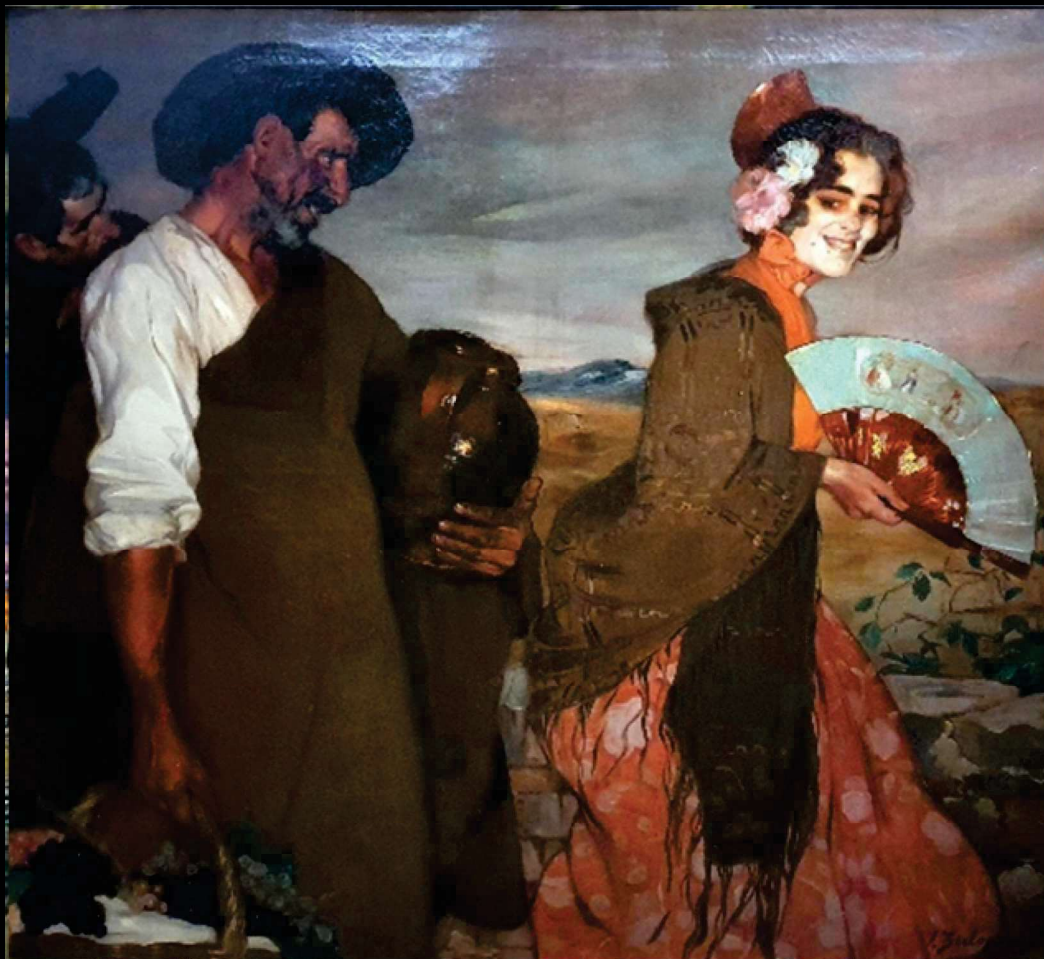


# Art Fact

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*Ignacio Zuloaga : The Flirt, Oil on Canvas, 125×138 cm, 1902,*

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## Ignacio Zuloaga - Portrayer of Spain

Philipp Grieb

Time and again, the Kunsthalle München surprises with exhibitions that inspire: Seven years after the successful and comprehensive presentation of the Spanish master of light, Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923, see ArtFact Bulletin May 2019), once again a forgotten Spaniard is brought into the spotlight here. This time it is Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945), seven years younger, whose exhibition follows on from Sorolla's and attracts friends of fine art in droves.

Munich's art lovers are familiar with the numerous museums and collections in the city, some of world reputation, which they have visited many times. The Kunsthalle has no collections of its own. Its concept is therefore to repeatedly put together attractive and high-quality exhibitions that surprise the spoilt art public. With great commitment, good international connections and, in the meantime, an excellent reputation, the Kunsthalle's small, competent team succeeded in bringing around 80 works on loan to Munich from 43 public and private collections in Spain, France, Mexico, Argentina, the USA, Germany and Sweden, among others. The cooperation with the Bucerius Kunst Forum, Hamburg, was helpful in achieving this. The exhibition will subsequently be shown there from 17 February to 26 May 2024.



