



John Singer Sargent's Captivation with Spain Comes to Legion of Honor

February 11–May 14, 2023

SAN FRANCISCO – The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (the “Museums”) are proud to present *Sargent and Spain*, the first exhibition to explore the influence of Spanish culture on the dynamic visual practice of the American expatriate artist John Singer Sargent (1856–1925). His fascination with Spain, which developed over the course of seven visits taken from 1879 to 1912, resulted in a remarkable body of work. The exhibition will present an array of Sargent's dazzling oils, watercolors, drawings, and never-before-exhibited photographs from his personal collection, which explore Spain's rich culture (both historic and modern), its people, and its magnificent urban and rural landscapes. *Sargent and Spain* will be on view at the Legion of Honor museum, the exclusive West Coast venue for this exhibition.

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Press Release

“Chronicling moments from John Singer Sargent’s numerous visits to Madrid, Granada, Tarragona, and other Spanish locales over several decades, we are delighted to host *Sargent and Spain* at the Legion of Honor,” stated Thomas P. Campbell. “In this setting, Sargent’s luminous paintings of the landscapes, people, architecture, and the works of art that he studied during the course of his travels will resonate with our own holdings of Spanish paintings, particularly those by Diego Velazquez and El Greco.”

Celebrated as the definitive society portraitist of his era, and noted for his artistic virtuosity, John Singer Sargent influenced a generation of American painters. Sargent was born in Florence, Italy, to American parents and traveled to Spain from his homes in Paris (1874–1882) and London (1882–1925). Sargent traveled widely across the country, from Madrid (the city he frequented the most) to nearby Toledo and Cuenca, Seville and Granada in the south, and Camprodón and Santiago de Compostela in the north. Visits to the Majorcan towns of Valldemosa and Palma in 1908 rounded out his experience.

“We are thrilled to host this magnificent exhibition, which presents astonishingly beautiful works by Sargent and attests to his embrace of Spanish culture,” said Emma Acker, Associate Curator of American Art at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. “These technically dazzling, creatively inspired, and deeply moving artworks capture a sense of the joy and excitement Sargent must have felt during his wide-ranging explorations of Spain, reminding us of the opportunities travel offers for growth, discovery, and inspiration.”

Sargent and Spain will be arranged in six sections that trace the artist’s multifaceted approaches to portraying the landscapes and culture of Spain. The first section, “Velázquez and the Spanish Masters,” will feature powerful early oils that the young artist produced during his first trip to Spain. Immersed in Spanish art at the Museo del Prado in Madrid, Sargent learned to adapt the palette and brushwork of the Spanish Old Masters he studied, especially that of his aesthetic hero Diego Velázquez. In addition to his copies after their work, this gallery will showcase paintings by Spanish Old Masters whom Sargent admired, as well as his original compositions that reveal their influence.

The second section, “Dance and Music,” will reveal Sargent’s enthusiasm for the performing arts he enjoyed in Spain. These works impart the artist’s admiration for the Spanish Roma peoples’ flamenco dance, dress, and music. Such paintings include *Spanish Roma Dancer* (1879–1880) and *The Spanish Dance* (1879–1882), in addition, his full-length oil portraits of the acclaimed Spanish dancer Carmen Daucet Moreno, known as La Carmencita. This section also includes an array of spectacular studies that Sargent developed in preparation for his tour de force depiction of a flamenco performance, *El Jaleo* (1882).



The next three sections showcase Sargent’s travels throughout Spain, where he was captivated by both rural and urban locales, the countryside, coasts, gardens, and the people that he met, depicted in brilliant oil and watercolors. “Architecture and Gardens” will feature Sargent’s views of Spanish architecture, including works of stunning Spanish royal palaces and environs, such as the Alhambra and Generalife, located in Granada. Works in “The Land and Its People” will divulge Sargent’s passion for depicting the people of Spain, including the Roma people of Granada, and their surroundings. The views in this section point to how wide ranging Sargent’s travels in Spain were, from the panoramic view of the snowcapped peaks in *Sierra Nevada* (1912) to the shadowy interior of a stable filled with pack mules in *Stable at Cuenca* (1903). “Majorca” will present the artist’s intense fascination with the Mediterranean island’s dazzling and varied terrain, with lush fruits and foliage, which he explored during his two visits there.

