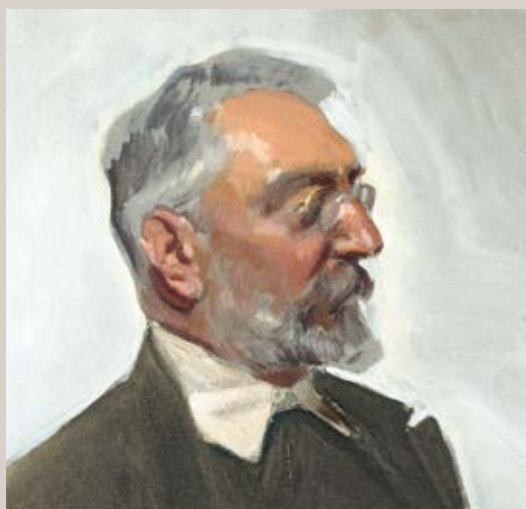


Portraits by Joaquín Sorolla at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum



Facundo Tomás
Felipe Garín

**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

This text is published under an international Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs Creative Commons licence (BY-NC-ND), version 4.0. It may therefore be circulated, copied and reproduced (with no alteration to the contents), but for educational and research purposes only and always citing its author and provenance. It may not be used commercially. View the terms and conditions of this licence at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-ncnd/4.0/legalcode>



Using and copying images are prohibited unless expressly authorised by the owners of the photographs and/or copyright of the works.

© of the texts: Bilboko Arte Ederren Museoa Fundazioa-Fundación Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao

Photography credits

© Bilboko Arte Ederren Museoa Fundazioa-Fundación Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao: figs. 1, 2 and 8

© Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York: figs. 3, 4 and 6

© Fundación Bancaja: fig. 7

© Museo Gustavo de Maeztu. Ayuntamiento de Estella-Lizarrar: fig. 10

© Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía: fig. 9

© Museo Nacional del Prado: fig. 11

© Museu de Belles Arts de Valencia-Generalitat Valenciana: fig. 5

Text published in:

B'09: *Buletina* = *Boletín* = *Bulletin*. Bilbao : Bilboko Arte Eder Museoa = Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao = Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, no. 5, 2010, pp. 239-278.

Two portraits painted by Joaquín Sorolla now in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum are perfect for an insight into how the artist went about painting his portraits [figs. 1 and 2]. The best known of the two, a portrait of Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), is actually unfinished¹. It is usually dated to around 1920, the assumption being that it was left unfinished because the artist was working on it when he suffered the stroke that killed him. Although Sorolla's remarkably modern brushwork certainly seems to suggest a later phase in his development, there are a number of features that, in our view, point to a somewhat different hypothesis. This hypothesis has several levels of interpretation, which together create a fine mesh of interrelations, while eschewing traditional ties of cause-and-effect. The main issue is that there is only one written reference to this portrait, and that from the pen of Salamanca University professor Unamuno himself. Archer Milton Huntington, founder and president of the New York-based Hispanic Society of America, had commissioned Sorolla to do a series of portraits of the leading personalities on the Spanish cultural scene of the time and, logically, Unamuno was one of the chosen subjects. In what was probably the most important theoretical text the Basque professor ever penned, *De arte pictórica [On painting]* published in two parts in *La Nación* of Buenos Aires on 21 July and 8 August 1912², Unamuno referred to the only portrait Sorolla painted of him:

Sorolla, the great Valencian painter [...] has been commissioned by Mr. Huntington to do another portrait of me for the Hispanic museum this deserving and opulent Hispanophile runs in New York, and I am looking forward to seeing how he leaves *me* when he returns here in the autumn to do it.

1 The portrait of Unamuno was left unfinished at the artist's death, and from 1923 was in the collection of his widow, Clotilde García del Castillo. It was left to María Sorolla García (as documented in the 1929 inventory) and from there it passed, in around 1947, to the Bilbao collector Luis Arbaiza. It was acquired by the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum in 1947.

2 Unamuno 1912.



1. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Portrait of Unamuno, c. 1912
Oil on canvas, 143 x 105 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 82/14

© Protected material



2. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Portrait of the painter Mañanós, 1903
Oil on canvas, 112 x 72 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 82/13

In the summer of 1912, then, the portrait of Unamuno was still not finished, and the sitter was awaiting Sorolla's visit in the autumn. Sorolla never returned to Salamanca and there is absolutely no record of the two ever having met anywhere else (in Madrid, for instance). In Laureano Robles's collection of Unamuno's previously unpublished correspondence, *Epistolario inédito*³, there is no reference either to Sorolla or to the portrait. In a letter to his wife sent from Salamanca on 30 May 1912, Sorolla briefly mentioned supper with the then rector of the University⁴:

Last night the governor and Unamuno came to visit, and ate with us.

