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“Eternal Sunlight” of 1909:
Examining the Appeal of Joaquín Sorolla’s First U.S. Exhibition

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of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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by

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A lot of good arguments are spoiled by some fool who knows what he is talking about.
-Miguel de Unamuno

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

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Master of Arts, Graduate Program in Art History
University of California, Riverside, June 2018
Dr. Jason Weems, Chairperson

In March 1909, millionaire Archer M. Huntington wrote to his mother:

“Everywhere the air was full of miracle... There was eternal talk of ‘sunlight.’ Nothing like it had ever happened in New York.” The event described is the presentation of 356 paintings by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (1863-1923) at the Hispanic Society of America in New York City. The show was both the inaugural exhibition of Huntington’s fledgling library and museum as well as the Spanish luminist’s first in the United States. It was, furthermore, a wild success in terms of criticism, sales and sheer number of visitors.

The importance of the Hispanic Society exhibition has not escaped scholars. Yet none have deeply considered the implications of the works’ popularity with the art-going public of turn-of-the-century New York and New England. Those who *have* pondered the matter have culled answers from the nineteenth-century press, or related the painter’s work to larger, American art trends—specifically belated-Impressionist or “bravura-style” brushwork. I believe these methodologies have revealed the immediate reasons for Sorolla’s appeal. In other words, they highlight the explanations that viewers at the time would have been willing and able to articulate. Though valid, I argue these immediate or

surface reasons are only part of the deeper narrative that the historian might elucidate. My thesis is an attempt to trace that deeper narrative, wherein fascination with Sorolla's art is the surface manifestation of the canvases' ability to affirm and comfort fin-de-siècle, East-Coast observers—specifically with regards to Positivism, nationalism, technology and industrial capitalism.

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Introduction

Part 1: Why Sorolla? Reconsidering a Painter's Popularity

Shortly after March 9, 1909—feeling more on top of the world than a millionaire usually might—Archer M. Huntington wrote to his mother:

Everywhere the air was full of miracle... There was eternal talk of 'sunlight.' Nothing like it had ever happened in New York. Ohs and Ahs stained the tile floors. Automobiles blocked the street... And through it all, the little creator sat surprised, overwhelmed, yet simple and without vanity...¹

The event described is the presentation of 356 paintings by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (1863-1923) at the Hispanic Society of America in New York City. The show was both the inaugural exhibition of Huntington's fledgling library and museum—opened a year earlier in 1908—as well as the Spanish luminist's first in the United States.² It was a

¹ "Apéndice: Correspondencia entre Sorolla, Huntington y La Hispanic Society con Selecciones del Diario de Huntington," *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 378.

² Though the Hispanic Society was founded May 18, 1904, its library and museum were not officially inaugurated, nor open to the public, until January 20, 1908.

Sorolla would return to the U.S. in 1911 for equally popular exhibitions in Saint Louis and Chicago. He would also undertake a massive mural commission for the reading room of the Hispanic Society of America, but would not live to see the works installed.

Scholars continue to grapple with how best to define Sorolla's style. It is a style shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by a large, international roster of painters working alongside the Spaniard at the end of the Nineteenth and beginning of the Twentieth Century (including, to give a few examples, William Merritt Case, John Singer Sargent, Andres Zorn and Valentin Serov). These artists, as Tomàs Llorens explains, "were not Impressionists, but practiced a sort of Impressionism *sui generis*..." In my research, I've seen their work, and that of Sorolla, described as "Luminism," "bravura-style," "Naturalist," "*plein-air*," and paradoxically, as both "Belated" and "Advanced" Impressionism. Some historians even use the term "Sorollism" to indicate both the painter's technique, and that of the sizeable group of followers he inspired— particularly in the U.S. and his home city of València. In this thesis, I primarily employ "luminism,"

resounding success, as the letter above attests. From February to early March, nearly 160,000 people flocked; breaking attendance records for art exhibitions in the city.³ The show's catalogue was reprinted five times, totaling 20,000 copies, and "photographs were sold in unheard-of numbers," Huntington informed his mother.⁴

Sorolla, for his part, may have been "surprised" and "overwhelmed" initially, but he had months to contemplate his accolades while traveling with his paintings to the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy and Copley Society of Boston, where they were received with nearly equal enthusiasm.⁵ In a missive to Huntington that June, as he departed for Spain, the artist reflected: "Half of my artistic life I leave in America, and the one that remains I must dedicate to the memory of my dear and caring friend Archer..."⁶ It is unclear what Sorolla means by "artistic life." He might reference the fact that his North-American debut was not just a critical success, but a commercial one. Of the 356 canvases brought to the East Coast, 195 would remain with U.S. buyers—on top of a

"bravura-style" and "Belated Impressionism" for how they emphasize what I feel to be defining aspects of the artist's style: namely, his interest in the dynamics of light and shadow, his rapid, impasto brushwork and the reality that many nineteenth-century viewers and critics considered him an unofficial Impressionist. However, I have chosen to use "luminism" in lowercase, to distinguish my sense of the word from both American Luminist landscape painting, and Belgian Neo-Impressionism. (Llorens and Sagredo, *Sargent/Sorolla*, 4)

³ Coddling, "Sorolla and the Hispanic Society of America," *Sorolla and America*, 58.

⁴ *Ibid*, 58 and *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 378.

⁵ Scholars have noted that Bostonians were a little more restrained with their appreciation than their Buffalonian and New York-counter parts.

⁶ "Media vida artística deajo en América, y la que me reste la he de dedicar a la memoria de mi caro y cariñoso amigo Archer..." (*Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 381)

landslide of portrait commissions.⁷ Sorolla was a highly-productive painter, but even so, when the exhibition ended, a notable portion of his oeuvre would reside across the Atlantic.

Or possibly, the artist acknowledges a turning point in his career, with “half of [his] artistic life” building to this moment of acclaim, and a new phase ahead. Huntington confirms this when closing the note to his mother: “So you have the Hispanic Society’s first serious presentation of itself to New York, and the artist gained the wherewithal for the fulfillment of his dream of a home in Madrid to be built as a museum for later days.”⁸ As the millionaire’s comment attests, the response of the U.S. public guaranteed that after years of forging a reputation on the “international”—i.e. Western European—art scene, Sorolla had finally secured both his fortune and the means to fund an institute devoted to his legacy.⁹ Ultimately, the two readings are not mutually exclusive, the larger point

⁷ This sales statistic comes from Pons Sorolla, “Sorolla: His Painting and Family,” *The Painter Joaquín Sorolla*, 24.

“In New York alone, the artist was commissioned to paint 24 portraits, including one of President William Howard Taft (in office from 1909-13).” (Domenech, “Sorolla and America: Critical Fortune,” *Sorolla and America*, 283)

⁸ “Apéndice: Correspondencia entre Sorolla, Huntington y La Hispanic Society con Selecciones del Diario de Huntington,” *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 378.

⁹ The scholar Blanca Pons Sorolla (the artist’s great granddaughter) has corroborated the 1909 and 1911 shows as financial turning points her progenitor, writing: “...with part of the money he had already earned [from the U.S. exhibitions], he had realized his dream of having a home and studio with a garden... soon it was mentioned in the press as his ‘museum,’ or, as Sorolla himself called it, his ‘private Hispanic Society.’” (“New Triumph in the United States: The 1911 Exhibitions,” *Sorolla and America*, 45)

being that the admiration inspired by the painter on the Eastern Seaboard was tremendous: enough to change his finances and his life.

The importance of the Hispanic Society exhibition has not escaped scholars. It has been discussed by those interested in Sorolla, Huntington's Hispanophilia and penchant for museum-building, and the history of artistic exchange between Spain and the U.S. Yet none have deeply considered the implications of the works' popularity with the art-going public of turn-of-the-century New York and New England. Those who *have* pondered the matter have culled answers from the nineteenth-century press, or related the painter's work to larger, American art trends—specifically belated-Impressionist or “bravura-style” brushwork.¹⁰ I believe these methodologies have revealed the immediate reasons for Sorolla's appeal. In other words, they highlight the explanations that viewers at the time would have been willing and able to articulate. Though valid, I argue these immediate or surface reasons are only part of the deeper narrative that the historian, with the advantage of retrospect, might elucidate. My thesis is an attempt to trace that deeper narrative, wherein fascination with Sorolla's art is the surface manifestation of the canvases' ability to affirm and comfort fin-de-siècle, East-Coast observers—specifically with regards to Positivism, nationalism, technology and industrial capitalism.

That only a handful of scholars have ruminated on Sorolla's North-American success can be explained, first, by a general dearth of popular and academic interest in

¹⁰ On occasions where I cannot avoid using the words “American” and “America,” my intent in this thesis is to refer to the United States, with the acknowledgement that such a usage may in some contexts obscure the geographic, linguistic and cultural diversity of the continents of North and South America.

the artist from about 1920-80. As the dates indicate, the painter suffered the particularly harsh fate of being deemed admirable, though *passé* while still alive (Sorolla died in 1923). When the mural-sized canvases of *The Provinces of Spain*—a commission from Huntington to which the artist dedicated the last third of his life—were finally installed at the Hispanic Society in 1926, after much bureaucratic delay, “the event was little noticed in the Spanish press,” causing some commentators to bemoan their countrymen’s apathy.¹¹ In New York, a *Tribune* writer opined that Sorolla’s art had “lost its thrill.”¹²

Though the painter remained a household name in twentieth-century Spain (the Franco regime featured his face on the thousand-peseta note), both Falangists and Communists “agreed in their condemnation of [the artist].”¹³ His works were old-fashioned “from the standpoint of the international avant-garde,” as well as “from that of

¹¹ The New York correspondent for *La Prensa* complained: “A few days ago we shared in the public enthusiasm for the [Ramón] Franco flight to South America. Along with our rejoicing over that triumph of Spanish aviation, we felt sorrow in the depths of our heart as Spaniards and Valencians... At that time when the government and the whole nation were eagerly awaiting the outcome of the transatlantic flight, an event of enormous importance to the honour and glory of Spain was taking place at the headquarters of the Hispanic Society of America... yet most Spaniards knew and cared nothing about it.” A few months later, writer/director Miguel de Zárrega wrote that Huntington’s *Provinces* commission “paid to the memory of Joaquín Sorolla the final homage that he deserves, but has yet received, from Spain.” (Gracia, “Sorolla and his Critics,” *The Painter Joaquín Sorolla*, both quotes 77)

¹² According to Priscilla E. Muller: “A *New York Tribune* writer asserted that though manual adroitness is a great gift it at long last wears out its welcome, and thus, though Sorolla’s art remained respectable and his technique still amused, it had ‘lost its thrill.’” (“Sorolla and America,” *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 37)

¹³ Garín and Tomás, “Joaquín Sorolla’s Critical Fortune,” *Joaquín Sorolla: 1863-1923*, 482.

the Francoist ideology of national renewal,” an opinion bolstered by the fact that Sorolla’s few, remaining advocates were artistic reactionaries.¹⁴ Bernardino de Pantorba, the artist’s main biographer at midcentury, “explicitly placed the Valencian master’s painting in opposition to the routes taken by the avant-garde.”¹⁵

If this fall from scholarly and popular grace had Sorolla spinning in his grave, he could take comfort in the fact that it was not entirely personal. Numerous once-lauded art stars of the Turn of the Century—the American John Singer Sargent, or the Frenchman Puvis de Chavannes, for example—were ignored for roughly the same time and reason. The work of all three does not fold neatly into the narrative of increasing abstraction and bourgeois-provocation that mid-twentieth-century researchers created to canonize a historical avant-garde and glorify popular styles of their own age, such as Abstract Expressionism. Scholars of the latter half of the century have realized the obfuscating effect of modernist, critical fascination: how construction of a lineage from Manet to Rothko and beyond has inadvertently thinned the true stylistic plurality of Western art around 1900. A significant, public correction of this oversight was the Guggenheim exhibition *1900: Art at the Crossroads*, curated by Robert Rosenblum, Maryanne Stevens and Ann Dumas in the year 2000. It aimed, through a review of Paris’s *Exposition Universelle* of 1900, to reconsider “those countless artists from all over the Western

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. De Pantorba is also notable for publishing Sorolla’s catalogue raisonné in 1953. The artist’s great granddaughter, Blanca Pons Sorolla, currently has her own catalogue raisonné in the works.

world, from Australia to Russia, who flourished at the same time and usually in the same milieus as the artists we have elevated to our pantheon.”¹⁶ Sorolla, as a case in point, took home the exhibition’s *Grand Prix*. Six years later, his first solo show at the *Galerie Georges Petit* was attended by Rodin, Monet and Degas.¹⁷ And yet, as Tomás Llorens explains: “the Valencian painter is still absent in most of the international panoramas dealing with the art of his time.”¹⁸

1900 contends that the real battles of the Paris exposition were not those of individual artists among nationalist lines, but rather, a larger clash of “-isms,” that had less to do with geography or ethnicity than with ideology—specifically, how to approach the problems and possibilities of modernity. These included Post-Impressionism, Fauvism and Expressionism, as well as “Belated Realism” and Sorolla’s own “Belated-Impressionist” or luminist style.¹⁹ Rosenblum groups the first three under the umbrella of

¹⁶ Rosenblum, “Art in 1900: Twilight or Dawn?,” *1900: Art at the Crossroads*, 27.

¹⁷ According to theater critic Jacques Copeau, Degas “went up very close to the paintings, almost touching them, and turned silently to Sorolla, who was waiting behind him. After viewing the works one by one, he left without uttering a word.” (*Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 67)

¹⁸ Llorens, “Sorolla y El Naturalismo en el Entresiglo XIX-XX,” *Naturalismo y la Vida Moderna*, 13. “La bibliografía específicamente dedicada a Sorolla es abundante y crece a buen ritmo. Sin embargo, el pintor valenciano sigue ausente en la mayoría de los panoramas internacionales que tratan del arte de su tiempo.”

¹⁹ Rosenblum’s designation of “Sorolla, Sargent and Serov” as “Belated Impressionists” and Morbelli, Cottet or Backer as “Belated Realists” is no doubt an attempt to express the debt owed to Monet et. al (in the case of the former) and Courbet, Millet etc. (in the case of the later) in paving the way for their respective styles and subject matter to be accepted as “art” rather than provocation.

“Symbolism,” placing the latter two in an opposing “Naturalist” camp. If the 1913 New York Armory show represented a turning point in terms of the Western World’s widespread embrace of “Symbolist” parameters as the project of modern art, the thesis of Rosenblum et. al, and other revisionist historians, is that in the preceding years this victory was not yet secure.²⁰ There were many who thought luminism was the future of art, and among them, those who viewed Sorolla as a pioneer. In 1900, one Belgian art student expressed: “All who want to give new horizons to art adore [Sorolla]... many of us believe he is the primary painter of today.”²¹ A decade later, in 1911, the Spanish painter Gabriel García Maroto—who Javier Pérez Rojas points out was, “one of the future proponents of the Spanish avant-garde during the 20s”—wrote: “Thanks be given to Sorolla for his advent into Spanish painting. Had not he renewed our art, we might still be doing those huge and soulless historical canvases.”²² And yet, there were those around 1900 who still believed “soulless historical canvases” were the way forward. As Rosenblum relays of the *Exposition Universelle*: “the arch-conservative, Jean Léon Gérôme... tried to stop Émile Loubet, the newly elected president of the French Republic, from entering the Impressionist galleries, proclaiming, ‘the shame of French painting is in there.’”²³ Sorolla, Gérôme and myriad forgotten artists of the *Exposition* are

²⁰ Tomás Llorens defends a thesis similar to Rosenblum et. al in “Sorolla y El Naturalismo en el Entresiglo XIX-XX” in *Naturalismo y la Vida Moderna*.

²¹ Muller, “Sorolla and America,” *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 14.

²² Rojas, “Sorolla: Atrapando Impresiones,” *Los Sorolla de Valencia*, 81.

²³ Rosenblum, “Art in 1900: Twilight or Dawn?,” *1900: Art at the Crossroads*, 29.

reminders of the diversity of taste and aesthetic expression at any given moment, and the need to recognize this as we write our histories.

Though the year 2000 provided a fitting occasion to reexamine turn-of-the-century, Western art in a large-scale exhibition, scholars began considering Sorolla anew about twenty years prior, in the 1980s.²⁴ The efforts of the last three decades have resulted in the largest crop of shows and publications related to the artist since the height of his prestige at the start of the Twentieth Century.²⁵ Research continues to grow, as evidenced by the decision of the Hispanic Society of America to publish the correspondence between Huntington and the painter, due to the frequency of requests to

²⁴ Felipe Garín and Facundo Tomás note in “Joaquín Sorolla’s Critical Fortune”: “After 1980 a large number of publications appeared, beginning with the book by Trinidad Simó, *Joaquín Sorolla*, which was followed by numerous articles by the likes of Felipe Garín, Javier Pérez Rojas, Carmen Gracia, José-Francisco Yvars, Florencia de Santa-Ana, José Luis Díez, Priscila Muller and Marcus Burke, and, above all, the painter’s great-granddaughter, Blanca Pons Sorolla...” (*Joaquín Sorolla: 1863-1923*, 483)

²⁵ New Sorolla scholarship tends to accompany new exhibitions. Two early, notable shows (in the opinion Felipe Garín and Facundo Tomás) include *Los Sorollas de La Habana* (1985), at the *Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes de Cuba*, and the retrospective held at the inauguration of the *Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno* (1989). Sorolla finally made it to the Prado in 2009—“the first time in the [museum’s] history that a nineteenth-century artist [was] the object of such an extensive exhibition.” Three years earlier, in 2006, the *Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza* and the *Petit Palais* sponsored *Sargent/Sorolla*, which sought to highlight new aspects of the artists’ works by putting them in conversation with each other. Two final exhibitions whose catalogues have been pivotal to my research are *Sorolla and America* (2013-14), organized by The Meadows Museum and the San Diego Museum of Art, and *Sorolla and the Paris Years* (2016-17), a French, German and Spanish collaboration. The former spotlights important works, exhibitions, patrons and artistic contacts of Sorolla’s in the U.S. The latter details the painter’s attempts to establish himself in the Parisian art market, and the ways in which the city shaped his oeuvre in the process. (From the dedication by Miguel Zugaza in Díez, José Luis and Javier Barón’s *Joaquín Sorolla: 1863-1923*, no page number available.)

consult it.²⁶ However, to my knowledge, no historian has concentrated on the immense popularity of Sorolla's New-York/New-England debut. Those who have broached the issue, as mentioned, gesture either to the stylistic similarities between the Spaniard's work and that of eminent, American artists like Whistler or Merritt Chase, or accept the praise of fin-de-siècle, U.S. critics at face value. Yet Rosenblum's writing on the true diversity of art around 1900 is precisely why we cannot take the enthusiasm of Sorolla's East-Coast audience for granted: the painter had *lots* of competition. Scholars have noted that ironically, the artist garnered significantly more attention and approval (both in the U.S. and abroad) in 1909 than Ignacio Zuloaga and a young Picasso—two Spaniards whose reputations fared far better in the decades to come.²⁷ In preferring Sorolla over his fellow countrymen, turn-of-the-century Americans “picked” one, individual artist over two others. But in doing so, as Rosenblum has illustrated, they also chose “Naturalism” over “Symbolism.” My thesis extends this logic, seeking to consider *what more*

²⁶ This happened in 1999 in the catalogue *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society: Una Vision de la España de Entresiglos*, which corresponded with an exhibition by the same name at El Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza and El Museo de Bellas Artes de Valencia. The Hispanic Society's rationale was explained to me in email correspondence with John O'Neil, curator of Special Collections at the society.

²⁷ Ignacio Zuloaga was known as the painter of “*España Negra*,” with an equal reputation in both Spain and the “international” art scene at the end of the Nineteenth Century. Pablo Picasso, of course, needs no introduction. M. Elizabeth Boone has cited that 23,000 New Yorkers visited the former's exhibition at the Hispanic Society during the three weeks it was open. (Boone, “Choosing Zuloaga,” *When Spain Fascinated America*). The latter would show his cubist works at Alfred Stieglitz's 291 gallery in 1910, where they would be labeled the “gibberings of a lunatic.” (Greenough, *Modern Art and America: Alfred Stieglitz and His New York Galleries*. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 26-53.)

fascination with Sorolla indicates beyond the immediate, surface explanations provided by nineteenth-century art trends and journalism.

Part 2: Related Literature, or the History of a Question

A handful of researchers have addressed my query more or less generally. An adumbrated list begins with the book *When Spain Fascinated America* (2010), edited by Stanley G. Payne. Its thesis, supported by various contributors, offers one answer: namely, the existence in the U.S. from 1898-1925 of a “Spanish craze.” In other words, as the title suggests, an obsession with Spanish “culture.” Though the introduction names Sorolla’s Hispanic Society exhibition as a key marker of the craze, none of the subsequent chapters revisit this assertion.²⁸ If it were enough for the artist’s Spanish identity to suffice as explanation for his charm, then the work of Zuloaga or Picasso would have been equally popular in the first decade of the Twentieth Century. Yet as previously noted, this was not the case. Additionally, a main tenet of *When Spain* is that Americans’ interest in Iberia was hardly a nuanced investment in the peninsula’s contemporary culture and politics, but rather, an appropriation of specific artifacts, styles and customs for decorative and entertainment purposes.²⁹ These decontextualized

²⁸ See Suárez-Zuloaga, “Introduction,” *When Spain Fascinated America*, 5.

²⁹ Just a few examples include the Spanish-Colonial and Baroque revivals in American architecture (such as the *giraldas* of the Chicago World’s Columbian and Buffalo Pan-American expositions and William Randolph Hearst’s Florida summer home); the rage for Spanish song and dance performances, epitomized by Madison Square Garden’s hosting of the “Carmencita Ball” in 1891; and Helen Hunt Jackson’s best-selling romance novel *Ramona: A Story* (1884), about a mestiza woman living in Spanish California. Countless others are discussed in *When Spain Fascinated America*, and a briefer

borrowings evoked timeless, exotic Spain, while tacitly asserting the U.S. as heir to the former empire's legacy in the Americas.³⁰ It is easy then, to understand the demand for Zuloaga's portraits of U.S. society women masquerading as flamenco dancers and toreadors, and for his work in general, which—whatever his intent—makes heavy use of antiquated (some would say stereotypical) Spanish scenes and subjects. Sorolla's oeuvre, on the other hand, though it features the occasional, traditional outfit, is relatively free of what then constituted typical, Spanish tropes—an issue that I will return to, and that will be important to my argument, further along. The “Spanish Craze” thus fails on two counts to explain the brief, yet intense passion for the painter in America. Indeed, it underscores once more the need for closer examination of the 1909 show, precisely because Sorolla's canvases are *not* populated with the missions, mosques, gypsies and *majas* that constituted the allure of Spain in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century U.S.

Priscilla E. Muller and Cristina Domenech—whose work I have alluded to throughout this introduction—are the only two scholars I've encountered who directly grapple with the same question driving my research.³¹ As mentioned, their methodology

overview can be found in Boone's essay “Book's Canvases and the Built Environment: The Allure of Spain in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” from *Spanish Sojourns: Robert Henri and the Spirit of Spain* (2013), ed. Boon, et. al.

³⁰ Specifically, this is the argument of Richard L. Kagan's essay: “The Spanish Craze: The Discovery of Spanish Art and Culture in the U.S.” (Payne, *When Spain Fascinated America*)

³¹ Muller's essay treating this query is entitled: “Sorolla and America” in *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society* (2004), while Domenech's is called “Sorolla: Critical Fortune” in *Sorolla and America* (2013).

assumes that the testimony of the fin-de-siècle, American press, and the artist's stylistic similarity to respected, nineteenth-century, U.S. painters, suffice to explain his draw. However, as I hope to now demonstrate, these explanations inspire more questions than they answer, betraying themselves as the speakable veneer of an attraction rooted in deeper, cultural-historical forces.

Muller, for example, asks of the 1909 show: "What then, so excited and astounded so many?"³² Her answer starts with the concurrent popularity in New York of numerous American painters working in a belated-Impressionist style comparable to Sorolla's. These included: "John Singer Sargent; John Duveneck, whose 'slap dash' brushwork caused a sensation in Boston in 1875; Winslow Homer, who rendered sea, sunlight, nature and man with a 'swift bravura'; and Thomas Eakins, who fixed sparkling outdoor realities on canvas."³³ The equally-esteemed Ashcan School may have chosen more morose subject matter, yet their technique for rendering the gritty realities of urban existence was largely the same as that of their more poetic contemporaries.³⁴

Still, Muller admits that shared style alone fails to explain the draw of Sorolla's works, stating: "the impact of [his] special appeal... therefore depended instead on... his interpretation and treatment of light, and his incorporation of a brilliant sunlight in

³² Muller, "Sorolla and America," *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 14.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* Though the work of John Sloan, Robert Henri, William J. Glackens and the rest of The Eight was generally considered bold, even controversial to some artistic conservatives, Muller notes that their 1909 exhibition had been "mobbed" by appreciative crowds.

confidently and powerfully rendering the (usually) optimistic scenes from reality that he chose to represent.”³⁵ In short, the artist’s East-Coast audience also responded to his depiction of light, buoyant subject matter and perceived faithfulness to reality—all of which the historian evidences with quotes from media outlets of the period. Muller’s (and similarly, Domenech’s) hypotheses are limited by the scope of her question, which asks “what” but not “why?” Put differently, the two scholars isolate aspects of Sorolla’s work that they believe resonated with turn-of-the-century New Yorkers, but treat the value of these aspects as self-evident. Why was luminism admired in America around 1900—when we know there were many “-isms” to choose from? Why did the Eastern, Metropolitan elite crave optimism, sunlight and “truthfulness to reality?” These are predilections I plan to address.

Part 3: The Spanish-American War and the Government, Economy and Geopolitics of Fin-de-Siècle Spain and the U.S.

Broaching the “why” of Sorolla’s success in 1909 requires familiarity with the geopolitics of Spain and the U.S. in the years leading up to, and immediately following, the dawn of the Twentieth Century. These were largely shaped by the Spanish-American War, itself a boiling over of tensions that had existed for most of the 1800s.³⁶ While the conflict registers today as a blip in the collective memory of U.S. military engagements,

³⁵ Ibid, 15.

³⁶ Payne, “The Reencounter between Spain and the United States after 1898,” *When Spain Fascinated America*, 11-12.

the four-month fight from April to August 1898 had significant consequences for both nations, including challenges to the imagined identities of each.

Yet before discussing the war and its significance to Spain, the U.S. and relations between them, it is necessary to delineate what exactly is meant by “Spain” and “the U.S.” as political entities at the close of the Nineteenth Century.³⁷ Spain was a sovereign state throughout the 1800s (save for four years during the Napoleonic Invasion of 1808-12), whose population doubled from 10.5 to 21 million over the course of the century.³⁸ Though it lost its overseas colonies in 1898 (the ultimate outcome of war with the U.S.), its borders in Europe were generally the same throughout the Nineteenth Century as they are today.³⁹ Attempting to centralize a unitary state of provinces based on the French model, politicians in Madrid resisted periodic, nationalist uprisings by Basques and

³⁷ This is needed because nations, despite the rhetoric surrounding them, are anything but stable and unchanging. Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* offers an insightful expansion on this notion.

³⁸ Pearson, *The Longman Companion to European Nationalism 1789-1920*, 64-65. (For population statistic see chart 1: *Comparative Populations of European States*, 237.)

³⁹ *Ibid.*

An exception is the presence of Spain in Northern Morocco, known at the time as “Spanish Morocco” and containing the principal cities of Tangier and Melilla. This territory did not fall to the U.S. in 1898, but remained a Spanish “protectorate” until 1956. (Wikipedia contributors, “Spanish protectorate in Morocco,” *Wikipedia* https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Spanish_protectorate_in_Morocco&oldid=839345748 (accessed May 11, 2018))

Catalans.⁴⁰ This regional fragmentation was echoed in, and partially created by, “a dual economy of rich and poor provinces” in “the absence of a truly national economy.”⁴¹

The government in place in 1909 (and throughout most of Sorolla’s life) was a constitutional monarchy known as the Restoration Monarchy, which altogether existed from 1876-1923. The two-party system was designed to facilitate peaceful alternation of power between conservatives and liberals (*el turno pacífico*)—ostensibly based on electoral results. The constitution granted freedom of the press, assembly, and in theory, universal male suffrage.⁴² The role of the Bourbons (Alfonso XII, Maria Christina II and Alfonso XIII) was by no means purely ceremonial. As the only political entity a majority of Spaniards could agree on, their involvement gave a veneer of stability to the perpetually fractious, splintering oligarchy—from which they were supposed to form effective ministries.⁴³

Returning to the events of 1898, what had begun for Spain as an upstart, Cuban insurrection devolved over three years into a humiliating defeat by U.S. forces in the Caribbean and Philippines.⁴⁴ As mentioned, the country was forced to abandon its few, remaining colonies, marking the end of the empire that discovered the “New World,”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Carr, *Spain: A History*, 216.

⁴² Ibid, 223.

⁴³ Ibid, 219.

⁴⁴ Harrison, “Introduction: The Historical Background of the Crisis of 1898,” *Spain’s 1898 Crisis: Regenerationism, Modernism, Post-Colonialism*, 1.

commanded the armada and flourish during the “Golden Age” of Exploration. “*El Disastre*,” as it was called, “plunged [Spain] into a profound mood of agony and introspection” that lingered until the Spanish Civil War, and that profoundly impacted the nation’s art and literature—including the work of Sorolla (to be discussed in Chapter One).⁴⁵

Spain’s identity crisis was in many ways precipitated by Americans’ troubled self-conceptions across the Atlantic. In 1909, the U.S. officially consisted of the forty-eight contiguous states.⁴⁶ The population soared over the course of the Nineteenth Century: from around 5 million in 1800 to over 92 million by 1910.⁴⁷ In the 1890s—the decade leading up to the Spanish-American War—the transition from a predominantly agrarian society to an urban and industry-focused America—“well under way in the 1880s”—began to accelerate.⁴⁸ This rapid change brought growing pains including: “agrarian radicalism... in the shape of the Populist party; a severe depression [that] began in 1893 and continued into the latter part of the decade; labor unrest... urban squalor... and rampant political corruption.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid, 5.

⁴⁶ Alaska and Hawaii had been annexed in 1884 and 1898, respectively, but were still territories.

⁴⁷ *Chart of US Population, 1790-2000*, Census-Charts.com, <https://www.census-charts.com/Population/pop-us-1790-2000.html>

⁴⁸ Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal*, 30.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 29.

Adding to these stressors was one more anxiety: the close of the frontier. The 1890 census had declared “that the country had, up to 1880, featured a frontier line of settlement, but now that line was so broken up by bodies of population that such a settlement line no longer existed.”⁵⁰ Frederick Jackson Turner summed up the perceived ramifications of this loss for many Americans in his 1893 “Frontier Thesis,” which posited the U.S.’s formerly limitless territory as “the most benign force in American life—the source and lifeblood of qualities such as democracy, independence, opportunity, self-reliance and manliness.”⁵¹

Historians have argued that the battle with Spain (purportedly over Cuban Independence) and the hypocritical expansionism that followed can be seen as a national reaction to this “frontier crisis”—a way to keep the promise of Manifest Destiny alive, while finding new markets for the rising tide of U.S. manufacture.⁵² The Monroe Doctrine’s “fourth point” (see footnote below) was invoked to justify the jingoistic sentiments of Americans like Theodore Roosevelt.⁵³ Appointed Assistant Secretary of the

⁵⁰ Ibid, 30.

⁵¹ Ibid, 54.

⁵² Ibid, 29 and 53.

⁵³ Per *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “The Monroe Doctrine (December 2, 1823) was a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy enunciated by President James Monroe in his annual message to Congress. Declaring that the Old World and New World had different systems and must remain distinct spheres, Monroe made four basic points: (1) the United States would not interfere in the internal affairs of or the wars between European powers; (2) the United States recognized and would not interfere with existing colonies and dependencies in the Western Hemisphere; (3) the Western Hemisphere was closed to future colonization; and (4) any attempt by a European power to oppress or control any

Navy in 1897, and “instrumental” in preparing the U.S. fleet for battle, the future president wrote to a friend that same year: “I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one.”⁵⁴ His assertion was based on the widely-held belief that previous generations of U.S. men had been tested and hardened by military conflict.⁵⁵ In a matter of months, Roosevelt and his fellow war hawks got their wish—aided by the popular fervor enflamed by yellow journalism, and the pretense provided by the explosion of the USS Maine in Spanish-controlled Havana Harbor. With victory, the U.S. took Spain’s place as an imperial power in the Caribbean and Southeast Asia—whether it could admit to this role or not.⁵⁶

Despite hateful rhetoric on both sides, particularly in each country’s popular press, affluent Americans continued to travel to Spain in the years just before, during and

nation in the Western Hemisphere would be viewed as a hostile act against the United States.”