The exhibition will conclude with a gallery dedicated to Sargent’s interest in “Religion and Spirituality,” presenting works inspired by Spanish Catholic religious imagery, which he admired for its visual and spiritual power. Displayed here will be studies of soaring cathedrals, crucifixions, and Madonnas, many of which were made in preparation for Sargent’s ambitious mural cycle at the Boston Public Library, the *Triumph of Religion* (1890–1919). The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, will lend photographs from Sargent’s personal collection of Spanish devotional sculptures, which also aided his development of the library project.

Sargent and Spain will be on view from February 11 through May 14, 2023 at the Legion of Honor museum in San Francisco. The exhibition was curated by Sarah Cash, Associate Curator of American and British Paintings at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC; and Elaine Kilmurray and Richard Ormond, leading authorities on Sargent. The Legion of Honor's presentation is organized by Emma Acker, Associate Curator of American Art at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

About John Singer Sargent

Born in 1856 in Florence, Italy, to expatriate American parents, John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) received his first formal art instruction in Rome in 1868, and sporadically attended the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence between 1870 and 1873. In 1874 he was accepted at the Paris atelier of the portraitist Emile Auguste Carolus-Duran and attended drawing classes at the École des Beaux- Arts. Sargent's subsequent and extensive travels throughout Europe had a significant impact on his artistic development.

By the turn of the 20th century, Sargent was recognized as one the most acclaimed international society portraitists of his era, noted for his dazzling technical virtuosity. Sargent resented the limitations of portraiture, however, and from the beginning of his career painted a wide range of genre and landscape subjects. Although he spent his career abroad, Sargent was committed to America's cultural development and executed important mural decorations for institutions such as the Boston Public Library (1890–1919).

[Media Image Gallery](#)

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Ticketing

More information regarding tickets can be found at [legionofhonor.org/visit-us](#).

Exhibition Organization

Sargent and Spain is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, in collaboration with the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

Support for the national tour has been generously provided by Bank of America. Lead Sponsors: Denise Littlefield Sobel. Additional support is provided by The Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation and Wendy W. Kwok & family.

Visiting \ Legion of Honor

Lincoln Park, 100 34th Avenue, San Francisco. Lincoln Park, 100 34th Avenue, San Francisco. More information regarding tickets can be found at [legionofhonor.org/visit-us](#).

About the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco oversee the de Young, located in Golden Gate Park, and the Legion of Honor, in Lincoln Park. It is the largest public arts institution in San Francisco and one of the most visited arts institutions in the United States.

The Legion of Honor was modeled after the neoclassical Palais de la Légion d'Honneur, in Paris. The museum, designed by George Applegarth, opened in 1924 on a bluff in Lincoln Park overlooking the Golden Gate. It offers unique insight into the art historical, political, and social movements of the previous 4,000 years of human history, with holdings including ancient art from the Mediterranean basin; European painting, sculpture, and decorative arts; and the largest collection of works on paper in the American West.

The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco respectfully acknowledge the Ramaytush Ohlone, the original inhabitants of what is now the San Francisco Peninsula, and we further acknowledge that the greater Bay Area is the ancestral territory of the Miwok, Yokuts, and Patwin, as well as other Ohlone peoples. Indigenous communities have lived in and moved through this land over hundreds of generations and Indigenous peoples from many nations make their home in this region today. Please join us in recognizing and honoring their ancestors, descendants, elders, and all other members of their communities.

Image credits (L-R): John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) "Study for "The Spanish Dancer"", 1880-188. Watercolor, 11 7/8 × 7 7/8 in. (30.16 × 20 cm) Dallas Museum of Art, Foundation for the Arts Collection, gift of Margaret J. and George V. Charlton in memory of Eugene McDermott, 1974.1.FA. Image courtesy Dallas Museum of Art. Image courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.; John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) "Ilex Wood at Majorca with Blue Pigs," 1908. Oil on canvas, 22 × 28 in. (55.88 × 71.12 cm). Gift of John R. and Eleanor R. Mitchell. Collection of Cedarhurst Center for the Arts, Mt. Vernon, IL. 1973.1.54. Photograph by Daniel Overturf. Image courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.; John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) "Majorcan Fisherman", 1908. Oil on canvas, 27 1/2 × 21 1/2 in. (69.85 × 54.61 cm). Private collection. Julia Featheringill Photography. Image courtesy of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.