



## CATALOGUE DETAILS

Author	Emilio Sala Francés (1850-1910)
Place of production	Valencia
Place of origin	Valencia
Title/object name	<i>Spring; Autumn</i>
Date	c. 1885
Measurements	116 x 225 cm; 116 x 225 cm
Materials/technique	Oil paintings on canvas
Inventory no.	CE4/00345 and CE4/00346
Location in the museum	First floor/fumoir

## DESCRIPTION

*Spring* and *Autumn*, murals for the famous Valencian café El León de Oro, form part of a long list of allegorical women painted by Emilio Sala to highlight turn-of-the-century social gatherings in public and private spaces. Like them, *Spring* and *Autumn* can be read as codifications of a collective identity in delicate equilibrium between allegorical typology and naturalistic attention to detail. Their environment, cafés (among them establishments such as Fornos displaying Sala's allegories), were described by the most influential writers as melting pots of Restoration culture, places where the symbols of the empire of opportunism fermented. The renegotiated social order, anxious to capitalise on industrial and commercial progress, was also characterised by an insatiable demand for female types, timeless and modern at the same time. The statuesque sisters of Sala's allegories filled town squares and lobbies of public buildings, to

sanction the moral order of the owners of cities which, like Valencia, underwent a transformation unparalleled in their history. A contemporary of expansion districts, stone pavements, streetlights and the internationalisation of financial establishments, “man” – according to one of the architects of urban decor, the sculptor Blay – “feels the need to set the immortal pages of their great deeds and their distinguished figures in marble and bronze”. This same man came to be the governor of the spaces decorated with semi-nude allegories: both in the street and in cafés. Milestones in the literature of “types” such as *Las españolas pintadas por los españoles* (Spanish women painted by Spanish men) dated 1871 describe the flesh-and-blood women who penetrated this last realm of social gatherings: the malleable victim of gazes that studied her and evaluated her like goods in a shop window. A fact that we would be hard-pressed to separate from one of the themes that came up during never-ending table conversation: the problem of the “fair sex”.

## REREADING

<p><b>Related them</b></p>	<p>Gender and social class Gender and space Gender stereotypes: Desiring subject / desired object</p>
<p><b>Rereading</b></p>	<p>The expression of identity models in female bodies began in Classical antiquity, but the theoretical basis came later, for obvious reasons. This can be seen in one of the first treatises on allegorical representations, <i>Iconologia</i> by Cesare Ripa in 1593, which reads: “because every virtue is a manifestation or facet of the beautiful, the true or the desirable [...] it can appear as a woman.” This unchallenged transition from the ideal to an object of desire, fundamental for Western symbolic representation, turns out to be very helpful for understanding the use of allegorical woman at the turn of the century.</p> <p>Emilio Sala began his artistic training during the <i>Renaixença Valenciana</i> (Catalan Renaissance). His generation participated in the visual debate of its time, considering the representation of identity through types. These were related to the tastes of a middle-class that requested to be portrayed in the festive dress of a ‘huertano’ (peasant farmer), and simultaneously to those of certain intellectuals who were sensitive to the progressive values that developed painting in the open air. Perhaps because of this, Autumn and Spring share a naturalism filtered through a benign luminosity with their neighbours, paintings by Pinazo. Sala’s trajectory guides us through different allegorical female forms, pushing idealisation to the limits with Art Nouveau. His friend Juan Ramón Jiménez summed up Sala’s work in this way: “We are in the realm of verses that flee like women, and of women that turn into roses”. Within this panorama, ideal images become closely connected to their commercial use: we see an example of this in the allegories of Music and Fine Arts in the MUBAG, which add more modern symbols, such as a phonograph or the cylinder of a press, to their classical ones.</p> <p>This type of representation evokes a key characteristic of nineteenth-century culture: civic, moral and cultural values were inseparable from financial profit. Various female deities adorned the monuments and friezes found throughout the new city, usually with the function of supporting or singing the praises of a masculine hero: he a historic personality, with a realistic face and contemporary clothing; she, inexpressive, rigid and scantily clothed. In addition to the numerous female ‘Patria’ and Cities, almost unchanged throughout such a tumultuous nineteenth century, other stone entities lay at the feet of the national heroes: Fame, Victory, Charity and Peace were part of the typical decoration of every developed city. As the century progressed, these classical images, together with the traditional muses which dominated History, began to make way for some new muses</p>

that were more current and often more elaborate. Allegorical representations showed middle-class man, eager for symbols of identity, ever more allegories of financial worth: in Spain they inaugurated effigies of Industry, Agriculture, Goodwill, Banking, even Tobacco in the Philippines or the Compañía de Vapores Transatlánticos (Transatlantic Steamship Company).

Allegorical women at the turn of the century and the beginning of the 20th century constructed ideal and ideological bridges between financial wellbeing and middle-class moral order. And as society assimilated the aesthetic values of Art Nouveau, the inheritance of the classical allegory remained clear, made lucrative by an emerging advertising industry. The gestural language of the muses of consumption became the direct continuation of codified allegorical expression: if previously the bland female body could be confused with the abstract entity it represented, now this same body acquired the qualities of the advertised product. The selfless gesture was the same: the woman always offered herself up, offering a model and an idea worthy of being internalized and followed, or a product worthy of desire and expense. Following this line of reasoning, it is not strange to find in the allegories of Sala de León de Oro the same expressions that we could see in many advertising images in the following decades. At the end of the day, they were there to embellish or encourage the consumption of the café's main commodity – defined in one of Bécquer's last articles, most certainly, dedicated to the decoration of the aforementioned Madrilenian café Fornos. The poet associated the café with "comfortable and cheap" freedom. Incidentally, of course, Autumn and Spring could also sell the remaining articles of León de Oro.

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