The background of the page is a large, expressive painting in an Impressionist style. It depicts two figures in a dark, textured environment. The figure on the left is wearing a white shirt and dark trousers, while the figure on the right is wearing a white shirt and a yellowish-brown skirt. The brushstrokes are thick and visible, creating a sense of movement and light. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greys, and blacks, with highlights of white and yellow.

The Beginnings of Modern Painting in Spain: Sorolla and His Time

The Beginnings of Modern Painting in Spain: Sorolla and His Time

EXHIBITION

From March 12, 2019

Museum of Fine Arts of Valencia



Joaquín Sorolla Bastida: *Seascape* (ca. 1907)
Oil on canvas. Donated by CEMEX (2007). Inv. 1/2007

Introduction

Of all the painters from Valencia in his time, Joaquín Sorolla Bastida (1863-1923) was the one whose fame extended beyond the local domain with his works earning him acclaim throughout Spain and indeed internationally. In many ways Sorolla marks the beginning of modern painting in Spain, offering a joyful, bright and optimistic image of a country full of life, in sharp contrast with the ingrained notion of Spain popularised by other artists, for instance the dramatic genre scenes and the severe, dark portraits by the Basque painter Ignacio Zuloaga Zabaleta (1870-1945).

Modernism was largely informed in Joaquín Sorolla's output by his choice of beach scenes from Valencia and the depiction of landscapes. In Sorolla's times, modern was synonymous with *plein air* painting. As such, the main novelty introduced by Sorolla's realism was the choice of subject matter, for which he drew inspiration from his immediate surrounding environs.

The work of this artist gave rise to an influential movement known as Sorollismo, defined by a simple palette, works painted in the open air, depicting what the eye sees, scenes of Mediterranean beaches and traditional costumes. And so, Sorollismo ultimately came to define Valencian art.

The exhibition *The Beginnings of Modern Painting in Spain: Sorolla and His Time* follows a basically chronological and diachronic layout, divided into several sections which underscore the relevance

of the work by artists who were directly or indirectly connected with Sorolla. Comprising works coming exclusively from the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts of Valencia, it opens with Sorolla's forerunners, which is to say, the artists who were successful in Valencia when Joaquín Sorolla was setting out on his career, followed by the painters who taught Sorolla at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts of Valencia, and the work of his coeval artists and friends, and naturally, Sorolla's own creations. From there, the exhibition moves on to show works by Sorolla's pupils as well as by the school of followers of his style, who were known as Sorollistas. Finally, it shows pieces by late followers of the painter, the so-called post-Sorollistas who reinforced the pre-eminence of his style during their time.

Art in Valencia in the Late 19th Century: Sorolla's Forerunners

Art in Valencia during the last third of the nineteenth century was mainly dominated by four painters: Francisco Domingo Marqués (1842-1920), Antonio Muñoz Degraín (1840-1924), Ignacio Pinazo Camarlench (1849-1916) and Emilio Sala Francés (1850-1910) who, in one way or another, marked the point of departure for future generations of Valencian artists.

The four painters represented the accepted movements in art at the time, leaning heavily towards history painting, the kind of work particularly suited to enter the annual National Fine Arts Expositions, given that this was the genre that enjoyed the highest



Ignacio Pinazo Camarlench: *Icarian Games* (1877).
Oil on canvas. Deposit from the Diputación de Valencia. Inv. 724

recognition and won most awards. However, the genre gradually began to lose favour and came to be seen as empty, inexpressive, overly local, melodramatic, and removed from reality.

That being said, together with the renewal brought about by French Impressionism, prior to Sorolla, these artists showed a liking for strong colouring, with a particular mention for the purity of light in Pinazo and Domingo Marqués, the radiant landscape extolled by Muñoz Degraín and the subtle execution of subject matter in Emilio Sala.

Even though Joaquín Sorolla was never under the direct tutelage of Francisco Domingo Marqués, on several occasions he admitted Domingo Marqués' influence in his artistic formulas, brushwork and colouring, particularly at the beginning of his professional career.

At the early stages of his practice, Sorolla also admired the realism of Ignacio Pinazo's painting, an admiration that led him to create small sketchy paintings similar in their silhouetting to those painted by Pinazo, clearly influenced by Italian *macchiaioli*, also imitating his palette and Valencian genre scenes in his subject matter.

Finally, Sorolla was indebted to Antonio Muñoz Degraín for his taste for intensely bright and highly colourful painting.