So, with the details now available to us, it is surely not too outlandish to think that it was during this visit to Salamanca that Sorolla dashed down the outline for the writer's portrait. And that he left it at that, assuming the intellectual would sit for him in the near future so he could finish the portrait. This of course never happened, and so we are left with what is in effect a highly developed sketch. Another detail supports the 1912 dating: it is true that Sorolla often 'improved' the appearance of his sitters, but not to the point of actually modifying their features. In this portrait, Unamuno's hair and beard are grey. In later photographs of the Basque writer and thinker, his hair (both head and beard) is pure white: there would have been no reason for the grey seen in the Sorolla portrait. The artist surely took the painting to his studio "to finish it as soon as possible", but that never happened.

This may in fact have been a good thing, as historians and the public in general today have a unique insight into the way the artist worked, while also being able to appreciate the sheer artistry with which Sorolla committed his first impressions of his sitters to the support. Another Spanish writer, the ever-malicious Pío Baroja (1872-1956) [fig. 3], bears witness to the speed with which Sorolla got down the general lines (and even the complete painting) of a portrait. Baroja referred to the point in question in his memoirs, *Memorias*⁵, written long after the events they portray, which means his account should be taken with a largish pinch of salt. At one point describing Sorolla as "intelligent and Machiavellian" Baroja writes, in one of many anecdotes involving the painter, that they talked about the art of portrait painting, mentioning in particular how the artist had modified the portrait of Baroja he was working on for the Hispanic Society after assimilating some negative comments made by the writer. Baroja took advantage of the story to talk about Sorolla's portraits, making in the process a criticism that may seem to rank amongst the novelist's most consistent:

As psychology perhaps, his painting lacks interest. Sorolla didn't study the sitter; he wasn't looking for the inner turmoil.

I think that if you're doing a portrait of someone, you've got to put something in of what he is or what he wants to be [...]. I suppose that to make a portrait you have to observe the sitter, study his expression, see in what attitude he has most character.

Sorolla didn't do this. As soon as he had the person in front of him, he started to paint, as if it were something mechanical. They told me he did a portrait of Alejandro Pidal in three hours.

They say that, when they took him to do a portrait of the French tragic actress Raquel, Ingres studied her conscientiously and said he would need five or six years to do it.

Clearly, there are a lot of hours' difference between Sorolla's instant picture and the five or six years of Ingres.

In any case, I do believe that in a subject you've got to look for what is peculiar to him and makes him different, assuming he's got it of course.

3 Unamuno 1991.

4 Sorolla 2007-2009, vol. 2 (Correspondence with Clotilde García del Castillo).

5 Baroja 1944.



3. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Portrait of Pio Baroja y Nessi, 1914
Oil on canvas, 128 x 107.8 cm
The Hispanic Society of America, New York
Inv. no. A1924

Baroja's comment is of no little interest. The first, most important thing now is to confirm that Sorolla could indeed have produced the sketch for the portrait of Unamuno in a fairly short session, either before the supper he mentions to his wife, or possibly on the day after. He may have needed no more than an hour to paint it. A single doubt comes into play here: in his almost daily letters, Sorolla gave his wife a detailed account of all his activities, particularly what he was painting, and in all the correspondence from Salamanca he makes no mention whatsoever of the portrait of the university rector. But that doesn't necessarily mean that he didn't execute it then. It has been suggested (not entirely without foundation) that Sorolla painted the portrait from a photograph. However, in light of the available information, we need to go back to 1912 for the portrait of Unamuno, to Sorolla's visit to the province of Salamanca to collect 'types' for his panels for the Hispanic Society.

We should now take a closer look at one of Baroja's criticisms, because it is intimately related to Sorolla's general portrait practice. What strikes us today is that the painter should have been criticised (and not only by Baroja: it was a common theme amongst his detractors) for the "ease of execution" or the "speed" with which he produced his paintings. As if that were a defect, and not a virtue! Surely it would be fairer to consider that Sorolla was not "fast" by chance or good luck; it had taken him a lot of hard work to achieve that "speed of execution". The issue bears closer investigation. Joaquín Sorolla's professional career pretty much began when he was 15 years old; at that age, after regular attendance at the local school of crafts, his progress in painting was sufficiently striking to interest the director, Cayetano Capuz, who advised his uncle and aunt to enrol him at the School of Fine Arts. Starting there in 1878, Sorolla spent the next five years studying, learning the art of painting; or, to put it another way, trying out formulas of representation, looking at different compositional organizations on the canvas, freeing the



4. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Portrait of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, 1906
Oil on canvas, 127 x 90 cm
The Hispanic Society of America, New York
Inv. no. A51

hand as it worked the brush, seeing how pigments behaved when deposited in a particular way on the support, acquiring and gradually improving criteria of preferences and rejections, often letting himself be guided by the time-honoured method of trial and error. This is a good antidote to the hoary old cliché of the genius nestling in the artist's soul from early childhood. Sorolla wasn't born with a brush in his hand, he learnt his trade; this is particularly relevant in understanding how unjustified were the criticism he would subsequently receive for being "prodigiously quick": one gets the impression that his critics insisted on this point assuming it was merely a gift of nature. In fact, the speed and accuracy of Sorolla's brushwork were the result of a permanent process of assimilation and discrimination, of judgement and consolidation of criteria that would enable him to go as fast as his hard-earned know-how counselled. But it was know-how, not a "gift"; the "prodigiousness" was the result of accumulated hours of work. When talking about his own experience, Valencian novelist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez [fig. 4], called it the "snowball process", comparing this almost spontaneous know-how with a snowball that grows as it rolls⁶. A glance at