⁵⁴ “Interactive Timeline,” *Crucible of Empire: The Spanish-American War*, PBS. <http://www.pbs.org/crucible/>

This was not a one-off statement by Roosevelt, who wrote elsewhere in 1897: “I wish to heaven we were more jingo about Cuba and Hawaii!” (Theodore Roosevelt as quoted in Gerald Linderman’s *The Mirror of War*, 200)

⁵⁵ Roosevelt’s assertion that “There seems to be a gradual failure of vitality in the qualities... that make men fight well and write well,” was clearly echoed by many in the nation, as Susan Moeller reports, “In Tampa... there were not even enough ships to transport all the troops to Cuba. Thousands of would-be heroes were left behind.” (Moeller, *Shooting War*, 35)

⁵⁶ While the U.S. granted independence to Cuba, it maintained control of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines.

after the war.⁵⁷ In fact, U.S. tourism to Iberia was at an all-time high; had been increasingly steadily since the middle of the Nineteenth Century.⁵⁸ Visitors sought the picturesque and rustic, as Spain was thought to be “a country apart; severed in history, habits, manners and modes of thinking from all the rest of Europe”—in the words of beloved author Washington Irving.⁵⁹ Remnants of an Islamic past abounded, offering glimpses of the exotic east from the safety of a European country. Though many U.S. travelers were bankrolled by a newfound affluence stemming from industrial-capitalist enterprise, the point was to forget “modern” life. The same applied to reading about Spain, as Irving explains in the beginning of *The Alhambra*:

In the present day... when the universal pursuit of gain is trampling down the early growth of poetic feeling, and wearing out the verdure of the soul, I question whether it would not be of service for the reader occasionally to turn to these records of loftier modes of thinking; and to steep himself to the very lips in old Spanish Romance.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ A July 1898 issue of the art and culture magazine *Album Salon: Revista Ibero-Americana* insists that the Yankees are thieving, money-obsessed turncoats who fabricated the Maine conspiracy in order to force Spain to fight (See Salvador Carrera’s “Espana Siempre Grande.” *Album Salon: Revista Ibero-Americana de literatura y arte*, no. 21 (Julio, 1898): 142-3.) In the U.S., yellow journalism periodicals run by competing tycoons Hearst and Pulitzer depicted the Spanish as brutal, backwards oppressors. (Kagan, “The Spanish Craze: The Discovery of Spanish Art and Culture in the U.S.,” *When Spain Fascinated America*, 26.)

⁵⁸ An overview of this phenomena is provided in the introduction of Boone’s *Vistas de España*.

⁵⁹ Boone, *Vistas de España*, 9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

The peninsula held an additional draw for artists: the Prado. Historically perceived as peripheral and uncouth, Spanish art had been “discovered” by French and British Romantics around 1820-40.⁶¹ From the middle of the century forward, scores of U.S. painters—from Mary Cassatt to Robert Henri—undertook the “artistic pilgrimage” to the Madrid museum, many at the behest of their French teachers.⁶² The journey was made easier after the construction of the Paris-Madrid railway in the 1870s.⁶³

Rising diplomatic tensions throughout the 1880s and 90s, and full-on military hostility in 1898, did little to dampen tourism from the U.S. to Spain. Though the official reasons for fighting were to avenge the atrocities of the Maine and liberate Cuba, the only American citizens with real skin in the game were those with economic ties to the island, or those like Roosevelt, who wanted war for war’s sake. John Singer Sargent “traveled through the Iberian Peninsula at least *six* times during the years that bracketed the Spanish-American War.”⁶⁴ His business on several trips was research for a monumental

⁶¹ Jiménez-Blanco, “Spanish Art in American Collections,” *When Spain Fascinated America*, 62.

⁶² Boone relays in *Vistas de España* how Americans Thomas Eakins and Harry Humphrey Moore were encouraged by Léon Gérôme—their instructor in Paris for three years—to travel to Spain. She adds: “Gérôme was one of several European teachers directing their students to the Iberian Peninsula during the late 1860s” (62). “Artistic pilgrimage” is also her phrase (see page 90).

⁶³ Kagan, “The Spanish Craze: The Discovery of Spanish Art and Culture in the U.S.,” *When Spain Fascinated America*, 35.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 181. Emphasis mine.

mural cycle at the Boston Public Library—the theme: the History of Spanish Literature.⁶⁵ Archer Huntington first visited Spain in 1892, and traveled to the country nearly every year afterward.⁶⁶ Indeed, the millionaire published his travelogue, *A Note-book in Northern Spain*, in 1898—apparently unconcerned about the effects that war, or increasing enmity (the month of publication is unknown), would have on the work’s reception.

How to make sense of this? Even if Sargent, Huntington and other American Hispanophiles had no personal qualms about visiting enemy territory, wouldn’t they at least be afraid of what *others* would think of their patriotism? I believe the answer lies largely in the final piece of historical context necessary before concluding this introduction: Prescott’s Paradigm.

The phrase “Prescott’s Paradigm” was coined by Richard L. Kagan in his seminal analysis of the historiography of U.S. histories of Spain. Kagan argues that William Hickling Prescott’s widely-read *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella* (1837), “shaped both the character and direction of historical research in Spanish studies for well over a century.”⁶⁷ At the heart of the paradigm was “an understanding of Spain as America’s antithesis.”⁶⁸ In other words: “America was the future—republican,

⁶⁵ Sargent himself would later change the subject to “The Triumph of Religion.” (Boone, *Vistas de España*, 182)

⁶⁶ Proske, *Archer Milton Huntington*, 4.

⁶⁷ Kagan, “Prescott’s Paradigm: American Historical Scholarship and the Decline of Spain,” *Oxford Journals*, Vol. 101 No. 2 (April 1996), 425.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 430.

enterprising, rational; while Spain—monarchical, indolent, fanatic—represented the past.”⁶⁹ This was not to say that the country did not have its positive attributes. The same Romantic writers who “discovered” Spanish art also “tempered” negative stereotypes by claiming Iberia was picturesque.⁷⁰ Yet as Kagan points out “the country was picturesque *because* it was both exotic and backward—a quintessential Other...”⁷¹

Thus, the typical, nineteenth-century American understood Spain as a place of inevitable light and dark. Even its advocates acknowledged this. Huntington, for example, begins his *Note-book*:

In Spain, it is less the ‘color’ and ‘romance’ of which we hear so much, than... the wonderful melancholy landscape, unvaried, sullen, monotonous today, tomorrow ablaze with a fiery life; impetuous, restrained, indifferent, responsive. Look deep enough into its heart and you may read the heart of a Spaniard.⁷²

The perceived essence of Spain was its fickleness. Darkness was inherent; to expect improvement folly. War couldn’t be helped, for in Spain, Huntington wrote: “Fanaticism is natural, chivalry a necessity.”⁷³ One might as well enjoy the positives with the negatives—the pleasures of travel in the midst of conflict.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 426.

⁷¹ Ibid. (Emphasis mine)

⁷² Huntington, *A Note-book in Northern Spain*, 1.

⁷³ Ibid, 2.

Overview of Proceeding Chapters:

To close this introduction: a description of what lies ahead. The remainder of this thesis consists of two chapters and a conclusion. My intent is to address the under-examined popularity of Sorolla's 1909 show at the Hispanic Society of America in New York—his first in the U.S. However, it would be irresponsible, if not impossible, to postulate about the success of the artist's work in an American context without first understanding it in his own. Chapter One will begin, therefore, as Sorolla did: in Spain. Its central concern will be why the artist paints what, and as, he paints—which will further elucidate why he would pursue a U.S. exhibition to begin with. As the painter is in one sense a product of his environment, the answer to these questions will involve discussion of the cultural-historical conditions of Spain at the turn of the Nineteenth Century. Yet every artist is also an agent who by various means—beginning, but never ending with the production of art-objects—actively transforms his or her environment while being informed by it. Furthermore, within the larger, social-cultural reality in which the painter operates, he or she has a choice of milieus and sub-markets. This understanding is derived from Michael Baxandall's 1985 *Patterns of Intention*.⁷⁴ His concept of the artist's "brief" (or self-set task) and "troc" (or marketplace) will be foremost in my mind as I chart the development of Sorolla's oeuvre—his path from Spain

⁷⁴ Specifically Chapter Two, "Intention Visual Interest: Picasso's Portrait of Khanweiler."

to New York by way of Paris—with an intent to keep the relationship between painter and environment, in Baxandall’s words: “very loose, and very reciprocal.”⁷⁵

Once we consider why Sorolla paints the way he does, and why a U.S. venture might have appealed to him, we can turn in Chapter Two to the artist’s East-Coast audience and ask: Why would a Sorolla show be attractive to them? To begin answering this question, it will first be necessary to specify as narrowly as possible what types of New Yorkers and New Englanders constituted this viewership. I will then assess what American spectators knew of the Spaniard and his work prior to the 1909 exhibition—examining his earlier reputation among both the general, art-going public as well as the U.S., artistic community. I will also discuss the character of the Hispanic Society as a venue. Both these factors—previous news of Sorolla, and the nascent mission of the institute—primed visitors to respond favorably. However, they are ultimately extrinsic, with the potential to inflect observers’ encounters with the canvases, but not to determine or produce them. Accordingly, I will turn to the subject matter and luminist style of Sorolla’s paintings, reviewing the immediate reasons scholars have thus far identified for their allure, and contributing three of my own that I believe have been overlooked, namely: family values, a new image of Spain and a deeply-immersive sense of travel. Yet as I’ve stated, my final goal is to move beyond these surface explanations—which are apparent in nineteenth-century reviews and which viewers at the time would likely have echoed—to tap into a deeper narrative. In this narrative, Sorolla’s art enchanted not because of what fin-de-siècle, U.S. audiences saw in it, but because what they saw

⁷⁵ Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, 47.

confirmed and consoled certain beliefs and anxieties related to a Positivist approach to modernity, prevalent nationalist discourse, technology and industrial capitalism.

Chapter One

Peninsular Origins: Sorolla's Painting in a Nineteenth-Century Spanish Context

Overview

This chapter traces the development of Sorolla's oeuvre from his student days, to his 1908 exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in London, where he first attracted the patronage of Archer Huntington.⁷⁶ Its aim is to elucidate why the artist worked with the evolving subject matter and luminist technique that he did. I begin by describing the larger, cultural-historical setting of late-nineteenth-century Spain in which the painter began to make art—because the answer lies partially there. Inspired by Michael Baxandall, I then discuss the highly-personalized “briefs,” or challenges, Sorolla set for himself.⁷⁷ These were based on his artistic predilection (for atmosphere and instantaneity over symbolism or narrative) and material and spiritual needs (to provide for a family of five, through the activity he most loved and excelled at).⁷⁸ As the historian notes: “The

⁷⁶ The Grafton Galleries show ran from May-July. Huntington acquired his first Sorolla paintings from the exhibition, and “before returning to New York...contacted [the artist's] agents in London to propose an exhibition... at the Hispanic Society in the next year.” (Coddington, *Sorolla and America*, 57)

⁷⁷ Specifically, his concept of the relationship between the artist's “brief” (or self-set task) and “*troc*” (marketplace) outlined in Chapter Two (“Intention Visual Interest: Picasso's Portrait of Khanweiler”) of *Patterns of Intention* (1985).

⁷⁸ By “spiritual needs” I do not refer to spirituality per say, but Baxandall's idea that “The painter may choose to take more of one sort of compensation than another—more of a certain sense of himself within the history of painting, for instance, than of approval or money.” (*Patterns of Intention*, 48)

painter registers his individuality very much by his particular perception of the circumstances he must address.”⁷⁹ This perception in turn delivers the artist to a sub-market in which he or she will operate. This was no less true for Sorolla, who from very early on, directed his energy to making a name for himself on the “international” art scene.⁸⁰ Establishing why the 356 canvases of the 1909 show look the way they do is essential to understanding their enthusiastic reception by the Spaniard’s first, U.S. audience—my concern in Chapter Two.

Part 1: Sorolla, *El Desastre* and Liberal “Regenerationism”

Sorolla was in his mid 30s and had been painting professionally for about fifteen years when Spain’s loss of the Spanish-American War—“*El Desastre de 98*”—precipitated what can fairly be called a national, existential crisis. From the perspective of the populous, the country was “transformed overnight into a second-ranking nation-state.”⁸¹ The political elite, however, had known the government was bankrupt, the military ill-equipped, but had been “prepared to sacrifice... hundreds of brave soldiers in the cynical exercise of damage limitation.”⁸² Citizens’ full comprehension of the extent

⁷⁹ Ibid, 46.

⁸⁰ As in the introduction, and throughout this thesis, I use “international” in quotes to underscore that what I am really talking about is, in fact, the nineteenth-century “Western” art world.

⁸¹ Harrison, “Introduction: The Historical Background of the Crisis of 1898,” *Spain’s 1898 Crisis: Regenerationism, Modernism, Post-Colonialism*, 1.

⁸² Ibid, 4.

of the country's powerlessness, it was reasoned, would topple Queen-Regent Maria Christina II, whose reign gave legitimacy to the oligarchy.⁸³

Regardless of political party, socio-economic status or previous awareness of the inevitability of defeat, the word on lips across the peninsula was “*Regenerationismo*.” Regenerationism summarized the belief that immediate, drastic change was needed to kick-start an intellectually-, technologically-, economically- and morally-stalled Spain. A collective yearning rather than a cohesive platform, its plans and proponents were diverse. King Alfonso XIII, for example, was a self-proclaimed “Regenerationist,” although his reign saw little departure from the status quo, and ended with his support of Prime Minister Primo de Rivera's dictatorship from 1923-30.⁸⁴ On the opposite end of the spectrum, Catalan and Basque nationalists, socialists and anarchists also claimed Regenerationist intents.⁸⁵

A group of artists and writers known as the “*Generación del 98*” has come to define the Regenerationist efforts of Spanish intellectuals in the wake of *El Desastre*.⁸⁶ Yet Pío Baroja, Miguel de Unamuno, Ramón del Valle-Inclán, Ignacio Zuloaga and the rest of the '98 contingency were, in reality, part of a larger network of artists and thinkers

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Alfonso officially succeeded his mother, the queen-regent, in 1902 at the age of 16. Before the regency, his father, Alfonso XII had ruled from the end of the First Spanish Republic in 1874, to his death in 1885.

⁸⁵ Carr, “Liberalism and Reaction: 1833-1931,” *Spain: A History*, 225.

⁸⁶ The name *Generación del 98* was coined by José Martínez Ruiz, commonly known as Azorín, in his 1913 essays titled “*La Generación de 1898*” (Boone, *Vistas de España*, 176)

who had been advocating for reform and renewal for the preceding three decades.⁸⁷ Sorolla's close affiliation with this cohort has been historically under-acknowledged, due in no small part to the fact that *Generación-del-98* authors considered his work technically skillful, but ultimately vapid and uncritical.⁸⁸ However, Javier Tusell and Luisa Menéndez Robles have recently re-emphasized the personal and professional relationships the painter maintained with key progressives of his day.⁸⁹ Though little evidences that the artist painted to engage in politics—in other words, with the goal of influencing contemporary policy and/or society through his work—even during his “Social-Realist” phase—the aforementioned scholars argue that lack of *gravitas* does not equate to lack of political cause or consequence. In other words, just because Sorolla was not intentionally political, does not mean he was not ideological, that is, possessed of a “collection of ideas which characterized his thought, and which are therefore present in his life and painting.”⁹⁰ Building on the research of Tusell and Menéndez Robles, my aim in the first half of this chapter is to reveal how the goals and beliefs of the artist's intellectual peers indirectly shaped certain aspects of his canvases.

⁸⁷ Harrison, “Introduction...,” *Spain's 1898 Crisis*, 5.

⁸⁸ Menéndez Robles, *Sorolla and His Idea of Spain*, 9-10.

⁸⁹ See Tusell's “Joaquin Sorlla en los ambientes políticos y culturales de su tiempo” in *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society* (1999) or Menéndez Robles' “Sorolla and his Idea of Spain: Preparatory Studies for the Hispanic Society of America” in *Sorolla and His Idea of Spain* (2009).

⁹⁰ Menéndez Robles, “Sorolla and his Idea of Spain: Preparatory Studies for the Hispanic Society of America,” *Sorolla and His Idea of Spain*, 9.

As mentioned, the shock of defeat by the United States merely brought to a fever pitch calls for reform accumulating in Spain since the early Seventeenth Century.⁹¹ In the last quarter of the Nineteenth, a faction of liberal thinkers, led by Francisco Giner de los Ríos and Gumersindo Azácrate, criticized the restoration monarchy of Alfonso XII, whose mother, Queen Isabella II, had been deposed seven years before by the Revolution of 1868.⁹² Many of these individuals considered themselves disciples of German philosopher Karl Krause.⁹³ Their interest in foreign theory reflects their belief that Spain had fallen behind the rest of Europe, and needed to adopt northern countries' more "modern" systems of industry, finance, public services and governance to catch up.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Joseph Harrison relays in his introduction to *Spain's 1898 Crisis*, "The publication of remedial tracts did not originate in the 1890s: in the early-seventeenth century a remarkable collection of economists known as the 'arbitristas' petitioned the Hapsburg monarchy with a series of proposals aimed at reversing Spain's decline" (5).

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Karl Christian Friedrich Krause lived from 1781-1832. Krausism was essential to the delineation of Spanish liberalism during the Restoration period (roughly 1854–74). Jeane Hunter Delaney writes: "the philosophy appealed [in Iberia] for a number of reasons: its strong emphasis on ethics; its role as an intellectual bridge to the rest of Europe; and, most convincingly, because it combined ideas consonant with traditional Catholic precepts (an organic vision of society, a concern with social rights and a belief in God) with liberalism's respect for individual freedom, free inquiry, and legal equality. Thus, for nineteenth-century Spaniards, Krausism offered an ethically-based middle path between classical liberalism and Catholic obscurantism." (Delaney, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause and His Influence in the Hispanic World*. By O. Carlos Stoetzer. (review), *Hispanic American Historical Review* 81.1 (2001) 176-178)

⁹⁴ Ibid, 6.

In 1875, Giner and like-minded faculty were dismissed from their university posts for refusing to teach what they insisted was monarchist, Catholic dogma.⁹⁵ Their response was to establish the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (ILE), reaffirming their conviction that “reform of the country’s backward education system” was “a fundamental precondition for the modernization of the country.”⁹⁶ In addition to Krause, ILE members were “deeply influenced by positivistic determinism”—especially the work of Hippolyte Taine.⁹⁷ The Frenchman’s theorizing of the relation between “*race, moment et milieu*” promised that careful study of Spain’s environment—aided by new disciplines such as geology and ethnography—might yield insight into the country’s “decline.”⁹⁸ Yet the progressives’ interpretation of Taine was ultimately a hopeful one. If *moment* (contemporary action/events) and *milieu* combined to propel evolutionary change, then the adjustment of one or both could re-direct a people’s trajectory.⁹⁹

Giner and his peers believed that art had a special role to play in understanding and ameliorating Spain’s current, deplorable conditions. Painting, in particular, could

⁹⁵ Jurkevich, *In Pursuit of the Natural Sign: Azorín and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*, 28.

⁹⁶ Harrison, “Introduction...” *Spain’s 1898 Crisis*, 6.

⁹⁷ Jurkevich, *In Pursuit of the Natural Sign: Azorín and the Poetics of Ekphrasis*, 28.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Jeremy T. Medina writes in *Spanish Realism* that “by studying scientifically the ways in which society and the individual affect each other, Zola [heavily influenced by Taine] hoped that someday it would be possible to alter that milieu which ‘determined’ man’s action and attitudes. Spanish writers, anxious to demonstrate that man is a dual entity of matter and spirit... emphasized the individual’s powers to change his and others’ circumstances” (33).

concern itself with geology through landscape.¹⁰⁰ Gayana Jurkevich has detailed the connection between the ILE and the development of Spanish, *plein-air* landscape painting, explaining that while the school considered all landscapes “highly effective visual stimuli which... would lead students to a recovery and definition of the Spanish nation and its character,” *plein-air* scenes were most truthful because of the “*excursionismo*”—or real-life encounter—they necessitated.¹⁰¹ *Plein-air* instruction had only recently become available in Spain with the arrival of Belgian landscapist Charles de Haes in 1857.¹⁰² Thirty years later, in an essay entitled “On the Artistic Education of Our People,” Giner urged his countrymen to follow this, and other educational trends in Europe, through implementation of courses in the fine arts beginning at the primary level.¹⁰³

After *El Desastre*, liberal intellectuals intensified their calls for better schools, public works and other reforms aimed at “consolidation of a modern, industrial society” and “*Europeización*.”¹⁰⁴ They accused politicians across the spectrum of supporting

¹⁰⁰ Pío Baroja recalled in his memoirs, “From then on the ILE decided that painting was the most important of the arts.” “Ya por entonces, la Institución Libre de Enseñanza había decidido que la pintura era la más importante de las artes.” (Jurkevich, “Defining Castile,” 62)

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 60-61.

¹⁰² Ibid, 59.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 63. The title given above is a translation of the original Spanish: “Sobre la Educación Artística de Nuestro Pueblo.”

¹⁰⁴ Harrison, “Introduction...” *Spain’s 1898 Crisis*, 6.

policies that had lead Spain off a cliff. As the establishment could not be trusted to seek the people's best interests, "it was now the job of the underrepresented middle classes, the so-called 'neutral classes'... to determine the political agenda."¹⁰⁵

Evidence suggests that Sorolla, whether by name or not, was a Regenerationist sympathetic to the tenets of the ILE. First, as Tusell and Menéndez Robles have demonstrated, the artist moved in liberal circles throughout his life. His introduction to progressivist thinking began at an early age in València through his employer and future father-in-law Antonio García, a well-known photographer.¹⁰⁶ At València University, where the painter attended art school, a Krausist group was formed that included historian and jurist Rafael Altimira, psychiatrist Luis Simarro Lacabra and Amalio Gemenio, a nobleman, scientist and politician. All three moved to Madrid on completing their

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Though fin-de-siècle, liberal intellectuals imagined Spain's middle class as "underrepresented" and "neutral," they were in fact only correct in the first part of their evaluation. Despite being "on paper, one of the most democratic polities of Europe," the country was plagued by *caiquismo*, a form of wide-spread voting manipulation by local political bosses that disenfranchised urban and rural Spaniards of all classes. (Carr, *Spain: A History*, 223)

Who were the nineteenth-century Spanish bourgeoisie? According to Medina, "the new bourgeoisie was largely made up of intellectuals, bureaucrats, low-ranking politicians, public administrators, and other white collar workers, most of whom were driven by the new principle of capitalistic enterprise and material acquisition and tended to adhere to a liberal and progressive ideology" (Medina, *Spanish Realism*, 69). Compared to countries like France and Britain, the Spanish middle class was relatively small, reflected by the fact that "even by 1900, almost two-thirds of the population worked in agriculture and... 60 percent of Spaniards were illiterate..." (Carr, *Spain: A History*, 207)

¹⁰⁶ *Sorolla and His Idea of Spain*, 10.

studies, and introduced Sorolla to the city's even larger, liberal cohort when he relocated there with his wife, Clotilde, in 1889. In 1907, Gimeno (then a government minister) initiated The Board of Further Studies. In the spirit of Europeanization, "the Board was created to send scholars to study abroad, with the hope that when they returned their acquired knowledge would contribute to the development of the country."¹⁰⁷ Santiago Ramon y Cajal was made president, "with Sorolla as seconder."¹⁰⁸

Though members of the *Generación del 98* thought the painter a sellout whose works exploited the pleasure principal, older intellectuals "identified with [his] art, recognizing in it signs of the modern, Spanish-European identity they wanted to build."¹⁰⁹ Giner wrote to Sorolla following his U.S. triumph: "You are highly important to us, and this beloved land of Spain, eulogized in the works of its children, deserves a painter like you. You my friend will know full well the responsibility that your success brings you. Every time better and looking higher."¹¹⁰

Sorolla's pictures themselves further indicate the impact of the ILE on his ideology, or, the "collection of ideas which characterized his thought."¹¹¹ As stated, little (including the artist's own testimony) supports the conclusion that he painted to express

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 11.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ See footnote #15 in this chapter.

his politics.¹¹² Yet the convictions and ambitions of his Regenerationist circle are reflected in his work nonetheless. Take *Sad Inheritance!* (**fig 1**), a 7 x 9.5-foot canvas created in 1899. For most of the Twentieth Century, it hung in the Episcopal Church of the Ascension north of Washington Square in New York City, where parishioners likely saw it as a paean to the charity of religious orders.¹¹³ After all, its subject is a group of boy orphans with various physical and mental maladies, whose play at the beach is monitored by an anonymous priest. The image becomes more complex, however, in the context of Sorolla's late-nineteenth-century, intellectual milieu.

The work was originally called *The Children of Pleasure*, supporting a reading only slightly more nuanced than that of pious selflessness: that the sins of the father are visited on his progeny. Vicente Blasco Ibáñez—Sorolla's friend and well-known Impressionist novelist—suggested a change that the artist accepted before submitting the painting to the *Exposition Universelle* in 1900.¹¹⁴ The new title highlights the picture's symbolic potential beyond a critique of lust. For example, if the men and women who sired the pitiful infants are themselves children of Spain, the ignorance or desperation that led them to prostitution or extramarital sex indicates the sub-par environment in which they were raised—their own sad inheritance. If we accept this moral ambiguity, the stoic

¹¹² Tusell, "Joaquín Sorolla en los ambientes políticos..." *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 19.

¹¹³ *Sad Inheritance!* was bought from Sorolla in 1902 by Spanish-American businessman Jesús Vidal. It was acquired by John E. Berwind in 1904 and donated to the Church of the Ascension in 1908, where it remained until 1981 when it was auctioned to the *Caja de Ahorros de València*.

¹¹⁴ Pons Sorolla, "Sorolla and American Before 1909," *Sorolla and America*, 118.

priest (who enjoys none of the contemplative solitude of Kaspar David Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea*) becomes questionable. He could exemplify the lack of governmental support for parentless children; or he might implicate the church in cultivating the dogmatism that leads to unplanned pregnancies and abandoned children. The boy he shepherds occupies the center of the painting, making it difficult not to wonder whether his grip on the child's arm is more vice-like than tender; his hand on the youth's head a benediction, or a forcing of the gaze downward, into the sand. Ibáñez's title additionally signals the canvas as embodiment of turn-of-the-century Spaniards' mournfulness and self-pity over "inheriting" a geopolitical disaster generations in the making. Given that Sorolla executed the work a year after the war, this does not seem so far-fetched.

Echoes of the psychic trauma and progressivist criticisms of contemporary Spain likely went unnoticed by most who lauded *Sad Inheritance!* in Paris, where it secured the *Grand Prix*. Yet the fact that the Spanish government declined to purchase the painting, as was custom, reinforces the notion that it reverberated with the concerns of Sorolla's liberal circle—even if this was not his original or explicit intent.¹¹⁵ The painter claimed he began the picture after observing a similar scene on a beach in València. That the image became so intensely evocative seems to have surprised Sorolla himself. His peers had to force him to finish, and he confessed to a friend: "*Sad Inheritance!* is my

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 119.

nightmare and my fears.”¹¹⁶ He later told a U.S. journalist that after completing the canvas, he vowed “never again to paint such a subject.”¹¹⁷

The artist was not misremembering. He abandoned gloomy subjects entirely after his win in France in 1900; shifting focus to depictions of healthy, hard-working characters from València’s ports and agricultural industry, and scenes of daily, bourgeois life, often featuring his family or colleagues. In both types of image, the convictions of Sorolla’s Regenerationist peers persist. *An Investigation* (1897, **fig 2**) portrays a group of men huddled around Dr. Simarro (the painter’s Krausist peer from València) as he works by electric light with the latest medical equipment. *Don Antonio García* (1908, **fig 3**) presents Sorolla’s father-in-law in his darkroom, starring not at the viewer, but at a print he holds before him at eye level. His gaze implies the technical understanding of a scientist and the aesthetic judgement of an artist. In *Maria Painting in El Pardo* (1907, **fig 4**) Sorolla’s eldest daughter (who became an artist herself) is engaged in the *plein-air* technique practiced by her father and espoused by Giner. Sheltered by a giant umbrella, the young woman assesses the landscape before her with less assuredness, but equal focus, as her grandfather. All three pictures testify to the industriousness and thirst for knowledge of their bourgeois subjects. Whether petri dishes and a microscope, a camera and developing solution, or a mobile palette that leaves the studio behind, the figures embrace the latest technology in an effort to see (and thus know) more of the world. In

¹¹⁶ Joaquín Sorolla to Pedro Gil, n.l. Feb 15, 1900, in F. Thomas et al., eds., *Epistolarios de Joaquín Sorolla*, vol. 1: Correspondencia con Pedro Gil Moreno de Mora (Barcelona and València, 2007), letter 88, 133.

¹¹⁷ Abbott, “Two Spanish Painters of Genius,” *The Chautauquan*, LV, 1909, 480.

other words, the images share the progressivist faith in the middle class as the shapers of a better, modern Spain.

However, it was not work-ethic or new equipment alone—but new *values*—that evidenced the “neutral” class’s preparedness to lead.¹¹⁸ Maria’s portrait in particular affirms this. Sorolla was a feminist by nineteenth-century standards, a fact suggested in the image of his daughter painting—not for amusement in her parlor, but in an educational act of *excursionismo* in the rugged outdoors.¹¹⁹ (At the time, women were permitted at the School of Fine Arts in Madrid, but barred from the Academy in Paris, the center of the art world.) Another work, *Elena and Maria on Horseback* (1908, **fig 5**), further embraces the power and potential of women. What appears to be a folkloric, Valencian couple is revealed, on further inspection, to be the painter’s daughters riding double. Maria sits at the rear—side-saddle in a copious white dress—resting her arm on her sister’s shoulder for balance. Elena is in front and astride the horse, wearing matching white stockings, pants and a bolero jacket with a black, wide-brimmed hat tipped jauntily to one side. She holds the reins in one hand, the other resting on her hips so that her

¹¹⁸ Harrison, “Introduction...” *Spain’s 1898 Crisis*, 6.

¹¹⁹ Sorolla wrote to Huntington regarding American women: “It’s obvious that the American woman is an exceptional being, and merits all the love and affection of her man; and they must be given a full alternative, since they are worth more than we are, or rather, they amount to the same in every respect.” (Letter of March 18, 1909, *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 379)

“Está visto que la mujer Americana es un ser excepcional, y merece todo el amor, todo el cariño, del hombre, y hay que darles plena alternativa, pues valen más que nosotros, o hay que decir, tanto monta en todo.” (Letter of March 18, 1909, *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 379)

elbow juts confidently to the side. While her sister engages the viewer with a sweet smile befitting her “feminine” flounce, Elena stares—if not sternly, then fixedly—somewhere beyond. She seems to embody Giner’s urging of her father to “[look] higher”—a sense reinforced by the low angle of the spectator in relation to the sisters, who from atop their massive steed, do appear to have the most advantageous view. Sorolla’s portrait of his daughters thus blends the traditional (indicated by the regional costuming) and the progressive (a woman steering a horse—in men’s clothes no less) in much the same way his liberal peers hoped to guide the country to greener pastures through embracing the modern while preserving the positive “essentials” of Spanish character.

That the task of guiding Spain belonged exclusively to Sorolla’s own social sphere is further underscored by his portrayals of the working class. This is most easily seen in paintings like *The Villagers of Lyon* (1907, **fig 6**) or *Segovian Family* (1912, **fig 7**), where, as the title suggests, the sitters’ individualities are subordinate to their roles as models of antique clothing and embodiments of a timeless folk culture. In *Elena and Maria on Horseback*, the artist’s daughters straddle the line between past and present with a charmingly-subversive masquerade that employs traditional costume to proclaim new values, and hence, the girls’ contemporaneousness, and participation in “modernity.” The Segovian and Lyonese groups, on the other hand, are posed in pliant rows resembling the arrangements of ethnographic snapshots, in which, the assumption is, that the subjects do not perform, or self-fashion, but simply stand still in order for the camera to record their “essence.” While Elena and Maria done the guise of antiquity, their working-class contemporaries are painted as if they still *live* it. With no agency to toggle

between the past and the present, with no sense of history, the Segovian and Lyonese figures are exiled from the project of modernity, whose ultimate goal is improvement of the present based on understanding of the past *as such*.