Ignacio Pinazo Camarlench: *Altar Boy Playing a Zambomba* (ca. 1894)
Oil on canvas. Collection of the San Carlos Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Inv. 723

Sorolla's Masters

Joaquín Sorolla Bastida started studying drawing at the School of Arts and Crafts of Valencia. Then, in 1879, he enrolled at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts, also in Valencia. He later won a scholarship from the Diputación de Valencia provincial government to study painting at the Spanish Academy in Rome. Throughout the nineteenth century, the School of Fine Arts implemented new learning methods to encourage the student's individual freedom and the various subjects were taught by locally famous Valencian painters.

In the late nineteenth century, the faculty at the fine art school who taught Sorolla was made up by the landscape painter Gonzalo Salvá Simbor (1845-1923), who taught linear perspective and landscape, assisted by Genaro Palau Romero (1868-1933); Ricardo Clemente Lamuela was in charge of artistic anatomy; drawing from classical sculptures and from life were imparted by Julio Cebrián Mezquita (1854-1926); colour was taught by Isidoro Garnelo Fillol (1867-1939), assisted by Pedro Ferrer Calatayud (1860-1944); other teachers included prestigious artists like Joaquín Agrasot Juan (1836-1919), José Garnelo Alda (1866-1944) and Juan Peyró Urrea (1847-1924).

Throughout the five years Joaquín Sorolla continued his academic training at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts of Valencia, those Valencian artists who had been part of the faculty exerted an influence on the early technical and theoretical learning of the painter from Valencia.



Antonio Fillol Granell: *Pride of the Village* (1895)
Oil on canvas. On deposit from the Prado Museum. Inv. 1246



Cecilio Pla Gallardo: *The Fly* (1897)

Oil on canvas. Collection of the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts. Inv. 1250

Sorolla's Environs: His Friends, His Colleagues and His Time

In the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth century, the city of Valencia underwent great changes. In 1865, the city walls had been demolished, and the city was expanded in the Ensanche, laid out in a grid-like pattern. The silk industry was in decline due to its problems in adapting to the Industrial Revolution. However, new industries emerged and were consolidated: textiles in Alcoi, shoes and rugs in Vall del Vinalopó, furniture in Valencia, and ceramics in Manises, Alcora, Onda and Castellon.

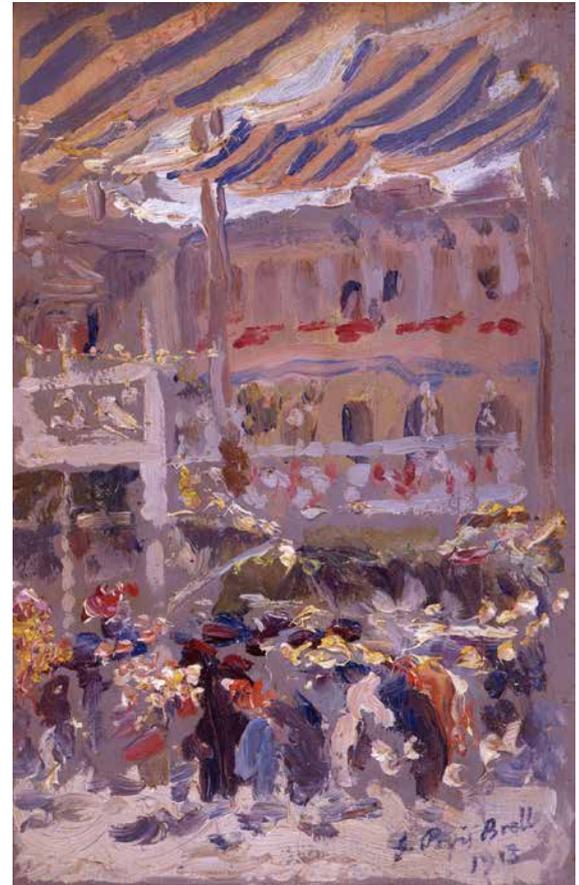
In 1909 the province of Valencia accounted for around 4.5% of Spain's total population. The city of Valencia had 233,248 inhabitants, and the rest of its province 630,950.