6 Letter from Blasco Ibáñez to Julio Cejador, 1918: "I am convinced that, for as long as I live, I'll be writing novels. They generate by the snowball procedure. An unlooked-for sensation, an idea, arising from the limbos of the subconscious, form the nucleus and around them group new observations and sensations stored in the same subconscious, without one ever having been aware of them. The true novelist possesses an imagination like a photographic camera, with the lens always open. With the same lack of consciousness as the camera, without realizing what's going on, it files away pictures of daily life, physiognomies, gestures, ideas and sensations, and retains them without knowing that they are there. Then, slowly, all these riches of observation move in the unconscious mystery, they amalgamate, they crystallize, waiting for the moment to come out into the open; and the novelist, writing at the dictate of some invisible force, believes he is saying something new, freshly-minted, when all he is in fact doing is transcribing ideas that have lived in him for years and which were suggested to him by some forgotten acquaintance, by a far-off landscape or by a book that he doesn't remember."



5. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Still-life, 1878
 Oil on canvas, 44 x 66 cm
 Valencia Fine Arts Museum



6. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Guipúzcoa, skittles, 1914
 Oil on canvas, 352 x 231 cm
 The Hispanic Society of America, New York
 Inv. no. A1814

what is probably the earliest surviving work by Sorolla, a *Still-life* from 1878 (painted at the age of 15) now in the Valencia Fine Arts Museum [fig. 5], is enough to show that the famous ease of execution was still some way off.

It is, then, highly probable that the portrait of Unamuno was executed in 1912, during the visit to Salamanca when university professor and painter met.

One attractive proposition is to place the painting at the centre of an ideal controversy between the writer and the artist. Such controversy is “ideal” because, in the absence of hard fact, all we have is our imagination and essays and pictures to shape it; but it is interesting to relate certain paragraphs by Unamuno to paintings by Sorolla, in the manner of the *sacre conversazioni* that brought saints from very different ages together in a single setting where they could enter into an ideal dialogue that belonged entirely to the painting’s scope of meaning and reference. Besides the portrait we are dealing with, we felt it would be useful to refer to the large panel devoted to the Basque Country (*Guipúzcoa, skittles*) [fig. 6] in the Hispanic Society series, together with most of the studies Sorolla made as final preparation for the big canvas.

In his article in *La Nación*, apart from mentioning the portrait, Unamuno related some of the things Sorolla said during a conversation either at the supper or during the sitting for the portrait. We tend to think that, as the Basque theme was the central issue, they probably discussed it while Unamuno sat for the painter. Unamuno remarks:

In one of my recent conversations with Sorolla (without a doubt the best-loved Spanish painter in Spain, and the one who earns most money from his art), the artist complained of other painters' odd predilection for all that is tragic and sad in our country, which, in the general run of things, entails declarations of its decadence, although there's a lot to be said about what such decadence might actually be. Unlike them, he looks for anything that represents health, joy, strength and good living and he paints it all in the full light of the sun. Even in those poor children who, in the brightest sunlight, expose their squalid bodies to bathe in the redemptive sea, you see a tendency towards health [fig. 7]. What's more, Sorolla, in his art excursions through the countryside and villages of Spain, had come to the conclusion that the dominant concern of our people was the pleasure to be got from women, or, to put it another way, the sex urge. I don't see it that way, but that's not for now.

Sorolla was commissioned by Mr. Huntington to paint a giant frieze for the Hispanic museum in New York showing the regions of Spain. He went to my Basque homeland, and, when we were talking about the region, remarked how different he had found it from how it appears seen through the eyes of most artists and writers. He came across a Basque region of noisy and cheerful people, who eat a lot, drink a whole lot more, dance when they can, have fun at a terrific pace and are every bit as interested in skirt as they are anywhere else. Some of which is true. And I myself have written somewhere of the sure instinct of our modest old master painter Antonio Lecuona (whose student I was and who showed me the principles of drawing and painting) in preferring to imitate Teniers. In the Dutch processions-cum-excursions of Teniers he saw a likeness to our own *romerías*.

I won't deny that that is the Basque country that first meets the eye, but it strikes me as undeniable that beneath it there is something else, something more austere and perhaps more sombre. A procession is one of the most typical features of the Basque country I know and the painting by Elías Salaverría, showing the procession of the Sacred Christ of Lezo [fig. 8] is undoubtedly highly revealing of the soul of my fellow countrymen, where religious concerns perhaps run deeper than in any other region in Spain, and certainly much more so than in the pagan Valencia, Sorolla's home patch. For his part, Sorolla neither sees nor feels the Christian religious aspect of things and of men.

And I add the Christian to the religious because I would never dream of denying religiosity in his art. The thing is that it is a pagan religiosity, an explosion of life and light under the open sky.