To be fair, the majority of Sorolla's working-class subjects are not depicted statically posing in traditional, regional costume, but rather, hard at work in their daily dress. The painter was as sympathetic to his models as he knew how: they are often monumentalized (as in *Preparing Raisins* (1900)) and occasionally even rendered with a sense of interiority (as in *A Fisherwoman in València* (1916)). Yet Sorolla clearly gravitated towards those occupations whose production processes in Spain had not yet been corporatized and industrialized—particularly fishing and farming. Countless examples (of which *Fishing Nets* (1893, **fig 8**), *Valencian Fishermen* (1895, **fig 9**), or *Stacking Hay* (date unknown, **fig 10**)) are a mere few) reinforce the timelessness of working-class labor and its proximity and harmony with nature, thus implying the same for its participants. An interesting exception is *Packing Raisins, Javea* (1908), in which Sorolla has portrayed a sort of proto-sweatshop—a long, narrow room into which a single window emits a stream of light. Seated around rectangular tables in the semi-dark are at least two-dozen women, anonymously and robotically boxing raisins. The canvas is a rare acknowledgement of the industrialization of labor, and the modernity of the working subject, even in locales as remote as sea-side Javea, where the painter often traveled to “escape.” Sorolla has captured no other scene like this, as far as I am aware—which makes sense. In order for the middle class to steer Spain toward a better future, they had to harness what was beneficial in the customary, without being part of the retrograde

themselves (to be “traditional,” I’ll reiterate is to exist without knowledge of History and thus without modernity). The past had to be embodied somewhere, or it would lose all currency in the present—the working-class body provided a seemingly pliant vehicle.

Sorolla’s outwardly-idyllic representations of middle- and working-class Spaniards collectively suggest a hierarchy based on the former’s modernity, enterprising spirit and progressive values—with the latter as noble, but passive, vessel of the customary. The dominant position of the Spanish bourgeoisie in relation to the working class, was of course not an invention of the artist’s, but a historical reality that his canvases re-code as a moral, rather than an economic and political issue. The growth of the country’s middle class—precipitated by industrialization—had been further strengthened by the confiscation and sale of church and aristocratic property during the upheavals of the first-third of the Nineteenth Century.¹²⁰ This bolstering of the bourgeoisie occurred not solely at the expense of the nobility and clergy, but urban and rural laborers as well, who were precluded from land redistribution by lack of purchasing power. As Jeremy T. Medina elaborates:

...country workers were employed by the new landowners and exploited mercilessly for profit. Others, migrating to the cities, found only severe unemployment, government agencies insensitive to their needs, and further exploitation by the new *burguesía*. Most became fiercely anti-liberal, opposing capitalistic innovations and the regulatory pressures of central government. Some turned to open protests or banditry. Many became beggars in the streets.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Medina, *Spanish Realism*, 70.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

Sorolla's canvases thus not only beautify and naturalize middle-class assumptions of superiority and authority over their laboring counterparts; they also dissemble large-scale, working-class resistance to liberal, Regenerationist intellectuals and their plans for improving the nation.

Landscape was a third genre Sorolla pursued with intensity from the beginning of his career until the end of his life.¹²² Like *Sad Inheritance!*, or the artist's bourgeois or working-class scenes, his depictions of nature were not painted for political ends, and yet cannot be separated from the concerns of his progressive milieu. As previously discussed, *plein-air* painting was a decidedly modern artistic tactic in nineteenth-century Spain, its novelty underscored by the fact that "before the 1840s, virtually no attention was paid to landscape painting, and it was not until 1844 that the Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid approved a *cátedra* [chair] of landscape painting."¹²³ *Excursionismo* was encouraged by the constituents of the ILE, who believed nature scenes engaged both artist and viewer in active exploration of Taine's "*race, moment et milieu*."¹²⁴ In this context, Sorolla's sunny

¹²² Pons Sorolla, "Landscapes and Gardens," *Sorolla and America*, 184.

¹²³ Jurkevich, "Defining Castile," 59.

¹²⁴ Tusell describes Giner's argument in the essay "El Paisaje" of 1885 thusly: "Contemplation [of the landscape] would permit one to know the geological reality that informs the natural sciences, but also... it would have important moral consequences... A town 'asleep in secular prostration' could achieve regeneration through contemplation of a landscape in which human action appeared to be irrevocably imprinting itself." ("Joaquín Sorolla en los ambientes políticos..." *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 25)

"Para Giner su contemplación [del paisaje] permitía conocer la realidad geológica de la que nos informan las ciencias naturales, pero también... tenía unas importantes consecuencias morales... un pueblo 'dormido en secular postración' podría hacer posible su regeneración a través de la contemplación de un paisaje en que la acción

vistas are telling. Rarely does the artist evoke the harsh, arid geography of Castile. Rather, the majority of his landscapes focus on Spain's lush regions—Galicia, the royal grounds of El Pardo and La Granja, the well-irrigated gardens of Andalucía and the orchards of València. For disciples of the French philosopher, Sorolla's paintings indicated fruitful ground for Spain's collective character.

Yet unquestionably, the artist's preferred topography was the coast. According to Blanca Pons Sorolla: "A survey of Sorolla's overall production reveals more than 980 works with scenes related to the sea..." The painter's total output numbers approximately 4,000 canvases—meaning the ocean figures in about a quarter of his oeuvre.¹²⁵ One might assume, given the significance of the theme over the length of his life, that Sorolla painted the maritime from the outset. In reality, the artist did not devote himself continually to the beach scenes he is most known for until 1895—the year his work *Return From Fishing* (1894) was awarded a second-class medal at the *salon* and purchased by the French government.¹²⁶

1895 was also the year that Generation-of-98 novelist Miguel de Unamuno first published *Regarding Castilianness*.¹²⁷ The author's "declared aim," like so many others,

humana aparecía imprimiendo su huella de forma imperecedera." ("Joaquín Sorolla en los ambientes políticos...", *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 25)

¹²⁵ Blanca Pons Sorolla, *Sorolla and America*, 152.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ The original, Spanish title of the work is: *En Torno al Casticismo*. Printed in 1902 as a book, the iconic publication originally appeared as five articles released over the course of as many months.

was “regenerating a Spanish culture that was in deep crisis... disintegrating in the difficult transition between tradition and modernity.”¹²⁸ He cites the influence of both Taine and Krause before venturing his own argument: that “*lo castizo*,” Spain’s “authentically-traditional, Castilian character” was in fact a split personality.¹²⁹ As Joseph Harrison explains:

One is the dominant historical tradition of the ruling elite, and the other is the eternal intrahistorical tradition of the people. The mentality of the first is defined by analogy with the Castilian landscape—arid extremes of cold and heat, plain and mountain – and its literature – a rigid polarization between Don Quixote’s fantasy and Sancho Panza’s practicality. The second is defined by the famous metaphor of the sea, in which beneath the surface-waves of history are the silent, hidden depths, the common people who toil away like ‘*madréporas suboceánicas*,’ reef polyps.¹³⁰

Unamuno additionally used the ocean as a metaphor for what his country needed most:

“...fresh air from Europe, and immersion of the elite in the reality of the people. – ‘*Tenemos que Europizarnos y chapuzarnos en pueblo.*’”¹³¹

Given that Sorolla and Unamuno belonged to the same Regenerationist, intellectual community, it seems probable that the artist would have read—or at least have known the tenets of—the writer’s work. While Sorolla certainly did not paint the sea to “represent the people,” this emerging progressive symbol likely validated his choice of subject matter—both in his own eyes and those of his peers and (upper)middle-

¹²⁸ Harrison, “Introduction...” *Spain’s 1898 Crisis*, 18.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 18-19.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 18.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 19.

class clients. The artist's paint-handling technique further strengthens the resonance between his work and Unamuno's regenerative ocean. Sorolla's seaside babes and youths are slick and shiny from waves or spray—like new colts or the recently-baptized. But even those subjects depicted nowhere near the beach are in some sense embryonic water-people, owing to the wet, glossiness of Sorolla's brushstrokes, which even today, appear freshly applied (take, for example, *La Siesta* of 1912).

Despite these iconographic and sensual connections, Alberto Acereda has argued that “the painting of Sorolla, is aligned with the bourgeois idea of perceiving the marine space and the beach as *locus amoenus* and framework of diversion...” in contrast to “modernist poets... [who] use the marine landscape as a space for reflection and metaphysical mediation of an existential kind...”¹³² In short, Acereda asserts that the painter employs the ocean as a symbol of modernity in the socio-economic/technological sense—a modernity that validates the dominance of the (upper)middle class and contrasts with the critical modernity of Unamuno and other avant-gardes. I support this reading, and believe it does not ultimately contradict my own. Rather, it indicates the disparity between why we like something, and why we *think* we like something. Sorolla and his

¹³² Acereda, “Dos Visiones del Espacio Marino como Modernidad,” *Revista Hispanica Moderna*, No. 2 (Dec 2002), 282.

“Más particularmente, sostenemos como hipótesis que un sector de la representación pictórica finisecular, especialmente la pintura de Joaquín Sorolla, se alinea con la idea burguesa de percibir el espacio marino, y en él la playa, como *locus amoenus* y marco de diversión (modernidad de raíz socioeconómica); los poetas modernistas, y en concreto la poética de Darío, emplean el paisaje marino como espacio para la reflexión y meditación metafísica de carácter existencial (modernidad de raíz artística).”

buyers may have subconsciously thrilled at the power their capital allowed: to transform nature into leisure, to participate in novel recreation that others could not. Yet consciously, they did not see themselves as privileged dominators. Relative to the historic, Castilian elite—the political oligarchy—they were “the people,” and the painter’s sunny, windswept beaches foretold of the beauty and promise Unamuno insisted was theirs by nature of their very “commonness.”

The artist and novelist were also generational cohorts. Sorolla was born in 1863, Unamuno a year later, with Ignacio Zuloaga, Pío Baroja, Ramón del Valle-Inclán and Azorín following between 1866-73. Some scholars like Jurkevich see Sorolla’s age and Regenerationist concerns as reason enough to number him among the *Generación del 98*.¹³³ More commonly, however, the artist is regarded as the group’s antithesis, both because of the stark contrast between his work and that of Zuloaga (the ’98ers’ preferred painter) and because of direct criticism of his art by the authors themselves.¹³⁴

¹³³ See footnote #1 of Jurkevich’s, “Defining Castile,” 56.

¹³⁴ Tusell notes on the first page of “Joaquín Sorolla en los ambientes políticos...” that, for the Generation-of-98 writers: “Basque painters [like Zuloaga] represented honesty, the critical spirit, and the will for modernist transformation of the country, while Sorolla and Valencian painters became synonymous with easiness, superficiality and the desire for maximum profitability. From there, the identification of Sorollism as the ‘rumor of the Levant merchants’ (Machado), the ‘gypsies or Phoenicians’ (Valle-Inclán) or even the ‘lascivious’ (Unamuno).”

“Los pintores Vascos representarían la honradez, el espíritu crítico y la voluntad de transformación modernizadora del país, mientras que Sorolla y los pintores Valencianos vendrían a ser lo mismo que la facilidad, la superficialidad epidérmica y el deso de obtener la máxima rentabilidad económica. De ahí la indentificación del Sorollismo como el ‘rumor de mercaderes de Levante’ (Machado), los ‘gitanos o Fenicios’ (Valle-Inclán) o incluso la ‘lascivia’ (Unamuno).”

The facts surrounding the creation of *Sad Inheritance!* reveal Sorolla's personal distaste for dwelling on the depressing. Thus, though his birthdate aligns him with Unamuno and company, he was spiritually more akin to Giner and the earlier generation of intellectual reformers, who, though they saw many problems, were by-and-large optimistic about Spain's ability to succeed in the new century. By the time of the Spanish-American War, the older progressives were nearing the end of their careers and lives.¹³⁵ The Generation-of-98 writers, conversely, hit their literary stride in the first years of the 1900s, their calls for reform colored darker by the humiliating military defeat.¹³⁶ The search for positive, essentially-Spanish characteristics begun by Giner and the ILE shifted to rumination on "*España Negra*," or the country's underbelly. This trend is well-encapsulated in a passage from Darío Regoyos and Emile Verhaeren's illustrated prose/poetry book of 1899, entitled (if not originally, then at least appropriately) *España Negra*: "The happiest music, the *jota*, is sung in pitiful tones by the blind. And Andalusian airs are actually sorrowful lamentations. The false beauty of the women is betrayed by their wan and serious demeanor, and bullfighters, after all is said and done, are marked by blood and death."¹³⁷

Just as his luminist style precluded discussion of his work by mid-century, Modernist critics, Sorolla's predilection for positivity alienated him from the writers who,

¹³⁵ Giner would pass in 1915, and Benito Pérez Galdós (an important mentor of Sorolla's to be discussed later this chapter) in 1920.

¹³⁶ Harrison, "Introduction..." *Spain's 1898 Crisis*, 32.

¹³⁷ Boone, *Vistas de España*, 175. (Translation Boone's)

for posterity, would come to characterize the liberal, intellectual community of Spain after 1900. This isolation was compounded by two additional factors. First, the painter's increasing financial success in the "global" art market (most condemnably, in the U.S., which the *Generación del 98* referred to as "*ese país del cerdo y del embutido*" ("that country of pork and sausage")).¹³⁸ Second, his frequent patronage by the Royal Family—the anti-avant-garde—after 1907.¹³⁹ Yet as we have seen, Sorolla had strong ties to a milieu that was disgruntled with, and (in the case of the ILE) at times openly oppositional to, the monarchy.

Does this make Sorolla a hypocrite? In the eyes of nineteenth-century, Spanish socialists, anarchists and the '98ers: yes. Today, in many contexts, readers would probably agree—that to paint for the monarchy while espousing progressive reform are politically oppositional acts. Yet for many Spaniards at century's end, monarchism and liberalism were *not* mutually-exclusive.¹⁴⁰ Tusell addresses this when charting what he sees as the artist's shifting politics throughout his life. As a young man in València, the

¹³⁸ Tusell, "Joaquín Sorolla en los ambientes políticos..." *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 29.

¹³⁹ In his analysis of the correspondence between the artist and King Alfonso XIII, Tusell asserts: "If there was anything like an 'official painter,' or unofficial, during this reign, his name was Joaquín Sorolla" ("Joaquín Sorolla en los ambientes políticos..." *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 26).

"Si hubo algo parecido a un 'pinto oficial' u oficioso durante este reinado se llamo Joaquín Sorolla" ("Joaquín Sorolla en los ambientes políticos..." *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 26).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

scholar notes, Sorolla was close with Blasco Ibáñez, whose name was practically synonymous with Valencian populism.¹⁴¹ However, after moving to Madrid, befriending more affluent peers, improving his own livelihood and falling out with the Impressionist novelist (exactly why is unknown), Tusell hypothesizes that Sorolla began to align with “*un cierto liberalismo monárquico*.”¹⁴² The strongest evidence of this change, for the scholar, is the correspondence the painter maintained with Alfonso XIII, which he interprets as decidedly more friendly than professional. I personally feel the “intimacy” of the letters is overstated (though I am not a native speaker). However, I believe the near-total dominance of the state-as-patron in nineteenth-century Spain (an issue to be discussed further later) *did* create an environment where not only could liberals be monarchists, but artists with privately radical leanings could be forgiven (and forgive themselves) for seizing work when and where it could be had. The sculptor Mariano Benlliure, for example, hid Blasco Ibáñez when he was pursued for his political activism, but also created the principal monuments commemorating the reign of Alfonso XII, the regency and Alfonso XIII.¹⁴³ Ultimately, my larger point (and that of Tusell) is that Sorolla’s relations with the crown do not inhibit a reading of his art as inflected by liberal, Regenerationist ideology.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 20.

¹⁴² In English: “a certain monarchical liberalism.” (Ibid, 22)

¹⁴³ Ibid, 20.

Part 2: From Spain to America via Paris: The Formation of an Oeuvre from the Artist's Perspective

To begin a nuanced discussion of why the artist paints as he does, I have attempted to re-emphasize the way in which his works were inflected by the beliefs and aspirations (both conscious and unconscious) of his progressive peers. Sorolla himself, however, would more likely have attributed his landscapes, seascapes and bourgeois scenes to personal choice rather than groupthink. And though we could respond with Clark's observation that ideology: "closes speech [or in this case, image-making] against consciousness of itself as production, as process, as practice, as subsistence and contingency," the artist's agency is a very real factor that did more than just inflect, but actively drove, his selection of subjects and luminist method.¹⁴⁴ The remainder of this chapter will thus consider the immediate "briefs" or self-imposed challenges Sorolla set for himself over the course of his career—as vital to understanding the formation of his oeuvre as his historical context and social/cultural sphere. In fact, it is from the painter's "forward-looking" perspective, not at all concerned with politics, that his artistic practice may appear most political—albeit in a different sense of the word.¹⁴⁵

Sorolla's "brief"—"his particular perception of the circumstances he [had to] address" in his painting—stemmed in no small part from his artistic predilection and

¹⁴⁴ Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 8.

¹⁴⁵ I borrow the concept of the artist's "forward-looking" perspective which innovates, creates or finds solutions, rather than solves problems, from Baxandall's *Patterns of Intention*. (See subtitle: "Khanweiler, Picasso and Problems," 89.)

material and spiritual needs.¹⁴⁶ As I've noted, and will begin to argue in earnest, these included the prioritization of technique over subject matter, and two personally-imposed obligations: to paint, and to make money doing so. Yet even though, as Baxandall writes, "the artist's formulation of a brief is a very personal affair," it is not fabricated from thin air. Rather, it is "freely selected out of an array" of possibilities.¹⁴⁷ This array constitutes the "pattern of barter...primarily of mental goods" that is the Western picture-*troc*, or art market. According to Baxandall, the *troc* is "both generic and historical."¹⁴⁸ It is generic in that certain rules persist across time. To begin, "typically [the *troc*] involves a degree of competition among both producers and consumers between whom is a medium of non-verbal communication: parties on either side can make statements with their feet, as it were, by participating or abstaining."¹⁴⁹ Additionally: "there is choice on both sides, but... a choice on any one side has consequences for the range of choice on both sides."¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, "while the basic relation of the *troc* is simple and fluid, in any particular case it is partly encased in actual market institutions that are less so."¹⁵¹ This historical contingency, Baxandall suggests, does not mean that "institutions are... pure

¹⁴⁶ See footnote #3 in the chapter.

¹⁴⁷ Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, 47.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 46.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 49.

expressions of immediate aesthetic impulse in a culture. Often they represent survivals from earlier moments; [they] are inertial.”¹⁵² This was certainly the case with the mid-nineteenth-century, Spanish art *troc* into which Sorolla was born on February 28, 1863 in the city of València.

Sorolla and his generation are credited with initiating the “Age of Silver” in Spanish art and literature.¹⁵³ Yet the cultural climate of the painter’s youth was hardly robust. The beginning of the Nineteenth Century saw Napoleon’s invasion and eventual conquest of Iberia (1803-15) and the reactionary dictatorship of Fernando VII (1808-33), both of which brought violence, political chaos and financial collapse to a region whose military and economic influence had been fading since the mid-Seventeenth Century.¹⁵⁴ The period from 1830-74 was profoundly isolationist, as Spain was embroiled in one infight after another, until the crowning of moderate monarch Alfonso XII finally brought stability and a measure of reform.¹⁵⁵ Over the preceding three centuries (beginning with the arrival of El Greco in 1577 through the death of Tiepolo in 1770) “leading exponents

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ According to Javier Pérez Rojas “...it was during the last fourth of the Nineteenth Century when Spain initiated one of its most creative and flourishing cultural stages... In reference to the Golden Age, we talk today about an Age of Silver when referring to the years 1898-1936.” (Pérez Rojas, *Los Sorolla de València*, 22) (1936, of course, marked the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.)

¹⁵⁴ Roglán and Barón, *Prelude to Spanish Modernism: Fortuny to Picasso*, 7.

¹⁵⁵ These included the Carlist Wars between Fernando’s daughter Isabella II and her Uncle, Carlos V; the *Vicálvaro* and *Gloriosa* Revolutions of 1854 and 68; and the declaration of the First Spanish Republic.

of European painting” had migrated to or through Madrid.¹⁵⁶ This trend ceased in the Nineteenth Century, as Spain no longer possessed the conditions for stable government, let alone a bourgeoning art market.¹⁵⁷

In characterizing the country’s visual-art *trac* after 1800, Javier Barón and Mark A. Roglán note: “The impoverishment of the nation and its feeble political situation enormously weakened the traditional means of patronage—the Crown, the nobility and the Church...”¹⁵⁸ The Spanish State—already the primary educator of artists via the Royal Academy system—now emerged as their greatest benefactor as well.¹⁵⁹ This near-total overlap between the arenas of instruction and consumption, unsurprisingly, made for “extremely conservative taste, and painting that lacked innovation.”¹⁶⁰ It also resulted in “a singular mechanism of artistic training and promotion... which remained practically unaltered during the major part of the Nineteenth Century.”¹⁶¹

In the absence of private galleries, dealers and *salons* for the *refuse* (which offered choice to French counterparts looking to bypass the Academy) aspiring Spanish

¹⁵⁶ Roglán and Barón, *Prelude to Spanish Modernism: Fortuny to Picasso*, 6.

¹⁵⁷ It is telling that within the Prado, a museum known for its eclecticism, the nineteenth-century collection contains the most works by Spanish artists, and the fewest by artists of other nationalities (Ibid, 7).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 8.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 7.

artists appeared to have a single roadmap for success. It began, as Barón and Roglán describe, with “the local school of fine arts... where academic foundations were learned.”¹⁶² Next, promising pupils “attempted to obtain scholarships or grants to travel abroad to continue their training.”¹⁶³ Once returned, they began their careers. Some moved to Madrid, “where the Court and the political, administrative, and cultural centers of the State were located.”¹⁶⁴ All participated in the series of national expositions which, since initiated in 1856, had “[taken] on the traditional role that the art-school competitions had played at the local level, serving as a showcase that encouraged clients to purchase art.”¹⁶⁵ Like the official French *salons*, the Spanish *exposiciones* had rigid rules for entry and a jury of Academy members.

I must now specify that the aforementioned model was not necessarily pertinent to those nineteenth-century Spanish artists who merely wanted to paint. However, it was the established route for those seeking financial solvency through their craft. Both Sorolla’s early biography and his own testimony indisputably place him in this second category—beginning with the fact that he came from a working-class background, and ending with his confession years later to Pío Baroja: “The painting I do has made me rich, and if I

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 8.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

now felt moved to alter it, I would not.”¹⁶⁶ And so, at eighteen, the artist enrolled in the *Escuela de San Carlos*—the branch of the Royal Academy in València—where he studied with the aid of a scholarship from 1878-81.¹⁶⁷ Three years later, he sought a grant to expand his horizons in Rome from 1885-89. Finally, he entered works in the *Exposición Nacional*, beginning in 1881 with three marinescapes.¹⁶⁸

All three paintings went unnoticed. Sorolla’s newcomer status explains this to some extent. Yet the inattention also had much to do with Baxandall’s “inertial” institutions and a mismatch between the painter’s nascent, artistic concerns and those of the nineteenth-century, Spanish art *troc*. To begin with the latter issue: history painting dominated at the peninsular national expositions.¹⁶⁹ Considered the noblest of the visual

¹⁶⁶ Though Sorolla’s biological father was a tradesman, he died, along with his wife, in an 1865 Cholera epidemic when the artist was two years old. Sorolla and his sister Concha were then lovingly adopted by a childless aunt and uncle of much more modest means—the former a homemaker, the latter a locksmith. As a boy, the artist’s passion and talent for sketching prompted his headmaster at the *Escuela Normal Superior* to suggest he be enrolled in evening drawing lessons given by the sculptor Cayetano Capuz. His uncle was receptive to this advice, but insisted Sorolla also work in his shop “to learn a trade properly in case art did not provide a sufficient livelihood.” (Pons Sorolla, Francisco, “Sorolla: his Painting and his Family,” *The Painter Joaquín Sorolla*, 19.)

The Baroja quote comes from Burke and Muller, *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 33.

¹⁶⁷ The Marqués de Villagrancia became Sorolla’s first benefactor helping to offset the cost of Academy tuition. (Pons Sorolla, Blanca, *Joaquín Sorolla*, 42)

¹⁶⁸ Sorolla’s early chroniclers wrote that he destroyed all three losing paintings—likely for the drama it adds to his biography. In fact, Blanca Pon Sorolla has indicated that at least one, *Seascape, Ships in the Port*, survives to this day. Alan E. Smith lists the following as the titles of the three paintings: *Veleros en El Mar*, *Escena de Puerto* and *Barcos en Puerto con Fondo de Edeficios*. (“Galdos y Sorolla: Encuentros en El Camino,” *Naturalismo y la Vida Moderna*, 90)

¹⁶⁹ Pons Sorolla, Blanca, *Joaquín Sorolla*, 48.

art genres since the days of Alberti, it was also the most frequently submitted and rewarded.¹⁷⁰ Juries, critics and public expected “theatricality and an intensely interpretative point of view” from historical canvases, which were “sometimes more than twenty-five-feet long.”¹⁷¹ Period “fidelity” was prized, requiring artists to carry out extensive research in order to accurately portray the era depicted.¹⁷²

Sorolla had a very different set of artistic interests. This is revealed in accounts of his time at *San Carlos*, and embodied in *Seascape, Ships in the Port* (1881), the sole work, of the three submitted, still known today.¹⁷³ The artist described the professors and method of painting he gravitated towards as a student in a speech given at the Spanish Royal Academy years later:

...but it was Don Gonzalo Salva, who was well informed of the artistic tendencies of the moment, that were so full of luminous yearnings, who let us be free and always encouraged us to copy Nature with a realist vision. With true delight, I recall the long strolls under the burning Mediterranean [sic] sun, in search of an effect of light or a note of color.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ The genre of “history painting” is seen as beginning with Leon Battista Alberti’s use of the word *historia* (Latin for “story”) in 1435 to describe a narrative picture with many figures. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century academic doctrine includes both factual and fabled events within the category. In early-modern Europe through Sorolla’s time, historical canvases were the most exalted because of their supposed edifying aims and their use of a body of stylistic rules called the “Grand Manner” which, according to Pietro Bellori, distinguished elite taste from that of the populous who “praise things painted naturalistically” and “approve of novelty.” (“History painting,” *Grove Art Online* and Mannings, David, “Grand Manner,” *Grove Art Online*.)

¹⁷¹ Roglán and Barón, *Prelude to Spanish Modernism: Fortuny to Picasso*, 8.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ The painting “still has a label on its stretcher which indicates that it formed part of the exhibition.” (Pon Sorolla, Blanca, *Joaquín Sorolla*, 48)

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 44. (Translation Pons Sorolla’s.)

Given the occasion of the utterance, there is a chance that the artist's words do not reflect the truth of his past proclivities, but are rather an attempt to establish continuity, a sense of heroic inevitability, between his school days and the canvases he became known for. However, recollections of his classmates—like the following from Cecilio Plá—buttress his narrative: “We entered class at eight in the morning and by that time Sorolla had already made the rounds of the outskirts of València, where he painted landscapes. His activity was extraordinary, he frightened us all.”¹⁷⁵ Plá remembers, above all, his peer's blistering productivity. But he also corroborates the elder Sorolla's assertion of his youthful predilection for a particular kind of painting. In both accounts, the artist is drawn to scenes of “Nature”—particularly landscapes—rendered on site. That Sorolla had “already made the rounds” by 8AM further testifies to his fascination with effects of light and color—as these are most dramatic as the sun rises and sets.

Yet the painter's artistic priorities—not at all those of contemporary, Spanish history painting—did not emerge Platonically from a counter-culture spirit of genius. As his mention of Don Gonzalo Salva reflects, they were in fact nourished by certain instructors at *San Carlos*—themselves members of the academic system. Thus, Baxandall's claim that “...institutions are not pure expressions of immediate aesthetic impulse in a culture,” but rather, “are inertial,” applies in the context of late-nineteenth-century Spain. Between 1857-81 de Haes' *plein air* technique had gained traction among

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 46.

certain artists, like Salva, at the Academy's regional, grassroots level.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, recall that in 1887 Giner's "On the Artistic Education of Our People" was still advocating for the method (and for arts education in general) to be fully embraced by Spanish schools. Apathy for Sorolla's three marinescapes earlier in the decade, though partially an apathy for the newcomer, was at the same time a disregard for "the artistic tendencies of the moment," which had yet to inspire converts in Madrid—the top and center of the academic hierarchy.

Seascape, Ships in the Port (**fig 11**) actually has the look of a work composed in the studio with the help of on-site studies—though no scholar has elaborated on its making, as far as I am aware. Regardless, it demonstrates the interest in atmosphere and light that Sorolla traced to his student days. The ships are not part of a narrative, in fact, they are hardly more than pretense for the true subject of the picture: the sky, water and breeze that swells the sails and pushes the clouds. At 17.7 x 30.7 inches, the canvas would have been easy to carry around València, and just as easily overlooked in an exhibition dominated by large-scale, historical pieces.

That Sorolla destroyed his two other failed marinescapes is likely apocryphal.¹⁷⁷ Yet, as previously noted, the sea views of his youth ceased to be a priority for over a

¹⁷⁶The artists Aureliano de Beruete and Martin Rico, both of whom worked out of Madrid, were two other notable students/followers of de Haes (Beruete was also a long-time instructor at Giner's ILE). In València, the artist Antonio Munoz Degrain had absorbed and adapted de Haes' teachings and was "highly esteemed by Sorolla." (Pérez Rojas, "Sorolla, Capturing Impressions," *Los Sorolla de Valencia*, 33)

¹⁷⁷ See note #86 in this chapter.

decade following his first national competition.¹⁷⁸ Sorolla's accompanying of his paintings to the 1881 exhibition had been his first visit to Madrid, and to the Prado. Two years later, he returned to the capital, specifically to study the works of Velázquez, Ribera and El Greco—three masters known for their portrayals of the human figure and history paintings. This sojourn reflects a decided change in tack for the artist, a gearing up for his next Academy exposition, where instead of three beachscapes, he submitted a 13 x 19-foot image in the “Grand Manner.” The theme was *The Second of May, 1808* (1884, **fig 12**), the most triumphant moment of the Spanish War of Independence against Napoleon. It won a second-class medal.

This switch from ocean views to *The Second of May* demonstrates Sorolla's flexibility with regard to the subject matter of his art. Indeed, to those new to the painter's oeuvre, the only constant in his canvases before 1900 seems to be their inconsistency, as they run the gamut from marinescapes to historical/religious figures to social-realist scenes—as if the work of three different people. And yet this continually-changing subject matter points to, and is largely the result of, two stable priorities, each constituting a significant strand of the painter's brief. First, as mentioned, Sorolla wanted to make money through his craft. As we will see, his jettisoning of ocean views in favor of historical painting is only the first of many instances in which he explored new subjects in order to align his work with market tastes (initially, those of the Spanish Academy). However, Sorolla refused to budge on his *plein air* methods. Breaking with the tendency of composing historical scenes in the studio, he moved his materials and

¹⁷⁸ See note #51 in this chapter.

models for *The Second of May* outside, to the València bullring, where he set off fireworks in attempt to accurately render the haze of artillery fire. This indicates the second major thread of the artist's brief: a devotion to in-situ painting and continued interest in fleeting, environmental conditions.

The success of his first history painting likely spurred Sorolla's pursuit of a scholarship from the *Diputación de València* to continue his training in Italy in 1885.¹⁷⁹ As stated, study abroad was a common stepping stone for promising, nineteenth-century Spanish artists. Yet the painter's choice of the Academy in Rome was, in the words of an early biographer: "a continuation of the influence of contemporary, Spanish painting" (i.e., Academic painting).¹⁸⁰ As part of the Spanish Colony, Sorolla was expected to drink in the genius of Raphael and Michelangelo while producing "*academias antiguas*" (traditional academy studies) with an emphasis on line and modeling. His first batch of works were ill-received by the academicians of the *Diputación* who complained that "[the artist] had substituted sketches from life" for the required studies in the antique mode.¹⁸¹ Sorolla continued working in Italy for the full extent of his grant, but failed to elicit more than lukewarm responses from his sponsors. His recollections of the period again underscore his capacity for flexibility and willingness to compromise for the sake of

¹⁷⁹ He won the scholarship with a second, favorable scene from the Napoleonic Invasion: '*El Palleter*' *Declaring War on Napoleon* (1884).

¹⁸⁰ Rafael Domenech as quoted by Blanca Pons Sorolla in *Joaquín Sorolla*, 56.