Among the artists who were friends with Joaquín Sorolla are the brothers José Benlliure Gil (1855-1937) and Mariano Benlliure Gil (1862-1947). In the early 1900s, his friendship with Sorolla encouraged José Benlliure to introduce certain innovations in his painting, adapting his style to the tastes of society. To this end, he borrowed inspiration from his friend Sorolla and simplified his compositions. In turn, Mariano Benlliure coincided with Joaquín Sorolla in the Paris 1900 World Exposition; besides, in 1918 he sculpted a marble bust of Sorolla for The Hispanic Society of America and in 1919 another one which he donated to the City Council of Valencia which was then included in the monument erected as a tribute to the painter in 1933 at the city's Malvarrosa beach.

Other colleagues of Sorolla included painters like Antonio Fillol Granell (1870-1930), Cecilio Pla Gallardo (1860-1934) and Constantino Gómez Salvador (1864-1937). Fillol was a disciple of Pinazo and a coeval of Sorolla (although seven years younger) who alternated landscapes and genre scenes with works of social realism. He was one of the most cultivated Valencian painters of his generation, and also a man of humble origins who used painting as a means to denounce social inequality and the suffering of the dispossessed. Pla, who made a name for himself with his extraordinary portraits and beach scenes, abandoned the restraints of the academy in favour of the early postulates of modernism; however, the overwhelming influence of Sorolla cast a shadow over his career. In the case of Constantino Gómez, he trained at the San Carlos School of Fine Arts of Valencia, where he coincided with that prolific generation from Valencia in-between the two centuries comprised by Sorolla, Cecilio Pla and Salvador Abril and he won fame mostly due to his superb landscape painting.

Sorolla and His Time

In the Valencian region, the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century was marked by profound economic and social transformations which, to some extent, were triggered by the crisis of traditional agriculture and the beginning of a slow process of industrialisation. Exports of wine, grapes and oranges from 1890 onwards sustained the growth of the local petit bourgeoisie, with rice-growing being relegated to a secondary level. Handcrafts and home-based industry were replaced by localised industrialisation



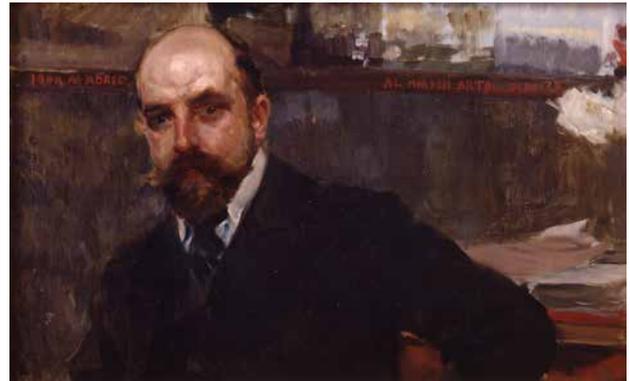
Julio Peris Brell: *Plaza de la Virgen* (1913)

Oil on wood. Acquisition by the Generalitat (2001). Inv. 25/2001

that favoured the emergence of factories and the proletariat. In the early twentieth century the population began to concentrate in the first industrialised towns and cities near the coast. Meanwhile, the city of Valencia grew apace with new urban planning and architecture.

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867-1928) was a renowned author and politician who championed the emergence of a political republican force that enjoyed significant popular support. He was initially influenced by Constantí Llombart, a radical writer from *Renaixença Valenciana*, a literary, cultural and social movement that came about in the former Kingdom of Valencia in the late nineteenth century, led by figures who defended the role of the Valencian language in public institutions and, above all, in literature. Blasco Ibáñez was the leader of Republicanism in Valencia between 1892 and 1905. At first, the movement known as Blasquism, after Blasco, was defined as federalist, anti-centralist and regionalist although it later took on a more clearly patriotic and pro-centralist stance. With its republican agenda, Blasquism continued as the leading political force in Valencia until the Second Republic (1931-1939).

In relation to the teaching of the various art disciplines, the system had barely changed in many years, and so the exams to obtain the scholarship granted by the Diputación de Valencia were the only possibility of travelling abroad and gaining first-hand knowledge of international art movements.



Joaquín Sorolla Bastida: *The Beach in Valencia. Fisherwomen*
Oil on canvas. Collection of the San Carlos Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Inv. 892

Joaquín Sorolla Bastida: *Count Artal (1900)*
Oil on canvas. Acquisition by the Ministry of Education and Culture (1967). Inv. 1236

Joaquín Sorolla Bastida (1863-1923)

Joaquín Sorolla was the first Spanish nineteenth-century painter to garner popular and critical acclaim both in Spain and abroad with local and Spanish subject matters.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Spanish painting was almost entirely dominated by history painting, a genre that was highly successful in Spain's National Fine Arts Expositions. In striking contrast with the pre-eminence of that genre, 1892, the year when Sorolla painted *El día feliz*, was seen as the beginning of a move towards Realism, and this painting was considered "the first work by Spain's contemporary school."

