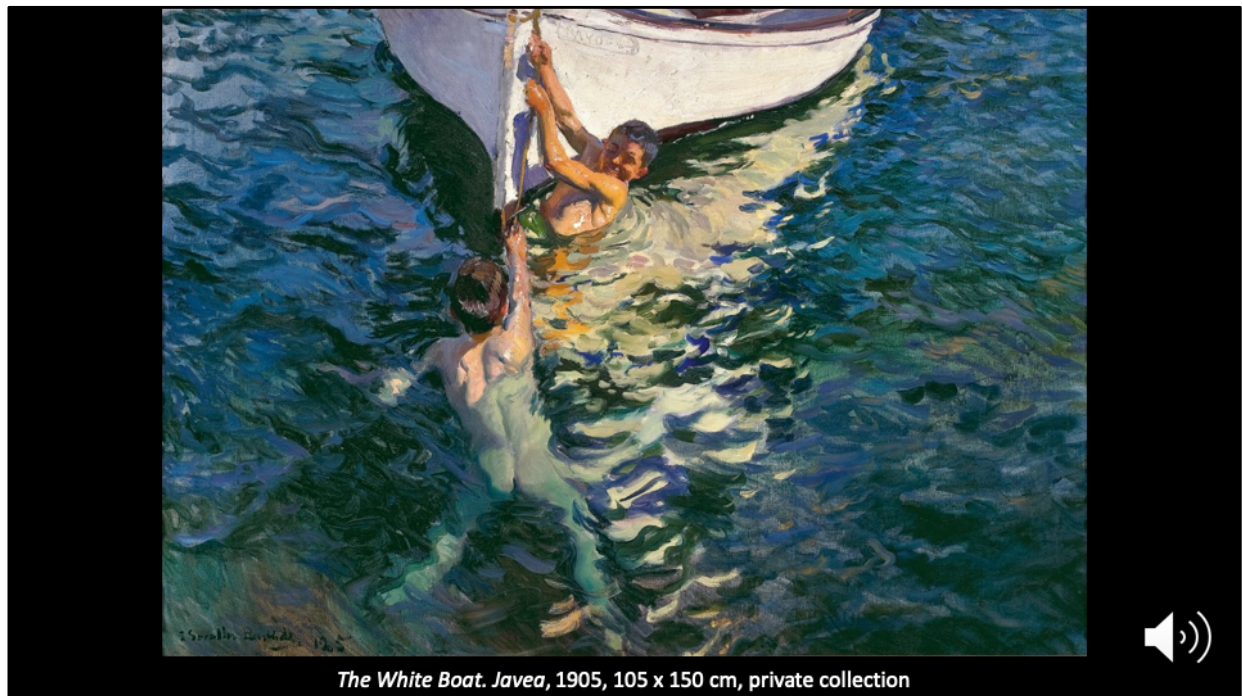


Boys on the Beach, 1909, 118 x 185 cm, Prado

- Let us return to his other great passion, beach scenes.
- He left London early in 1908 and said he would go back to Spain to paint scenes for America like this one. Arguably the most famous of Sorolla's paintings.
- Although dated 1910 it must have been painted in the summer of 1909. He stayed in Valencia between late June and September that year.
- It is one of a number of reclining nudes on the beach that he painted from life with his easel at the water's edge. There are traces of sand in the paint of many of his paintings.
- The composition combines the static posture of the boys with their dynamic alignment. The diagonal of the nearest boy takes our eye up to the horizontal second boy and the movement is stopped by the third horizontal relaxed figure. The sand and figures occupy the canvas and the intensity of the colours increase as we go up the picture. The white tones of the nearest dryer boy contrast with the darker tones of the second boy's wetter body. The sea swirling round the feet of the second boy is captured by a few long swirling movements of the brush. The reflections of the boys' bodies distorted by the undulations of the sea and sand contrast with the dark violet shadows underneath their bodies indicating a fierce midday sun.