[...] Running around the countryside, dusty old villages and cities of Spain, you'll more often run into cheerfully rowdy *romerías* under a clear sky than ones with Christs of the Blood [Unamuno is referring to the painting *Cristo de la Sangre*, *Christ of the Blood*, by Ignacio Zuloaga, fig. 9] under a stormy sky, but that doesn't mean anything. It's just a statistic. And you might just run more often into scenes of pagan lust than ones of Christian mysticism, that's if you don't actually find the two things linked in a tragic embrace [...] ⁷.

Sorolla is unlikely to have been amused by Unamuno's comment on his brand of religious feeling, which the writer called "pagan"; the painter professed an intense Catholicism (as we were able to confirm recently in his correspondence with Pedro Gil Moreno de Mora)⁸ and must also have been pretty tired of people

7 Unamuno 1912, 8 August, pp. 54-55, 56.

8 See Sorolla 2007-2009, vol. I (*Correspondence with Pedro Gil Moreno de Mora*). For a significant example of Sorolla's religiosity, Pedro Gil, in a letter dated 8 December 1912, asked him if he would be willing to paint "the mid-point" of the niche of *La Virgen de los Desamparados* [Our Lady of the Defenceless] in Valencia, adding: "needless to say, it'll be Our Lady herself who'll be paying you. As it's Our Lady of the Defenceless it's a pleasure for me to give you this commission." Sorolla answered (no. 397, 14 December 1912): "Delighted, and anything for my adored Lady of the Defenceless. / I confess that there's something of an exaggeration in my devotion to her; I may possib[ly] be wrong to focus my fervour on her, but without her my life would often be unbearable." (*Ibid.*, p. 320).



7. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Sad Inheritance!, 1899
 Oil on canvas, 210 x 285 cm
 Bancaja Collection, Valencia

resorting to the word “pagan” to describe the Catholicism of Valencia⁹. Furthermore, Unamuno’s article as a whole, despite the attempt to strike an “impartial” note, was ultimately intended to praise Zuloaga’s painting while subtly turning its nose up at Sorolla’s; for him, the authentic Spain was the *España negra*, “black Spain”:

The austerity and sobriety, the real Catholicism of Spain, in the broadest and deepest sense of the word Catholicism, finds its expression in the paintings of Zuloaga not only because of the choice of subject matter, nor even principally because of it, but rather the sober, powerful and austere manner of their execution, the severe *chiaroscuro*. And the other Spain, the Spain we might call pagan and, perhaps in a certain sense progressive, the one that wants to live and not think about death, has its other painter in Sorolla¹⁰.

The debate between “white Spain” and “black Spain” has been the subject of many a historiographical foray and a variety of interpretations¹¹. Unamuno’s position was the most representative of the criteria of “black Spain”; in several other paragraphs of the same article he presents his arguments for the darker side of the country:

9 Pío Baroja and Azorín and Blasco Ibáñez himself had insisted on the “pagan” condition of Catholicism in Valencia, in a sort of equation between Christianity with all that is “dark, gloomy and bloody” while joy and the will to live are seen as paganism. In several discussions of the issue we refer in particular to Miguel de Unamuno; see our book (Tomás/Garín 2006), our introductory article “Sorolla’s vision of Spain ninety years on” for the catalogue of the exhibition *Sorolla. Vision of Spain* (Valencia 2007), and Facundo Tomás’s book *Peripheral cultures and the ‘98 syndrome* (Tomás 2000). Because, in effect, primitive Christianity *assimilated* many features of pagan religions existing in Imperial Rome, and the successive Protestant reforms that gradually did away with the elements of pagan origin, while Catholicism retained them. This was seen clearly by Friedrich Nietzsche, who, in one of the posthumous fragments of 1880 [3= M II 1.Spring 1880. *The Shadow of Venice*] (Italian version by Mazzino Montinari; Spanish translation by Facundo Tomás) wrote: “3 [137] Christianity derived from Judaism and nothing else; but it grew within the Roman world, and produced fruits that are either Jewish or Roman. This crucified Christianity has found in Catholicism a form in which the Roman element has come to predominate; and in Protestantism another form, in which the Jewish element predominates. This is not due to the Germans (who are the bearers of the Protestant faith) being closer to the Jews, but rather to them being further from the Romans than the Catholic population of southern Europe.”

10 Unamuno 1912, p. 58.

11 It is worth recalling the main texts: Joaquín de la Puente’s article *Unamuno: su cotejo Sorolla-Zuloaga (dos españas)* [“Unamuno: Comparing Sorolla and Zuloaga (Two Spains)"] appeared in 1965 (Puente 1965), and revisited the turn-of-the-century controversy. Subsequently, the issue remained half-buried until Francisco Calvo Serraller revived it in his vindication of Julio Romero de Torres, *La hora de iluminar lo negro: tientos sobre Julio Romero de Torres* [Time to light up the dark: approaches to Julio Romero de Torres], an essay in the catalogue for the 1993 Romero de Torres anthological exhibition (Calvo Serraller 1993); another essential contribution is Lola Caparrós’s lecture at the 11th CEHA Congress, *Una polémica en la pintura española de fin de siglo: lo blanco, naturalista, luminoso, sensual, mediterráneo; versus negro, idealista, brumoso, espiritual, nordicista* [A controversy in turn-of-the-century Spanish painting: the white, naturalistic, luminous, sensual Mediterranean versus idealist, misty, spiritual, Nordic black] (Caparrós 1998); Facundo Tomás’s *¡Blanco, que te quiero blanco!* [White! I love you white!] (Tomás 1997) contained something of a vindication of white Spain, and shortly after another essay, *Sorolla y Zuloaga: luz y sombra del drama moderno en España* [Sorolla and Zuloaga: lights and shadows in the modern drama of Spain] by Calvo Serraller appeared giving an in-depth review of the controversy (Calvo Serraller 1997). And—reservations apart—the six essays on Sorolla published by the authors of this article (Tomás/Garín 1998, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2006 and 2007) also partake of this spirit, as does Facundo Tomás’s book *Las culturas periféricas y el síndrome del 98* (Tomás 2000).