However, the first true sign of Joaquín Sorolla's defining style was *La vuelta de la pesca*, the work painted in 1894 in El Cabanyal. It won him a Second Class Medal at the 1895 Salon des Artistes Français in Paris, and was acquired for 6,000 francs that same year by the French Government for the Musée du Luxembourg (since 1977 at Musée d'Orsay, Paris). The work sums up the principles of Sorollista painting: a subject matter focusing on Valencian life, executed with visible brushstroke and a palette dominated by browns, violets and blues, with touches of white.

The name of Sorolla was very soon inextricable from the notion of modern painting, mostly due to the optimism conveyed by his work, the depiction of ordinary people in fishing and sea scenes, capturing Spanish habits and traditions, the freedom shown in his



José Santiago Garnelo y Alda: *The Songstress Pepita Sevilla* (1887)
Oil on canvas. Donated by the artist (1940). Inv. 1354



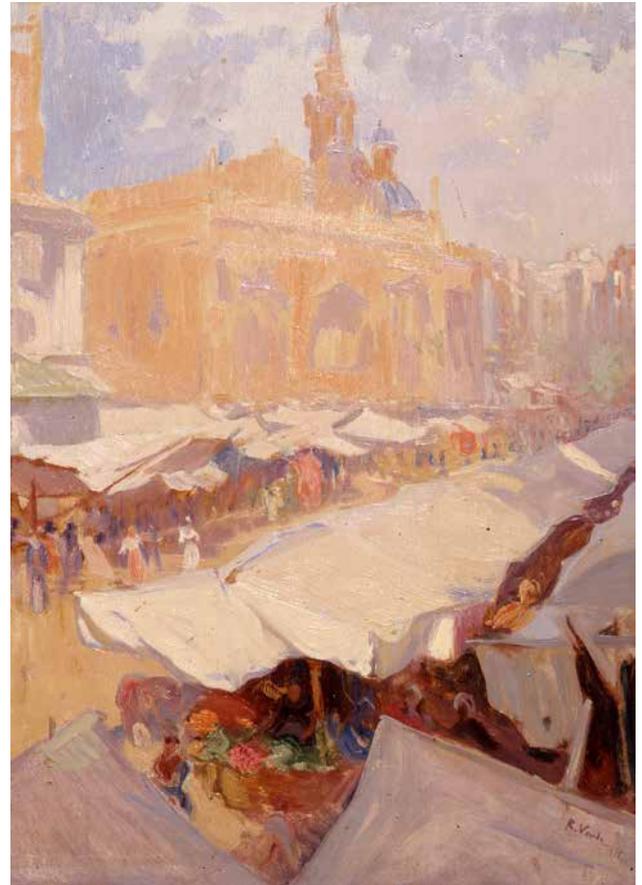
José Navarro Llorens: *Gypsies on a Bridge*

Oil on wood. Goerlich-Miquel Donation (1963). Inv. 1147



Julio Peris Brell: *Barraca Houses, Malvarrosa* (1918)

Oil on wood. Acquisition by the Generalitat (2001). Inv. 7/2001



Ricardo Verde Rubio: *Plaza del Mercado* (1915)

Oil on canvas. Goerlich-Miquel Donation (1963). Inv. 1161

painting of light and colour, in short, his painting in the open air. His direct observation of life and his absolute respect for truth became the main features of Sorolla's painting.

Like his fellow Valencian, the author Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, whose novels set in Valencia were celebrated outside Spain, in his home city, Sorolla was held in great esteem and his stature remained above question. Throughout the twentieth century his fame was further consolidated. Sorolla's international success was reinforced in 1906 following solo exhibitions in Europe and North America, with a particular mention for the critical and commercial success of the shows held in Paris, Berlin, London, Chicago and New York. The painter's enormous popularity led to the emergence of a large number of artists who faithfully followed his style.

Joaquín Sorolla represented a vision of Spain based on modern thinking, creativity, radical progress, in other words: a more European Spain.

