

THE MYTH OF SPAIN: IGNACIO ZULOAGA (1870–1945)
17 FEBRUARY TO 26 MAY 2024

The Kunsthalle München and the Bucerius Kunst Forum are mounting the first-ever large-scale exhibition in Germany devoted to the Spanish painter Ignacio Zuloaga. An international star during his lifetime, Zuloaga shaped the image of Spain held by those abroad like no other artist, an image that still reverberates today. His paintings focused on figures he saw as embodying the "true" Spain: toreros, flamenco dancers, simple rural folk and also outsiders. The show brings together some 80 works from the period between 1890 and 1941, on loan from Spain, France, Italy, Sweden, Poland, Germany, Mexico, Argentina and the USA.

More than any other artist working at the turn of the last century, Ignacio Zuloaga left an indelible mark on the myth of Spain with his paintings. At a time when the country was in a state of upheaval due to rampant industrialisation and efforts to keep up with European modernity, Zuloaga believed that Spain's quintessential qualities were being threatened: the small villages, folk dress, dancing and bullfighting, religious processions, and other centuries-old customs, traditions and legends. In his quest to evoke the true essence of Spain, he endeavoured to capture the "Spanish soul" in his art. Zuloaga encountered this native spirit especially in the Castile region upon moving to Segovia in 1898. For him, the landscape and inhabitants there reflected the authentic Spain. He proceeded to produce a number of paintings whose symbolism embodies the Spanish identity.

Born in 1870 in Eibar in the Basque Country as the son of a prominent blacksmith, Zuloaga spent much of his life in Paris, the centre of the international art world. He befriended artists, writers and musicians and was well connected in cosmopolitan high society. For example, he shared a studio with Paul Gauguin, was friends with Auguste Rodin and travelled with Maurice Ravel. In the mid-1890s, Zuloaga moved to Seville, where he gained experience as a torero and kept company with Gitanos, the Spanish Roma community.

The exhibition traces Zuloaga's artistic career in several thematic chapters while placing the painter in the cultural-historical context of his time. The first chapter is dedicated to his artistic beginnings and early years in Paris. The inspiration he drew from the international art world is evident in the café and street scenes he painted during this period as well as his first portraits. The second chapter sheds light on Zuloaga's study of the Spanish masters, in particular Velázquez, El Greco and Goya, and their impact on his work. Images showing the world of prostitution, set in both France and Spain, are also presented. The following two chapters are linked biographically with Zuloaga's time in Seville and his folkloristic

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depictions of bullfighting and flamenco dance. The artist's prime creative period, which began with his move to Segovia in 1898, is the subject of the sixth chapter. The focus is on renderings of the harsh and barren landscape of Segovia and environs as well as the area's "archetypal" inhabitants. In the seventh chapter, Zuloaga's connections to protagonists from the worlds of music, dance and theatre are examined. This is followed by religious scenes that evoke the piousness of the Spanish people. The last two chapters deal with commissioned portraits as well as intimate and private likenesses of friends and colleagues. By setting his subjects in the landscape in a novel way, Zuloaga pioneered an entirely new genre of portraiture.

The way in which Zuloaga portrayed Spain sparked fierce debates in that country. Many of his compatriots criticised his renderings as being unpatriotic and coloured by a foreign point of view. Spain was in the midst of a deep crisis after being defeated by the USA in 1898 and losing its last important overseas colonies. In Germany, by contrast, Zuloaga's works were presented in a number of exhibitions during his lifetime and were well received by both artists and writers. Literary and artistic personalities such as Rainer Maria Rilke, August Macke, Paul Klee and Paula Modersohn-Becker were inspired by his art. Many believed that Zuloaga's paintings captured the "genuine", "real" Spain. In the latter years of his life, the artist was greatly admired by the Spanish dictator Franco, and he allowed himself to be co-opted for propaganda purposes.

The exhibition is accompanied by a comprehensive catalogue with around 168 colour illustrations, published by Deutscher Kunstverlag.

An exhibition of the Kunsthalle München, in cooperation with the Bucerius Kunst Forum. The exhibition is on view in Munich from 15 September 2023 to 4 February 2024.

KUNSTHALLE MÜNCHEN

The exhibition is sponsored by