References

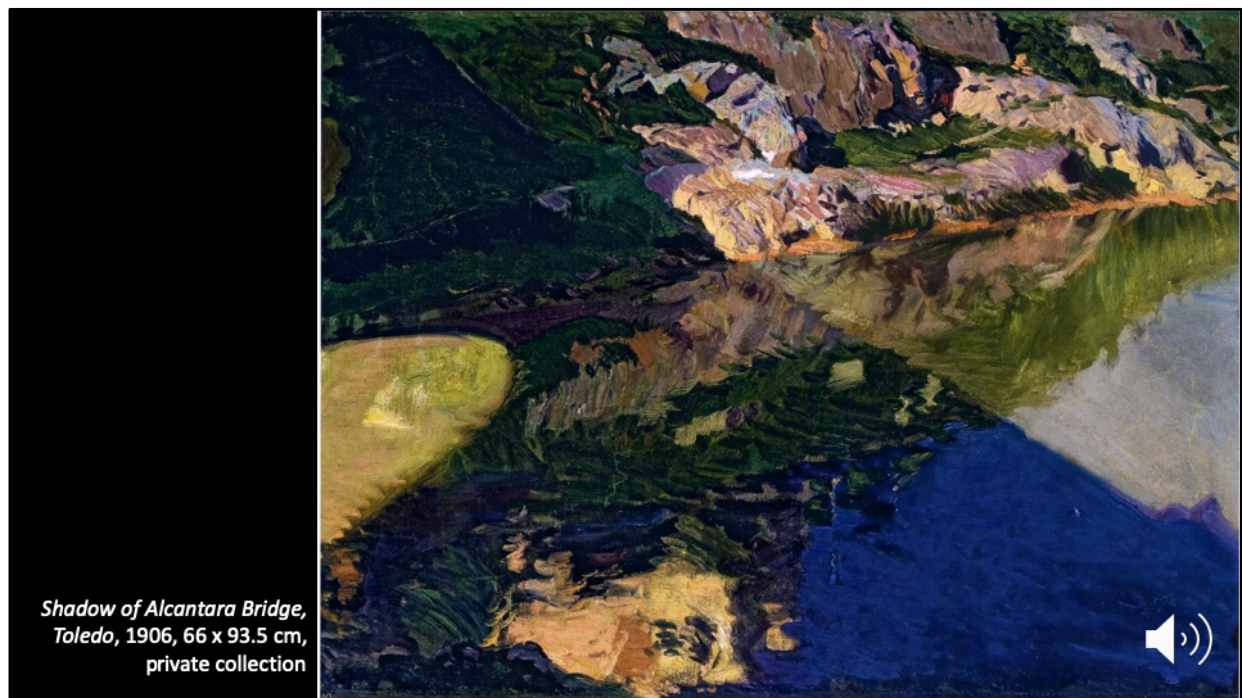
- <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/boys-on-the-beach/edd7a202-c069-49f1-a3f4-eacf9b4022c2>



The White Boat. Javea, 1905, 105 x 150 cm, private collection

The White Boat. Javea, 1905, 105 x 150 cm, private collection

- This was painted in 1905 in Xàbia (pronounced 'sabia') or Jávea (pronounced 'havia') is a coastal town about 100 km from Valencia where he spent the summer with a Valencian friend.
- Sorolla painted it from a high vantage point, perhaps a nearby cliff. There is a cliff opposite the harbour.
- The boys are straining to pull in the boat. Their bodies are painted in a thick creamy impasto that becomes a translucent green under the water. The deep blue water surrounding them is a deep blue priming layer covered in dashes of emerald green, blue, turquoise, white and yellow. The dark blue and purple in the foreground suggest rocks that the boys are holding onto for support.
- The boat's name 'Rayo' means lightning, implying speed.



Shadow of Alcántara Bridge, Toledo, 1906, 66 x 93.5 cm, private collection

- The Alcántara Bridge is a famous bridge that the Romans built in 104-6 AD although it has been destroyed and rebuilt many times. It crosses the Tagus river to Toledo.
- Sorolla visited Toledo a number of times and wrote, "**If not Madrid, those of use who make painting our life should live here, There is nothing equal to it in Italy or Belgium ...**". Many of the 20 paintings he made of the city are from unusual angles and viewpoints.
- The shadow of the bridge cuts diagonally across the painting creating a powerful dark blue shape into which the sunlight streaming through the arch creates a golden arc. At the bottom a golden reflection of rocks breaks up the shadow. The sunlit bank is created from vertical and horizontal brushstrokes of creams and browns interlaced with pinks and violets.
- You can see him becoming more and more experimental. You are not sure what you are seeing it is a reflection of the arch lying on the water, as soon as you realise it snaps into place. He freedom of paint application becomes greater and greater.