The Influence of Sorolla: Disciples and Sorollista Painters

Although Joaquín Sorolla is undoubtedly the most important Valencian artist of his time, he had very few direct disciples, the main ones being José Mongrell Torrent (1870-1937), Eduardo Chicharro Agüera (1873-1949) and Manuel Benedito Vives (1875-1963). Mongrell was perhaps his most loyal follower, with Chicharro and Benedito often viewed as mere imitators of the master's artistic



Manuel Benedito Vives: *Castiza*

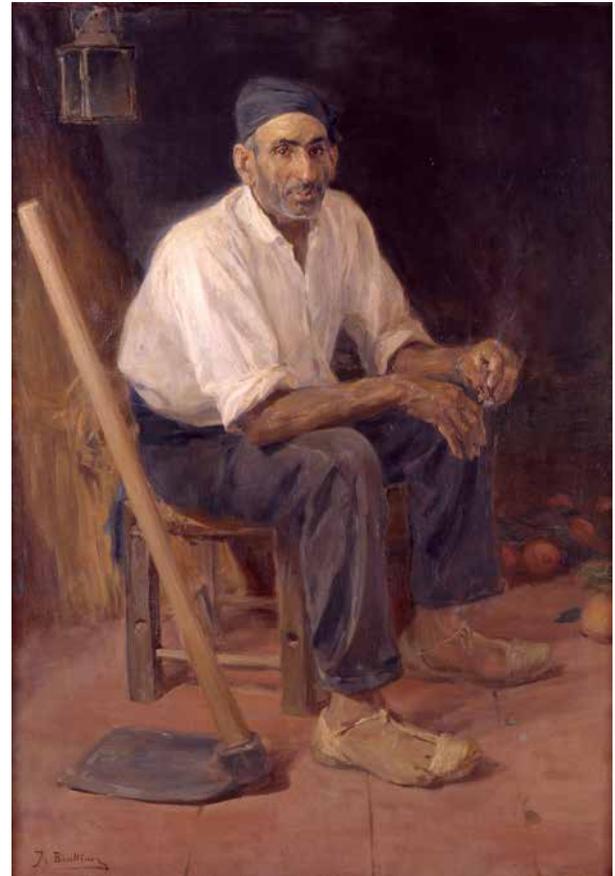
Oil on canvas. Donated by Víctor Pedrer Ramiro (1913). Inv. 881

qualities. On the other hand, the main contact between Sorolla and the rest of Valencian artists took place through the Association of Valencian Art Youth, a group of painters set up in 1916 by Sorolla himself.

The so-called Sorollista painters were a group of Valencian artists influenced by Joaquín Sorolla's work and followers of his style. Worth mentioning among them are: Alfredo Claros García (1893-1965), Tomás Murillo Ramos (1890-1934), José Navarro Llorens (1867-1923), Enrique Navas Escuriet (1875-1952), Francisco Pons Arnau (1886-1955), María Sorolla García (1889-1956), Ricardo Verde Rubio (1876-1954), Julio Vila Prades (1873-1930) and Fernando Viscáí Albert (1879-1936).

Sorollismo is, in fact, a catch-all term used to describe very dissimilar features and painters with different stylistic solutions. That said, the aspects that identified all these painters were, first of all, a distinctive Mediterranean quality, reflected in the use of a bright palette to capture a sense of optimism and joy in their works; and secondly, their profound admiration for the figure and work of Joaquín Sorolla, to the point that all of them regarded him as their maestro.

Much of the second half of the nineteenth century was overshadowed by the hegemony of genre painting and history painting. This trend was broken however by the irruption of Sorollismo, a movement connected with Realism, which took everyday reality as its main source of inspiration.



José Benlliure Gil: *Tío Andreu from Rocafort*
Oil on canvas. Donated by the artist (1932). Inv. 804



Genaro Palau Romero: *Gardens of the Ripalda Palace* (1922)
Oil on canvas. Orts Bosch Donation (2004). Inv. 262/2004



José Benlliure Gil: *The Alamedas de Serranos (Flood and Rain)*, Valencia (c. 1920)
Oil on canvas. Donated by the artist (1932). Inv. 773

One can often hear about the existence of Spain in the early twentieth century of a movement known as Spanish Impressionism. Comparing Sorolla's work with French Impressionist painting is misguided, because there was never a direct equivalent in Spanish painting to the French movement. To a large extent, it was owing to a superficial analysis of the external features of the painting of Joaquín Sorolla and also of his followers. In Sorolla, light never overruled the specific values of form. And, although admitting the existence of many formal coincidences between Impressionism and Sorollismo, painters in Valencia did not abide by the same postulates and technical methods as French artists. It would perhaps be more correct to speak of



Ignacio Pinazo Martínez:
Valencian Farmworker
Tío Quico
Bronze. Collection of the San Carlos Royal Academy of Fine Arts
Inv. 109

Luminist painters, artists devoted to the study and reflection of light in their paintings.