8. Elías Salaverría (1883-1952)
Corpus procession, Lezo, c. 1910
 Oil on canvas, 74.5 x 120.5 cm
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
 Inv. no. 88/79

This religious, tragic Spain, this black Spain that Verhaeren came in search of when he made that book in tandem with Darío de Regoyos, this Spain is as Spanish as any other, and, some of us believe, even more so. Which is not to exclude the others of course. From which we see how difficult it is, even in art, to eschew the doctrinal trends of the spirit. No, there can be no doubt, there is pagan painting and Christian painting, there's Catholic and progressive and there is even orthodox and heterodox painting [...] even in landscapes, there are Christian landscapes and pagan landscapes. Did I not say that the ingenuous landscapes of Regoyos were Franciscan?¹²

While Unamuno links "black Spain" to Catholicism, white Spain is for him bound up with a pagan conception of the world. Logically, in line with the foregoing, there was Christian and pagan painting, the latter being made to coincide exactly with Sorolla in the same way paganism was related to Valencia. In a frank expression of admiration for a work by Zuloaga, Unamuno made explicit his view of Spain, completely at odds with Sorolla's:

A few days back I spent some time looking at an engraving showing a painting by Zuloaga, the *Cristo de la Sangre*. It is one of those typical Spanish Christs, pale, long-haired, a gloomy expression, bloodless and bloody, Christs who have shed every last drop of blood and have none left in their bodies, to give it to mankind ... Around him four austere Castilian figures, with their long heavy cloaks and candles in their hands, serious and serene. In the background is a walled city that puts us in mind of the Ávila of the Knights, of the Ávila of the saints, of the Ávila of St. Theresa of Jesus. And then a stormy sky¹³.

So Unamuno's position was pretty clear. Just a year later, in an impassioned interview with Francisco Martín Caballero¹⁴, Joaquín Sorolla appeared to answer him point by point (although what he says could apply perfectly well to other writers and painters):

¹² Unamuno 1912, pp. 56, 57.

¹³ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁴ See Martín Caballero 1913.



9. Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945)
Christ of Blood, 1911
Oil on canvas, 248 x 302 cm
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid
Inv. no. AS00784

In painting we've gone through a time you might call epic, in which we all did nothing else but bury Kings. Afterwards came a healthy current of naturalism: the pleasure of living ... But it was soured by an enormous black literary wave, so great that, under its influence, you actually began to doubt whether you should blow your newborn son's brains out or let him live. We are still caught up in the reign of this wave. The literature of pessimism also intruded onto the field of my art. There's almost no book that doesn't have its neurasthenic, nor painting that doesn't have a sick man. Well: in the midst of all that wave of sadness, I felt a great optimism which I believe must triumph. I think they are nothing more than surface currents, as Simarro calls them. Surface currents that in the nature of things are bound to disappear. My nation cannot live and shall not live in that false atmosphere of art and literature. I certainly don't mean that people should be fooled again by painting our country as the only one, the best one in the world in all areas. But nor is it true that Spain is in such a lamentable state.

In the 1912 *La Nación* article, Unamuno entered into another controversy that also set him well apart from Sorolla: colour. There he said:

[...] I prefer painters that we might call chiaroscurists, artists who paint little more than black and white, not those other colourists who degenerate so easily into nothing much more than colour and whose decorative art doesn't fit in all that well with the severe, classical painting. A good painting doesn't lose so much as people seem to think in a good uncoloured graphic reproduction, in a good engraving, or in an excellent photograph. What you can't reproduce in an engraving is a kaleidoscope or an embroidered Manila shawl. Velázquez's noble portraits conserve much of their nobility in a good engraving and his magnificent Christ is, thank God, fairly easy to reproduce.