Skipping Rope, La Granja, 1907, 105 x 166 cm, Museo Sorolla

- Sorolla spent the summer of 1907 at the royal palace of La Granja de San Ildefonso about 80 km north of Madrid. He was there to work on portraits of the king and queen. In between sittings he painted his family playing in the garden.
- This is the Fountain of the Snail and he has painted his youngest daughter Elena (1895-1975) skipping around the fountain with her friends. With photographic spontaneity he has captured her in mid-air. The painting consists of dynamic strokes of paint mimicking the girl's energy. The skipping rope is a single white line of paint.
- Has something to do with photography as before the snapshot it is difficult to think someone would paint someone floating in the air. Kodak cameras were now available and changed out visual imagination. By 1907 Kodak was well established and the 'snapshot' was becoming a way of viewing the world.



Running Along the Beach, 1908, 90 x 166.5 cm, Museo de Bellas Artes Asturias, Oviedo



Running Along the Beach, 1908, 90 x 166.5 cm, Museo de Bellas Artes Asturias, Oviedo

- In 1908 in London when he was there for an exhibition at the Grafton Galleries he went to the British Museum to study the Elgin marbles and this is a reference to those marbles. Their billowing draperies echo those of the Greek sculpture.
- The figures seem to fly across the margin between sea and sand with the warm sand colour echoed in their skin tones contrasting with the cool blue of the sea.
- “There hasn’t been a major exhibition of works by Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923) in London since 1908. Back then, at the fashionable Grafton Galleries in Mayfair, he was unabashedly advertised as ‘The World’s Greatest Living Painter’. As opposed to in the United States, however, where success was instantaneous, Sorolla never caught on here. He is represented in UK public collections today by a few, scattered pictures, none of them major, none at the National Gallery, none at Tate. If Sorolla figures in British discussions of painting around 1900 at all, it is mostly in fleeting comparisons to his friend and fellow wizard of the paintbrush, John Singer Sargent.” (Apollo Magazine)

References

- <https://www.apollo-magazine.com/sorolla-national-gallery-london/>



Reflections in a Fountain, 1908, 58.5 x 98 cm, Museo Sorolla



Reflections in a Fountain, 1908, 58.5 x 98 cm, Museo Sorolla

- A much more austere painting created in Seville the same year. Sorolla travelled there to paint Queen Victoria Eugenia of Spain in the royal palace of Alcázar. It was between appointments with the monarch that he painted a series of vistas, sixteen in total of the gardens and buildings. It shows his lifelong interest in reflections and his personal collection of photographs include many pictures of buildings reflected in water.
- It takes a moment for the viewer to orientate the scene which is a reflection of the renaissance extension of the Moorish palace in the Garden of the Reservoir, also known as the Mercury Pond named after the statue of the Roman messenger god shown here merely as a green blur. The statue was made in 1576 by a Spanish sculptor. The picture conveys the heat of the sun contrasted with the cool of the fountain with the pale blue Sevillian sky reflected in the lower left corner.



Strolling Along the Seashore, 1909, 205 x 200 cm, Museo Sorolla, Madrid

- This one of Sorolla's best known and iconic works. It was painted in Valencia in the summer of 1909 and shows his wife Clotilde (1864-1929) and his eldest daughter Maria (1890-1956). Sorolla had just returned triumphant from his outstanding success in New York, Buffalo and Boston. The painting is self-assured, bold and refined and shows the mature artist in complete control.
- The pair walk casually leaning into the wind which blows their clothes back while Sorolla captures the soft late afternoon sunlight. Sorolla's daring photographic 'snapshot' of a moment in time cuts the Clotilde's hat and leaves a large strip of sand at the bottom.
- The high viewpoint eliminates the horizon and enables him to use the contrasting sea and sand as a backdrop. Sorolla captures all the nuances of white and by including the colours of the sea and sand in the white and in the ribbons and flowers of their hats he unifies the picture which is tied together by the white line of surf at the top.