Evolution of Style in Sorolla: Post-Sorollista Painters

Sorollismo began to lose step when the ideas sustaining the discourse about the meaning of Joaquín Sorolla's work in relation with modernity and the faithful copying of reality were no longer in vogue. In the change from modernity to contemporaneity, the demand on modern painting was for it to be defined by a copy of reality that included an intellectual component, turning it into a blend of realism and idealism.

Though the post-Sorollista painters trained under the influence of Joaquín Sorolla, they would soon abandon it in order to instill their painting with a character of its own. Despite actually working at Sorolla's studio from 1908 to 1912, José (Peppino) Benlliure Ortiz (1884-1916) evolved until finding his own style. Luis Dubón Portolés (1892-1953) started with a treatment of light in line with Sorollismo, but ended up turning basically ornamental aspects into the object of his painting. In turn, the work of José Pinazo Martínez (1879-1933) was defined by a strong emphasis on luminosity and local themes very similar to Sorolla's, but with results clearly removed from those of the Valencian master.

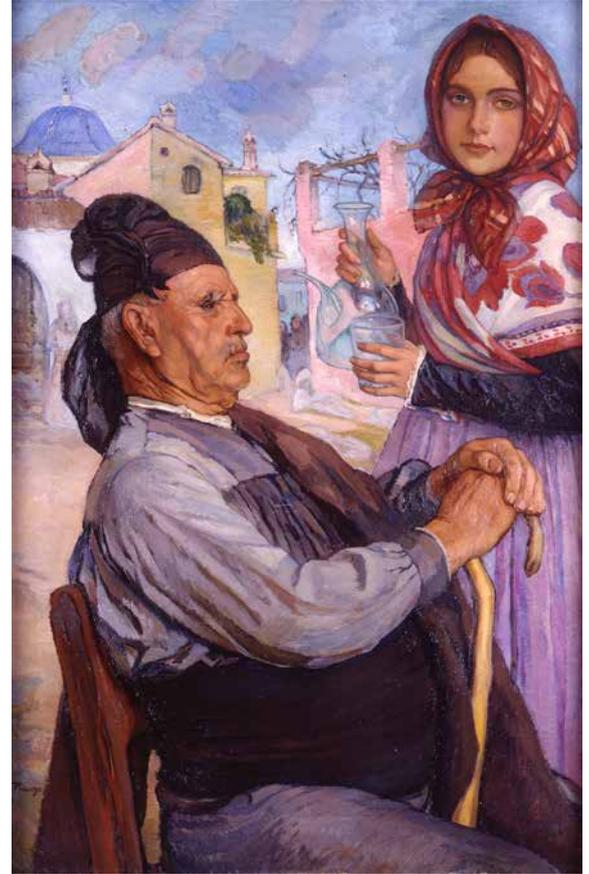
It could be concluded then that, from 1925 on, any insistence on maintaining the style of Joaquín Sorolla alive was beginning to be viewed as negative, to the point that it was even thought that, if



Mariano Benlliure Gil: *Chula* (1927)
Ceramic. Goerlich-Miquel Donation (1963). Inv. 1190

it were to continue following those formulas, painting in Valencia would be in danger of becoming vulgar. As such, one could claim that the danger of a genius lies in the school that follows him.

That said, other artists removed from the direct influence of Joaquín Sorolla, like Ignacio Pinazo Martínez (1883-1970), Horacio Ferrer de Morgado (1894-1978), Vicente Beltrán Grimal (1896-1963) or Ricardo Boix Oviedo (1904-1994), ended up, between the 1920s and 1930s, formulating artistic postulates that were framed within a renewed spirit of modernity more attuned with the new times.



José Pinazo Martínez: *Characters from the Huerta in Valencia. Godella. Tío Cono*
Oil on canvas. Collection of the San Carlos Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Inv. 873



María Sorolla García: *Chula* (1925)

Oil on canvas. Donated by Francisco Pons Sorolla (1957). Inv. 1308

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