¹⁸¹ Pons Sorolla, Blanca, *Joaquín Sorolla*, 61.

success, as well as a persistent belief in the in-exchangeable particularities of a given time and space:

...in Rome I felt the influence of the period... without wishing to, I yielded to the milieu, I went with the flow, but my work did not stem from the expression of a healthy sentiment: I could not understand, nor did my conscience approve of, how the things or matter of a particular place could be painted in different places... And the expected occurred: ...my poor *Burial of Christ* was a failure!”¹⁸²

The Burial of Christ (1887) was Sorolla’s required, capstone project for his time in Rome, and more importantly, his submission to the *Exposición Nacional* of Madrid in 1887.¹⁸³ As his statement indicates, the painting was a flop with the jury (who failed to medal it) and with most critics, among whom the opinion of Isidoro Fernández Flórez (writing under the penname Fernanflor) is as illuminating as it is oft-quoted. The critic claimed:

I don’t believe that this *Burial* is an act of faith, but rather a pictorial theme. I don’t believe it because in the painting, there is a certain theatrics of a landscapist, of a lover of Nature. Mr. Sorolla... has painted not the burial of Christ, but the hour in which Christ was buried. To paint the burial it would be necessary to characterize something more, as almost all the characters that figure in this biblical act have their personality, without which we cannot satisfy ourselves by putting capricious names on a few shadows and silhouettes.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Originally from a letter to Pedro Gil, as quoted in *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, ed. Pons Sorolla and López Fernández, 15.

¹⁸³ Only fragments of this canvas, which apparently took “the longest to complete in [Sorolla’s] entire career” survive in the *Museo Sorolla* today. (Ibid, 64)

¹⁸⁴ “No creo que ese *Entierro* sea un acto de fe, sino un tema pictórico. Y no creo porque en el cuadro hay cierto efectismo de paisista [sic], de amante de la Naturaleza. El señor Sorolla... ha pintado, no el entierro de Cristo, sino ‘la hora en que le enterraron.’ Para pintar el entierro hubiera sido preciso caracterizar algo más, pues casi todos los personajes que vienen figurando bíblicamente en este acto tienen su carácter y su personalidad, sin que pueda satisfacernos poner nombres caprichosos a unas cunatas sombras y silhuetas.” (de Pantorba, *La Vida y la Obra de Joaquin Sorolla*, p. 23)

Ironically, Sorolla's apathy for subject matter—the very trait that, theoretically, should have allowed him to forge a career in history painting despite his personal predilections—was in fact the cause of his “failure” in the Grand Manner. The soldiers in *The Second of May* suggest their patriotic essence easily enough through their unambiguous fighting. But to endow the various figures of the burial with their appropriate traits and emotions involved a devotion to iconography and symbolic gesture/composition—not to mention biblical exegesis—that Sorolla did not possess, fixated as he was on the conditions of the literal scene in front of him.

A year later, while finishing up his Italian residency, Sorolla briefly returned to València to marry his childhood sweetheart, Clotilde García. As devoted as their relationship appears to have been, I address it here not to add a touch of intimacy to my account, but to suggest how the union both reaffirmed, and prompts further nuancing, of the artist's self-set challenge to make money by painting. That is, from one perspective, Sorolla's promise at age twenty-four to provide for a wife and any children to come (they did, in 1890, 1892 and 1895) can be read as a further cementing of his original brief to achieve financial solvency through art. In other words, in one view, his marriage deliberately raised the stakes on realization of a long-held ambition. And yet, from another perspective, Sorolla's decision to start a family speaks not solely to his commitment to fiscal success, but to *how* he would achieve this success, as it partially answered a crucial marketing question: what *kind* of artist would he be?

The leveraging of an artistic persona has been a promotional strategy employed by Western artists since at least the Renaissance. However, as Sarah Burns has

highlighted, self-fashioning took on a new imperative in the fin-de-siècle art world, due in large part to broader commodification of the artwork and a burgeoning mass media that “played an increasingly dynamic role in representing the modern artist in the public realm.”¹⁸⁵ Consequently, Burns contends: “At the turn of the century, the identification of producer with product became complete, and consideration of personality was almost inseparable from appreciation of the artist’s work.”¹⁸⁶ As “artist” like “gender” “was an unstable category, continually contested, appropriated and reshaped,” no specific “personality” guaranteed the limelight.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the artist’s lifestyle was now a second, no-less-crucial frame of his or her work, as well as a beacon to specific clients. Thus, Sorolla’s marriage to Clotilde and the family he would start was not just a doubling-down on his financial goals, but partially the means by which he might achieve them. Through it, he shed his bachelor, student identity and assumed the posture of the professional, family-oriented, artist he hoped to become.

It would be impossible to fully rationalize Sorolla’s choice to embody the enterprising, bourgeois artist-patriarch instead of infinite other personas. But we can point to the model he had in his father-in-law, Antonio García. Don Antonio was a family man and a widely-respected photographer whose work furnished an upper-middle-class

¹⁸⁵ Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 2.

While Burns’s book focuses on Gilded-Age America, the same, general trend can be assumed to have manifested in Spain, which was equally undergoing transformations in media technology and the bourgeois sphere—albeit at a slightly less break-neck pace.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

lifestyle for himself and his loved ones. Sorolla began working in García's studio as a photo-retoucher during his student days at *San Carlos*, and held on to the position until his departure for Italy, as he and the elder were fond of each other. We might also consider larger changes in nineteenth-century "social conventions" of "what it [was] to be an artist" that made it newly possible for Sorolla's familial inclinations to be a strategic part of his painter's identity.¹⁸⁸ History is, of course, filled with artists—from Vermeer to Pissarro—who married and had families. And yet, as Burns points out, it wasn't until the appearance of the "corporatized," "professionalized" artist—itself a reaction to Romantic-era notions of the artist as impoverished, bohemian recluse—that a wife and children could be imagined as trappings of a certain kind of creative individual.¹⁸⁹ The forces behind the emergence of the "successful, refined, artistic gentleman" at the turn of the century are complex, and so well-detailed by Burns, that it seems unconstructive to delve into them here. The larger point is that this new "type"—which Sorolla closely matched—"rejected anything more than cosmetic eccentricity, and sought to construct an image of competence, discipline, social skill, organization and managerial acumen."¹⁹⁰ Put differently, the corporatized, gentleman-artist addressed the bourgeois sphere not with the aim to provoke, but rather, to reassure: "I am like you—my business just happens to be painting." Accordingly, if a "natural" result of male, commercial prosperity

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 19.

¹⁸⁹ See pages 26-40 of *Inventing the Modern Artist*.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 23.

was the establishment of a family, it followed the successful, professional artist would start one too.

Having discussed the significance of Sorolla's marriage to his articulation of a marketable, artistic identity, we can return to its immediate effect on the portion of his brief devoted to financial solvency. As previously mentioned, forging a family with Clotilde no doubt intensified the painter's need to resolve his rejection in the Spanish picture-*troc*. While Sorolla considered his time in the Spanish Colony a disaster with regards to this goal, three things happened in Italy that, from the historian's perspective, precipitated a path forward—including a fortuitous friendship, a trip to Paris and the support of a critic.

Sorolla met his life-long friend Pedro Gil de Moreno Mora in 1885 during his first year in Rome. Gil came from a family of bankers, was an entrepreneur, and dabbled in painting himself. He split his time between Paris and Italy, participating in the high society of both, while also “[mingling] with great masters” and “[taking] several artists under his wing.”¹⁹¹ Sorolla was one such neophyte whose artistic sensibilities resonated with Gil's own. That same year, the two traveled together to Paris.

Gil proposed the trip to introduce his friend to an artistic milieu beyond Spain and the Italian tradition. His instinct was correct, as, in the words of Aureliano de Breuete (another painter-peer of Sorolla's) in France, “[the artist] opened his eyes for the first time to the movement that had then begun in modern painting.”¹⁹² This movement was

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 14.

¹⁹² Ibid.

Naturalism, with its Impressionist and Realist sub-schools. While the former was just beginning to gain acceptance among the *salon*-going public, the later had fully transformed from the scandal of Courbet into a popular, new genre: “infused... with social pretenses... often prone to sentimentalism and melodrama.”¹⁹³ ¹⁹⁴ In Paris, painters could be seen in parks, omnibuses and cafes, producing the kinds of “sketches from life” that had so displeased Sorolla’s academic sponsors. Gil advised his friend to remain in France, though as we know, the artist ultimately returned to Rome to complete his scholarship.¹⁹⁵

According to Pons Sorolla, her great grandfather “later regretted this decision, especially following the fiasco of his *Burial of Christ*.”¹⁹⁶ Yet even the disappointment of the 1887 *exposición* had a silver lining. Though Sorolla was lampooned by most of Madrid’s critics, he found a champion in prominent novelist/journalist Benito Pérez Galdós.¹⁹⁷ Galdós’s defense of *Burial* was in fact not the first he had written on behalf of

¹⁹³ Manet’s posthumous, 1884 retrospective—though the artist never considered himself an Impressionist—has been tagged by numerous scholars as a turning point for his cohort’s reception. Others have pointed to the Impressionist’s inclusion in the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889 as a watershed moment of acceptance for the group. (Pons Sorolla, *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 228)

¹⁹⁴ Pérez Rojas, *Los Sorolla de València*, 41.

¹⁹⁵ Pons Sorolla and López Fernández, *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 14.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Galdós, who lived from 1843 to 1920, was a leading literary figure in nineteenth-century Spain, who many scholars believe ranks second in repute only to Cervantes. He is often compared to Dickens, Balzac or Tolstoy, devoted as he was to the Realist novel, which, taking cues from Zola and Taine, strove to show how characters were products of their environment. Galdós began his writing career as a journalist for *La Nación*, and was

the young Valencian. During the *exposición* of 1884, while others praised *The Second of May*, the journalist singled out a different entry of Sorolla's, writing: "*The Second of May*... and above all the *Head of An Old Man*, announce an excellent artist."¹⁹⁸ As Alan E. Smith has noted, by commending the contemporary life study over the historical scene, Galdós "indicated to young painters the path of the future: that which represents the reality in front of their eyes."¹⁹⁹ The novelist's preference is not surprising, given that as a Realist, this was the rule he followed in his own writing.²⁰⁰

Beyond his brief approbation of *Old Man*, Galdós devoted pages of his 1884 exposition review to attacking current, academic tastes. The competitions were "besieged," he complained, by "chainmail armor, velvet dalmaticas, ermine coats,

the editor-in-chief of *La Revista de España* when he published his first book. He was also active in politics. In 1907, as a Republican deputy, he organized a coalition of anti-monarchical groups. However, he eventually became disillusioned with his political peers, who he felt prioritized personal power over real conviction to change. This led him to renounce his anti-monarchist position in an audience with Alfonso XIII in 1916. (Wikipedia contributors, "Benito Pérez Galdós," *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Benito_P%C3%A9rez_Gald%C3%B3s&oldid=824929850 (accessed February 13, 2018))

¹⁹⁸ "*El Dos de Mayo* de Sorolla y sobre todo la *Cabeza de Viejo* anuncian un excelente artista." (Smith, "Galdós y Sorolla: Encuentros en el Camino," *Naturalismo y la Vida Moderna*, 94)

¹⁹⁹ "Smith writes: "Galdós ha hecho una espléndida labor de crítico: ha indicado a los jóvenes pintores cuál ha de ser la senda del futuro: la que representa la realidad que tienen delante de los ojos." (Ibid, 94)

²⁰⁰ For more on Galdós and the Realist literary movement see: Smith, "Galdós y Sorolla: Encuentros en el Camino," *Naturalismo y la Vida Moderna*.

garments embroidered in gold and silver, and defunct dress-coats of the Goya era.”²⁰¹ He called this preoccupation with the past a “mania” and urged artists to realize that: “Just as all nature is beautiful, all historical eras are equally picturesque, and ours... is no less than the previous.”²⁰² To prove that an eye for the contemporary was a defining quality of great artists across the ages, he claimed: “Rembrandt, crucif[ied] Christ among the Jews of Amsterdam; Van Dick [sic] ha[d] him seized by Flemish soldiers; Velázquez plac[ed] Vulcan’s forge in the smithies of Madrid...”²⁰³ Similarly, what the journalist praised two years later in *Burial* was its eschewal of period detail. While for Fernanflor, the reduction of biblical figures and costuming to shadowy silhouettes allowed nature to eclipse the story, Galdós appreciated Sorolla’s creation of *gravitas* without theatrics: “The worthiest of admiration in this work is the general melancholic tone, the sad atmosphere that envelopes it, the sinister toughness of the landscape; its figures are

²⁰¹ “La pintura de género, que es la que más se acomoda a las tendencias del género moderno, no merece aún de nuestros artistas una preferencia absoluta, y es probable que por mucho tiempo sigamos asediados por las cotas de malla, las dalmáticas de terciopelo, las ropillas, los mantos de armiño, las vestiduras recamadas de oro y plata y por los ya desacreditados casacones de la época goyesca...” (Smith, “Galdós y Sorolla: Encuentros en el Camino,” *Naturalismo y la Vida Moderna*, 93)

²⁰² “[Nuestros artistas viven] tocados de una manía o preocupación cuyo origen debe buscarse en ciertas rutinas de pensamiento muy arraigadas entre nosotros. Para combatir esta preocupación, no nos cansamos de repetirles un día y otro: ‘Así como toda la naturaleza es bella, todas las épocas de la historia son igualmente pintorescas, y la nuestra... no lo es menos que las anteriores.’” (Smith, “Galdós y Sorolla: Encuentros en el Camino,” *Naturalismo y la Vida Moderna*, 93)

²⁰³ “Y da tres ejemplos: Rembrandt crucificando a Cristo entre los judíos de Ámsterdam; Van Dick [sic], haciéndole prender por soldados flamencos; Velázquez, poniendo en las fraguas de Vulcano a los herreros de Madrid [...]” (Smith, “Galdós y Sorolla: Encuentros en el Camino,” *Naturalismo y la Vida Moderna*, 93)

painted with a sobriety that is perhaps excessive.”²⁰⁴ All in all, the novelist perceived a “marked Realist accent” in the painter’s treatment of “one of the oldest topics in art.”²⁰⁵

Sorolla and Galdós would eventually become friends, though exactly when is unclear. The former painted the latter’s portrait in 1894, but it is likely that they met sooner, when the Sorollas relocated to Madrid in 1890. That year, the artist exhibited *Paris Boulevard* (1890)—a large-scale work based on studies made during his trip to the French capital—at the National Exhibition of Fine Arts. There, he befriended Aureliano de Beruete, a landscapist, Regenerationist, and one of the founding members of the ILE along with Giner and Azácrate. If Sorolla’s Krausist peers from the University of València were not the ones to put him in touch with Galdós, then it was probably Beruete, who “[introduced] [the painter] as a portraitist to the nobility and haute bourgeoisie of Madrid” to which he and the novelist belonged.²⁰⁶ While Sorolla would not meet his epistolary champion until at least three years after the 1887 presentation of *Burial*, he must have been aware of his review, given that it was a singular, encouraging voice amid a chorus of negativity.

²⁰⁴ Lo más digno de admirar en esta obra es el tono general de melancolía, la atmósfera de tristeza que lo envuelve, la adustez siniestra del paisaje; sus figuras están pintadas con sobriedad quizás excesiva.” (Smith, “Galdós y Sorolla: Encuentros en el Camino,” *Naturalismo y la Vida Moderna*, 95)

²⁰⁵ “*El Entierro de Cristo*, de Sorolla, es una interpretación originalísima y con marcado acento realista de uno de los asuntos más antiguos que en el arte existen...” (Smith, “Galdós y Sorolla: Encuentros en el Camino,” *Naturalismo y la Vida Moderna*, 95)

²⁰⁶ Pons Sorolla and López Fernández, *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 15.

Some artists' response to critical maelstrom is to stubbornly weather it. But Sorolla's pressing desire for financial success compelled him, once again, to re-examine his painting and its incompatibility with the Spanish picture *troc*. His time in France, and Galdós's writing (inspired, as it was, by the work of Émile Zola), pointed to a possible solution: aim beyond the peninsula. In Spain, the Academy's devotion to historical canvases was dying hard. Throughout the rest of Europe, however, eyes were fixed on Paris, where Realism was already a full-blown literary and artistic trend, and scenes of quotidian, middle-class existence were becoming acceptable, *salon* subject matter due to the activity of the Impressionists. These two "modern," Naturalist movements were compatible with the type of rapid, *plein air* painting that had long constituted a non-negotiable part of Sorolla's brief. Thus, as Pons Sorolla relays: "During [his] first ten years living in the Spanish capital... [the painter] entered works for all the major art exhibitions... both French and foreign."²⁰⁷

The aforementioned *Paris Boulevard*—created and exhibited the year Sorolla and Clotilde moved to Madrid—testifies to the artist's new focus on the French and "international" art circuits.²⁰⁸ As the title suggests, the painter altered his subject matter a third time, portraying an everyday, cosmopolitan scene he no doubt believed would have maximum appeal with audiences and juries outside of Spain. And yet, the fact that Sorolla initially showed the work in the *Exposición Nacional* complicates his

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Per Pons Sorolla, *Paris Boulevard* "was acquired in 1890 by Dr. Rafael Cervera, but its current location is unknown." (Ibid., 45, note #12)

commitment to success abroad. Indeed, though the artist would monitor and adapt to “global” trends for another two decades, he never ceased to show in his own country while cultivating his reputation beyond. After all, there was Galdós, Giner, Gil and more progressives like them, dedicated to regeneration through Europeanization. Together they formed an affluent submarket of the Spanish art *troc*, with an appreciation for “modern” developments to the North, including, as we’ve seen, those in the arts. The fact that *Paris Boulevard* was awarded a second-class medal in the Madrid exhibition additionally demands nuancing of Sorolla’s reception by the *Real Academia* in the last decade of the Nineteenth Century. While the painter was busy broadening his ambitions beyond his home country, Pérez Rojas has observed that the Spanish state’s singular admiration for historical subjects was beginning to shift too.²⁰⁹

Pons Sorolla has detailed that between 1890-1900—the first decade of Sorolla’s international *sortie*—“the number of prizes...would be enormous.”²¹⁰ How did this work? As the reader will by now have predicted, the artist’s flexibility with regards to *what* he would paint proved advantageous. Scholars acknowledge that in his first years on the “global” scene, Sorolla “often [chose] paintings on subjects that were in vogue at the time.”²¹¹ Through frequent trips to Paris (made possible due to the same convenient, new modes of transport that brought U.S. tourists to Madrid) the artist sought inspiration and

²⁰⁹ “By the end of the 80s the historical genre started to decline in the national exhibitions.” (Pérez Rojas, *Los Sorolla de València*, 41)

²¹⁰ Pons Sorolla and López Fernández, *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 15.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

determined his next projects.²¹² Indeed, from 1895-1909, Sorolla visited the City of Lights fourteen times—an average of once per year.²¹³ Pedro Gil was also invaluable. A full-time resident of the French capital, he reported on shows, trends and news of interest. He also received shipments and oversaw the hanging of his friend's works at each *salon*. Perhaps most importantly, he was the painter's secret ear to the opinions of the Parisian haute bourgeoisie—the crowd that not only frequented, but made purchases based on the annual exhibitions.²¹⁴ Over time, as Pons Sorolla has explained: “Gil [became], in practice, Sorolla's dealer in Paris, though he was not motivated by financial gain.”²¹⁵

The artist's first international submissions did not feature scenes of middle-class, urban life like *Paris Boulevard*. After a visit to France in 1891, and perhaps some sage advice from Gil, Sorolla evidently determined that pictures with “social themes” would be best received. Scholars have confirmed that Social Realism was a “prevalent genre” in the official, artistic circles of Paris—even Madrid—by the close of the Nineteenth Century.²¹⁶ While the reasons why are beyond the scope of this thesis, Sorolla's thematic intuition paid off. Between 1892-1900, paintings like *Otra Margarita* (1892), *Kissing the*

²¹² Ibid, 49.

²¹³ This statistic is derived from counting the artist's trips to Paris noted in the timeline at the back of *Sorolla and the Paris Years*.

²¹⁴ Per Pons Sorolla, Gil: “conveyed to Sorolla his impressions—always sincere and apt—and reported any comments he heard about [his pictures].” (Ibid, 15)

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 16.

Relic (1893), *White Slave Trade* (1895) and *Sad Inheritance!* won him the prizes, press and official recognition he sought in exhibitions from Munich, Chicago, Venice and Vienna to, of course, Paris.

Historians considering the entirety of the painter's career have tended to describe his social-realist phase as a “dabbling,” or “foray,” undertaken—his great granddaughter goes as far as to say—“with the sole aim of securing prizes in the major competitions of the day.”²¹⁷ Yet how Sorolla produced some of the fin-de-siècle, Western art world's most valued visualizations of social critique, especially considering his preference for technique over narrative, is a significant question that a future scholar will hopefully address. I will merely suggest that once more, Sorolla's relaxed relation to subject matter, his liberal peers, and the portion of his brief committed to *plein air* all played a role.

To begin with the first two observations, it is clear, as previously stated, that Sorolla did not paint with conscious, political ends. His work before the 1890s was not concerned with social questions, and after clinching the Paris *Grand Prix* with *Sad Inheritance!* at the turn of the century, he abandoned social-realist painting. And yet many of his progressive, intellectual friends thought and wrote frequently not just about the bourgeois imperative to shepherd the country into modernity, but also, about the vulnerability of the poor to progress's dark side.²¹⁸ The artist's peers then, more than

²¹⁷ All quotes from *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ As Pérez Rojas explains: “Major cities in Spain experienced unbalanced development during the Bourbon Restoration, and migratory movements... unleashed all kinds of social evils. Layers of uprooted and poor people grew up considerably around Madrid, Barcelona, València, Bilbao...” (Pérez Rojas, *Los Sorolla de València*, 49)

likely encouraged his attempts at social commentary, and furnished him with a wealth of ideas he was happy to accept. Pérez Rojas has written that “well-read friends,” like Galdós or Giner, “might have provided him with literary materials such as the works of Zola, Flaubert and Maupassant.”²¹⁹ Francisco Pons Sorolla suggests that Dr. Simarro (of *An Investigation*) may have, contrary to Sorolla’s testimony, proposed the image of differently-abled children out for a medicinal bath.²²⁰ But the soundest evidence is the painter’s relationship with Blasco Ibáñez, a friend since childhood. The latter wrote Sorolla into the 1923 preface of his novel *Flor de Mayo* (1895), where the reader finds the artist “magically reproducing on his canvases the gold of the light, the invisible color of the air, the palpitating blue of the Mediterranean...”²²¹ But as E. Michael Gerli has demonstrated, Blasco Ibáñez did more than pay homage to the painter in a later edition, but rather, specifically crafted passages of the book to achieve “the diaphanous quality of Impressionist art...”²²² As for Sorolla, scholars have discussed the parallels between his *And They Say Fish is Expensive* (1894) and scenes from *Flor*, concluding that artist and novelist probably developed the theme together.²²³

²¹⁹ Ibid, 48.

²²⁰ Pons Sorolla, Francisco, “Sorolla: his Painting and Family,” *The Painter Joaquín Sorolla*, 31.

²²¹ “Reproduciendo magicamente sobre sus lienzos el oro de la luz, el color invisible del aire, el azul palpitante del Medeterraneo.” (Gerli, Michael E., “Blasco Ibáñez’s *Flor de Mayo*, Sorolla, and Impressionism,” *Iberomania* No. 1, 1974)

²²² Ibid, 126.

²²³ Gerli explains: “...the concordance between novel and canvas seems to go beyond the realm of chance artistic likeness, for the dates of both coincide almost perfectly: 1895 and

Sorolla clearly did not wish to devote his long-term artistic practice to Social Realism. Yet in the 1890s, the genre was arguably the best available synthesis of the two fixed aspects of his brief. After all, such subject matter was popular and profitable.²²⁴ It also saved the artist from the periodization, characterization and narrative that made history painting a chore and a challenge. By definition, the social-realist picture relates to contemporary life.²²⁵ Paintings like *Otra Margartia*, *White Slave Trade* and *Sad Inheritance!* were not rendered in one sitting, yet they allowed Sorolla to do what he liked best: set up a palette at the beach or in a train car and make rapid, oil sketches of the scene around him.²²⁶ Because the figures in such works are anonymous representatives of Spain's impoverished and/or vulnerable populations, the artist has no obligation to channel a distinct, known personality as in a literary, mythical or biblical canvas. In fact,

1894 respectively. Bernardino Pantorba... points out that Sorolla began to paint his marine motifs in València during the summer of 1894, and it is commonly known that Blasco in early years frequented the beach in summer and later wrote a number of his novels there. It is highly possible, therefore, that these close friends, novelist and painter, simultaneously discussed and influenced each other's work." (Ibid, 124)

²²⁴ Charles Nagel Sr., for example, paid \$1,800 to purchase *Otra Margarita* following its exposition and medaling at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

²²⁵ Social Realism is defined as the "term used to refer to the work of [artists] who draw attention to the everyday conditions of the working classes and the poor, and who are critical of the social structures that maintain these conditions." (Todd, "Social Realism," *Grove Art Online*)

²²⁶ Pons Sorolla quotes two 1904 interviews between Sorolla and Leonard Williams where the artist claims he painted *Otra Margarita* in El Grao, València, "on the third-class railway carriage which appears in the canvas" and *Sad Inheritance!* after "securing from the hospital authorities permission to work upon the spot and...besides the water's edge, produce my picture." (Pons Sorolla, "Sorolla and America Before 1909," *Sorolla and America*, 118-19)

the subjects' metonymic relation to a specific social "group" actually justifies that seemingly unimportant elements (such as a cloth-bundle suitcase, third-class carriage, or the contrast between pale, bluish skin and bright, seaside light) are given pride of place in the image in order to inflect the nameless figures with meaning. Lastly, Pérez Rojas has aptly discerned that in Sorolla's social-realist paintings, "the title is an obliged reference to identify the scene."²²⁷ This is true of *White Slave Trade* (**fig 13**), where three trafficked women could just as easily be snoozing away their journey under the watchful eye of grandma. Yet even *Sad Inheritance!* and *Otra Margarita* (**fig 14**) would be ambiguous if unnamed. This underscores that what the artist really did when creating "socially-critical" works, is paint a scene from daily life, and then attach a provocative title. Or, to again invoke Pérez Rojas: "In Sorolla, the painter carries more weight than the thesis he tries to maintain."²²⁸ Sorolla himself was frank about this. When asked by a Spanish social activist: "Maestro, you who have had such a brilliant success with works on social themes, will you please tell me what you think about them?," he is said to have replied "explosively": "My friend, I just paint the pictures—other people do the explaining!"²²⁹ Further along in his career, the artist remembered *Otra Margarita* to the *St. Louis Star* not as a painting about infanticide, but rather, "as his first attempt to paint sunshine."²³⁰

²²⁷ Pérez Rojas, *Los Sorolla de València*, 49.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Pons Sorolla, Francisco, "Sorolla: his Painting and Family," *The Painter Joaquín Sorolla*, 31. (Translation Pons Sorolla's)

²³⁰ Muller, "Sorolla and America," *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 12.

From 1891-94, Sorolla continued making and collecting prizes for “socially-conscious” scenes, until the creation of *Return from Fishing* (1894, **fig 15**) signaled what scholars see as a turning point in his artistic project. To begin, Sorolla himself stated that, while painting *Return*, he was “shown the ideal [he] was pursuing in all its amplitude.”²³¹ The picture was also the first marinescape the artist submitted to a major competition since *Seascape, Ships in the Port*. Whatsmore, works produced after *Return* do begin to fall more and more in line, thematically and stylistically, with the portion of the painter’s oeuvre now designated as his “mature” (and most characteristic) phase. I do not dispute the canvas’s import in Sorolla’s chronology. But whereas most have taken the artist’s word that *Return* marked the sudden discovery of his painterly ideal, I argue, as I have throughout this chapter, that this “ideal” (in other words, his brief) existed all along. The work’s true significance then, is the way in which its success allowed the painter to slowly abandon social-realist themes for subject matter that fully foregrounded his interest in light, atmosphere and *plein air* technique.

Sorolla created *Return from Fishing* specifically for the 1895 Paris exposition, after visiting the city a year earlier. At that time, he and Gil inspected the *Salon* of the Society of French Artists, the *Salon* of the National Society of Fine Arts, the Louvre and the *Musée du Luxembourg*. What they saw is unknown, but their research convinced Sorolla to return to the beach.²³² As Pons Sorolla notes, the artist had previously

²³¹ Pons Sorolla, “Seas and Beaches in the American Exhibitions of 1909 and 1911,” *Sorolla and America*, 152.

²³² Pons Sorolla, *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 16 and 229.

exhibited and sold works such as *The Happy Day* (1891) and *The Nets* (1893), in which the ocean is seen through the doorframe of a fisherman's hut, and beyond the courtyard of a beach house, respectively.²³³ One glance at *Return From Fishing* however, reveals its new direction, as the sea, wind and sunshine are not confined to the background, but are equal protagonists with the fishermen and oxen who haul a boat towards the shore in knee-deep water.

Despite the change embodied in *Return*, the painter was cautious. He paired the entry with *White Slave Trade*, an example of the social-realist canvases he was known for. Indeed, in its serene glorification of labor, *Return* could be said to possess tenuous social undertones. Perhaps it was this combination of the expected and novel that appealed to the jury, who awarded the picture a second-class medal—Sorolla's first in France. With his win as reassurance, the artist continued developing his beach scenes. Indeed, the seashore features in every painting with which he swept the *Grand Prix* at the *Exposition Universelle* five years later.²³⁴ However, as the submission and special praise for *Sad Inheritance!* indicates, Sorolla's retreat from Social Realism was not immediate following *Return*. And though the heart-breaking image in 1900 was the painter's last overtly-critical canvas, he continued to exhibit genre scenes (increasingly set along the

²³³ Pons Sorolla, "Seas and Beaches in the American Exhibitions of 1909 and 1911," *Sorolla and America*, 152.

²³⁴ "Sorolla was awarded the *Grand Prix* for the quality of the group of works" that included: *Sewing the Sail*, *Eating on the Boat*, *The Bath (Sea Breeze)*, *El Algarrobo: Javea* and *La Caleta, Javea*. *Sad Inheritance!* was singled out as the best among these. (Pon Sorolla, *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 23)

coast) for the next five years. It wasn't until 1905, during his third summer residence in Javea, that Sorolla completely paired down his marine canvases to the works he is most known for today, namely, his landscapes and women and children who relax or frolic amid the ocean elements.²³⁵

In addition to initiating a change in subject matter, *Return from Fishing* also marked a technical shift for the artist, as his paintings from 1894 onward became increasingly Impressionistic. This did not miss the notice of his contemporaries, as Pons Sorolla's paraphrasing of Catalan critic Rafael Domenech demonstrates. According to the former, the latter observed in *Sorolla: Su Vida y su Arte* (1910) that:

...before 1894, form appears to be the overriding concern, from this date forward [Sorolla] realized that things reach the eyes not in their own perfectly defined form, but in a form that is altered by the atmosphere and the luminosity in which they have been immersed. His struggle from this moment on would consist in reconciling form with light broken down into incessant colorations.²³⁶

Whether the painter was really struck by profound realization, or more likely, his engagement with Paris was starting to outweigh his stint with the Spanish Colony, it is true that his works from the latter half of the 1890s forward betray looser, more obvious brushwork, stripped-down palettes and achievement of tonal gradation through independent strokes of color rather than blended pigments. Even earlier than Domenech, in 1906, French critic Camille Mauclair commented that Sorolla's pictures exhibited "the

²³⁵ Per Pons Sorolla: "While his prestige at major exhibitions grew, Sorolla embarked on a period of creativity in which the sea became his favorite subject... The seaside paintings... reached their zenith in the series painted in Javea in 1905, where the focus is on the changing fluidity of the water and heightened contrasts of colors." (Ibid, 10)

²³⁶ Ibid, 17.

most surprising marvels of Impressionist observation.”²³⁷ But it was Beruete, in 1901, who articulated perhaps the most nuanced understanding of his friend’s relationship to the movement, saying: “Sorolla soon saw... the good and truth there is in Impressionism... and immediately assimilated it.”²³⁸ The artist himself never admitted this much—and in a way this makes sense, when we consider that his brief to capture the fleeting conditions of a given place existed long before his immersion in the French scene. Sorolla instead held that “all inspired painters are impressionists.”²³⁹ Denying any interest in the group, he called Renoir and his comrades “crazy” and a “plague of idlers.”²⁴⁰ In an 1894 letter to Gil, he stated he was “shutting [his] eyes and ears to everything related to Impressionism and Pointillism,” adding, “how lucky we [Spaniards] are to be free of that plague of drones.”²⁴¹ Issues of stylistic authorship aside, Impressionism proper had a rebellious reputation that did not jibe well with the painter’s professional, paternal persona.

In 1899, five years after the success of *Return*, and a year before his *Grand Prix* sweep, Sorolla told a Spanish reporter: “Today, mercantilism rules [and] the painter

²³⁷ López Fernández, “The Makings of an International Artist: Sorolla and the Painters in Paris,” *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 65.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

²³⁹ Muller, *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 22-23.