Although veiled, the attacks on Sorolla's painting were discernible throughout the article. For that reason, besides the reply he gave Martín Caballero, we really need to consider the large panel devoted to the Basque Country [fig. 6] as another answer to the Unamuno's opinions, scarcely two years after the article was published. From the perspective of colour, the tones used in the panel are the softest of the entire Hispanic Society series, with Sorolla's habitual luminosity muffled to reflect both the humid, almost misty



10. Gustavo de Maeztu (1887-1947)
Portrait of Ramiro de Maeztu, 1910
 Oil on canvas, 154 x 140 cm
 Gustavo de Maeztu Museum, Estella Town Hall, Navarra

climate of the Basque region and, one suspects, his determination to demonstrate to the writer that he, Sorolla, was perfectly capable of getting away from what Unamuno disdainfully described as *colorinismo* in his *La Nación* article and which appeared there as a major defect of Sorolla's art. What's more, for the only picture of the Basque Country in the entire series he chose as central themes scenes of game playing and love; this was his way of reasserting the views that Unamuno had so energetically criticized, by showing a Basque Country of "cheerful, rowdy people, who eat a lot, drink a whole lot more, dance when they can, have fun at a terrific pace and are every bit as interested in skirt as they are anywhere else."

So the portrait really fits this ideal controversy. Of the series of personalities painted for the Hispanic Society, Unamuno looks by far the most arrogant¹⁵. Was the look the writer and professor's own? No doubt about it; although it is also undeniable that the arrogance was accentuated by Sorolla, in the placing of the head (Unamuno seems to be looking down his nose at anyone fool enough to approach him) and in the opening of the jacket, almost as black as the waistcoat, which gives the impression, certainly at first sight, of a chest puffed to the limit with self-importance. In other respects, the portrait conforms to Sorolla's usual practice: a drawing that stands out from the background, although it is true the colours don't actually respect the drawing too much, inundating it and breaking over the lines on a number of occasions and blurring it in the process. The background is a white wall that deepens to a more intense white around the sitter, tracing his profile to make it stand out more powerfully. Two small areas are particularly luminous, the strong whites

15 "Even so, the work shows the spirit and personality of the sitter, a regular feature of Sorolla's portraits and which, on this occasion, accentuates the arrogant bearing with which the painter presented the philosopher." Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao... 2006, pp. 122-123 (commentary by Javier Novo).



11. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Aureliano de Beruete, senior, 1902
Oil on canvas, 115 x 110 cm
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid
Inv. no. P04646

contrasting with the dark suit and providing a touch of lightness to counteract the severity and seriousness of the black: the shirt-collar and the scarcely glimpsed right sleeve¹⁶.

Although unfinished, despite being just a preliminary sketch, it is in itself an extraordinary portrait, where the force and personality of the subject are fully there¹⁷. It might be a good idea here to mention the criticism made by Ramiro de Maeztu (1875-1936) [fig. 10] in 1908 of Sorolla's portraits:

Bastien-Lepage said the landscape should be approached like a portrait. Sorolla tends, instinctively, to approach the portrait as a landscape¹⁸.

Maeztu's words need a little interpretation perhaps: if Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884) sought to pamper landscape to the point of working on every leaf, blade of grass, tree and hill as if they were the features of someone's face, Sorolla depersonalized his sitters to the point of summarily resolving the outer features, as if they were components of a landscape. Maeztu judged this as his way of renouncing "psychological depth." Rather than showing the soul of the sitter, Sorolla brought the soul to the surface and weighed up the features of the face in the way he would any other elements of the painting.

16 "[...] the style that characterized his work: light that blurs the contours, without ever entirely doing away with the drawing, thick brushstrokes, colours dissolved in water, glazes [...]". Ibid.

17 In our book *Joaquín Sorolla* (Tomás/Garín 2006) we have this to say about the Unamuno portrait: "The third of these portraits we referred to is the one of Miguel de Unamuno which Sorolla left unfinished. Although the sketch wasn't completed, it does allow us to intuit the main lines of what would have been and, in any case, actually *is*, a magnificent portrait, even in its unfinished state. Unamuno's eyes aren't to be seen here either; but his face is caught to perfection with just a few strokes, and the entire bearing of his body in that three-quarter length twist in search of a profile, hands in pockets supporting the jacket [...] collaborates with the imagined look towards the far horizon of the inner soul, an introspection, to give the image the look somewhere between arrogance and shyness, the drive behind the ferocious defence of his own opinions that hid the deep-lying vacillation, the petulance that was so much part of the writer's makeup."

18 Maeztu 1908.

Two objections can be made to these opinions. The first consists in denying the aptness of the criterion Maeztu attributes to Bastien-Lepage, because for painting aspiring to be modern it wasn't the potential for reference or what we might call transitivity that mattered in the execution: the priority was the importance of the plane of representation, as that had effectively been the characteristic feature of modernity in painting from Édouard Manet (1832-1883) onwards. Sorolla's portrait painting, according to Maeztu's criterion, is in fact much more "advanced" than the system rivalled against him. The other objection has to do with Sorolla's capacity for "psychological penetration"; in our opinion, there is no reason whatsoever to accept the painter's alleged lack of this capacity; very briefly, people who criticize Sorolla's lack of psychological penetration rested their case purely on the sitters' faces and, more precisely, almost entirely on the eyes, on the look, the other components of the face acting merely as accessories or support. But even from this perspective, Sorolla produced magnificent portraits where the personality of the subject appeared in all its splendour. While it is difficult to take the sketch for the portrait of Unamuno discussed here as an example, the other portrait in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, of the artist Asterio Mañanós Martínez (1861-1935) [fig. 2] is, however, particularly useful¹⁹.