*The Torero (Pepito and his fiancée), 1896-1900, 190×100 cm*

### Paris sharpens his view

As early as 1889, the young Zuloaga, who was born into a respected Basque family of artisans, moved to Paris – at that time the international centre of the art world. Inspired by the scene there, he created café and street scenes as well as his first naturalistic portraits. The French capital was an important constant in Zuloaga's life, a place to which he returned again and again. He was well connected not only in the bohemian world, but was also friends with the big names of the cultural scene such as Auguste Rodin, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Maurice Ravel. During his numerous stays in Spain, however, he also



*The Sacrifice of the Fiesta, 1910, 284×344 cm*



*Portrait of Enrique Larretas, 1912, 188×212 cm*  
consciously sought the vicinity of ordinary people.

His many travels and long stays in modern Paris gave him a new perspective on his homeland. Like many of his contemporaries, Zuloaga saw the archaic, original character of the country threatened with disappearance by progress and the increasing Europeanisation of Spain. He wanted to preserve this identity in his paintings and expressed it in mythically exaggerated form. Zuloaga's preoccupation with Spain's old masters, especially El Greco, Diego Velázquez and Francisco de Goya, plays a decisive role in his search for the essence of the Spanish. With a respectful and at the same time melancholic eye, he made outsider figures such as the pint-sized and beggars the subjects of his paintings. This also included the milieu of prostitution, which was often taken up in art around 1900 and which he located in his French as well as in his Spanish environment.

#### **Seville: Corrida and Flamenco**

Zuloaga's works from his years in Seville (1894-1898) are concerned with folkloric representations of the corrido, the ritual killing of the bull in a fight, and with flamenco dance. During this period, he himself trained as a torero. Corrida and flamenco are closely linked to the culture of the Gitanos, the Spanish Roma, among

whom Zuloaga maintained friendly contacts for decades. After the Parisian refinement, the world of the toreros offered the greatest possible contrast. Yet Zuloaga omitted the corrido itself. He concentrated instead on portraits of individual toreros and scenes associated with the corrido. In many paintings of dancers and gitanas, Zuloaga established the female type of the exotic Andalusian woman, reminiscent of the famous Carmen figure.

#### **Segovia: Myth of Spain**

In 1898, Zuloaga's move to Segovia marked the beginning of his most important work period with paintings depicting a conservative Spain: In Segovia and its surroundings, he created depictions of the harsh, barren landscape and its archetypical people. These scenes contributed decisively to the spread of the Castilian myth. Castile, which embodied the historical origins of Spain, was elevated to the status of a national



*Self-portrait, 1908, 112 × 71 cm*

landscape. Its people, who stood for originality and authenticity, represented the spirit of the people. An important group of works from the Segovian period are the numerous paintings of Zuloaga's cousins living there, who were seen, especially abroad, as the epitome of an authentic Spanish sensuality and an innocent, informal femininity.

In Segovia, he also created many of his religious paintings, often with references to El Greco and his pictorial language. They nourished an image of Spain determined by obscure religious traditions and sombre popular piety. In his painting "The Cardinal", however, he demonstrates a distance from the religiosity of ordinary people: For this work, his frequent model Francisco, a simple labourer dressed as a cardinal, mimes the churchman.

#### Portrait painter in demand

Zuloaga was one of the most sought-after portraitists of the 20th century. With his portraits of personalities from intellectual and artistic circles and of important families from all over Europe, North and South America, which he created over decades, he celebrated international success. His portraits met a need for representation that could not be satisfied by photography. They secured him considerable income, as the average price of a Zuloaga in the 1910s was 15,000 dollars.



*The Cardinal, 1912, 201x236 cm*



*Aunt Luisa, 1901, 199 x 134 cm*

During his lifetime, at the beginning of the last century, Zuloaga's works were shown several times in Germany and attracted great attention.

He inspired writers and visual artists such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Paul Klee and August Macke. A show of 25 of his works was held in Munich in 1912/13. In his paintings one saw a real Spain and exotic-mythical places of longing, which were also acquired for museums and private collections. After two world wars, it became quiet around him. The current, excellent presentation in Munich, which can be seen thereafter in Hamburg, will change that.

In his home country, Zuloaga's personal view of Spain was controversially discussed and criticised as unpatriotic. Many critics wanted more openness towards Europe instead of reflection on tradition and Spanish characteristics. He was denied public recognition for a long time. Today, retrospectives of his work once again populate the museums.