²⁴⁰ López Fernández, “The Makings of an International Artist: Sorolla and the Painters in Paris,” *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 65.

²⁴¹ Reyero, “Sorolla and the International Painting of his Day,” *Sorolla: 1863-1923*, 162.

cannot follow his inclination, but [instead must follow] those imposed by the market. He has to fool the public, and the buyer, and trick the jury.”²⁴² This assertion that the artist “cannot follow his inclination” offers a final piece of evidence for my own reading of Sorolla’s changing subject matter as a series of concessions in pursuit of recognition, rather than experiments born of natural curiosity. When it comes to the “what” of the painter’s oeuvre then, it does appear that in the first half of his career, he was, as he relayed, imposed upon by the market—unable to paint what he wanted. (Though this imposition was of course, conditioned by another freely-made choice—to make money painting.) And yet, as we’ve seen, Sorolla yielded to subject-matter trends precisely in order to continue painting in the luminist manner that pleased him. He seems to subconsciously acknowledge this when he adds that buyers and audiences must be “fool[ed]” and “trick[ed]” rather than simply obeyed.

The painter made this statement as he neared the midpoint of his time as a professional artist. Given what we know about his transformation from Academy student to international award-winner, we can understand how at that moment, his oeuvre may have felt like one of calculation and subterfuge, of “fool[ing]” and “trick[s].” Yet there is every indication that once Sorolla began painting his marine scenes, he was following his artistic inclinations without compromise or concealment. After all, the painter himself had called *Return* the first canvas to embody his “ideal.” Furthermore, he never retired his sea-shore themes, despite taking on new subject matter like portraiture, and the

²⁴² V. Gutiérrez Barón, “Sorolla y las Exposiciones Nacionales de Bellas Artes” as quoted in Muller, *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 33. (Brackets are Muller’s)

ethnographic *Provinces of Spain* cycle at the Hispanic Society of America. Why would he desert the beach? Capturing its views and inhabitants allowed Sorolla to drop all pretense of narrative, work outdoors in the environment he loved as an art student, and focus on rapid brushstroke and atmospheric conditions. His own words corroborate this last point, especially:

It would be impossible for me to paint slowly in the open air... The sea curls up at every instant; the cloud is deformed as it changes place... that boy leaps... but even if everything were petrified and fixed, it would be enough for the sun to move, as it does continually, to give things a different appearance... Painting has to be fast, because so much is lost, fleeting, never to be found again.²⁴³

Sorolla's ocean-side images were popular on the international art scene (they could not have remained his "ideal" if they were not) and constituted a significant aspect of the ten, one-man shows the artist would mount in the eleven years after 1900.²⁴⁴ His first exhibition, at *Galerie Georges Petit* in Paris, is worth discussing, as its success established a model the painter would follow in subsequent presentations—including on the East Coast in 1909.

The *Sorolla Bastida Exhibition* was organized by Sorolla and Gil at the showroom at 8 *Rue de Séze*. *Georges Petit* was one of the most prestigious galleries in the city, attracting what one fin-de-siècle, Spanish ex-pat described as "tout Paris," or, "what is

²⁴³ Pantorba, *La Vida y la Obra de Joaquín Sorolla*, as quoted by Pons Sorolla, "Seas and Beaches in the American Exhibitions of 1909 and 1911," *Sorolla and America*, 153.

²⁴⁴ Sorolla's solo shows were as follows: Paris, 1906; Berlin, Dusseldorf and Cologne, 1907; London, 1908; New York, Buffalo and Boston, 1909; Chicago and Saint Louis in 1911. The artist also participated in group show in Santiago de Chile and Mexico City in 1910.

known today as all the aristocracies of blood, money, industry, politics and talent.”²⁴⁵

Petit was a rival of Durand-Ruel in the sale of Impressionist works. Between 1889-1897, he hosted retrospectives for Monet and Rodin, Renoir, Pissarro and Sisley that were instrumental to establishing popular enthusiasm for their painting.²⁴⁶ Sorolla’s pictures thus meshed well with the space’s previous, artistic program.

Petit “had a taste for ostentatious luxury” that Sorolla and Gil perhaps endeavored to match more than any artist before.²⁴⁷ The show featured 497 works, “cram[ming]” the gallery’s three rooms.²⁴⁸ Never had one painter occupied so much of the space.²⁴⁹ Following his father, François’s, precedent, Georges strove to make his openings “splendid social occasions.”²⁵⁰ The size of Sorolla’s exhibition resonated with this strategy; it was as if the artist aimed for the spectacle of an Academy competition, all on his own. Spectacle was, in fact, the result, as Pons Sorolla notes: “Parisian visitors enthused about the dazzling impression made.”²⁵¹ Critic Leopold Honoré dubbed the show: “an exhibition which, more than an event, is a triumph that is applauded

²⁴⁵ José Gaya as quoted by Pons Sorolla in *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 34.

²⁴⁶ Whiteley, “Petit family,” *Grove Art Online*.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Pons Sorolla, *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 34.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ Whiteley, “Petit family,” *Grove Art Online*.

²⁵¹ Pons Sorolla, *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 34.

unreservedly,” suggesting a sense of immersion and entertainment beyond that of the *salon* and closer to that of the theater.²⁵² How Sorolla’s paintings prompted this sense of absorption, when the shipping inventory describes 300 of the 497 images as “sketches,” will be considered in Chapter Two.²⁵³ For now, I will note that whereas international exhibitions necessitated submission of a handful of highly-finished, iconic works, the artist’s solo shows demonstrated his full range, allowing for a variety of subjects rendered both formally and experimentally.

The presentation at *Georges Petit* was a critical and commercial success among the French.²⁵⁴ In Spain—where the artist had been heroized by the press since receiving the gold medal for *Return* in 1895—coverage of the first one-man exhibition continued the narrative of art as national conquest.²⁵⁵ Four more shows were organized over the next two years: in Berlin, Dusseldorf and Cologne in 1907, and London in 1908. It was after the latter, as previously mentioned, that Huntington was inspired to stage the first Sorolla exhibition in the U.S.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ See footnote #134 in this chapter, Ibid.

²⁵⁴ A total of 65 works were acquired for the sum of 230,650 francs. (Ibid, 35)

²⁵⁵ After his 1895 win, *El Heraldo de Madrid* reported: “No one who does not live here [Paris] can imagine what Señor Sorolla’s triumph means. It is a bigger thing than victories at Manigua, Midanao or Melila!... The Spanish flag has advanced through the midst of thousands of French and foreign painters, and now it occupies the Luxembourg fortress by right of conquest!” (Pons Sorolla and López Fernández, *Sorolla and the Paris Years*, 17). Similarly, the artist’s 1906 success was reported in Spain: “Veni, vidi, vinci... The whole of Paris has come to see his 497 compositions....” (Ibid, 37)

²⁵⁶ Coddington, *Sorolla and America*, 57.

It is clear why the millionaire's invitation appealed to the painter. In the first decade of the new century, Sorolla was expanding his reputation (and sales) beyond the context of the national-exhibition circuit. His numerous solo shows comprised a sort of tour of the major industrial centers of the Western art world—a tour that would not have been complete without the U.S. The country's economy had been booming since the early-Nineteenth Century, amplifying its geopolitical influence. Wealthy "elites" desired to demonstrate this new, central position on the world stage was not solely based on mercantile and military superiority, but on appreciation and production of culture. Thus, "rich Americans spent more money on art during the thirty years from 1880 to 1910 than had ever been spent by a similar group in the world's history."²⁵⁷ This included both "Old Master" paintings, and contemporary greats such as Degas, Monet and the members of the Barbizon school.²⁵⁸ As late as the 1830s, major metropolitan centers like New York and Chicago had been unable to sustain the country's earliest curators and gallerists.²⁵⁹ By midcentury, however, museums, exhibition spaces, art clubs and periodicals mushroomed.²⁶⁰

It is also evident why Huntington—a key player in the turn-of-the-century, U.S. "culture craze"—would desire Sorolla for his museum's first, contemporary art

²⁵⁷ Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, as quoted by Domenech in "Sorolla and America: Critical Fortune," *Sorolla and America*, 283.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Lynes, *The Tastemakers*, 13.

²⁶⁰ Domenech, "Sorolla and America: Critical Fortune," *Sorolla and America*, 283.

exhibition. He wanted the Hispanic Society to be taken seriously. Many of his countrymen were skeptical that a “dead and gone” country like Spain deserved to be the subject (or object) of a historical institute.²⁶¹ Sorolla had a well-established reputation on the international scene, having been hailed as a “modern master” for more than a decade. He had art in Parisian museums and the love of the Spanish Royal Family. (The latter, as Princess Eulalia’s presence at the 1893 World’s Fair had demonstrated, captivated U.S. industrialists at the same time they denied placing import on such “backward” institutions as monarchy.)²⁶² Finally, as I will detail in the next chapter, Sorolla was well-respected by many of the U.S.’s most beloved, national artists.

All this guaranteed a decent show of bodies and press for the opening of the painter’s first, North-American exhibition. But it does not explain the crowds that persisted a month later, reporters’ rave reviews, nor the overwhelming sales—which tripled those in Paris, even though 141 *fewer* pictures were shown.²⁶³ These reactions necessitate further examination of why the East-Coast, art-going public was so enamored with Sorolla in 1909. Having explored Sorolla’s art in relation to the cultural-historical

²⁶¹ Huntington recalled an 1891 meeting with Morris K. Jesup—head of the American Museum of Natural History, and a family friend—who, “made clear that my place was [at the Natural History Museum] and not in what he indicated was a ‘dead and gone’ civilization, the study of which would bring me small reward or satisfaction.” (As quoted in Mitchel Coddington’s “Archer M. Huntington, Champion of Spain in the United States,” *Spain in America*, 149)

²⁶² For more information on Princess Eulalia’s visit see Boone’s “Marginalizing Spain at the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893,” *Nineteenth Century Studies* 25 (2011): 1-13.

²⁶³ In Paris, Sorolla sold 65 of 497 works; in New York, Buffalo and Boston: 195 of 356.

milieu of Regenerationist Spain, and the painter's own forward-looking perspective, Chapter Two will concern itself directly with his popularity in the fin-de-siècle, U.S. context.

Chapter Two

“Eternal Talk of Sunlight”: Sorolla’s Allure in America

Overview

A line from André Malraux’s *The Voices of Silence* eloquently reaffirms my goal in the second chapter of this thesis: “It is no vain quest seeking to ascertain to what deep craving of man’s nature a work of art responds, and we do well to realize that this craving is not always the same.”²⁶⁴ Indeed, my investigation of Sorolla’s appeal with art-conscious New Yorkers and New Englanders in 1909 is guided by the notion that art that fascinates does so because it satisfies some “deep craving.” In adding, “this craving is not always the same,” Malraux emphasizes that art addresses different needs as times change. Yet for the present writer, his observation also suggests the necessity of determining, as accurately as possible, exactly *who* was judging and loving Sorolla’s work. “Art-going, East Coasters” is a large, nebulous category in need of specification, as from audience to audience, like era to era, the “craving” art assuages “is not always the same.”

After further delineating the painter’s first, North-American viewership, I will assess what those viewers knew about Sorolla and his oeuvre prior to his Hispanic Society debut. I will also briefly consider Huntington’s museum as an exhibition venue. Both asides are necessary, as Sorolla’s prior reputation, and the mission of the fledgling institute, favorably impacted his reception in 1909. However, these two factors were ultimately extrinsic, with the potential to inflect spectators’ encounters with the canvases,

²⁶⁴ Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, 66.

but not to determine or produce them. Accordingly, I will turn to the subject matter and luminist style of the paintings themselves, noting how each supported a host of immediate reasons for the show's popularity—including, but by no means limited to—family values, a “new” image of Spain and a deeply-immersive sense of travel. I believe these immediate reasons are a substantial part of the narrative that turn-of-the-century New Yorkers might have told us about why they appreciated the exhibition—if we had the ability to turn back time and poll them at the exit. They are certainly apparent in the extant writings of the critics. And yet, as I've stated previously, a different narrative can be pieced together by the historian, who enjoys the advantage of retrospect. In this deeper narrative, Sorolla's art enchanted not because of what fin-de-siècle, U.S. visitors saw in it, but because what they saw confirmed and consoled certain beliefs and anxieties related to a Positivist approach to modernity, prevalent nationalist discourse, technology and industrial capitalism.

Part 1: The First U.S. Audience

What types of Americans braved the February cold to take in the painter's 1909 exhibition? I have assumed thus far, given the limitations of geography, that the majority lived on the East Coast where the three shows took place. By the same logic, we can expect that most of them were urbanites: residents of Boston, Buffalo or New York City. As more than half the canvases displayed were sold—and many more were commissioned—a significant portion of viewers clearly hailed from Gilded-Age America's “elite” sphere, or what Thorstein Veblen termed the “leisure class.” For these

old-money clans or newly-wealthy families, “display and ostentation were a highly competitive game,” thinly veiled in pretenses of culture, decorum and philanthropy.²⁶⁵ Veblen believed the “leisure class” pursued this game because: “propensity for achievement and... repugnance to futility remain the underlying economic motive.”²⁶⁶ In other words, as Veblen saw it, the amassing of wealth is not about survival, but about lending meaning to existence via continual competition with those of equal- or higher-capital means. Thus, the booming U.S. picture market from 1850-1910 was not just about demonstrating the nation’s cultural sophistication to other countries. Fine art had also become part of the “accredited canon of consumption” through which upper-class individuals “tastefully” flexed their status in a rapidly-expanding, rapidly-stratifying community of peers.²⁶⁷

Yet scholars have noted the “elite” collecting craze paralleled a growing interest in visual art among the U.S. population in general in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. Burns suggests the substantial role of the mass media in driving this interest, with “artists of all kinds” treated as grist for the publicity mill, “served up along with politicians, statesmen, adventurers, socialites, philosophers, scientists and tycoons.”²⁶⁸ Just as the *salons* had made art the business of Habermas’s “bourgeois public sphere” in

²⁶⁵ Lynes, *The Tastemakers*, 132.

²⁶⁶ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 33.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 116.

²⁶⁸ Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 4.

eighteenth-century, Western Europe, nineteenth-century, U.S. news outlets encouraged readers to become vested judges of “good” works. Though at the time, a handful of art periodicals reached a small number of subscribers, “[art features] appeared regularly” in the “true mass magazines” that “attained circulations of a million or more.”²⁶⁹ Burns has calculated that “for the mainstream publications (*Harper’s*, *Munsey’s*, *McClure’s* [...] and others) the audience was largely if not exclusively composed of middle- and upper-class readers...”²⁷⁰ Another sizeable portion of the 160,000 attendees of Sorolla’s show then, did not belong to the industrial-capitalist “elite.” Of more modest, middle-class means, they could not afford to buy a canvas—but they accrued social capital by becoming knowledgeable followers of contemporary, “High Art.”²⁷¹ That this middle-class contingent did more than just read about current exhibitions, but actually *visited* them, can be extrapolated from their strong presence at the Fine Art pavilions of the era’s world’s fairs and expositions. It is also evidenced in the magazines and periodicals they consumed. A correspondent for *The Evening Post*, for example, wrote of the 1909 show: “If the New York public does no take advantage of the exhibition of Sorolla y Bastida’s pictures... it will gain a well-deserved reputation for having no love for really great

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 7.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 6.

²⁷¹ This new compulsion of the middle class to understand and attend to rarified cultural trends, despite inability to fully participate in their economies, is reflected in nineteenth-century critic/collector Jackson Jarves’s statement: “It has become the mode to have taste.” (Lynes, *The Tastemakers*, 37)

art.”²⁷² A day later, a second review from the same periodical urged: “No one who appreciates great painting should miss seeing this exhibition...”²⁷³

Though Sorolla’s U.S. audience was likely majority upper- and middle-class, we can’t discount the possibility—given the record-breaking attendance and work of other historians—that some less-advantaged individuals also took interest. Lynes, for instance, has documented many occasions in the late-Nineteenth Century where working-class viewers showed up in eager masses at exhibitions of contemporary art.²⁷⁴ Huntington created the Hispanic Society as a free museum, and throughout my research, I’ve found no indication that he did not extend this policy to Sorolla’s show. However, the well-attended art presentations Lynes discusses were all enacted as charitable outreach to the urban poor, with neighborhood leaders often serving as “gallery guides” liaising between their communities and the hosting organizations.²⁷⁵ It is possible that this sanctioning of working-class contact with fine art, through the vehicle of specially-designed exhibitions, impacted attendance more than the simple offer of free admission.

²⁷² “Sorolla y Bastida Exhibit,” *The Evening Post* (Feb 4: 1909), *Eight Essays on Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida Vol II*, 136.

²⁷³ “Spain’s Great Painter,” *The Evening Post* (Feb 5: 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 160.

²⁷⁴ See Lynes accounts of: the 1892 University Settlement Society show in New York City, which took place “in rented rooms at the corner of Grand and Allen Streets on the Lower East Side”; the 1892-93 exhibitions in Boston’s North and South End neighborhoods, organized by the Andover House and Women’s College Settlement; or the small collection of Hull House, which circulated among working-class communities in Chicago circa 1895. (Lynes, *The Tastemakers*, 157-59)

²⁷⁵ Lynes, *The Tastemakers*, 157.

Having specified the geographic, economic and social origins of Sorolla's first, U.S. audience, I wish to clarify what these largely upper- and middle-class, East-Coast urbanites knew about the artist and his oeuvre prior to the Hispanic Society show. This is important to dispel the assumption that no American had ever beheld a Sorolla before, merely because the 1909 exhibition was his first in the country. Indeed, the U.S. press, and the painter's networking with American artists and students on the "international" scene, primed viewers to receive his works favorably.

There were only two Sorolla pictures on public display in the U.S. before 1909. The first was the social-realist canvas *Otra Margarita* (**fig 14**), which won an honorary medal at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. Charles Nagel Sr. acquired the painting after its time in Chicago, and immediately donated it to the Kemper Museum at Washington University in Saint Louis.²⁷⁶ *Otra* was also temporarily viewable at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, which borrowed the piece for its opening in 1905.²⁷⁷ The second work, *The Young Amphibians* (1903, **fig 16**), arrived in the country a decade later, when it was purchased at the 1904 Paris *salon* on behalf of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.²⁷⁸ Wealthy, artistically-inclined Americans could easily have seen Sorolla's works at international expositions, or later, at his one-man shows, during their travels abroad. The

²⁷⁶ Nagel bought *Otra Margarita* in 1893 for \$1,800, then gifted it to the Museum of Fine Arts at Washington University in 1894.

²⁷⁷ Colomer, "Charles M. Kurtz and the Sorolla Exhibition in Buffalo," *Sorolla and America: Friends and Patrons*, 156.

²⁷⁸ Pons Sorolla, "Sorolla and America Before 1909," *Sorolla and America*, 119.

less-affluent, conversely, would have had slimmer opportunity to experience the painter's pictures in actuality—and even then, only one image at a time.

Yet U.S. publications covered the drama of the “international” art exhibitions (in which, after all, their own countrymen competed) in articles flush with images. Middle- and working-class readers invested in a knowledge of contemporary art thus could have known Sorolla as a *salon* darling, champion of Spain and winner of prizes. Furthermore, in 1902, Cadwaller Lincoln Washburn (a former pupil of the painter's) published the first, long-form article devoted exclusively to the artist in an American periodical.²⁷⁹ The *Outlook* essay aimed to introduce the man behind the medals, and was tailored (consciously or unconsciously) to U.S. sensibilities. Sorolla was dismayed at what the Spanish public would think of the article's claim that he was “opposed to monarchism” and “despise[d] the superstitiously religious rites still carefully observed in Spain.”²⁸⁰ The piece caused a rift between teacher and pupil, yet Charles M. Kurtz—the next American

²⁷⁹ Boone, “Extending the Artist's Family...” *Sorolla and America*, 97.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

It is possible, given the evolution of the artist's political views as posited by Tusell (see Chapter 1 of this thesis or “Joaquín Sorolla en los ambientes políticos...” in *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society* (1999)) that Washburn's evaluation might not have been pure fantasy. The American “met Sorolla in 1896 while studying with [William Merritt] Chase in Madrid and returned to work with the Spanish painter later in the 1890s” (Boone, “Extending the Artist's Family...” *Sorolla and America*, 96). Thus, he knew Sorolla most intimately at a stage before the coronation of Alfonso XIII and the painter's distancing from his populist friend Blasco Ibáñez. Furthermore, little evidence exists that the artist was a devout Catholic. However, as discussed, by 1909 Sorolla was one of Spain's greatest international celebrities, making it understandable that regardless of the truthfulness of Starkweather's claims, he would have preferred his pupil keep mum about his personal politics.

to write an extended essay on Sorolla for *Scribner's* in 1907—paid him a similar backwards compliment, describing him as: “a man of ideals, of strong decision, indefatigable energy—such energy as one scarcely expects to find in a Spaniard—and of decided individuality.”²⁸¹ These articles—regardless of their veracity and despite the painter’s discomfort—prompted U.S. viewers to understand Sorolla not just as an art star, but as a talent more spiritually akin to themselves than his own countrymen, an “exceptional” Iberian in multiple senses.

Part 2: Sorolla and the American Artistic Community

While the press ostensibly provided the means to “know” the *man*, the general audience of the 1909 show arrived at the Hispanic Society with little-to-no previous, in-person contact with Sorolla’s work. This was especially likely for those who had not traveled to Western Europe.²⁸² However, both the painter and his pictures were well-known in U.S. artistic circles, due primarily to connections forged on the “international”

²⁸¹ Boone, “Extending the Artist’s Family...” *Sorolla and America*, 92.

Charles M. Kurtz (1853-1909) was a prominent art critic and museum curator who acted as Assistant Director of Fine Arts for the U.S. in the *Exposition Universelle* of 1900, and was hired by the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy as the first director of the Albright Art Gallery, which opened in 1905. (Colomer, “Charles M. Kurtz and the Sorolla Exhibition in Buffalo,” *Sorolla and America: Friends and Patrons*, 148)

²⁸² A February 13, 1909 article by James B. Townsend for *The American Art News* bolsters this: “While some few American art lovers and students of contemporary art movements in Europe have known of the amazing power, color quality, and dynamic strength of Sorolla’s canvases, few even of these have seen more than some scattered examples... while the American public was not prepared for what is a virtual revelation...” (*Eight Essays Vol I*, 219).

circuit, as well as the Spaniard's receptiveness to teaching. Sorolla's acquaintances with John Singer Sargent and William Merritt Chase, and his mentoring of students like William E.B. Starkweather, suggest that, in addition to a history of positive media coverage, he enjoyed strong, word-of-mouth support going into his North-American venture.

Sargent was the premiere portrait painter of U.S. and British high society at the turn of the Nineteenth Century, and shared Sorolla's luminist or bravura paint-handling technique.²⁸³ A meeting with the Spaniard in Madrid, in 1903, is well documented, though it is possible the two were introduced earlier, as Sargent frequently traveled to Paris and competed in the same expositions as Sorolla.²⁸⁴ Mary Crawford-Volk has advanced that the former "played a supporting role" in the "gestation" of the latter's 1908 Grafton Gallery exhibition—at the behest of landscape painter and mutual friend Aureliano de Beruete.²⁸⁵ The two painters' professional relationship does appear to have grown closer the year of the show, with letters indicating Sorolla dined at least twice with

²⁸³ Ormond, "Sargent, John Singer," *Grove Art Online*. For Sargent as "luminist" see Llorens and Sagredo, *Sargent/Sorolla*, 4.

²⁸⁴ Sargent was visiting Madrid in 1903 as part of his research for the mural *The Triumph of Religion* at the Boston Public Library. (The theme had been changed from the original concept: "The History of Spanish Literature.") (Llorens and Sagredo, *Sargent/Sorolla*, 299)

²⁸⁵ Crawford-Volk, "International Interlude: Sargent and Sorolla," *Sorolla and America: Friends and Patrons*, 209 and 211. For a refresher on Beruete, see Chapter One.

Sargent and his sister during his time in London.²⁸⁶ Whether the artists ever met again is unclear, but they corresponded through 1916—at one point exchanging sketches.²⁸⁷

Like Huntington, Sargent admired Spanish “culture,” and promoted it among his artist and socialite peers. While the millionaire amassed libraries and art collections, the painter was passionate about music and dance. He treated flamenco frequently in his work, and just as significantly, was responsible for importing the talents of Spanish dancer Carmen Dausset—stage name Carmencita—to the U.S.²⁸⁸ Carmencita’s first North-American engagement was a party Sargent helped organize in 1890. She went on to tour the country, inspiring such a following that a year later, Madison Square Garden hosted the sold-out “Carmencita Ball.” However, it appears the artist could always call upon Dausset for smaller events, including the birthday of a friend’s wife, a party at his 23rd Street studio, and a performance for Isabella Stewart Gardner.²⁸⁹ The latter acquired Sargent’s controversial flamenco scene, *El Jaleo* (1882, **fig 17**), in 1914, underscoring how the painter’s activities as Spanish cultural liaison encouraged interest in his Iberian-themed works.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ Llorens and Sagredo, *Sargent/Sorolla*, 299. According to Crawford-Volk, the painters dined together *three* times. (See her essay in *Friends and Patrons*, 216-219.)

²⁸⁷ Llorens and Sagredo, *Sargent/Sorolla*, 299.

²⁸⁸ Boone, *Vistas de España*, 139.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 140-43.

²⁹⁰ Gardner admired the painting so much she convinced its owner, fellow Bostonian Thomas Jefferson Coolidge, to give it to her. She then installed it in her home in a theatrically-designed Spanish cloister, where it remains as part of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. (*Ibid*, 145)

Clearly, Sargent was more than just a trusted portrayer of the Anglophone, social “elite”—he was a tastemaker as well. Whether or not he was physically in the U.S. in 1909, it seems reasonable to conclude that he pointed his East-Coast contacts in the direction of Sorolla’s show. To begin, his image as “insider” with regards to all things Spanish depended on it. Second, the Hispanic Society exhibition opened only a year after the cementing of the painters’ friendship in London. If Sargent were to be inspired to aid Sorolla, it would surely be in 1909, when memory of their time together was still fresh. Third, the American would already have been in heightened contact with friends and colleagues in New York, as his own show of watercolors was happening concurrently with the Spaniard’s at the Knoedler gallery.²⁹¹ Finally, Sargent was growing increasingly fatigued with portrait painting around this time. Scholars have noted his withdrawal from the genre coincides precisely with Sorolla’s busiest moment as a portraitist. This is likely because Sargent told Beruete in 1907 that he planned to switch focus.²⁹² The two Spanish painters’ close confidence was well known, making such a confession seem hardly accidental. Perhaps the 1909 show was another opportunity for the American to subtly retreat from portraiture: he had already pointed Sorolla (through Breuete) in the direction of his clients, now he could raise attention to another artist capable of preserving images in a manner similar to his own.

²⁹¹ Muller, “Sorolla and America,” *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 14.

²⁹² Muller, “Sorolla y Huntington: Pintor y Patrono,” *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 121.

William Merritt Chase's support for Sorolla in the U.S. was more active, and probably more sustained, than Sargent's. Also a bravura-style painter, he was part of the Chicago committee that awarded *Otra Margarita* a gold medal, and sought out the Spaniard on moving to Madrid for six months in 1896.²⁹³ Chase arrived in the capital with his family and a group of students. He brought the class to see Sorolla's workspace.²⁹⁴ A decade later, he returned to Madrid with another group of pupils and again toured the studio. Sorolla was not there to receive them personally, so Chase extended his thanks in writing, saying: "It was... wonderful to see for ourselves that you are indeed the best painter in all of Spain."²⁹⁵ This was not mere flattery. The American had been urging his students to seek out Sorolla on their European sojourns since his own first encounter with the painter.²⁹⁶ Cumulatively, this made for a lot of free publicity, as Chase's pupils numbered in the hundreds.²⁹⁷ He further demonstrated his esteem by receiving the Sorollas on their first evening in New York. Dorothy Rice, one of his

²⁹³ Boone, "Extending the Artist's Family..." *Sorolla and America*, 91.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 92.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 92-93.

²⁹⁶ Boone writes: "By 1909, Chase had been sending students to Sorolla for more than a decade" (in *Ibid*, 96) while Muller affirms the same on page 16 of *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*.

²⁹⁷ Orcutt, "Painterly Controversy: William Merritt Chase and Robert Henri," *Antiques and Fine Art Magazine* (Spring: 2007), 180-84.
<http://www.antiquesandfineart.com/articles/article.cfm?request=766>

students at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, remembered him directing her class to get on the train and not to miss the show.²⁹⁸

Chase's advocacy of the Spaniard, as Boone has pointed out, was not without personal motive. Two years prior to the 1909 exhibition, he had quit the New York School of Art over a dispute with Robert Henri, who ironically, had joined the faculty at Chase's behest in 1902. The controversy boiled down to subject matter. The youthful Henri was urging his students to record the gritty, urban scenes around them, and avoid the "frivolous," aestheticizing themes of the previous generation. An exhibition of "The Eight," in which Henri participated, had garnered considerable attention just a year before Sorolla's arrival, in 1908. Thus, as Boone explains, "Chase saw Sorolla's success as a point for his side."²⁹⁹ Of course, the former's support of the latter began long before his debate with Henri. But whether we regard Chase's support in 1896 or 1909, the underlying, self-preserving impulse is the same. To recall Rosenblum: a plethora of artistic styles vied to be considered "modern" at the turn of the Nineteenth Century. Though artists still had to distinguish themselves as individuals, in this environment of divergent trends and wider commodification of the artwork, the perceived modernity of one's general technique was of paramount concern, and all luminist (or Symbolist or Cubist) boats rose together.

The promotional effects of Chase's funneling of U.S. students across the Atlantic could have been negligible—might even have backfired—if Sorolla hadn't been

²⁹⁸ Boone, "Extending the Artist's Family..." *Sorolla and America*, 96.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

amenable to mentorship. Yet the vast number of pupils from the Americas and Europe who worked with the artist over the years attests to his teaching ability—or at the very least, to his being interesting to observe and willing to be watched. Sorolla’s self-fashioning as a professional, patriarchal artist additionally expanded his intake of mentees, as Boone has discussed.³⁰⁰ By 1890, women made up almost half the total population of U.S. art schools (they comprised just 10% two decades earlier).³⁰¹ In Spain too, women were free to apply to the *Real Academia* and other art institutes.³⁰² Most of these women, both American and Iberian, came from bourgeois or upper-class backgrounds, and were subject to social mores frowning on extended, private contact with unmarried men. Both Chase in the U.S., and Sorolla in Spain, were thus able to leverage their “family man” personas to court a population of students off-limits to their bachelor counterparts.³⁰³

What did Sorolla’s teaching—whether men or women—have to do with priming positive reception of his Hispanic Society show? As Washburn’s writing demonstrates, satisfied pupils became evangelists for the artist’s cause, and by 1909, Sorolla had hosted scores of U.S. students for various lengths of time. Not all of them had the will or means

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Washburn’s 1902 *Outlook* article reflects this. While assuring his countrymen of Sorolla’s anti-Catholic, anti-monarchical sentiments, he also comments on the painter’s “abstinence from all those dissipations of life which often characterize the environment of an artist.” (Ibid, 97)

to publish an essay, but surely, they told friends and family about their time in Spain, and the necessity of experiencing the painter's work in person. After all, the success of Sorolla reflected the potential of his artistic progeny—and as with Chase, reaffirmed his students' stylistic predilections.

One mentee, William E.B. Starkweather, grew close to the artist after spending the summers of 1904-1906 painting under his tutelage.³⁰⁴ He took on a similar role for Sorolla in New York as Gil had in France—though the American was not nearly as well-connected. However, like Gil (and unlike Washburn) Starkweather was astute and discreet.³⁰⁵ Correspondence indicates that he was seeking opportunities for a Sorolla show on the East Coast when Huntington contacted the artist in 1908.³⁰⁶ He also sent his mentor photos of contemporary U.S. paintings, and Spanish Old Masters acquired by American collectors, just as Gil had reported on the noteworthy artists and exhibitions of Paris.³⁰⁷ When Sorolla and his canvases finally made it to the U.S., Starkweather acted as interpreter and delivered talks on the painter and his artistic influences at the Hispanic

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Starkweather's advocacy for Sorolla paid off. He was the Sorollas' closest friend in New York, and helped the artist with every step of the exhibition organization (which, as we know from Huntington's account, the painter was eager to do himself). The millionaire was evidently impressed by the younger artist, as Starkweather later became the Hispanic Society's first curator of paintings. (Muller, "Sorolla and America," *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 16)

³⁰⁶ Boone, "Extending the Artist's Family..." *Sorolla and America*, 98.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

Society, the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, the Copley Society and the Boston Public Library.³⁰⁸

Thus far, I've established that Sorolla's 1909, U.S. audience consisted primarily of upper- and middle-class viewers from New York, Boston, Buffalo or nearby East-Coast metropolises—like the art students of the Pennsylvania Academy, who Chase instructed to attend. For those who had not seen the painter's work in Europe, and whose involvement in the American artistic community was peripheral, news of the Spaniard's triumphs in continental exhibitions, and the profiles of Washburn and Kurtz, constructed him not just as a winner, but as a champion whose success U.S. citizens could conscientiously support. A large faction of the North-American "art world" had even more reason to receive the show favorably. Many of its constituents were former students of Sorolla's, knew someone who had been, or would have been impressed by the evident, mutual respect between the painter and "home-grown" greats such as Sargent and Chase.³⁰⁹ However, the artist's prior reputation was by no means the sole factor, external to the work itself, that positively inflected the show's reception. I will now consider the Hispanic Society as a venue, how it efficaciously framed Sorolla's presentation for his nineteenth-century, U.S. audience—before finally taking up the allure of the canvases themselves.

