

# ROOM I · Biography



**Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)** is one of the great names in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish painting and the artist now known to us as the creator of an optimistic vision of a luminous and Mediterranean Spain. Together with Velázquez and Goya, Sorolla is probably the most beloved and appreciated Spanish painter.

Sorolla's art reflects the naturalistic trends of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and numerous specialists have termed it "Impressionist" or "luminous". Sorolla did not in fact identify himself with the Impressionists but he was very familiar with their works and absorbed their new use of colour, their manner of applying it in separate, barely mixed brushstrokes in order to maintain its spontaneity, their compositional formats inspired by the recent invention of photography, and above all their absolute belief in the necessity of painting from life and if possible outdoors.

In reality, the artist considered himself closer to other painters of his day such as the Americans John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) and James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) and the Swede Anders Zorn (1860-1920). These artists shared the Impressionists' interest in light but maintained a more volumetric approach to the figure and a discipline of line that reveals their rigorous academic training.

This building was Sorolla's last house in Madrid. He had it built when he was already a fully established artist and lived here from 1911. When he died in 1923 his family bequeathed the house to the State together with its collections in order to create this Museum, which opened in 1932.



Joaquín Sorolla, Antonio García Peris, 1883-1884

## 1863

Joaquín Sorolla was born in Valencia on 27 February 1863. His parents, Joaquín Sorolla Garcón and María Concepción Bastida Prat, were tradespeople in cloth who died in an epidemic when Sorolla was only two years old. He and his sister were brought up by their maternal aunt and uncle.

## 1878

Sorolla entered the School of Fine Arts in Valencia. There he made friends with Juan Antonio García del Castillo and both attended the Figure Drawing classes. Juan Antonio introduced him to his father, the Valencian photographer Antonio García Peris (1841-1918), who immediately became Sorolla's patron and supporter during his early years.

## 1885

The Provincial Council of Valencia awarded Sorolla a grant to study in Rome. There he met Pedro Gil Moreno de Mora (1860-1930) who became one of his closest friends and invited him to accompany him to Paris that year. For Sorolla the artistic climate in Paris was a true revelation and it was there that he discovered two naturalist painters who had a profound impact on him: Adolph von Menzel (1815-1905) and Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884), both essential for his early artistic development.

## 1888

On 8 September in Valencia Sorolla married Clotilde, his friend Juan Antonio's sister. The couple spent a period in Assisi where Sorolla began to paint "genre scenes" to make a living.



The Sorollas, Antonio García Peris, 1888

## 1890

Following their return to Spain, Joaquín and Clotilde settled in Madrid where they soon started a family: María Clotilde was born in 1889 and Joaquín in Valencia in 1892. Three years later, in 1895, their last child Helena was born.



Elena, Joaquín and María Sorolla García, Antonio García Peris, 1901

## 1895

Sorolla regularly participated in the leading art competitions, sending large-format paintings on subjects relating to contemporary society with the aim of becoming known. He won a First Class medal at the General Fine Arts Exhibition in Madrid with *And they still say fish is expensive!*, which the Spanish acquired for the Museo Moderno (now in the Museo del Prado). That same year he sent *White*



And they still say fish is expensive!, J. Sorolla, 1894. Museo del Prado

*Slave Trade* and *Return of the Fishing Fleet* to the Salon des Artistes Français, receiving a Second Class medal. The French State acquired the latter for the Musée du Luxembourg (now in the Musée D'Orsay), marking the artist's first success outside Spain. In 1896 he painted *Sewing the Sail*, which was acquired by the Italian State and represents a new direction in his painting, which moved towards greater luminosity and more light-hearted subjects.

## 1900

Sorolla presented six works at the Universal Exhibition in Paris, including *Sad Inheritance!* (Fundación Bancaja). He was awarded the Grand Prix, a prize that fully consolidated his international reputation.

## 1906

Sorolla organised his first solo exhibition at the prestigious Galerie Georges Petit in Paris which brought him outstanding critical success. He showed 450 works, including *Swimmers*, *Jávea* and *Female nude*, selling 65 for a total of 230,650 francs. He then enjoyed a period of rest in Biarritz where his painting evolved towards a refinement, elegance and freshness of colour that were new in his work.



Swimmers, Jávea, J. Sorolla, 1905



Return of the Fishing Fleet (detail), J. Sorolla, 1895. Museo D'Orse



*Skipping the rope, La Granja*, J. Sorolla, 1907

### 1907

Sorolla exhibited 280 works in Berlin, Dusseldorf and Cologne but his daughter María's serious illness prevented him from travelling to Germany with the paintings.

With María's recovery the Sorolla family spent the summer at La Granja where Sorolla painted the Spanish King and Queen in addition to works such as *María at La Granja* and *Skipping the rope, La Granja* and where he started to try out paintings of gardens.

### 1908

The artist exhibited 278 works at the Grafton Galleries London. An event of exceptional importance for Sorolla took place during the exhibition, namely his meeting with the American philanthropist Archer M. Huntington, founder of the Hispanic Society of New York. Huntington acquired works by Sorolla and suggested organising an exhibition at his institution.

### 1909

Accompanied by his wife Clotilde and their children María and Joaquín, Sorolla went to New York for the inauguration of the exhibition *Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida at The Hispanic Society of America*. It featured 336 works and during the month that it was on display it was visited by 160,000 people. The 20,000 copies of the catalogue sold out and Sorolla sold nearly 150 paintings. The exhibition then travelled to the Fine Arts Academy in Buffalo and the Copley Society in Boston.



*J. Sorolla at The Hispanic Society of America*, Sebastián Cruset, 1909

In a mood of euphoria due to the success he had achieved, Sorolla spent that summer in Valencia with his family where he painted some of his most celebrated works on its beaches, including *Stroll along the Seashore*, *The Horse's Bath* and *The Little Sailing Boat*.



*The Horse's Bath*, J. Sorolla, 1909

### 1910

Sorolla started work on the construction of his house on Paseo del Obelisco, now Pº del General Martínez Campos, 37.



*Sorolla's House*, Campúa, 1914



*The Siesta*, J. Sorolla, 1911

### 1911

The artist held exhibitions at the Art Institute of Chicago and the City Art Museum in St. Louis (Missouri). That summer he rested with his family in San Sebastián where he painted *The Siesta*. He signed a contract with Huntington to paint the panels of the *Vision of Spain* for the library of the Hispanic Society. At the end of the year the family moved into their new home.



*Joaquín Sorolla painting*, Arthur Byne, 1920

### 1919

From the time he started work in 1912 on the commission for the *Vision of Spain* with its extremely large panels Sorolla was obliged to travel incessantly, often in difficult conditions, which ultimately affected his health. During his "rests" from this project he produced some of his most dazzling paintings, such as *The Pink Robe* (1916), seeking refuge in the garden of his new house which he himself had designed and where he painted some of his most intimate and personal works.

### 1920

While painting the portrait of *Señora Pérez de Ayala* in the garden of his house Sorolla had a stroke that left him incapacitated. He would never paint again.

### 1923

He died in Cercedilla (Madrid).