

# SOROLLA AND SUMMER



Summer as a time of rest and relaxation could not be further from the intense pictorial activity in which Joaquín Sorolla engaged during that season. It was this time of year that offered him the opportunity to focus on his favourite subject and the one that brought him his greatest success in the exhibitions of his work held in both Spain and abroad: life on the beach, painted from first-hand observation.

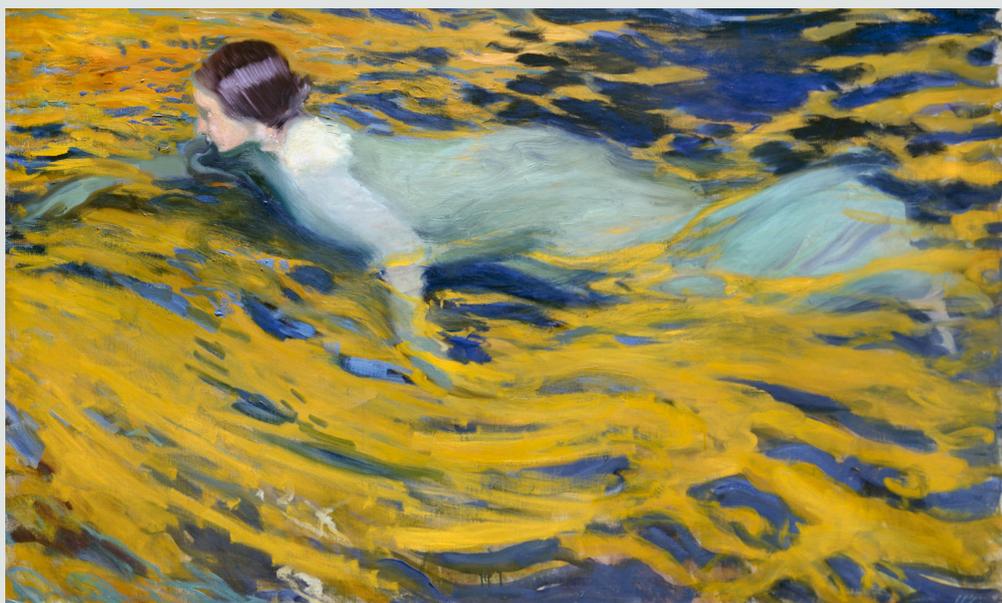
Anonymous photographer. *Joaquín Sorolla painting in El Cabañal (Valencia), 1916*. Museo Sorolla, Madrid (inv. 80171)



Sorolla's initial scenes of this type focus on working activities associated with the sea, depicting fishing boats, fishermen at work and women waiting for the boats to bring in the catch under the fierce Mediterranean sun. Among the earliest examples is a painting that earned the artist his most important international success to date at the 1895 Paris Salon, *The Return from Fishing*, and the exhibition opens with one of its preliminary studies. While the sea was associated with fear of the unknown until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, here it is seen as a fundamental resource that provided men and women with a dignified life.

Together with the labours of fishing, Sorolla's depictions of the summer holiday season at the beach are among the most popular of his entire oeuvre. They constitute a reflection of the new vision of the seaside which emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with regard to the health-giving properties of bathing, as well as the fashion for summer holidays as a time of leisure, entertainment and socialising. Sorolla adopted this new custom of the summer holiday and his depictions of the subject reveal two principal concerns centred on his own time spent by the seashore in summer. Firstly, his scenes of the Mediterranean coast, with a particular interest in his native Valencia, capture all the pleasure of the local people, with naked boys, girls in light bathing robes and swimmers in contact with nature. These works originated with *Sad Inheritance!* (1899), which despite conveying the drama of sick and disabled children seeking the curative effects of seawater also shows the fun and pleasure of bathing, as evident in the preliminary study exhibited here. Paintings such as *Swimmer, Jávea* (1905), *Girls in the Sea* (1909) and *Boys Bathing, Valencia. Afternoon Sun* (1910) are further examples of these scenes of summer leisure captured by the artist on the Mediterranean coastline.

*Swimming Woman, Jávea*, 1905. Oil on canvas. 107.5 × 180 cm. Museo Sorolla, Madrid (inv. 718)



Secondly, and in parallel to the rise of his professional reputation and consequent social ascent, Sorolla stayed at places on the Cantabrian coast which were favoured by the social elites in summer. During his holidays in Biarritz, Zarauz and San Sebastián he transmitted the distinguished tone of these cities under a very different type of light in compositions centred on female figures, generally his wife and daughters, who are shown elegantly dressed and enjoying their leisure time in spaces devised for socialising. In *Against the Light, María in Biarritz* (1906) and *María on the Beach at Zarauz* (1910) Sorolla depicts his daughter enjoying what was known as an “elegant stroll”. In *Under the Awning, Biarritz* (1906) we see a new type of beach “lifestyle” quite different to that of the Mediterranean: wearing long gowns and protected from the sun by awnings and parasols, the women are shown whiling away the time with reading, painting and conversation. The beach has become the continuation of a setting for social relations and has little to do with the direct contact with the natural world offered by sea bathing. Particularly numerous within this context of scenes on the northern coast are Sorolla’s “colour notes”, as he termed them: small-format paintings that were particularly appropriate for rapidly capturing all his ideas despite the constantly changing light caused by varying atmospheric conditions. He may also have used this format because he did not feel entirely comfortable setting out all the materials required to produce larger format works in the elegant social setting of these beaches.