³⁰⁸ Pons Sorolla, "Huntington, Sorolla's Patron in America: The 1909 Exhibitions," *Sorolla and America*, 22-23 (for locations where talks delivered) and Colomer, "Charles M. Kurtz and the Sorolla Exhibition in Buffalo," *Sorolla and America: Friends and Patrons*, 158 (for Starkweather as interpreter).

³⁰⁹ I use quotes because, in reality, Sargent lived most of his life in Europe.

Part 3: Huntington, Prescott's Paradigm and the Hispanic Society as Venue

Huntington founded the Hispanic Society of America in 1904 with the goal of “[advancing]... the study of the Spanish and Portuguese languages, literature and history.”³¹⁰ Yet an institute of letters was only half the millionaire’s aim. For years, he had also dreamed of building a museum. A letter to his mother reveals an attitude shared by many scholars of the day, namely, that texts could not provide the same level of understanding as object-lessons:

As I have often said I venture to flatter myself that I am not a “collector,” rather an assembler for a given expression. To be sure this is not altogether unlike the book maker [sic], but I find these good scholars wonderfully equipped with spongy facts, but insight and discrimination can only be had at first hand. One must almost *be* a Spaniard to understand him—*almost!*³¹¹

Huntington went on to create many museums, guided by the assumption that their immersive quality enlightened visitors by allowing them to temporarily *be* that which they sought knowledge of.³¹² The Hispanic Society museum, which opened a year before Sorolla’s show in January 1908, was the first and nearest to his heart—the culmination of a childhood fascination the millionaire had gradually cultivated into an expertise.³¹³

³¹⁰ Coddington, “Archer Milton Huntington, Champion of Spain in the United States,” *Spain in America*, 158.

³¹¹ *Ibid*, 154.

³¹² Other museums and wildlife preserves Huntington founded include: the Museum of the American Indian (NYC), Brookgreen Gardens (Myrtle Beach, SC), the Mariner’s Museum (Newport News, VA) and the Golf Museum (New Port News). (Proske, *Archer Milton Huntington*, 15, 22-24)

³¹³ As a young man, he learned Spanish and Arabic, then began translating medieval literature, collecting books and paintings, and funding Spanish architectural excavations

Huntington hoped his museum would present “a cross section in miniature of the culture of a race.”³¹⁴ He explained to Arabella: “It must condense the soul of Spain into meanings... It must not be a heaping of objects from here or there or anywhere until the whole looks like an art congress...”³¹⁵ Thus, though Huntington believed in the unique teaching-potential of objects, no merit existed in their “heaping.” Only a carefully-considered constellation of items could reveal higher “truths.” Here, again, the millionaire’s project is typical of nineteenth-century, museological thinking. However as Coddington has noted, “the idea of a museum focusing on the artistic and intellectual achievements of a *single* people was relatively new” and “certainly without precedent in the United States.”³¹⁶ And yet, given the strident, essentializing nature of nationalist discourse at the time, from the historian’s perspective, it is not that surprising.

The Royal Family supported Huntington’s promotion of Spain, and appreciated his promise to buy only objects that had already left the country (as the American himself admitted: “there are plenty to be had”).³¹⁷ It was within the U.S. that he faced an uphill battle. Archer described an 1890 meeting with his cousin (and future stepfather) Henry

and restorations. (Proske, *Archer Milton Huntington* or Coddington, “Archer Milton Huntington, Champion of Spain in the United States,” *Spain in America*)

³¹⁴ Bennett, *The Art of Wealth*, 144.

³¹⁵ Coddington, “Archer Milton Huntington, Champion of Spain in the United States,” *Spain in America*, 154.

³¹⁶ Both quotes from *Ibid*, 149. (Emphasis mine)

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, 154 and 158.

Huntington thusly: “He repeated several times, ‘But why Spain?’ And rather laughed at me.”³¹⁸ When the Hispanic Society was officially founded fourteen years later, its patron felt the public’s response was similar: “When the H.S.A. had come to notice in the press... without a *torbellino de aplausos* [resounding applause], many people were amused at the new form of fad by a rich man.”³¹⁹ Archer’s quote evidences that even in 1904—with the Spanish roundly defeated and physically removed from the Americas—Prescott’s paradigm continued to inform popular notions of Iberia.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, Huntington accepted many of the stereotypes promoted by the paradigm—but through the Romantic lens that envisioned them as both the origin of Spain’s troubles, and its charms. Returning to his 1898 *Note-Book in Northern Spain*, the millionaire (who also wrote poetry) described the country as a bell, perpetually chiming “death” and “hope.”³²⁰ On the same page, he (rightly) accuses the U.S. of being ignorant and prejudiced about the peninsula, saying: “...our knowledge, largely at second hand, colored with antipathy of race or religion, too often produces an attitude of contempt, pity or aversion...”³²¹ In his role as “champion of Spain,” the millionaire hoped to reverse this antipathy.³²² Yet subscribing as he did to the paradigm, he did not deny accusations of Spanish fundamentalism, medievalism and impulsiveness.

³¹⁸ Ibid, 148.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 158.

³²⁰ Huntington, *A Note-Book in Northern Spain*, 2.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Proske, *Archer Milton Huntington*, 5.

Rather, he reinforced these old stereotypes by crafting “better” explanations for them. “Spain lacks the trading spirit,” Huntington admitted. “For seven centuries she was a battlefield. During that time she was keeping the Mohammedan wolf from the door of Europe... With the absence of trade goes the absence of a knowledge of the outside world...”³²³ Thus, Protestant Europe (the eventual mother of the U.S.) owed its rational, enterprising, republican culture in no small part to Spain’s sacrifice. And though Iberians’ actions could be puzzling, to live temporarily among them provided relief from Protestant civilization’s burdensome “knowledge of the outside world.”

Huntington’s preoccupation with the true “soul” of Spain, and his eagerness to re-spin old stereotypes in a more positive, forgiving light, speak to a larger goal behind his desire to create “a cross section in miniature of... a race.” While nineteenth-century, ethnographic showcases such as the “villages” of the 1893 Chicago fair, or the forced “performances” of Sarah Baartman, traded on stereotypes for entertainment and curiosity, the millionaire strove for empathy and appreciation through a re-evaluation of typical, Anglophone notions of Iberia. As he wrote in *Note-book*: “few I know cross the threshold of the Spanish house to find out how good a man at heart the owner is.”³²⁴ The Hispanic Society, we can assume, was to be that house. Yet of course, what people discovered there was not in fact the “soul” of the peninsula, but Huntington’s own imagining of it. This imagining, despite upholding much of Prescott’s paradigm, contradicted the

³²³ Huntington, *A Note-Book in Northern Spain*, 5-6.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

historian in one significant way: Spain had a future in Huntington's eyes. While most U.S. citizens regarded the country as hopelessly mired in the past, the millionaire aimed to: "[present] a picture... of what was, had been, and might be."³²⁵ However, Huntington's "belief" in Spain's future was a patronizing one, premised on the idea that the nation could and should "catch up" with the rest of the Western world, which was presently leaving it in the dust: "So excellent a nature I have found in the Spaniard," he assured, "that I cannot help believing in his ultimate development."³²⁶

Despite the latent condescension in its founder's thinking, the Hispanic Society was still a "safe space" for Spanish art in the *fin-de-siècle* U.S., all things considered. Once visitors crossed its threshold, they were invited to rethink antagonistic views of "what was" and "might be," through Huntington's celebratory curation of what "had been." In other words, the museum's mission threw a welcoming, enthusiastic frame around Sorolla's work that amplified audience appreciation. Were the painter to have exhibited at Knoedler's or the Duveen gallery, viewers would not have forgotten he was Spanish. But his national identity would have counted for less in spectator's overall determination of the quality of his work, than it did in a context specifically devoted to encouraging Spain's "potential." While the Fine Arts Academy and Copley Society were not "ethnic" museums, media coverage from both Buffalo and Boston suggests the show was ultimately understood as the purview of the Hispanic Society. Thus, the nurturing

³²⁵ Coddington, "Archer Milton Huntington, Champion of Spain in the United States," *Spain in America*, 149."

³²⁶ Huntington, *A Note-Book in Northern Spain*, 6.

tone of the New York institute carried over to New England, despite becoming slightly muted in transit.

Mention of another setting in which nineteenth-century Americans encountered Spanish art underscores my claim about the power of the Hispanic Society to favorably impact Sorolla's reception. The world's fairs and expositions paradigmatic of the turn-of-the-century West were premised on "expanding understanding between nations" and "evaluating the current progress of man and his achievements."³²⁷ However, a *Harper's Weekly* cartoon, "Our Artist's Dream," (**fig 18**) published during the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial, evidences the competition and xenophobia that co-mingled with the official aims of such events.³²⁸ In the image, where the nations of the world offer up local "delicacies" to fairgoers, a Chinese man serves "Puppy a la Centennial" while Africa's stall boasts signs for "Parrot Pot Pie" and "Natives on the Half Shell." Spain's booth contributes "Cuban Broil" and "Carlist Stew." Unsurprisingly, in such an environment, U.S. critics were inclined to reiterate conventional, negative stereotypes about Iberia and its art.³²⁹ As George T. Ferris wrote during the 1876 exhibition: "The showing of Spanish art and industry at Philadelphia... bore testimony to the decadence wrought by centuries of civil dissension, bad government, and religious intolerance; and referred the

³²⁷ Stevens, "The Exposition Universelle: 'This Vast Competition of Effort, Realisation and Victories,'" *1900: Art at the Crossroads*, 63.

³²⁸ My awareness of this cartoon comes from reading Boone's "'Civil Dissension, Bad Government, and Religious Intolerance': Spanish Display at the Philadelphia Centennial and in Gilded Age Private Collections," 9.

³²⁹ For a detailed examination of this claim, see the above citation.

mind in a melancholy contrast to the day when Spain was the queen of Europe, and her arts flourished in such rich luxuriance.”³³⁰

Part 4: Tip of the Iceberg: Immediate Explanations for Sorolla’s Appeal

The redemptive aim of Huntington’s museum, as well as Sorolla’s prior reputation in the U.S., can be compared to dry tinder that created favorable conditions for a fire. But the spark that set American hearts ablaze in 1909 could only issue from the works themselves. Accordingly, I will now consider the subject matter and luminist style of the paintings: how each supported a plethora of immediate reasons for the show’s popularity. As mentioned earlier, by “immediate reasons,” I refer to the responses nineteenth-century New Yorkers or New Englanders might have supplied if asked why they liked the exhibition. When thought of in terms of Clark’s notion of ideology, these explanations can be understood as the “permitted modes of seeing and saying,” which, like the visible portion of an iceberg, stand in for what lies beneath: the “unthinkable, aberrant or extreme.”³³¹

I have noted that I am not the first to ponder Sorolla’s success with turn-of-the-century, East-Coast viewers. However, I’ll reiterate my claim that scholars thus far have only partially answered the question—indicating “what” was so attractive about the painter’s works, but neglecting to analyze “why.” In other words, Muller and Domenech perused critics’ reviews, and considered the 1909 canvases in light of nineteenth-century,

³³⁰ Ibid, 3.

³³¹ Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 8.

U.S. art trends, ultimately offering the same rationale apparent and articulable for spectators in Sorolla's day. My goal is to go beyond, or rather, beneath, that which could be safely stated or gestured to by U.S. art-goers of the period, with the understanding that art that captivates does so by assuaging and vindicating certain collective fears and beliefs.

Yet all exploratory dives begin at the surface, and similarly, my first step will be to acknowledge what fin-de-siècle observers saw and appreciated in Sorolla's canvases. The research of Muller and Domenech has been insightful in this regard, so I will briefly review and elucidate their findings. I will also suggest three additional surface explanations that I believe historians have overlooked—but which would have been obvious and significant to spectators at the time—namely, the sense of family values, a “new” image of Spain and deeply-immersive travel that Sorolla's painting evoked.

Section A: Discussion of Previous Findings

When asking of the Hispanic Society show, “What then, so excited and astounded so many?” Muller answers, first, with the wide appeal of the Impressionist and bravura styles in the U.S. at the start of the Twentieth Century.³³² The esteem of Sargent and Chase attests to this, but even their perceived opposites, Robert Henri, and the rest of the Ashcan School, handled paint in a similar manner despite treating diametric subjects.³³³

³³² Muller, “Sorolla and America,” *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 14.

³³³ *Ibid.*

Further evidence can be found in the styles' ubiquity among New York's top museums and galleries in the year 1909. As noted, Sargent had his watercolor show at Knoedler's, Cassatt and Degas were on view at Durand Ruel's, and the Met hosted a German Realist exhibition featuring works by Menzel, who Sorolla cited as an influence.³³⁴

A second immediate reason for the draw of Sorolla's pictures was what Muller has called their "optimism" and Domenech their "*joie de vivre*."³³⁵ As discussed in Chapter One, at a time when Spanish politician Francisco Silvela proclaimed the country to be "*sin pulso*," insisting that "the heart that ceases to beat and leaves cold and insensible all regions of the body announces decomposition and death to even the most ignorant," the artist was depicting leaping children, fertile mothers, cheerful workers and a pioneering middle class all rendered in bright, pastel colors.³³⁶ This idealism (which isolated him from Spain's post-*disastre* avante-garde) was noticed and lauded by U.S. critics. James B. Townsend wrote for *The American Art News*, "as a rule Sorolla paints the joyousness of life..." In a *New York Times* poem, Elizabeth Newport Hepburn praised

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid, 15 ("optimism") and Domenech, "Sorolla and America: Critical Fortune," *Sorolla and America*, 284 ("*joie de vivre*").

³³⁶ *Sin pulso* translates to: "Without a pulse." "El corazon que cesa de latir y va dejando frias e insensibles todas las regiones del cuerpo anuncia la descompesion y la muerte al más lego." (Harrison, "Introduction..." *Spain's 1898 Crisis*, 5)

Silvela made his speech in 1898, while Muller notes that "By 1900 Sorolla had begun to paint psychologically as well as physically pleasing subjects that allowed him to take complete advantage of the sea and sunlight to which he was so devoted..." (*Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 20)

the painter's portrayal of "radiant childhood," "sea-sprite babies," "winds that laugh" and the "joys that maternity brings," saying: "We welcome your art, Sorolla, because it's alive and aglow."³³⁷ Leonard Dalton Abbot, a *Chautauquan* critic, went as far as to suggest that the only American whose work was as life-affirming as the Spaniard's was the late Walt Whitman—a poet, not a painter.³³⁸

Amplifying the buoyancy of Sorolla's canvases was his representation of sunlight, which Muller identifies as a third surface explanation for the pull of the Hispanic Society show. Study of the exhibition catalogue reveals that most of the paintings included were produced after the 1894 success of *Return from Fishing*. As discussed, this win signaled to the artist that he could abandon all pretense of narrative in his pictures, and devote himself to beach scenes, landscapes and images of his family and bourgeois peers.³³⁹ Sorolla painted most of these new works in full sunshine—in accordance with the penchant for bright light and deep shadow he had harbored since the beginning of his career. He even coaxed some of his portrait clients outdoors.³⁴⁰ While the artist joked that

³³⁷ Townsend, "A Spanish Master's Works" (Feb 1909), from *Eight Essays Vol 1*, 220. Hepburn, "Sorolla" (Feb 1909), from *Ibid*, 352.

³³⁸ Abbot wrote in "Two Spanish Painters of Genius" (Aug 1909): "Only one of our own Americans, and he a poet, not an artist, has conceived of the world in this spirit. He is the author of 'Leaves of Grass.'" (Domenech, "Sorolla and America: Critical Fortune," *Sorolla and America*, 287)

³³⁹ The only social-realist canvas included in the exhibition was *Sad Inheritance*, which, I've contended, can be seen as a kind of transition piece in that it supports a narrative while also taking place at the beach.

³⁴⁰ As seen in *Raimundo de Madrazo y Garetta* (1906), *King Alfonso XIII in a Hussar's Uniform* (1907), *Louis Comfort Tiffany* (1911) and *Portrait of Miss Mary Lillian Duke* (1911).

his East-Coast audience suffered from Seasonal Affective Disorder, to U.S. critics, his depiction of sunlight was no trivial matter.³⁴¹ A reporter for *The Nation* opined:

If definitions must be sought, Sorolla is not so much an artist of the *plein air* as of the full sun. His greatest mastery lies in rendering the highest notes of the Spanish sun. Especially powerful are his paintings of sea and sand in the brightest light... many of the paintings dealing with these favorite subjects of Sorolla are positive *tours de force*, which simply leave the gazer astounded...³⁴²

Three years later, Duncan Phillips began his 1912 essay “Sorolla: The Painter of Sunlight” by suggesting: “Whatever rank may ultimately be awarded to [the painter]... the art chroniclers of the future could scarcely fail to remember that he was the first to successfully transcribe the effect of dazzling, unclouded sunlight.”³⁴³ The critic goes on to dub Sorolla a “modern of the moderns,” insisting that he finished Monet’s “ambitious adventures” in picturing outdoor light.³⁴⁴ In fact, Phillips believed the Spaniard not only concluded the Frenchman’s project, but ultimately produced better paintings, to begin with, because “Sorolla’s more legitimate brushwork” made his canvases “enjoyable even at close range.”³⁴⁵ For the writer, Monet’s “messy surfaces” represented a jettisoning of

³⁴¹ According to Muller, “[Sorolla] told a friend on returning to Spain, ‘New York had terrible winter, snowy and with weeks without sun; its people ‘were anxious for the sun; I brought it... and they sought it.’” (“Sorolla and America,” *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 21)

³⁴² “Sorolla y Bastida” (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol 1*, 190-195.

³⁴³ Phillips, “Sorolla: the Painter of Sunlight,” *Art and Progress* Vol. 4, No. 2 (Dec 1912), 791. Phillips was the founder of the Phillips collection in Washington D.C.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

aesthetics for the sake of optical inquiry. Sorolla, in his view, brought this experimentation back in line with the *noblesse* of “Art,” as the Spaniard: “set to work to make sunshine that should be beautiful as well as truthful, and expressive of his joyous emotion in the presence of nature, as well as of his scientific interest in natural phenomena.”³⁴⁶ Phillips, like Sorolla, perceived something anarchical in the brushstrokes of the Impressionists—in their refusal to please the eye from close range—even in 1912. The former proceeded to place the later above Monet, and by extension, French painters in general. The notion that Sorolla had somehow “turned the trick” on Gallic artists crops of up frequently in U.S. reviews of the 1909 show, and in my opinion, indicates a marked, anti-French tension whose implications should be explored by future scholars.³⁴⁷

The artist’s unique, “technical mastery”—which enabled his “capturing” of sunlight—was the fourth immediate reason for the admiration of art-going New Yorkers and New Englanders in 1909.³⁴⁸ Critics of the day consistently attributed this mastery to three factors: speed, surety and stamina. With regards to speed, an anonymous reporter for *The Nation* wrote: “It seems as if he had discovered a new way of fixing

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Phillips announced: “And the trick has turned—for not only are the best of the Spaniards canvases enjoyable even at close range for their beauty and color, but the sun is there as true to life as the mere artifice of painting can make it.” (Ibid) Henry Tyrrell commented on behalf of *The New York World* in 1909: “If you should happen to look in upon a bunch of Barbizons at Schaus’s or even upon the French Impressionists at Durand-Ruel’s, you will be astonished to find how black, how positively medieval, the latter appear...” (“Sorolla’s 300 Sunny Spanish Pictures” (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 214).

³⁴⁸ Domenech, “Sorolla and America: Critical Fortune,” *Sorolla and America*, 284.

instantaneously in paint not only form and color, but motion.”³⁴⁹ The swiftness of the artist’s brushstrokes mirrored his overall practice, as Henry Tyrell explained for *The New York World*: “Sorolla is always trying, for the sake of truth and unity of impression, to paint a complete picture at a single sitting.”³⁵⁰ When it came to surety, *The Evening Post* relayed: “It is said, and we have the authority of an artist who has painted side by side with him, that Sorolla never makes a correction.”³⁵¹ The same outlet wrote days earlier: “His color is brilliant and sane, his technique virile and sure...”³⁵²

The Spaniard’s speed and accuracy were a result, it was broadcast, of his work ethic, itself aided by his physical and mental stamina. In his contribution to the widely-purchased exhibition catalogue, Starkweather stated: “All day long, and every day in the summer, Sorolla paints... in a heat that often reaches 110 in the shade. It is a trial by fire for any northern born student who tries to keep up...”³⁵³ It was only through this tirelessness, the American revealed, that the painter, who was “very poor,” persevered in art, beginning with “small portrait heads at a dollar a piece.”³⁵⁴ Starkweather’s account

³⁴⁹ “Sorolla y Bastida”(Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 195.

³⁵⁰ “Sorolla’s 300 Sunny Spanish Pictures” (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 208.

³⁵¹ “Spain’s Great Painter: Exhibition of Pictures by Sorolla y Bastida” (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 166.

³⁵² “Sorolla y Bastida Exhibit” (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 135.

³⁵³ Starkweather, “Joaquín Sorolla the Man and His Work,” *Eight Essays Vol II*, 82-7.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

thus married the artist's bourgeois, professional persona with a "rags-to-riches" story that mirrored notions of the ideal executive in nineteenth-century, U.S. culture.

Of course, we know from Sorolla's experience with *Sad Inheritance!* that he also sometimes worked slowly, with trepidation, needing his peers' encouragement to finish. What U.S. viewers appreciated therefore, was not so much his actual process, but the painterly mythology his luminist brushstrokes (and select anecdotes from his students) allowed them to believe.³⁵⁵ Within this mythology, Sorolla was *almost* endowed with the ability to reproduce "exact Reality"—but not quite. As one critic mused: "the *Después del Baño* (1908, **fig 19**) is startling and almost makes one doubt [the painter's] word that he can only approach the truth of it... If that is not a true sunlight which falls upon the sheet... it is a very close *imitation*."³⁵⁶ Leonard Williams, another contributor to the catalogue, asserted: "His vision and his touch identify their purpose to convey the pure *interpretation* of the truth."³⁵⁷ The two writers posit Sorolla's pictures as extremely close to actuality, to "Life as is," unfiltered through artistic subjectivity. Yet both qualify this

³⁵⁵ With regards to the artist's "actual process," Pons Sorolla has suggested that her great grandfather did not, in fact, produce paintings completely unplanned and without considering composition. She writes: "before definitively taking on a painting, Sorolla made myriad studies or sketches and also drawings, which were complete works in themselves. Once he developed a very clear, complete and detailed overall vision of what he was going to make, he then proceeded to execute it with a pictorial speed, richness and exuberance that few artists could match." ("The Artistic Personality of Sorolla," *Sorolla: 1863-1923*, 194)

³⁵⁶ "Spain's Great Painter" (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 172. (Emphasis mine.)

³⁵⁷ Williams, "The Art of Joaquín Sorolla," *Eight Essays Vol I*, 317. (Emphasis mine.)

with words like “imitation” and “interpretation”—subtle reminders to themselves and their readers, that ultimately, Sorolla is a painter, not a camera.

The fifth and final surface explanation scholars frequently invoke to explain the popularity of the Hispanic Society show is U.S. audiences’ belief that Sorolla’s art blended the “traditional” and “modern.”³⁵⁸ In other words, while Cubists, Symbolists and other avant-garde movements appeared to throw history out the window, the Spaniard, and other masters of the luminist style, innovated while maintaining a reverence for past painting. To begin discussing what made Sorolla’s pictures modern, we must first acknowledge that “modernity” is not an inherent quality of artworks, but one endowed by human spectators. Nineteenth-century, U.S. supporters felt the painter was modern because his oeuvre built upon “traditional” projects of art history—placing him at the fore of a linear, progressive narrative of European art. For starters, Sorolla had “closed” Monet’s investigations into the depiction of light.³⁵⁹ He captured other fleeting conditions—wind, waves, the active body—just as conclusively. As Christian Briton wrote in 1909: “he revels in problems of light, shade and rapidly-shifting form which would appall the average painter, and is the essence of modernity...”³⁶⁰ The critic also

³⁵⁸ See Domenech, “Sorolla and America: Critical Fortune,” *Sorolla and America*, 284-5; Boone, “Extending the Artist’s Family...” *Sorolla and America*, 101; Llorens, “Sargent, Sorolla and Modern Art,” *Sargent/Sorolla*; or Rosenblum, “Art in 1900: Twilight or Dawn,” *1900*, 37.

³⁵⁹ See discussion of Duncan Phillip’s review on page 24 of this chapter.

³⁶⁰ Briton, “Sorolla at the Hispanic Society,” *The International Studio* 37, no. 145 (Mar 1909).

cited the artist's mobilization of "the vibrant splendor of the modern palette."³⁶¹ These color choices additionally built on the discoveries of the Impressionists, as Sorolla himself admitted: "With all its excesses, the modern Impressionistic movement has given us one discovery, the color violet."³⁶² Lastly, the artist primarily portrayed contemporary, bourgeois subjects, as Starkweather noted: "Sorolla has done few costume pictures... for which tourists search and which the general public expects of Spanish pictures."³⁶³

The fact that Impressionism—considered objectionable only decades earlier—was now part of the progress narrative of mainstream, nineteenth-century art history, should alert us that the tradition Sorolla's art purportedly upheld was no less constructed than his works' modernity. Indeed, this tradition—built around Velázquez, El Greco and Goya—was in fact invented (in the words of Eric Hobsbawm) in the last third of the Nineteenth Century. Fostered by the intellectuals of the ILE, as well as European and U.S. artists, the "Velázquez Revival" functioned to legitimize the Impressionist style, reassert Spain's relevancy on the world stage, and eventually, to rationalize American collecting trends.

Within the ILE, it was Giner the teacher, Beruete the painter and historian Manuel Bartolomé Cossío who, in the 1870s and 80s, began drawing attention to Velázquez, El Greco and Goya: "largely consigned to oblivion in Spain."³⁶⁴ The three progressive

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Boone, "Extending the Artist's Family..." *Sorolla and America*, 97.

³⁶³ Starkweather, "Joaquin Sorolla the Man and His Work," *Eight Essays Vol II*, 27.

³⁶⁴ Jurkevich, *In Pursuit of the Natural Sign*, 54. Cossío (1857-1935) was an ILE teacher and Spain's first internationally renowned modern art historian. (Ibid, 21)

intellectuals appreciated the artists' frequent depiction of the Iberian landscape, as well as their loose brushwork that seemed to prophesize the French Impressionists, and thus, modern art in general.³⁶⁵ This resemblance offered undeniable proof of the painters' value, not just to Spain, but to all civilized nations. Giner and Cossío published essays and led students on "art history field trips" exploring the oeuvres of these newly-discovered masters. The teachers saw it as their pedagogical and patriotic duty to "restore the diminished national self-esteem of [their] country" by "[focusing] public attention on the positive aspects of the Spanish past."³⁶⁶ Given Sorolla's close ties to the ILE, it is unsurprising he would posit himself as a disciple of Velázquez throughout his career. In fact, he claimed that violet was "the only discovery of importance in the art world since Velázquez."³⁶⁷

The fascination with Velázquez, El Greco, Goya and other artists of Spain's "Golden Age" that flourished beyond the peninsula developed concurrently, but largely independently, of the activities of Spanish progressives.³⁶⁸ As previously discussed,

³⁶⁵ Ibid, 22.

³⁶⁶ Ibid, 54.

³⁶⁷ Boone, "Extending the Artist's Family..." *Sorolla and America*, 97.

³⁶⁸ This is reflected in the scant availability of ILE literature on the artists in English. Beruete was the first to publish his work in a language other than Spanish. He did so in 1898 in a "limited, luxury edition" written in French (Jurkevich, 62). Meanwhile, in the U.S., Charles Curtis published *Velázquez and Murillo* in 1883, Carl Justi's biography of Velázquez was made available in English in 1898 and R.A.M. Stephenson's *Art of Velázquez* was released in 1895. (Kagan, "The Spanish Turn: The Discovery of Spanish Art in the United States: 1887-1920," *Collecting Spanish Art*, 39)

Manet played a significant role in valuating Iberian art—particularly that of Velázquez and Goya—among the French, who shortly thereafter began pointing American students south to the Prado. For those like Cassatt and her fellow Impressionists, who had foresworn the Academy, the loose, feathery technique of the three, recovered masters legitimized their own artistic projects. It wasn't long before artists were sharing their new inspiration with U.S. collectors. Cassatt and Sargent are known for their advising of Louisine and Henry Havemeyer, and Isabella Stewart Gardner, respectively. Beruete and fellow Spanish painter Raimundo de Madrazo also shared their expertise with Huntington and many other connoisseurs of the day.³⁶⁹ The result was that between 1870-1930, elite Americans “competed fiercely” for works of the Spanish “Golden Age”—which both authenticated, and were authenticated by, the concurrent craze for Impressionism and luminism.³⁷⁰ That Sorolla's art appeared to emerge from the nexus of the traditional and modern (in fact, two contemporary collecting trends) is evidenced in Kurtz's 1907 profile: “He is indeed a remarkable painter who at one moment recalls Velázquez, at another Goya, and again Fortuny or Sargent or Whistler, and yet who always preeminently is himself!”³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ Burke, “Archer Milton Huntington and the Hispanic Society of America,” *Collecting Spanish Art*, 213.

³⁷⁰ Kagan, “The Spanish Turn...” *Collecting Spanish Art*, 13.

³⁷¹ Kurtz, “A Great Spanish Artist: Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida,” *Scribners* Vol. 42, No. 49., 430.

Section B: New Hypotheses

Scholars such as Muller and Domenech have given considerable thought to what U.S. audiences enjoyed about Sorolla's 1909 exhibition. But their findings have not been exhaustive. Having reviewed what has already been posited, I would like to advance three more immediate reasons historians have neglected, but which I believe would have been crucial and obvious elements of spectator experience at the time. The first of these is the "family-friendly" nature of the show.

That Sorolla's primarily upper- and middle-class, nineteenth-century viewership could take their children to his exhibition may seem trivial from the perspective of art historians. As a group, we are not accustomed to considering non-adult observers, the general assumption being that juveniles are not the "target" of any culture's artistic production. Furthermore, children, it is understood, do not "contemplate" art so much as they are "entertained" by it—the notion of art as entertainment of course threatening to erode its privileged position as "Art." Yet evidence suggests that young Americans helped swell the roster at Sorolla's show, their presence permitted due to the works' compatibility with bourgeois "family values."

Images of mothers and children made up a substantial portion of the Hispanic Society presentation (and the artist's oeuvre in general). Whether anonymous figures, or portraits of the painter's loved ones, they are inevitably engaged in joyful play or peaceful repose. That U.S. viewers experienced these scenes as fitting paeans to the family is demonstrated by their willingness to see themselves reflected therein, as one critic asserted of *Mother*: "One mother and babe, all mothers and babes, are in this

picture.”³⁷² From reports of the indisputably optimistic tenor of Sorolla’s work, we can assume that American spectators held the rest of his landscapes, seascapes, portraits and scenes of idyllic labor to be as innocuous as his family groups. Even in *Sad Inheritance!*, the artist’s “darkest” picture, it is the audience that suffers on the orphans’ behalf, while the children themselves gingerly splash, and occasionally grin.³⁷³ I have yet to encounter an East-Coast commentator who imagined the canvas’s potential criticism of the Spanish government—unsurprising, as the Monarchs’ visages were part of the exhibition. However, James Gibbons Huneker’s interpretation for *The New York Sun* was a common refrain: “The ‘Sad Inheritance’ ... is a mute arraignment of parental sins and negligence.”³⁷⁴ Thus, Sorolla’s work was seen as both glorifying “modern Madonnas” and “radiant childhood” while warning of the consequences of the failed family unit.³⁷⁵

While the U.S. press frequently and suggestively described Sorolla’s style as “virile” and “masculine,” reporters made clear his show would pass muster with the strongest moralists.³⁷⁶ In her *New York Times* poem, Hepburn proclaimed: “We bring

³⁷² Huneker, “Sorolla y Bastida” *The New York Sun* (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol I*, 396.