Not only is this a finished work, it is in fact fully in line with the best of Sorolla's portraits. It is dated 1903, scarcely a year after one of the most important portraits Sorolla ever painted, of fellow artist Aureliano de Beruete [fig. 11]. Although Beruete was shown seated and Mañanós standing, the two portraits are undoubtedly quite similar: in both cases the dark clothes bring the clarity of the face into relief and allows us to concentrate on a penetratingly powerful look (based in both portraits largely on the power of the right eye) and a touch of weakness or submission (concentrated in the left eye). Although Sorolla was a friend of Mañanós, when he talked about him, he tended to condescend, out of a feeling of superiority. There are two references to the painter from Palencia in Sorolla's correspondence with his wife: one in a letter written in Segovia on 10 October 1906 mentions him en passant:

[...] it rained all day yesterday, as no doubt you have been informed by Maña[...]²⁰.

But in a letter written three days later, Sorolla goes into more detail:

[...] I'm sorry Maña should have been so daft as to tell you that, as I certainly said nothing about it²¹.

This in reply to something Clotilde had said in a previous letter:

[...] I didn't write to you last night because Maña came to see us and he said that all it does there is rain and that you would almost certainly arrive on the 11 p.m. train²².

19 Asterio Mañanós Martínez was a second-rank painter born in Palencia in 1861, where he began his studies at the municipal school. In 1877 he moved to Madrid to study at the School of San Fernando and attend the studio of Casto Plasencia and of fellow artist from Palencia José María Casado del Alisal, both recognised as important painters in the Spanish capital. He began competing in the National Exhibition of Fine Arts in 1881. He lived in Madrid, although also in Palencia, where he received several commissions from a number of public institutions, including the curtains and drops at the Teatro de Recreo Palentino theatre in his hometown, and, with Sabino Ojero, the decoration for the Teatro de la Peña Palentina theatre. In 1885 he was awarded a pension to further his studies in Rome, where other Spanish painters were to be found, including one Joaquín Sorolla. The two became friends there. In 1889 he spent a year in Paris, where he studied with Léon Bonnat. In 1908 the senate appointed him keeper of its works of art, which prompted him to paint a number of pictures connected with the senate, the senate building, the chamber of sessions during meetings, etc., which are among the best-known of his output. In 1988 the Caja Palencia savings bank decided to organize an anthological exhibition of his work, curated by Arturo Caballero Bastardo, the accompanying essay being pretty much the only available existing work dealing with the painter. Sorolla must have made a present of the portrait to the sitter, as it was certainly in his private collection and subsequently in his widow's at least until 1948, when it was acquired by Juan Conde, from Bilbao, going on in 1975 to the collection of Juan Ángel Larrea. After the latter's death, the portrait was left to the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. In the *Sorolla, 1863-1963: I Centenario del nacimiento de Sorolla* exhibition catalogue (Madrid 1963, cat. 40), it was featured with the title *Retrato de d. Asterio Mañanos*, [Portrait of Asterio Mañanos] and, under the title, in brackets, "núm. 1938". There it said: "Vendido por la viuda del retratado, hacia 1948, en 3.000 pesetas, a D. Juan Conde, de Bilbao. Pasó luego a Buenos Aires. Vuelto a España, lo adquirió su propietario actual. / Prop. de D. Juan Ángel Larrea. Bilbao" [Sold to Juan Conde from Bilbao by the sitter's widow c. 1948, for 3,000 pesetas. It subsequently went to Buenos Aires. Back in Spain, it was acquired by its present owner. Property of Juan Ángel Larrea. Bilbao.]

20 See Sorolla 2007-2009, vol. 3 (Correspondence with Clotilde García del Castillo (1891-1911)).

21 Ibid. no. 156, p. 131.

22 Ibid.

One feature of particular importance to Sorolla that helped to highlight the complex combination of energy and weakness in that look of Mañanós's was the sitter's broad forehead, prolonged by partial baldness. The forehead was one of the parts of the face that most interested Sorolla in his portraits; he remarked on this during an interview with Francisco Camba while Sorolla painted Manuel Bartolomé de Cossío:

Now his brushes seem to caress the forehead as he paints it, and, in reply to a comment of mine, he says:

"What most interests me in a sitter, what I paint with most care and respect, is the forehead."

And he smiles, adding:

"Sometimes I go too far. On one occasion, the wife of a sitter said on seeing the work: It's good, very good; but you've given him a face of someone with talent he doesn't have..."