*María on the Beach at Zarauz*, 1910. Oil on canvas. 65 × 92 cm. Private collection



Through a carefully selected group of works SOROLLA AND SUMMER introduces us to the influence of the new ideas regarding the sea on both the artist's work and life, revealing how the theme of the summer holiday is essential for an appreciation of the modernity of his painting in parallel to the emergence of this concept. The survey ends with Sorolla in the final phase of his career during the rests that he took from the major endeavour of the commission from the Hispanic Society of America for Vision of Spain, when he produced works such as *Bringing in the Boat* (1916), *Valencian Fisherwoman with Baskets* (1916) and *Children looking for Shellfish* (1919). During these periods Sorolla gave himself up to the relaxation and happiness he found in dedicating himself to his favourite theme: scenes of work and leisure by the sea.

Anonymous photographer, *Joaquín Sorolla painting in Biarritz, 1906*. Museo Sorolla, Madrid (inv. 80049)



## KEY THEMES IN THE EXHIBITION

# 1

## THE MODERNITY OF TRADITION

As noted above, the modernity of Sorolla's painting is particularly notable in his beach scenes. It is evident in his choice of the coast as a theme, the framing of his compositions and their connection with the language of photography, the spontaneity with which he captured the natural world, his mastery of the treatment of colour and use of the effects of light to create volumes. At the same time, in his depictions of the Spanish east coast Sorolla's work relates to the renaissance of the classical vision of the Mediterranean also present in the output of artists such as Bonnard, Signac, Matisse and Picasso. In parallel, he participated in the new vogue for summer holidays and he and his family went to Biarritz, Zarauz and San Sebastián, which were among the most favoured locations for the new European summer season. Sorolla's pictorial language is simultaneously associated with local tradition - his own Valencian roots - and with Spanish culture in general, with the result that his oeuvre presents a constant two-way flow between tradition and modernity, the vernacular and the cosmopolitan.

*Valencian Fisherwomen*, 1903. Oil on canvas. 99.5 × 129.5 cm. Diputació de València (inv. 2412)



## 2

INTERNATIONAL  
SUCCESS

Sorolla's beach scenes were undoubtedly among the works that brought him the highest levels of renown and popularity among his clients. Fully aware of this, he worked tirelessly on these subjects during the summers he spent on the Mediterranean and Cantabrian coasts. He went to these locations in the company of his family with the aim of depicting scenes of work and leisure beside the sea through which he consolidated his reputation as a painter and prepared for upcoming exhibitions. However, during the peak years of his career these themes became a type of refuge for the artist and their depiction signified the pure delight of painting and the rest that he required.

*Children Looking for Shellfish*, 1919. Oil on canvas. 64 × 96 cm. Colección Banco Santander



## 3

THE RISE OF  
THE SUMMER  
HOLIDAY

Through his depictions of the summer holiday Sorolla became the chronicler of an entire era in his first-hand reflection of social customs and habits at the turn of the century. The phenomenon of the summer holiday first appeared in Spain in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and was particularly evident on the Cantabrian coastline in cities such as Santander and San Sebastián where cold-water bathing began to be recommended as a therapeutic treatment. Following the Spanish royal family, the country's upper classes soon started to visit these locations, which gradually adapted to welcoming the new summer visitors with a wide range of enjoyable activities. As a result, the summer season ceased to be primarily aimed at health treatment and increasingly focused on leisure and socialising.

*Under the Awning, Biarritz, 1906. Oil on canvas. 61.3 × 92 cm. Museo Sorolla, Madrid (inv. 770)*



## 4

COLOUR  
NOTES

As part of the process of his visual research, throughout his career Sorolla produced rapid oil sketches or “colour notes”, as he himself termed them, executed on small wooden panels or pieces of cardboard. These small-format works are exercises of enormous creative freedom through which he tried out compositions, tonal ranges and subjects that he might or might not use for subsequent canvases. It was during his summers on the northern Spanish coastline that the artist particularly devoted his attention to works of this type, which summarise the essence of his entire oeuvre.

*Sea*, 1905. Oil on cardboard. 19 × 24 cm. Museo Sorolla, Madrid (inv. 726)



Fundación MAPFRE  
Paseo de Recoletos, 23  
28004 Madrid  
Tel. 915 816 100  
cultura@fundacionmapfre.org

Curator  
Casilda Ybarra Satrústegui

Dates  
22 september 2023 – 7 january 2024

Opening times  
Mondays (except public holidays):  
2 pm to 8 pm  
Tuesdays to Saturdays: 11 am to 8 pm  
Sundays and public holidays:  
11 am to 7 pm  
(Last entry 30 minutes before closing time. Visitors must leave the galleries 10 minutes before closing).

Ticket prices  
Standard: 5 € / Reduced: 3 €  
Free entry: Mondays (except public holidays)

Guided tours  
Important: the guided visit to this exhibition is combined with that of the exhibition *Medardo Rosso. Pioneer of modern sculpture*.  
Times and booking: on this [website](#)

Educational visits for schools and families  
Times and booking on this [website](#)

Audio guide  
Spanish and English (4 eur)

Bookshop  
LAIE  
Tel. 911 703 851  
fmapfre@laie.es

 fundacionmapfrecultura  
 @mapfrecultura  
 @mapfrecultura

Share your thoughts on the exhibition  
#SorollaAndSummerFM

<https://exposiciones.fundacionmapfre.org/SorollaAndSummerFMexhibition>



Image cover: *Girls in the Sea*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm. Museo Sorolla, Madrid (inv. 837)

Fundación **MAPFRE**



MUSEO **SOROLLA**



Exhibition organised by Fundación MAPFRE within the programme to mark the centenary of the death of Joaquín Sorolla, in collaboration with the Museo Sorolla and the Fundación Museo Sorolla.