³⁷³ See the grinning, impish boy who shields his face from the sun at bottom right, and the shy smile on the face of the youth in the left-hand foreground, who helps his companion to walk.

³⁷⁴ Huneker, “Sorolla y Bastida,” *Eight Essays Vol I*, 395.

³⁷⁵ “Modern Madonnas” and “radiant childhood” as subjects treated by the artist come from Elizabeth Newport Hepburn’s poem, “Sorolla,” for *The New York Times* (*Eight Essays Vol II*, 352 and 351).

³⁷⁶ For “masculine” see Huneker’s “Sorolla y Bastida,” *Eight Essays Vol I*, 389. For “virile” see J.G. Mottet’s “Sorolla y Bastida Exhibit” on behalf of *The Evening Post*, *Eight Essays Vol II*, 135.

thee greeting, Sorolla, for Art that is vital\ and clean.”³⁷⁷ Huneker, in his characterization of *Mother* (1895, **fig 20**), notes, “the right hand of the mother stretches, instinctively, toward the infant... On one finger of the hand there is just a hint of gold from a ring,” reassuring readers of the “legitimacy” of the sleeping woman and baby.³⁷⁸ Furthermore, any eroticizing of the beautiful bodies and faces that abound in the Hispanic Society canvases was (ostensibly) undercut by their belonging either to Sorolla’s family, or to generic figures whose youth and closeness to nature naturalized their nudity.³⁷⁹ The painter himself did not hesitate to relate his art to his “chaste” lifestyle. He told Huntington only shortly after meeting him: “True it is for most men that ‘*una mujer no basta*,’ [‘one woman is not enough’] but me—*yo soy casto* [I am chaste]... All great artists are pure...”³⁸⁰ U.S. critics, however, took Sorolla’s supposed “purity” a step further, into the realm of childhood innocence or the pre-contact “primitive.” Elisabeth Luther Cary insisted: “[his] special distinction is to embody in his art the franker and more healthful, the gayer and more childlike side of the Spanish character.”³⁸¹ Abbot

³⁷⁷ Hepburn, “Sorolla,” *The New York Times* (March 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 357.

³⁷⁸ Huneker, “Sorolla y Bastida,” *Eight Essays Vol I*, 396.

³⁷⁹ In her essay “Extending the Artist’s Family...” Boone has argued that “By using their wives as models, Chase and Sorolla shifted the relationship of artist and model from one of suspicion to one of bourgeois respectability.” (*Sorolla and America*, 94)

³⁸⁰ See Huntington’s diary entry of January 29, 1909 in “Apéndice: Correspondencia entre Sorolla, Huntington y La Hispanic Society con Selecciones del Diario de Huntington,” *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 375.

³⁸¹ Luther Cary, “Sorolla y Bastida: One of the Great Modern Masters,” *Eight Essays Vol I*, 360.

observed: “He is pagan and pantheist in one—pagan in the sense that he has returned to the very springs of life and to all that is primitive for his inspiration, pantheist in the sense that he conceives of sunlight, water and the human body as elements mystically united.”³⁸²

That New Englanders brought their children to experience the optimism, family values and moral “cleanliness” of Sorolla’s art is again, apparent in the exhibition literature. Specifically, Luther Crary reported for *The New York Times* how the picture *Water Joy* (1908, **fig 21**), “made a child of some six or seven years cry out with the glee of recognition when she encountered it in the gallery.”³⁸³ She continued: “A number of children already have visited, putting Señora Sorolla’s art to the test of their downright observation, and it has been amusing to note how triumphantly it has passed...”³⁸⁴ I have yet to encounter other sources that document the substantial presence of children at the 1909 show. However, I believe this is partially because official reviews by women are scarce. On the other hand, according to Burns, the 5.5 million readers of the “mainstream publications” that covered art in the nineteenth-century had a “strong feminine component.”³⁸⁵ This suggests that in many households, wives played the role of cultural custodian for their families, with the power to decide which exhibitions were a “must see.” Thus, though few women wrote about the Sorolla show, just as many women as

³⁸² Domenech, “Sorolla and America: Critical Fortune,” *Sorolla and America*, 287.

³⁸³ Luther Crary, “Sorolla y Bastida...” *Eight Essays Vol I*, 348.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 353.

³⁸⁵ Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist*, 6.

men (if not more) *read* about it—and what they read signaled it would be an elevating experience for viewers of all ages. The overlooked, yet sizeable presence of children at the Hispanic Society presentation helps clarify the record-breaking numbers—and was no doubt another explanation for “why Sorolla?” readily-apparent to spectators of the period.

In addition to being “family-friendly,” the 1909 exhibition presented a novel image of Spain—a second, unconsidered surface reason for its favor among fin-de-siècle East Coasters. Admittedly, the new and unusual is just as likely to repulse as to fascinate, meaning Sorolla’s departure from previous, painted representations of Iberia does not explain, in and of itself, why visitors flocked. The attraction New York and New England audiences felt to this unprecedented image, I contend, has to do with its affirmation of prevalent, nineteenth-century discourses of nationhood. As this is part of the deeper narrative of the show’s appeal—which I save for the end of this thesis—I ask that the reader trust that the present discussion of the uniqueness of Sorolla’s works in the lineage of Western depictions of Spain will ultimately yield larger insights.

The novelty of the painter’s portrayal of his country and countrymen is more easily grasped when compared with representations of Iberia that turn-of-the-century, art-going Americans were accustomed to. For U.S. artists invested in contemporary trends in Europe, Manet’s Spanish works of the 1860s were profoundly influential.³⁸⁶ The Frenchman used peninsular “types” or stock characters, both to lend his images an exotic, modern flare—in the same way others used *Japonisme*—as well as to draw comparison

³⁸⁶ Boone, “Mary Cassatt, Modern Woman, and the Ritual of Spanish Travel,” *Vistas de España*, 100-101.

between himself and the recently-revived, Spanish masters.³⁸⁷ In the last two quarters of the Nineteenth Century, U.S. artists from Thomas Eakins to Harry Humphrey Moore to Robert Fredrick Blum—inspired by the Frenchman and Romantic, Anglo-American authors such as Irving—sojourned to Spain in search of the folkloric, picturesque and so-“backward”-as-to-be-cutting-edge. At home, they found a healthy market for their canvases among those who had “encountered” (or one day hoped to see) such Spanish types on their own vacations to the country.

Painters from inside Iberia capitalized on types as well. In fact, Zuloaga—Sorolla’s biggest rival in terms of international renown—treated the same tropes, in dramatic Castilian landscapes, with the same Velázquezian palette, as countless Americans of the preceding decades. While his use of tradition and stereotype was undoubtedly motivated by different impulses than Sargent, Chase or Cassatt, his pictures were popular outside of Spain for their ability to induce the same flights of fancy as those produced by U.S. artists. Attendees of the artist’s Hispanic Society show (which immediately followed Sorolla’s), vicariously explored the heart of *España Negra*, through depictions of pallid *toreros*, smoldering *majas*, toothless peasants and otherworldly dwarves (see **fig 22 & 23** as examples).

While use of Spanish types allowed French, American and even Iberian artists to posit their art as modish (and to sell more paintings), the resulting image of Spain closely

³⁸⁷ The evocative power of toreadors, flamenco dancers and guitar players for Manet is not only evident in the paintings he produced, but also the etching series, *Galerie Espagnole* (also known as the Cadart Portfolio), that he circulated in 1862 to advertise his first solo show. (See Carol Armstrong’s “Reproducing Originality: The Cadart Portfolio” in *Manet/Manette* (2002)).

aligned with Prescott's Paradigm of eternal retrograde. The works included in Sorolla's show, however, departed drastically from this. Starkweather insisted the artist created "few costume pictures," and at the time, he was correct: the catalogue of the Hispanic Society exhibition lists only a handful of images employing traditional clothing or types.³⁸⁸ What's more, no itinerate beggars, gypsy performers or lay-about peasants are to be found in Sorolla's canvases. His working-class subjects are always captured in the midst of farming or fishing, and though many of his bourgeois figures enjoy leisure, those who do are women and children. Middle-class men enter the exhibition through formal portraiture, where elements of the image, or its title, announce their vocation and productivity. Thus, Sorolla's paintings were not just "family-friendly" and "morally upright" in a general sense—they also constituted the most "spotless" version of the Spanish populous Americans had yet seen.³⁸⁹

Depictions of the artist's bourgeois peers bucked U.S. expectations not only through their subjects' propriety and industriousness, but their innovativeness and modernity. These latter qualities are announced by the figures' dress and possessions—whether at work or play. Nowhere is this more apparent than in *Snapshot at Biarritz* (or *Instantaneous* (**fig 24**)) of 1906. The painting's focus is an elegant woman who, in

³⁸⁸ They are: *Leonese Peasants* (1907), *Segovian Family (The Suckling Child)?* (1894), *The Blindman of Toledo* (1906), *Clotilde with a Spanish Mantilla* (1902) and the previously discussed *Elena and Maria on Horseback* (1908) (*Eight Essays Vol II*). Please note: there are two Sorolla paintings entitled *Segovian Family*. One was painted in 1912—meaning the picture referred to in the Hispanic Society catalogue must be the one subtitled (*The Suckling Child*) from 1894.

³⁸⁹ This was originally the insight of Professor Susan Laxton, who shared the idea at my thesis defense.

reality, can barely be called a woman at all, as her presence and subjectivity is completely subordinate to her role as “technician” and “outfit.” She sits in the sand, nonchalantly manipulating a camera. Her white dress with leg-o’-mutton sleeves covers her from throat to foot, while her hands are concealed by long gloves. As she looks down at the device in her lap, her hat (also white) obscures all but her rouged lips and chin.

In 1909, the Kodak Brownie (which made possible amateur photography and with it, the “snapshot”) was not yet a decade old, and carried with it the same futuristic connotations that Apple Inc. products do presently.³⁹⁰ Even without knowing the title, the importance of the portable camera in *Snapshot* is unmistakable. The only jet-black feature in an otherwise pastel world, Sorolla has placed it in the near-dead-center of the painting—the pin that holds the rest of the zig-zag composition in place. It is the first thing our eyes are drawn to, quickly followed by the figure’s *a-la-mode* ensemble. The notion that attention to dress was as essential to participation in modernity as possession of the newest gadgets was widespread in the nineteenth-century West. Balzac and Baudelaire were just two of countless commentators to suggest that fashion’s very ephemerality made it the barometer of cultural and artistic change.³⁹¹ Through

³⁹⁰ Wikipedia contributors, "History of the camera," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_the_camera&oldid=84064115

³⁹¹ See Balzac’s *Treatise on the Elegant Life* (1830) or Baudelaire’s *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863).

incorporating the latest styles in canvases like *Snapshot*, Sorolla evidenced that both he, and his middle-class, Spanish associates, kept a finger on the pulse of modern life.³⁹²

As previously stated, we can imagine little about *Snapshot*'s woman in the sand besides her gender, class and consumption of state-of-the-art technology and clothing. However, her sophisticated apparel shows *just* enough skin to note she is as white as the veil that shields her from the sun. Accordingly, a final factor distinguishing Sorolla's Spain from the representations Americans were used to was the predominance of light hair and pale complexions. This is, of course, conspicuous in a region as ethnically-mixed as Iberia, but resonates with ideas about racial "unity" and national progress that were widespread in the nineteenth-century West—and that the painter clearly absorbed, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Joshua Seth Goode has detailed that the rise of racial "science" in Spain began in the 1860s and "exploded in the years between 1870 and 1900."³⁹³ As in the rest of Europe, "scholarly" inquiry "began against a backdrop of liberal optimism that science might solve... intractable social problems" such as crime, poverty, civil unrest and—in the specific case of Spain—"regional separatism and the weakness of Spanish

³⁹² A new exhibition entitled *Sorolla y La Moda* (Winter-Spring 2018), organized by the *Museo Sorolla* and Thyssen-Bornemisza, explores fashion as a central preoccupation of the painter's life and work. Highlighted in the show's literature is the artist's role in outfitting his family. His correspondence with Clotilde frequently mentions new garments purchased in Paris, London etc., meant to keep the Sorollas in style. (See Campelo, "El Verano Elegante," *Sorolla y La Moda: Guía Didáctica*, 31.)

³⁹³ Goode, *Impurity of Blood: Defining Race in Spain, 1870-1930*, 37.

nationalism.”³⁹⁴ While “specialists” to the North such as Joseph Arthur de Gobineau “factualized” racist associations of the “Aryan” with the “modern”/historical and the “non-Aryan” with the “primitive”/ahistorical, interracial *fusion* was the “constant” that tied all Spanish, racial theorists together.³⁹⁵ This is because, Goode explains, Spain could never claim a history of European racial purity in the peninsula. Thus, the country’s scientific community agreed that Spaniards were “Europeans with a dose of something else.”³⁹⁶ This “dose of something else” from Africa and the Middle East, it was believed, had for the most part been successfully absorbed by the peninsula’s “original,” “European” inhabitants. In fact, it had contributed certain positive qualities—such as fierce pride and independence—to the Spanish populous, making it “the racial vanguard of Europe.”³⁹⁷ However, “degenerative elements could remain,” producing genetic outliers from the beneficially-fused, Spanish race.³⁹⁸ It was these genetic outliers who became criminals, communists, separatists or whatever other “no-good” group race scientists wished to condemn.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, 37 and 55.

³⁹⁵ Ibid, 37.

³⁹⁶ Ibid, 72.

³⁹⁷ Ibid. (For the retention of “positive characteristics” from Africa and the Middle East see page 72-3. For Spain as the “racial vanguard” see page 57.)

³⁹⁸ Goode sites the example of Spanish anthropologist Manuel Antón y Ferrándiz, who stated: “It is still all too clear that the Caliph will occasionally reveal the atavistic daggers of his nature, in the fights in Bejar and Calendario, and among the various fighting and brawling one sees between teenage boys and even young men in the streets of our neighborhoods.” (Translation Goode’s.)

Members of the ILE and other liberal, Spanish intellectuals were well-versed in “developments” in racial studies due to their belief that modern, scientific disciplines imported from Europe were key to Spain’s progress. Indeed, two friends of Sorolla’s—the psychologist Luis Simarro and neuroscientist Santiago Ramón y Cajal—had direct ties to the Free School and Laboratory of Anthropology (founded in 1875), which was “the leading force in the formation of the modern discipline of anthropology in Spain.”³⁹⁹ In pointing this out, I don’t mean to suggest that the artist was racist—I haven’t encountered definitive evidence either way. Yet it seems plausible to me that the majority lily-white subjects of the Hispanic Society show can be seen in one sense as embodying nineteenth-century Spanish, racial-theorists’ faith in (or dream of) a unified Iberian race, capable of maintaining its ethnically-European core despite a history and future of miscegenation. Sorolla’s beach figures, in particular, appear peach-skinned, fair-haired and *energized* by their liminal position between sea and sand—Spanish earth beneath their feet, and winds from the Mediterranean/Middle East in their hair. Of course, this visualization of peninsular racial fusion would have gone straight over the heads of the artist’s 1909, U.S. audience. And yet, the general message would have been clear: Spaniards were, at heart, European—“white”—and therefore (according to nineteenth-century, Western cosmology) capable of the “ultimate development” of which Huntington had written.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁹ Ibid. (See pages 44, 45 and 56.)

⁴⁰⁰ For an explanation of the connection between “whiteness” and “progress” in the nineteenth-century West, see Robert Young’s “Sex and Inequality: The Cultural Construction of Race” in *Colonial Desire* (1995).

That the canvases of the Hispanic Society show resisted Prescott's Paradigm through evocation of an unmistakably industrious, modern and European Spain is readily-apparent from the historian's perspective. But the task remains to demonstrate that New York and New England viewers recognized and accepted this "new" Spain at the time. Once again, exhibition press coverage is revealing. To begin, an anonymous writer for *The New York Times* observed: "[Sorolla's] personal message is a national one as well... His Spain is a pleasant country, populated by kindly, intelligent people..."⁴⁰¹ From these lines we can induce that at least some East Coasters understood the painter's presentation as representative of his nation, and furthermore, that they acknowledged the cordiality and sophistication of his middle-class subjects. Additionally, Williams saw Sorolla's art as "interpreting all aspects and developments of contemporary Spain..." later opining that "the march of art in modern Spain has coincided with her evolution generally."⁴⁰² The critic's affirmation of Iberia's modernity and forward movement should not be taken for granted. As Boone has convincingly argued, U.S. fair organizers and media "altered and subverted" Spain's self-representation at the Philadelphia Centennial and Columbian World's Exposition—relegating the country to the mythic past in an effort to downplay its presence in the contemporary Americas.⁴⁰³ Whereas George T. Ferris, reporting on the

⁴⁰¹Untitled entry from *The New York Times* (Feb 5, 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 154.

⁴⁰² Williams, "The Art of Joaquín Sorolla," *Eight Essays Vol I*, 215 and 222.

⁴⁰³ Boone, "Marginalizing Spain at the World's Columbian Exhibition," *Nineteenth Century Studies* 25 (2011), 2.

centennial, had interpreted the peninsula's art as evidence of its unrelenting decline, Williams believed Sorolla's work signaled the nation's progress.⁴⁰⁴ Of course, to accede the existence of "modern Spain" meant that the country could no longer be a complete Other, since it was now seen as sharing the same, triumphant, civilizing project as the U.S. This newfound sense of relatability is reflected in Hepburn's poem, when she calls the artist: "Painter of men and women, of faces like *thine or\ mine.*"⁴⁰⁵

Not only did the Hispanic Society show introduce visitors to a "new" Spain—it did so through a deeply-immersive simulation of travel. This is the last immediate explanation that I argue is missing from our present understanding of East-Coast enchantment with the artist's oeuvre in 1909.

Both the content and curation of Sorolla's paintings encouraged the sense that in touring the museum's galleries, audience members were visiting the peninsula and its people. Beginning with content: Sorolla had shown an unprecedented 479 canvases at Georges Petit's. The 356 works at the Hispanic Society were likely equally impressive to New Yorkers, supporting the illusion that the artist, through his extraordinary speed and productivity, had managed to capture his country in microcosm.

The Hispanic Society did not photograph each painting, nor has any scholar assembled a fully-illustrated catalogue of the exhibition.⁴⁰⁶ However, the two-volume

⁴⁰⁴ To review Ferris' quote see note #64 in this chapter.

⁴⁰⁵ Hepburn, "Sorolla" (Feb 1909), "*Eight Essays Vol II*, 351. (Emphasis mine.)

⁴⁰⁶ Pons Sorolla, a great granddaughter of the artist, has a catalogue raisonné currently in the works.

commemorative book, *Eight Essays on Sorolla* (from which many of the reviews mentioned in this thesis originate), includes a list of all images displayed.⁴⁰⁷ Some titles are unique enough that they can be matched to specific pictures.⁴⁰⁸ The more generic titles (there are numerous *Playa de Valencia* and *Playa de Biarritz*s) still provide insight into the show's general makeup. Sorting the works by the subject matter their names imply reveals that the artist presented U.S. spectators with:

- 30 landscapes (excluding beach scenes)
- 28 anonymous workers and 3 generic "types" (for the latter see note #125 of this chapter)
- 45 portraits, including:
 - 23 of the artist's family
 - 6 of the royal family
 - 16 "notable" Spanish men
- 157 beachscapes (including depictions of boats)
- 38 adult and child "beach revelers"
- 30 architectural scenes
- 13 gardenscapes
- 12 botanical details (orange trees, rose bushes, etc.)⁴⁰⁹

Such a breakdown underscores not just the quantity but the *variety* of pictures on display. If "gardenscapes" and "botanical details" are combined, then the diverse categories are also present in roughly equal number, excepting "seascapes," which make up about a third of the exhibition. Titles within the architectural and land/marinescape

⁴⁰⁷ According to Pons Sorolla, the exhibition catalogue was published by the Hispanic Society in homage to Sorolla after the success of the show in New York. (Pons Sorolla, "Sorolla: Single Portraits," *Sargent/Sorolla*, 115).

⁴⁰⁸ Verifying, of course, that the painting was produced before 1909.

⁴⁰⁹ My work here is not an exact science, as some pictures, for example, *Low Tide (Elena in Biarritz)* (cat #95) could be considered a portrait of a family member, or simply a painting of a beach reveler...

groups suggest topographical variation, with scenes from the beaches of València, Biarritz, San Sebastian and Galicia; the dry, rugged plains of Castile; the lush, royal residencies of La Granja and El Pardo near Madrid; and the Moorish city of Sevilla in Andalucía. While these locations do not in reality, comprise the totality of Spain, they constituted the country for nineteenth-century, U.S. tourists. A similar comprehensiveness is implied in the remaining images of people of all social-classes and ages. Tyrell noted the over-all effect in *The New York World*: “Above and all around stretches a marvelously animated panorama of [Alfonso XIII’s] kingdom—the Spain of today...”⁴¹⁰

Timothy Mitchell has proposed that a defining mentality of the nineteenth-century West was that of “the world as exhibition.” Evident in the proto-shopping-malls, theatre culture, fairs and expositions, and *flaneur* literature of the time, he claims, are a contradictory “need to separate oneself from the world and to render it up as an object of representation” as well as “the desire to lose oneself within this object-world and to experience it directly.”⁴¹¹ Tyrell’s description of the Sorolla show as “panorama” indicates that the canvases successfully reproduced Spain as an “object” that could be safely and legibly regarded. Yet while the presentation’s contents connoted microcosm, its curation suggests that audiences experienced this expansiveness less like the “ordered” completeness of a museum and more like the chaotic unity of a fair. Photographs of the

⁴¹⁰ “Sorolla’s 300 Sunny Spanish Pictures,” *The New York World* (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 207.

⁴¹¹ Mitchell, “The World as Exhibition,” 231.

central patio of the Hispanic Society during the exhibition (**fig 25**) reveals the artist did not arrange pictures by genre, but rather, juxtaposed a bourgeois woman out for a stroll with a poor child roasting peppers in a sea-side shack, an elegant female leaning against a sunlit tree with a subdued, interior portrait of a man of letters. Two naked babes sandwich pictures of Spain's monarchs, while directly above Queen Victoria Eugenia's head, Valencian fishermen labor with a group of oxen.

The painter's interspersing of the lofty and humble, formal and casual, wild and domesticized no doubt produced a spontaneous, exploratory effect, as spectators moved from canvas to canvas not knowing what they would see next. In other words, the show was engrossing, allowing observers to "lose" themselves in a mode of looking that felt like the "direct" experience of tourism. This sense of interactive immersion is likewise readable in responses of fin-de-siècle viewers, both French and American. Recall that guests of Georges Petit applauded the "dazzling impression" of Sorolla's work—one critic averring it was more akin to theatre than to picture hanging.⁴¹² Similarly, Huntington's statement that there was "eternal talk of sunlight" indicates that New Yorker's not only admired the artist's work, but felt *transported* by it.

That the curation of the Hispanic Society presentation corresponds to Sorolla's own vision is evinced, first, by its structural resemblance to the *Georges Petit* exhibition (**fig 26**) (which Gil and the painter arranged together), as well as Huntington's known aversion to the "heaping of objects from here or there or anywhere until the whole looks

⁴¹² See note #177 in Chapter One.

like an art congress.”⁴¹³ The millionaire’s letters and diary further reveal that he essayed an initial installation that was heavily edited by the artist. In an epistle to Huntington a month before the show, the Spaniard intimated: “If you need me to help you install the exhibition, I beg you to telegraph me to advance the date of my trip...”⁴¹⁴ A diary entry from around the painter’s arrival in New York states: “[Sorolla] insisted on hurrying off to the H.S.A to see the pictures. Expressed his satisfaction at the hanging which I had done & made many suggestions.”⁴¹⁵ A few days later, the patron logged: “S is very tired. He has worked all day hanging his pictures, and at noon fell asleep on one of the marble slabs of the colonnade.”⁴¹⁶ Clearly, Sorolla was not going to wait for the American to request help before reshaping the show according to his own vision.

Further aiding the immersiveness of the presentation, I contend, was U.S. critics’ faith that Sorolla could *nearly* reproduce exact, objective “Reality.” As mentioned, reviewers stopped short of endowing the bravura technique with the same truth-authority as photography, which at the end of the day, absolutely testified that “something was there.”⁴¹⁷ However, when discussing the artist’s work, Williams asserted: “closely akin to

⁴¹³ See note #50 in this chapter.

⁴¹⁴ “Si ud. Me necesita para ayudarle a instalar la exposicion, le ruego me telegrafie para adelantar mi viaje...” (“Apéndice: Correspondencia entre Sorolla, Huntington y La Hispanic Society con Selecciones del Diario de Huntington,” *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 374)

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid*, 375.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴¹⁷ I use “testified” in the past tense because of course, we cannot assume the same of digital photography today.

actuality is swiftness.”⁴¹⁸ This presumed relation made it possible for an *Evening Post* writer to contend: “with a swift and unerring hand and a brush full of bright color, [Sorolla] sweeps in the actuality of life,” “without having studied the scene.”⁴¹⁹ Mitchell’s notion of “the world as exhibition” is again helpful for its ability to elucidate why turn-of-the-century viewers endowed the artist with near-documentary authority, without ever forgetting that in the end, he was painting. As the scholar explains, the mindset of “the world as exhibition”: “accept[s] the distinction between a realm of representations and the external reality which such representations promise...”⁴²⁰ But despite—in fact precisely because of—this separation between the “representative” and “the Real,” objects did not have to be “authentic” in order to teach or invoke “cold, hard fact.” Thus, in the same way that a fabricated “Cairo Street” could stand in for Egypt, or Baartman’s posterior could confirm black women’s “hyper-sexual” nature, Sorolla’s paintings were considered reliable representations, or legitimate simulacra, with the power to speak of “the Real,” that is, of Spain.

⁴¹⁸ Williams, “The Art of Joaquín Sorolla,” *Eight Essays Vol II*, 281.

⁴¹⁹ “Spain’s Great Painter,” *The Evening Post* (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 165 and 166.

⁴²⁰ Mitchell, “The World as Exhibition,” 225.

Part 5: What Lies Beneath: An East-Coast Viewership's "Deep Cravings" concerning Positivism, Nationalism, Technology and Industrial Capitalism

Having acknowledged the immediate reasons for East-Coast Americans' enjoyment of the 1909 show—those explanations that were utterable for visitors at the time—we can finally turn to the unarticulated “cravings” (to borrow Malraux's term) that found temporary relief in Sorolla's work. Yet some readers may wonder: why not take the painter's contemporaries at face value? Could the present writer be over-complicating the issue? In response, I'd like to briefly invoke Ariella Azoulay's thinking on “the opposition between ‘The Political’ and ‘The Aesthetic’” in *Civil Imagination*.

In the book's second chapter, the photo-theorist charts the evolution of the “judgement of taste,” the paradigmatic, governing relation between art objects and Western viewers since the early-modern era. Initially, the judgement's task was to determine: is this beautiful? Then it morphed into the question: is this “Art?”—the major concern of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century academics. By the fin-de-siècle—when the explosion of “-isms” made it impossible to maintain that “Art” had to look a certain way—the judgement shifted again to: is this work (too) aesthetic, or (too) political?

Azoulay notes that since the emergence of the “third judgement of taste,” art that is disliked by a viewer will almost inevitably be labeled irredeemably aesthetic or political. Either way, she posits, what the spectator really balks at is a worldview or perspective discordant with their own. This is because the opposition between “the political” and “the aesthetic” is ultimately a fallacy—every political message is delivered in a particular form, while the “strictly formal” is not created in a political vacuum. In

short, all art transmits ideology—though this ideology is not fixed and changes as the art is re-interpreted and -employed. But observers can only concede this when the work in question is undesirable. “Good” art—art that fascinates—does not raise hairs to ideology. It simply looks as art *should*, makes the statements art *should* make, and thus, naturalizes approving viewers’ own cosmology.

This is noticeable in fin-de-siècle, East Coasters’ praise for Sorolla. Whether lauding his optimism, technical mastery, child-friendliness or balance of modernity and tradition, their critiques inevitably concern the paintings themselves, or their connection to other pictures. To grasp how the enchantment of U.S. spectators was related to larger historical forces, and materialized visitors’ collective ideology, we must trace the roots of their appreciations to a set of convictions and fears related to Positivism, nationalism, technology and industrial capitalism.

It can be argued, for starters, that to love the artist’s belated-Impressionist or luminist style circa 1909 was to re-invest in a Positivist view of modernity that was, by the turn of the century, being challenged within the art world and in Western culture in general.⁴²¹ Recalling Rosenblum’s work on the *Exposition Universelle*, the plethora of

⁴²¹ Medina provides a succinct overview of Positivism in *Spanish Realism*: “...positivism [originated] between 1830 and 1842 with Auguste Comte. During the Second Empire in France under Napoleon III, [it] became the dominant trend in scientific thought, and was adopted by scholars, historians, and even literary figures. The positivists avoided metaphysics in favor of observable facts and tentative generalizations deriving from these observations. The movement reflected clearly the new confidence of the bourgeoisie—an attitude made aggressive by several successful revolutions against the old order in Europe. Positivism was based on the pragmatic principle that one looked only to solid, observable, identifiable data: objects, natural or historical forces, happenings. It rejected both the methodological and emotional (or imaginative) orientation of the past. Progress

artistic “-isms” competing for legitimacy around 1900 can be roughly (and not unproblematically) divided under the umbrellas of Symbolism and the Naturalism. In the former category are works that align with post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Fauvism, Cubism and other emerging movements. In the latter: art that resonates with the more entrenched schools of Impressionism and Realism—including luminism. Rosenblum differentiates the Symbolist from the Naturalist when he claims:

By 1900... the stubborn grasp of the external realities so familiar to nineteenth-century art—people, cities, landscapes and still-lives—continued to loosen. With eyes open or closed, mysterious worlds—the depths of the psyche or the far reaches of the imagination—could be explored. This willingness to challenge material facts led as well to the threshold of an art that kept exploring the very tools artists used to depict visible things...⁴²²

The scholar here notes the Naturalist preoccupation with “external realities” and “material facts,” which is observable in Sorolla’s oeuvre. This is not to say this “school” was superficial or materialistic—that Manet’s *Port of Bordeaux* (1871) is simply a painting about boats, any more than Cassatt’s *The Tea* (1880) is a mere portrayal of feminine, bourgeois pastime. Yet a chief aim of the former, if we are to believe Foucault, was to use the feverish horizontality and verticality of his ships’ masts, booms and sails to indicate the fibers of a canvas, and hence, the *corporeality* of the picture itself.⁴²³ If we agree with Pollock—that Cassatt’s painting speaks to the boredom and restrictiveness of

was deemed both necessary and desirable and was to be realized through the scientific inquiry of a talented, energetic and enlightened minority.” (24)

⁴²² Rosenblum, “Art in 1900: Twilight or Dawn?,” *1900*, 52.

⁴²³ Foucault, *Manet and the Object of Painting*, 42.

nineteenth-century, middle-class womanhood—this is only manifest through the expressions of the women, the prison-bar wallpaper and the objects that clutter the room.⁴²⁴ Furthermore, the historian insists that Cassatt and Morisot’s works testify to the way bourgeois women’s unique psychology was in fact shaped by their limited *physical* experience of fin-de-siècle Paris.⁴²⁵

What then, was the larger implication of the Naturalist emphasis on the “external” and “material”—on their devotion to social-realist images, land and cityscapes, and scenes of quotidian life? Sorolla’s comment to a New York reporter is revealing: “Nature, the sun itself, produces color effects... instantaneously. The impression of these evanescent visions is what we make desperate attempts to catch and fix by any means at hand...”⁴²⁶ The power and comfort of the visible/sensible then, had nothing to do with immutability, but rather, that it’s fleetingness could be “caught” and “fixed.” What can be “caught” and “fixed” can be preserved and studied. The concrete focus of Sorolla’s painting, and Naturalist art in general, thus dovetails (whether consciously or not) with the nineteenth-century, Positivist assertion that “Truth” is only that which is observable and quantifiable—in other words, that which originates, or is evinced, in the

⁴²⁴ Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, 249.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Tyrrell, “Sorolla’s 300 Sunny Spanish Pictures,” *The New York World* (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 214.

ocular/material world. This line of thinking further implies that there is no “truth” humans can’t potentially uncover—and once uncovered, physically alter if desired.⁴²⁷

Rosenblum’s quote additionally posits that Symbolist art enacted a subconscious “push-back” against the confident, evolutionary narrative premised on the primacy of “material facts.” So-called Symbolists took as subject matter all that was *not* scientifically verifiable and which humans could therefore never fully comprehend or control—let alone definitively depict. This included the “unconscious” (proposed by Freud in 1899 to be “the irrational bedrock of human behavior”), the religious, the occult, “basic” or elemental emotions and “mysterious organic energy” such as Henri Bergson’s *élan vital*.⁴²⁸ The concurrent interest in *stylistic* abstraction at the end of the century, the scholar suggests, was equally predicated on disillusionment with Positivism.