The Drunkard, Zarauz, 1910, Daniel Katz Gallery, London

The Drunkard, Zarauz, 1910, Daniel Katz Gallery, London

- As mentioned, in 1901 Huntington and Sorolla meet in Paris and Huntington proposes a painting commission, a mural around the walls of the Hispanic Society 210 sq. metres of wall. Sorolla did sketches. It was the largest commission given by an American outside America. Today the murals surround the visitor with the costumes and customs of Spain. It becomes the work of the rest of his life. His vision of Spain, in the forefront of his mind.
- He had been painting light toned painting for the previous ten years. Beaches, happy times, he realises he has to get back to painting peasant life, ancient traditions and to the dark power of Spanish painting. He paints a whole series of dark Spanish scenes, working men enjoying themselves, perhaps a bit too much.
- Zarauz is a small port and a quiet seaside town in the Basque region on the north coast near Bilbao. He spent a family holiday in the town and perhaps because of bad weather he painted a number of tavern scenes at least four of which are studies in alcoholism. This was a serious problem partly because cider was abundant and cheap. The painting shows four people making fun of a local drunkard called Moscorra. They are encouraging him to drink more cider and one is thrusting a glass in front of him. Another drunk with a red nose and a hard look stares at Sorolla.



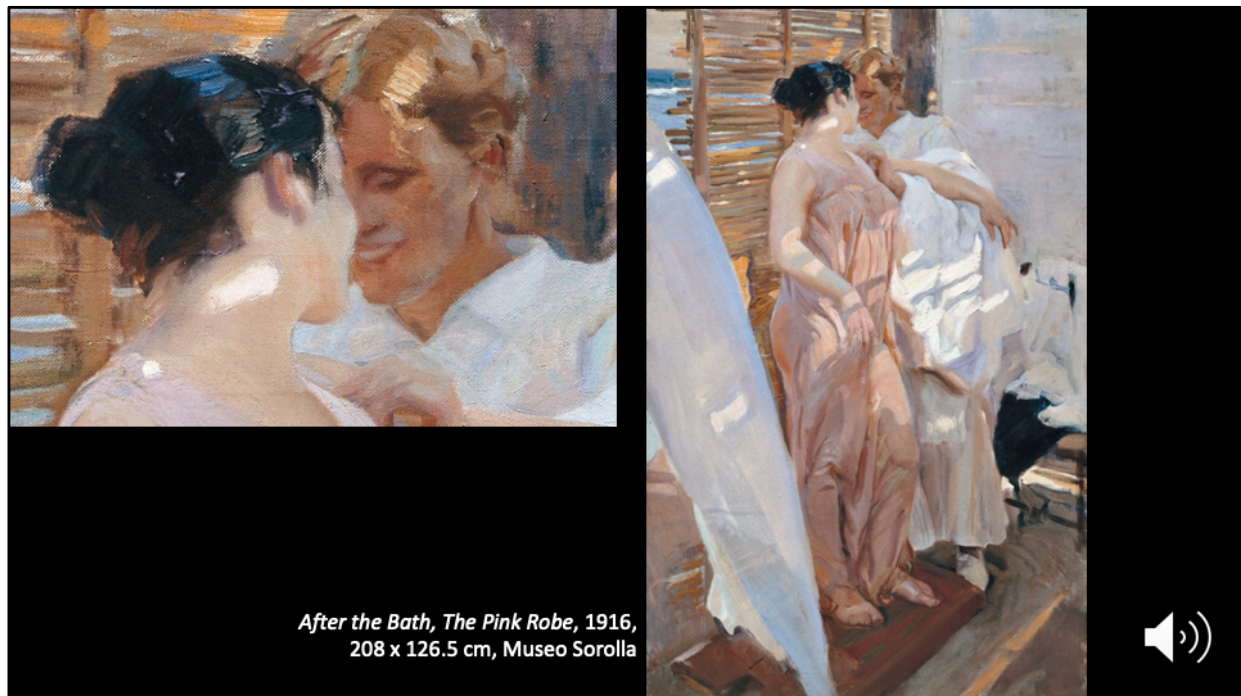
The Siesta, 1911, 200 x 201 cm, Museo Sorolla

- Another large picture. These reproductions fail to convey the power of the full-size paintings.
- In 1911 Sorolla spent the summer in the seaside town of San Sebastián in Spain's Basque region.
- It is difficult at first to see what is depicted. We are looking down on his two daughters and a friend having a siesta. At a distance almost like an abstract painting but once it snaps into place we see how true it is to nature. It is painted in the garden of an old friend.
- On a very hot day Sorolla took this enormous canvas out into the garden to paint the four women resting on the grass under the shade of a tree. Reclining across the painting is his wife Clotilde (1864-1929). Behind her are their youngest daughter Elena (1895-1975), a friend called Maria Teresa, a publisher engrossed in a book, and further back on the right their eldest daughter Maria (1890-1956) her fingers playing with a wicker chair.
- Sorolla is extremely daring. Some areas are bare canvas while others are thick impasto. Elena's dress is thick paint but the canvas can be seen through the thin paint of her arm. Clotilde's dress is an extraordinary mix of white, pink, orange, yellow and blue sometimes painted wet on wet. In the foreground is a hat with a dark blue ribbon suggested by a few brushstrokes.