Tomàs Llorens has echoed Rosenblum’s claim that Naturalism and Symbolism transcended national boundaries, and are best understood as paradigmatic forms of nineteenth-century, Western consciousness.⁴²⁹ He also further distinguishes the two camps by advancing that “Modern naturalists... were also historicists” while Symbolists

⁴²⁷ This was the necessary silver lining to the Positivist conviction that “Technological and biological discoveries [had] further demonstrated the probability that deterministic forces ruled man’s life.” (Medina, *Spanish Realism*, 24)

⁴²⁸ Rosenblum, “Art in 1900: Twilight or Dawn?,” *1900*. For Freud’s unconscious see 36, for Bergson’s *élan vital*, 39.

⁴²⁹ Llorens writes: “One of the most remarkable characteristics of this extensive naturalist movement was the way that it spread geographically. Independent of State for the first time in history, but now subject to that new, characteristically modern social force constituted by the general public, painters and novelists engaged in a society that crossed boundaries.” (Llorens, “Sargent, Sorolla and Modern Art,” *Sargent/Sorolla*, 4.)

(who he calls “avant-garde creators”) “dreamed of a place outside History.” Mimesis was vital to the former as a means of documenting the uniqueness of each historical period—its characteristic form, spirit and strivings—which ultimately confirmed beliefs of gradual, societal advancement.⁴³⁰ Alternatively, Symbolists’ skepticism of the historical project lead many to devalue mimesis.⁴³¹

Muller has stated that by 1909: “Impressionism had long before... yielded to Post-Impressionism, though neither had enjoyed their maximum financial potential.”⁴³² The second half of her claim is certainly buttressed by Sorolla’s massive sales in the U.S. Yet I believe the crowds that flocked to the Spaniard’s first, North-American exhibition demand a re-consideration of the verb “yield.” While Impressionism was no longer avant-garde, Sorolla’s success demonstrates that its “advanced,” or “belated,” iterations were still symbolically potent. In fact, I would argue that we can and should read the show’s popularity as a reaffirmation of a Positivist approach to modernity by its many East-Coast attendees; a (short-lived) counter revolution to the earlier Symbolist departure. In closing his 1909 catalogue essay, Williams makes the stakes of this contest (from the Naturalist perspective) clear:

Pre-Raphaelitism, medievalism, pointillism, chromatism; wilful [sic] and capricious lookings back or lookings forward; theory upon theory; fad upon fad—should all these sickly innovations be committed to the tomb, their loss will not affect us vitally. But alas for art when man should finally discard his interest in the life that is around... when he should finally avert his eyes from fact to superstition... For this—the earnest, undivided study of his days alone—alone

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Muller, “Sorolla and America,” *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 23.

can yield him an approximated knowledge of the perfect truth... a triumph worthy to be chronicled by Progress on the purest and most lasting table of her golden archives.⁴³³

For the critic, to engage with Symbolism was to support “fad” and “superstition.” To admire a Sorolla, on the other hand, was to vindicate “fact,” “progress” and the “golden archives” of History.

Given the link between Naturalist mimesis and nineteenth-century historicism articulated by Llorens, it is unsurprising that Starkweather proclaimed: “Of the... great leaders of modern Spanish art... Sorolla is in reality the most thoroughly national because he is the most thoroughly realistic.”⁴³⁴ After all, a demonstrable history was (and still is) an essential component of any people’s claim to nationhood, and mimesis, according to fin-de-siècle Positivists, was History’s hand-maiden.⁴³⁵ In calling the painter’s work “thoroughly national,” Starkweather no doubt meant that it was thoroughly “Spanish.” Nevertheless, the remark gestures to my own claim—that Sorolla’s show was celebrated by his U.S. audience not just for upholding Positivism, but for reifying a nationalist discourse that was pervasive (and largely identical) from country to country within the Nineteenth Century.⁴³⁶

⁴³³ Williams, “The Art of Joaquín Sorolla,” *Eight Essays Vol I*, 328.

⁴³⁴ Starkweather, “Joaquín Sorolla the Man and His Work,” *Eight Essays Vol II*, 27.

⁴³⁵ For an explanation of the relation between history and nationalism see the introduction of Hobsbawm’s *Invented Traditions* pages 12-14.

⁴³⁶ For proof that this “nationalist discourse” was/is similar, “modular,” and thus transposable from country to country, see Anderson’s introduction to *Imagined Communities*, page 4.

As previously noted, the human subjects of the Hispanic-Society canvases were conspicuously light-skinned and mono-ethnic. This resonated with turn-of-the-century conceptions of the nation as largely constituted, if not by racial and cultural *uniformity*, then only by specific, socially-beneficial “types” of miscegenation.⁴³⁷ (In the case of Spain, as previously discussed, this meant a proper “fusion” that acknowledged Iberia as a melting pot of Eastern and Western cultures, at the same time that it asserted the essential Europeanness of its populous.) The exhibition also demonstrated that Spain, like all nations, was possessing of “tradition”—or what Hobsbawm argues is, in reality, a set of practices, divorced from practical purpose, that have been “modified, ritualized and institutionalized” to establish continuity with a historic past.⁴³⁸ This is seen in the regional clothing sported by Sorolla’s family in *Elena and Maria on Horseback* and *Clotilde in a Spanish Mantilla*. It is also strongly suggested by the portraits of the monarchs, and images of working-class people, both “ethnographic”/“typed” and contemporary. I have acknowledged how the artist depicted his lower-class countrymen as live repositories of “tradition,”—either through their posing/costume or the “pre-industrial” labor they pursue. The same can be claimed of his paintings of the Royal

⁴³⁷ For more on this see Stuart Hall’s “Nations and Diasporas” in *The Faithful Triangle* (2017), Blanca Muratorio’s “Images of Indians in the Construction of Ecuadorian National Identity” (2000), or Tenorio Trillo’s “Mexican Anthropology and Ethnography at the Paris Exposition” in *Mexico at the World’s Fairs* (1996).

⁴³⁸ See again, the introduction to the scholar’s *Invented Traditions*, specifically, pages 1-4.

Family, who themselves are portrayed in traditional regalia, providing embodied testament to a history of governance.

In nationalist discourse, countries are not only distinguished by their “ethnic specificity,” but by their physical borders. Whether officialized or diasporic, nations necessitate connection to a common land. Excepting many of the formal portraits, the 356 pictures of the 1909 exhibition were produced outdoors, staging Spain’s geography—whether costal or inland—as unspoiled, bountiful and perpetually sunny. Finally, within the cosmology of the nineteenth-century, industrialized world, nations are “modern” and evidence the “progress” of their constituents. The concept of the nation arose in the era of Enlightenment and Revolution, when select groups of men claimed equality to each other and “natural rights as citizens” *directly* under God, “destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm.”⁴³⁹ Thus, to be part of a nation meant to belong to—or live among and “benefit” from—a class of men rational and enterprising enough to successfully claim sovereignty. The nation was further cast as the most “advanced” form of human social/political organization through comparison with more “primitive” societies whose members—positioned as they were on a “lower rung” of the evolutionary ladder—possessed neither the material prerequisites nor the natural intelligence to set their sights beyond their tribes or villages. As previously detailed, Sorolla foregrounded the modernity of his bourgeois subjects through their dress, equipment and professional and leisure-time activities. Additionally, his portraits of

⁴³⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

sixteen “notable Spanish men” left no doubt that the country possessed the type of “rational,” “enterprising” male confederacy that formed the backbone of all great nations.⁴⁴⁰

The painter was not the first of his countrymen to emphasize Iberia’s conformity with the tenants of nineteenth-century nationhood. The Spanish government had been fashioning the peninsula in such a manner for decades, in expositions in Madrid and abroad.⁴⁴¹ At every opportunity however, U.S. journalists and audiences denied assertions of a progressive Spain.⁴⁴² What had changed by 1909? The Spanish were no longer physically present in the Americas, thanks to the U.S. victory in the Spanish-American War, and over the proceeding decade, bureaucratic wrinkles in the peace treaty had been largely ironed out.⁴⁴³ With the former empire no longer an obstacle to U.S. influence south of the border, Spain’s claims to modern nationhood ceased to feel threatening.⁴⁴⁴ In

⁴⁴⁰ Huntington was as invested in these “notable Spanish men” as Sorolla. While the American was organizing the 1909 exhibition, he was also commissioning the painter to produce portraits for a gallery of “*Españoles Ilustres*” to be on permanent display in the Hispanic Society. No doubt part of his mission to demonstrate that Iberia had a future as potentially golden as its past... (Muller, “Sorolla y Huntington: Pintor y Patrono,” *Sorolla y La Hispanic Society*, 120)

⁴⁴¹ Two examples can be found in Boone’s “Marginalizing Spain at the World’s Columbian Exhibition,” *Nineteenth Century Studies* 25 (2011) or the slim scholarship on Spain’s own 1892 Columbian quartercentenary in Madrid.

⁴⁴² Again, see Boone’s work on the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair or 1876 Philadelphia Centennial.

⁴⁴³ Payne, “The Reencounter between Spain and the United States after 1898,” *When Spain Fascinated America*, 12.

⁴⁴⁴ This is not a new argument, but one that many historians of nineteenth-century Spanish-American relations have advanced. See, for example, page 191 of Boone’s

fact, they reinforced the “natural,” “universal” laws on which U.S. nationalism was premised—which conveniently justified male-only suffrage, exploitation of non-white peoples and imperialist expansion.

If Sorolla’s art *and* a “new,” progressive Iberia were on display at Huntington’s fledgling museum, then (upper)middle-class Spaniards were the clear protagonists of both. Yet as I’ve suggested, many 1909, U.S. viewers likely saw themselves reflected in the artist’s painted, bourgeois peers. Accordingly, my final contention with regards to the deeper appeal of the Hispanic Society show is that its canvases soothed anxieties about technology and industrial capitalism that nagged fin-de-siècle, middle-class Americans as much—perhaps more—than their peninsular counter parts.⁴⁴⁵

In the nineteenth-century West, the same “turn towards science” that precipitated Positivist philosophy resulted in a slew of empirical discoveries and technological innovations that kept pace with burgeoning mass production.⁴⁴⁶ The era’s new conveniences included the steam engine (with its application to the steamboat and railway), photography, the telephone, the telegraph, the electric light, the phonograph, the radio, the typewriter, dynamite, the machine gun—and many more. Indeed, between 1800-1900, “life was constantly being revolutionized by technological change” at a rate

“Choosing Zuloaga” or Kagan’s entire essay, “The Spanish Craze: The Discovery of Spanish Art and Culture in the United States”—both in *When Spain Fascinated America*.

⁴⁴⁵ I say “perhaps more” because the process of industrialization in Spain was less advanced and less totalizing than in the U.S. at the end of the Nineteenth Century.

⁴⁴⁶ Medina, *Spanish Realism*, 23.

unknown in the past.⁴⁴⁷ Such change was often met with optimism and excitement—especially in the U.S., according to Richard Hofstadter.⁴⁴⁸ Yet, “cultural critics from William Blake to Émile Zola” observed how, “industrial capitalism remade all aspects of society”—irreversibly, and not always, it seemed, for the better.⁴⁴⁹ William Wordsworth wrote in his 1814 poem *The Excursion*:

...I have lived to mark\ A new and unforeseen creation rise\
From the labours of a peaceful Land\
Wielding her potent enginery to frame\
And to produce, with appetite as keen\
As that of war, which rests not night or day,\
Industrious to destroy!...⁴⁵⁰

The American Charles Francis Adams undertook an 1879 study of railway accidents meant to reassure passengers about the safety of train travel. His language betrays the doubts that he himself may have had in his consolations:

Suddenly, somehow, and somewhere... an obstruction is encountered, a jar, as it were, is felt, and instantly, with time for hardly an ejaculation or a thought, a multitude of human beings are hurled into eternity.⁴⁵¹

Adam’s words buttress Minsoo Kang’s thesis that “the growing anxiety and ambivalence toward rapid industrialization of the West was evident in the shift that occurred in the

⁴⁴⁷ Franklin, *Future Perfect*, viii.

⁴⁴⁸ The historian writes in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*: “Everywhere, as machine industry arose, it drew a line of demarcation between the utilitarian and traditional. In the main, America took its stand with utility, with improvement and invention, money and comfort.” (239)

⁴⁴⁹ Kang, *Visions of the Industrial Age 1830-1914*, xviii.

⁴⁵⁰ Wordsworth as quoted by Wosk in *Breaking Frame*, 10.

⁴⁵¹ Adams as quoted by Ibid, 3.

second half of the Nineteenth Century from the dominant trope of trains as powerful but docile servants of humanity, to their reinvention as fearsome monsters of irrational will.”⁴⁵²

In the U.S. in particular, the 1890 census reported not only that the frontier was history, but that “for the first time, the value of industrial output exceeded the wealth produced on farms.”⁴⁵³ For some, this stoked unease that “the former agrarian paradise... [had] become an industrial hell.”⁴⁵⁴ Julie Wosk has posited that “through their images of exploding steam boilers, towering machines, and mechanized humans, nineteenth-century [American] artists... articulated... the country’s contradictory views toward technology, capturing the sense of proud achievement as well as undercurrents of skepticism and fear.”⁴⁵⁵ As the previous quote suggests, two primary concerns, per Wosk, were: “the lurking anxiety that people were becoming increasingly mechanized in body and mind” and that citizens would be “dwarfed and overpowered” by “new machines, with their often gigantic size.”⁴⁵⁶ Thus, the Positivist conviction that mankind was now in control of “Nature” was belied by presentiments that exponentially-accelerating technology and mass production were dictating aspects of human life in ways both unappealing and

⁴⁵² Kang, *Visions of the Industrial Age 1830-1914*, xix.

⁴⁵³ Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism*, 30.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 29.

⁴⁵⁵ Wosk, *Breaking Frame*, 19.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 19 and 17.

unstoppable. The subject matter and style of Sorolla's paintings diffused this fear of "unnatural" forces beyond Americans' control.

To begin, depictions of Spanish farmers and fishermen included in the Hispanic Society exhibition implied that the working class continued to survive "as it always had"—untouched by industrialization and monopolization, and enriched by proximity to nature.⁴⁵⁷ As previously mentioned, such representations likely assuaged middle-class Spaniards' guilt (and qualms about retribution) over the failure of the 1854 Revolution to redistribute confiscated church and aristocratic properties in a way that alleviated the crushing poverty of the country's lower classes.⁴⁵⁸ In a U.S. context, Sorolla's canvases offered similar consolation to bourgeois visitors who themselves had witnessed the growth of large-scale, mechanized farming, resulting agrarian protests, mass migrations to the city, and "instances of industrial violence such as the Homestead and Pullman strikes and Coxe's March [that] constituted a level of social unrest... almost unimaginable a few decades earlier."⁴⁵⁹

While the images of the 1909 show conjure visions of productive, contented laboring people—as placid as the lands they tend—they nevertheless indicate that a special relation with "Nature" is not the preserve of the working class. Sorolla sought

⁴⁵⁷ As noted, the one exception appears to be *Preparing Raisins* (1900) which I discuss in Chapter One.

⁴⁵⁸ See page 214 of Carr's *Spain: A History* or my own discussion of this issue in Chapter 1, Part 1.

⁴⁵⁹ Wrobel, *The End of American Exceptionalism*, 54.

financial success throughout his career, eventually “transcending” his “lower-class” origins to become the professional, gentleman artist whose trappings he had donned from early on. Yet he insisted to the New York press: “As for myself, I can assure you this lyrical impetuosity came to me as naturally as breathing or the beatings of my heart, at the earliest dawning of my sympathy with nature.”⁴⁶⁰ Though now part of the upper-middle class, the painter retained his “sympathy with nature,” without which, he intimated, his art would not exist. The Hispanic Society pictures similarly suggest that the Spanish (and by extension, the American) bourgeoisie maintain an appreciation for the natural world. Formal portraits aside, Sorolla’s family, peers and anonymous mothers and babes stroll and lounge in lush greenery, or relax and frolic amid ocean spray. They are thus exculpated from the real source of their status: commercial venture in bustling, urban centers—just as the artist’s “sympathy with nature” concealed the economic impetus of many of his artistic choices.

Of course, technology is not absent from the East-Coast canvases. As we have seen, it was vital to Sorolla’s articulation of the modernity of Spain’s “neutral” class. Yet throughout his work, technological advancement is always a small, personal device that his bourgeois subjects fully control for benevolent ends—whether against a natural backdrop (as in *Snapshot at Biarritz* or *Maria Painting in El Pardo*) or within a home laboratory or domestic setting (as in *An Investigation* or *Don Antonio García*). Consequently, the large-scale, societal effects of applied science, and its relation to

⁴⁶⁰ Tyrrell, “Sorolla’s 300 Sunny Spanish Pictures,” *The New York World* (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 213.

industrial capitalism, are evaded—as is the creeping notion, expressed by Henry David Thoreau, that “men have become tools of their tools.”⁴⁶¹

The Spaniard’s luminist style and “technical mastery” offered similar reassurance of the primacy of man over the mechanized/industrial. Alfred Gell argues in “The Technology of Enchantment and Enchantment of Technology” that throughout time, and cross-culturally, art garners “popular esteem” if it appears to be a “technical miracle.” “This technical miracle,” he explains, “must be distinguished from a merely mysterious process: it is a miracle because it is achieved both by human agency, but at the same time by an agency which transcends the normal sense of self-possession of the spectator.”⁴⁶² What was the “technical miracle” of Sorolla’s work at the Turn of the Century? Reviews from the painter’s North-American debut compare his process to that of an apparatus, specifically, the camera. An anonymous writer for *The Nation* stated: “His stroke is obviously as unwavering as that of a piston, the pure color being laid on in one jet. There is no fussing... all is immediate.”⁴⁶³ Here the reference to photography is oblique, but considering American soldiers carried cut-film Kodaks into the 1898 campaigns, it seems likely that within the context of “pistons” and “jets” the reporter was thinking of the

⁴⁶¹ Collomb, “Questioning the Empire of Science: John Muir’s Epistemological Modesty,” *Science and Empire in the Nineteenth Century*, 186. Thoreau’s quote comes from his 1854 book, *Walden*.

⁴⁶² All quotes from Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and Enchantment of Technology,” *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, 49.

⁴⁶³ “Sorolla y Bastida,” *The Nation* (Feb 1909), *Eight Essays Vol II*, 190.

camera when he praised Sorolla's "immediate" image-making.⁴⁶⁴ Starkweather was more direct, sharing with readers an exchange he purportedly had with his mentor: "'Just see the picture that is coming,' [the artist] says often of his canvases... exactly as a photographer, in developing a plate, watches with suspense emerge on the film the scene he photographed. His big pictures are painted in almost the same way."⁴⁶⁵ It would seem, in the eyes of his nineteenth-century, U.S. audience, that Sorolla's speed, surety and lack of premeditated composition meant he could do the work of a camera, *but by hand*: an astounding feat that reconfirmed the unique, endless potential of human beings. The demand for the Spaniard's "handmade photographs" additionally resonates with Veblen's assertion that "the cheap and therefore indecorous articles of daily consumption in modern, industrial communities are commonly machine products."⁴⁶⁶ This suggests that another attraction of the artist's work was its ability to evoke modern, photographic seeing in the time-worn style/medium of the proto-Impressionist masters.

I have argued so far that Sorolla's first, U.S. exhibition eased foreboding about the runaway consequences of technology and industrial capitalism through omission, diminutization and perceived technical co-option. I now suggest that the pictures' resonance with the American Transcendentalist and naturalists movements likewise mollified this worry. Transcendentalism (whose proponents included the authors Ralph

⁴⁶⁴ Moeller, *Shooting War*, 53.

⁴⁶⁵ Starkweather, "Joaquín Sorolla the Man and His Work," *Eight Essays Vol II*, 93.

⁴⁶⁶ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 161.

Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau) and naturalism (most closely associated with the environmentalists Alexander Humboldt and John Muir) first emerged in the 1820s and 30s, partially as a response to Positivism.⁴⁶⁷ Like the ideology they aimed to temper, the cultural influence of both movements was decelerating by the close of the Nineteenth Century, but still carried weight, as evidenced by the comparison drawn in 1909 between Sorolla's painting and the poetry of Walt Whitman, another affiliate of Transcendentalism.⁴⁶⁸ Indeed, this congruence was hardly skin-deep, as the Spaniard's seaside canvases (prevalent at the Hispanic Society show and particularly beloved in the U.S.) seem to reify notions of Idealism and holism espoused by the aforementioned Transcendentalists and natural philosophers.

When considered in a fin-de-siècle, scientific context, Idealism was the understanding that "nature [is] a reflection of higher principles." Or, as Emerson expressed in his 1836 essay *Nature*: "Nature is the symbol of spirit."⁴⁶⁹ Holism held that in the sciences, "the key, central focus is upon the unity of the cosmos." This is reflected in Muir's 1916 statement: "There is no fragment in all nature, for every relative fragment of one thing is a full, harmonious unit in itself. All together form the one grand palimpsest of the world."⁴⁷⁰ Both the Transcendentalists and naturalists insisted on these

⁴⁶⁷ Collomb, "Questioning the Empire of Science," *Science and Empire*, 180-181.

⁴⁶⁸ See footnote #75 in this chapter.

⁴⁶⁹ Emerson as quoted by Collomb in "Questioning the Empire of Science," *Science and Empire*, 181.

⁴⁷⁰ This quote comes from Muir's *Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf of Mexico* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1916) as found in *Ibid*, 183.

principles in the face of “growing specialization in the natural sciences, a trend which was already well underway during the last two decades of the Nineteenth Century.”⁴⁷¹ They believed that requiring scientists to “take a detached look at nature’s economy and choose a specific area of study” was resulting in a “cold and distanced approach to natural phenomena, which would imply a ruling out of instincts and emotions.”⁴⁷² A fragmented, purely materialistic outlook also, “gave short shrift to aesthetic or poetical considerations.”⁴⁷³ Muir, Thoreau and their associates were not anti-science. Rather, they embraced Positivism with a caveat, as Collomb relays: “There was no denying that naturalists had to start from empirical evidence, but only so as to provide a holistic explanation in the end.”⁴⁷⁴ Like Positivists more generally, they additionally believed in “nature as law-giver,” in other words, “that mankind was undergoing a moral development roughly parallel to biological development.”⁴⁷⁵

Transcendentalist and naturalist thinking encompassed Positivism, while aiming to resist the mechanization and commodification of human, scientific activity. Some might even say that Symbolism’s “miraculous forces” were “let through the back door” in the form of “nature as law giver.” Sorolla’s beach scenes, many of which were included in the 1909 exhibition, similarly embody a comforting blend of “empiricism”

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, 180.

⁴⁷² Ibid, 183 and 180.

⁴⁷³ Ibid, 181.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid, 182.

⁴⁷⁵ Medina, *Spanish Realism*, 24.

and Idealism. One such image is *The Young Amphibians* of 1903 (**fig 16**). As previously discussed, U.S. critics endowed the painter with nearly the same power as the camera to capture un-composed, “Reality.” *The Young Amphibians* would have been no exception to this notion that rapid, unflinching observation and documentation were at the heart of the artist’s practice. Nonetheless, just as Transcendentalists and naturalists “[started] from empirical evidence” only to “provide a holistic explanation in the end,” the appeal of the Spaniard’s marinescapes did not end with their supposed value as “windows” onto the world. Sorolla’s convincing rendering of wind, water, light and flesh ultimately suggests the unity of humanity and nature, and the former’s fruitful future if this connection is maintained.

For starters, the oneness of the human, natural and empirical is indicated in the painting’s title, which substitutes the scientific term “amphibian” for numerous, more obvious descriptors such as “children,” “bathers,” etc. Integration is further suggested by the figures’ nakedness and proximity to the elements. They crawl through the sand, soak in the water and are noticeably kissed by the sun and wind (see the reflections on the boys’ arms, legs and buttocks, or how the girl secures her hat and skirt against the breeze). Synthesis is also achieved through color. There is not a single tone that is not incorporated into multiple areas of the picture (except, perhaps, for the bright red of the hair ribbon). In the shallowest parts of the water we see the same taupe and ochre apparent in the sand, the same pink in the girl’s dress as on the boys’ limbs, violet and green in ocean and flesh alike. The picture’s name moreover alerts the viewer to a Darwinian diagram latent in the composition. Two babes crawling in the sand create an

unmistakably evolutionary chain with the standing girl at center, whose bright hat then guides the eye to the boy running full tilt in the background. Given the overall sense of joy and liberation generated by the scene, the work seems to promise that, because of their closeness with nature, the children's physical and moral evolution is ensured.

While many nineteenth-century, Western individuals—whether (upper)middle-class or otherwise—shuddered at the social and environmental drawbacks of modern technology and mass production, there were evidently just as many industrialists—particularly within the U.S.'s rapidly expanding and stratifying “elite” sphere—whose bigger concern was dissembling the source of their new-found wealth. This was socially vital, Veblen observed, because within the “leisure class,” “there is a more or less elaborate system of rank and grades. This differentiation is furthered by the inheritance of wealth and the consequent inheritance of gentility.”⁴⁷⁶ Freshly-moneyed Americans could not claim gentility through inheritance, but they could elevate themselves through what Veblen termed “conspicuous consumption”—in other words, a spending pattern whose official goal was the cultivation/refinement of “taste.”⁴⁷⁷

Art collecting, as already discussed, has been part of this “accredited canon” of soul-elevating purchases in the U.S. since precisely the period under discussion. Yet Sorolla's works were not just *objects* of conspicuous consumption exhibited within a museum that was *itself* an enlightened use of money. They also re-presented the practice

⁴⁷⁶ Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 76.

⁴⁷⁷ For “taste” as the presumed end-goal of conspicuous consumption, see *Theory of the Leisure Class* pages 74-75.

in microcosm, through their portrayal of “proper” bourgeois leisure time—another resource, besides money, that East-Coast elites had in excess. Veblen states of his era (and surely it remains applicable) that “a life of leisure is the readiest and most conclusive evidence of pecuniary strength.”⁴⁷⁸ However, as with goods, so with free-time: an individual of “quality” must pursue high-minded activities.⁴⁷⁹ Sorolla’s (upper)middle-class figures display “conspicuous leisure” readily, as they either commune with nature (**fig 27**) or partake in the arts, research or politics (**fig 28**).

In another sense, the mixed subject matter of the 1909 show testifies to the painter’s *own* newfound leisure time, and his commitment to spending it “nobly.” As mentioned, the lack of social-realist images in the Hispanic Society show (with the exception of *Sad Inheritance!*, the *Grand Prix* winner) can be explained by the measure of distinction and financial stability Sorolla had gained in the first decade of the Twentieth Century. Never motivated by activism, the artist produced “social” pictures in the 1880s and 90s to be popular *salon* showstoppers. By 1900, with a reputation and moderate savings established, he could paint the seaside and quotidian scenes he enjoyed. These canvases evidenced first, that he could afford vacation and a bourgeois lifestyle, and second, that he made “good use” of such privilege through his artistic practice. And yet, the plethora of portraits exhibited at the Hispanic Society show (and the number of American commissions the painter accepted as a result) remind us that at the time of his North-

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, 38.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, 43.

American debut, Sorolla was still working feverishly to “catch and fix,” both a better life and a better Spain, with all the speed, surety and stamina he could muster.

Conclusion

This thesis arose from my curiosity about the fact of Sorolla's wildly-popular, first, U.S. exhibition in 1909. My use of the word "fact" is deliberate, as this is how the success of the Spanish luminist's presentation at the newly-opened, Hispanic Society of America—and subsequently in Boston and Buffalo—has typically been treated by scholars. In some ways, of course, the show's appeal *was* a fact. It saw a record number of visitors for art exhibitions in New York City. Two-thirds of the canvases sold. Those who could not afford a painting purchased souvenir photographs or a catalogue.

Yet though it precipitated sales, attendance figures, and other undisputable statistics, my goal has been to demonstrate that the actual *force* behind this data—the New York and New England public's fascination with Sorolla's art—should be treated as more than fact, as more than something which needs not be investigated, because it is self-evident. I believe Archer Huntington would agree, as revealed by the same quote with which I began this thesis: "Everywhere the air was full of miracle... There was eternal talk of 'sunlight.' Nothing like it had ever happened in New York. Ohs and Ahs stained the tile floors. Automobiles blocked the street..." What the millionaire describes is the unprecedented, the miraculous; an event that keeps people talking, elicits involuntary appreciation, and prompts a spontaneous rush to participate. In other words, not a fact, but a phenomenon: a situation observed to exist or happen, but whose cause or explanation is in question.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁸⁰ I here paraphrase Merriam Webster's online dictionary.

Throughout this thesis, I have taken my cue from Huntington, trusting that his words are not all puffed-up pride, but a prod to Sorolla historians to shift their consideration of the painter's success in America from fact to phenomenon—to keep it in question. As noted, I am not the first scholar to make this switch. Both Priscilla Muller and Cristina Domenech have asked *what* about the Hispanic Society canvases “excited and astounded so many,” and have furnished answers that, in my view, certainly comprise part of the puzzle.⁴⁸¹ These explanations, which I reviewed in the preceding pages, include the paintings' cheeriness, representation of light, technical virtuoso, embodiment of the “traditional” and “modern,” and stylistic affinity with the work of celebrated, U.S., “bravura” artists. Some my own, new hypotheses for Sorolla's allure—the exhibition's family-friendly nature, its evocation of a new image of Spain, and its engrossing simulation of tourism—sprang from the same methodology employed by the aforementioned researchers. That is, I perused nineteenth-century, critical reviews and the popular press, relying on their commentary as guide.

However, I began this project not just to expand on Muller and Domenech's method, but to trouble it. I believe when we ask “what” was so appealing about the Spaniard's work, but not “why,” we end up with only the immediate, surface explanations noticeable and articulateable by viewers of the period. Inspired by T.J. Clark, I have tried to reconstruct the story of Sorolla's success, not just through the testimony of fin-de-siècle witnesses, but by considering those motivations that may not have been utterable or comprehensible at the time. The resulting narrative, found in

⁴⁸¹ Muller, “Sorolla and America,” *Sorolla: The Hispanic Society*, 14.

Chapter Two, posits that the power of the 1909 pictures additionally resided in their ability to affirm and comfort East-Coast spectator's beliefs and qualms regarding nationalism, technology, industrial capitalism and a Positivist approach to modernity.

Any scholar researching Sorolla is inevitably contributing to the expansion beyond prevalent, Modernist histories of nineteenth and twentieth-century art, which—in their fixation on a triumphant lineage of avant-garde heroes—have tended to obscure the true plurality of artistic tastes, styles, and visions of modernity around 1900. By redefining the painter's pull as phenomenon, and arguing for his images as material repositories of cultural/historical convictions and anxieties, I hope to impact the discipline of art history in two other ways. First, through providing and inspiring more nuanced research into the significance of the luminist's work as it crossed geographic and cultural boundaries, acting as a node of contact between two recently warring nations with a history of defining themselves in relation to the other. Second, by correcting what I consider to be another pitfall of High-Modernist thinking, namely, the tendency at work in Greenberg's *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, to dismiss popular art as mere placating propaganda. Though Sorolla's paintings are discrete objects that, from the outset, commanded luxury-item prices—two factors that distance them from the realm of “kitsch”—they were of course “popular” in that they elicited the approval of a large swath of the turn-of-the-century, Western, art-going public. Most Modernist critics then, would likely consider deep contemplation of his work at best, a waste of time, at a worst, a tacit glorification of the status-quo both past and present.

The Spaniard's canvases *were* placating and propagandistic. But as I have argued, they could also be progressive and undermining—on the peninsula, asserting women's equality and jabbing at the oligarchy's lack of concern for the governed; in the U.S., negating Prescott's Paradigm. The Generation of '98 maintained that Sorolla's paintings were a fantasy that had nothing to do with the realities of post-disaster Iberia. Yet I suggest that due to the very tensions and contradictions embodied within them, the images are in one sense the *most* reflective of fin-de-siècle Spain, where the entire populous yearned for "rebirth," with no majority consensus on how to get there. Like the divided populous he lived in, Sorolla himself was a conflicted figure—straddling a line between liberal provocation and bourgeois appeasement. It is only when we treat his wide appeal as phenomenon, however, that we can glimpse this tightrope. It hovers above the assumptions that the fact of his success implies from the Modernist perspective. To ignore it is both to simplify history, and to deny such lines in our own lives—yet another placating act.

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