Types from Roncal, 1912, 200 x 150 cm, Museo Sorolla

- Sorolla travelled across Spain with a photographer to record local costumes for the mural in New York.
- He asks locals to pose in the old costumes and he sometimes has to bring the costumes himself as they are no longer worn. He paints life-size images of them.
- This is Roncal Valley in the Pyrenees in the region of Navarra which is centred on Pamplona. Unusually we know the names of the models as their names were written on the photograph taken at the time. On the left is Benita Daspa dressed in a costume that identifies her as a single woman. To her left is her aunt Raimunda Monzón who, as a married woman, is dressed in dark clothing. The man is José Sanz and his black cape with red trimmings indicates he is the mayor or a local councillor. He used the figures in the final painting for the mural but in a ceremonial procession entering a church for a municipal meeting.
- The dress of the councilman was largely unchanged from the Middle Ages and it impressed Sorolla who wrote to his wife, **“the men are especially magnificent in their outfits ... a vision of Spain that is impressive, noble, and appealing.”**



After the Bath, The Pink Robe, 1916, 208 x 126.5 cm, Museo Sorolla

- By 1916 Sorolla was deeply engaged in his project to paint all the customs and costumes of Spain for the Hispanic Society in New York. He spent the summer in Valencia painting the local area as part of this grand project. The work was exhausting and emotionally draining and so he spent the final weeks of the summer resting on Malvarrosa beach, Valencia.
- The painting is life size and Sorolla considered it **“a major work, and one of the best I have ever produced.”**
- Two women have just returned from bathing and are in a beach hut where the farthest woman helps the one in pink remove her wet robe. We feel we are witnessing an intimate moment, normally hidden from view yet the triviality of the moment contrasts with the monumentality of the figures whose deeply folded costumes remind us of Greek dresses which gives the painting a classical, timeless dimension. It has the grandeur and stature of ancient Greek sculpture, a permanence and dignity. Sorolla was deeply interested in ancient Greek sculptor.



The Smugglers, 1919, 84 x 167 cm, private collection

- Sorolla is looking straight down the cliff at four smugglers climbing towards him. Three have almost made it to the top while a fourth is seen far below.
- It was commissioned by a wealthy America known as the 'Tobacco King' and this might be a reference to the smuggling of tobacco.
- Sorolla painted it in Ibiza from August to September after he had finished his *Vision of Spain* series.
- We know from sketches he made that originally the men were transporting the goods by donkey over a rough path but this cliff face obviously caught his eye.
- Sorolla decided to place the figures on the left by extending the canvas to the right. The join can be seen to the right of the leading man's left foot.
- The paint is applied vigorously throughout and the deep intense blue of the sea is reflected in the blue added to the white of the men's shirts.



Garden of Sorolla's House with Empty Chair, 1920, 125 x 103 cm, Museo Sorolla



Garden of Sorolla's House with Empty Chair, 1920, 125 x 103 cm, Museo Sorolla

- We return to Sorolla's home in Madrid.
- Travelling all over Spain to capture *The Vision of Spain* almost kills him. The difficulty, intensity and constant travel from 1910 to 1920 leads to him having a very serious stroke and he never paints again. The stroke occurs when he is at home and this is one of the last pictures he ever painted. We see the chair on which he often sat and painted. He died in 1923 and was buried like a state hero. His body was transported in a cortège by train to Valencia, where it was greeted by thousands and there, in his hometown, he was buried in full state pomp.
- Now it was all over, his work and the great project to record Spain for posterity. His great project was installed in New York in 1926 but was greeted with indifference. The world had changed. In the 1920s, when you thought of Spanish art, you thought of Dalí and Miró not Sorolla. After all these decades of ignoring Sorolla we need to reimagine him again to see where he fits into a more complex story of modern Spanish art. He was a great artist of his time and today, when 'modern art' is no longer a label that divides but unites, he is recognised as one of the great masters of handling paint.