From the forehead he moves on to the moustache. The brushstrokes are broader now...²³

Asterio Mañanós is shown standing, three-quarter length to the knees. A half-smoked cigarette dangles in one hand. As with the portrait of Aureliano de Beruete, the darkness of the suit and overcoat declare the dignity with which the artist carries himself, although, from a purely visual, plastic perspective, its main purpose is to highlight the clarity of the hand and face. Like the Unamuno portrait, the white shirt-collar stands out, although the long grey beard tends to mitigate its force. The same occurs with the touch of red tie: it is partially muffled by the superposition of the range of greys in the beard; at the same time, the damped-down red of the tie connects step by step with a range of reds that Sorolla distributed all over the painting; the most forceful is used for the lips and, beside them, the high rose tones of the ear, cheeks and hand. The forehead, broadened by baldness, consolidates the energy and melancholy of the eyes that look straight out at the spectator in search of some kind of spiritual connection that would lead the viewer directly into the sitter's soul. Here the background is much clearer than in the Beruete portrait: a fair-sized rectangle of diffuse, many-shaded ochre, which might be a large canvas leaning against the wall, and, against it, what seems to be a bracket that Sorolla, rather than give it genuine definition, really only hints at.

The portrait of Mañanós is a superb painting by Joaquín Sorolla. In both portraits by the artist in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, it is clear that the look and the face are not the painter's only objectives; what he aimed for was psychological penetration by means of a series of attitudes and treatments of paint surfaces as an element in which any sense might be embodied, together with all the messages, the actual transitivity of the reference to a human being of flesh and blood.

23 Camba 1918.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baroja 1944

Pío Baroja. *Desde la última vuelta del camino : memorias*. Madrid : Biblioteca Nueva, 1944 (memoirs originally published in instalments in 1942 and 1943 in *Semana* magazine: text compiled in edition by José Carlos Mainer. Barcelona : Círculo de Lectores, 1997 (Series: Obras completas, 1-2)).

Calvo Serraller 1993

Francisco Calvo Serraller. "La hora de iluminar lo negro : tientos sobre Julio Romero de Torres", *Julio Romero de Torres, 1874-1930*. [Exhib. Cat.]. Madrid : Fundación Cultural Mapfre Vida, 1993, pp. 19-75.

Calvo Serraller 1997

—. "Sorolla y Zuloaga : luz y sombra del drama moderno en España" en *Sorolla & Zuloaga : dos visiones para un cambio de siglo*. [Exhib. Cat.]. Bilbao : Fundación Bilbao Bizkaia Kutxa : Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, 1997, pp. 18-49.

Camba 1918

Francisco Camba. "Viendo trabajar a los maestros : Sorolla", *El Imparcial*, Madrid, 15 February 1918.

Caparrós 1998

Lola Caparrós. "Una polémica en la pintura española de fin de siglo : lo blanco, naturalista, luminoso, sensual, mediterráneo; versus negro, idealista, brumoso, espiritual, nordicista", *El Mediterráneo y el arte español : Actas del XI Congreso del CEHA, Valencia, septiembre 1996*. Valencia : Comité Español de Historia del Arte, 1998, pp. 226-231.

Madrid 1963

Sorolla, 1863-1963 : I centenario del nacimiento de Sorolla. [Exhib. Cat., Madrid, Casón del Buen Retiro]. Madrid : Dirección General de Bellas Artes, 1963.

Maeztu 1908

Ramiro de Maeztu. "Sorolla en Londres", *La Prensa*, Buenos Aires, 14 June 1908.

Martín Caballero 1913

Francisco Martín Caballero. "Hablando con D. Joaquín Sorolla", *La Correspondencia de Valencia*, 11 September 1913.

Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao... 2006

Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao : guía. Bilbao : Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, 2006 (ed. in English, *Bilbao Fine Arts Museum : Guide*).

Puente 1965

Joaquín de la Puente. "Unamuno : su cotejo Sorolla-Zuloaga (dos españas)", *Ínsula*, Madrid, February 1965.

Sorolla 2007-2009

Joaquín Sorolla. *Epistolarios de Joaquín Sorolla*. 3 vols. Facundo Tomás... [et al.] (eds.). Rubí, Barcelona : Anthropos, 2007-2009.

Tomás 1997

Facundo Tomás. "¡Blanco, que te quiero blanco!", *Pintors valencians al Museu de L'Havana = Pintores valencianos en el Museo de La Habana*. [Exhib. Cat., Valencia, Port of Valencia]. Valencia : Consorci de Museus de la Comunitat Valenciana, 1997, pp. 49-146.

Tomás 2000

—. *Las culturas periféricas y el síndrome del 98*. Barcelona : Anthropos, 2000.

Tomás/Garín 1998

Facundo Tomás ; Felipe Garín. "Joaquín Sorolla y la generación del 98 : el debate después de la modernidad", *Sorolla y la Hispanic Society*. [Exhib. Cat., Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza; Valencia, Museu de Belles Arts de València]. Madrid : Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, 1998, pp. 33-76.

Tomás/Garín 2000

—. "Cuatro aporías sobre Joaquín Sorolla", *Mariano Benlliure y Joaquín Sorolla : centenario de un homenaje*. [Exhib. Cat., Valencia, Museo del Siglo XIX]. Valencia : Direcció General de Promoció Cultural i Patrimoni Artístic, 2000, pp. 102-114.

Tomás/Garín 2001a

— . "Los motivos de Sorolla : Clotilde", *El museo Sorolla visita Valencia*. [Exhib. Cat., Valencia, Museo del Siglo XIX]. Valencia : Generalitat Valenciana, 2001, pp. 35-62.

Tomás/Garín 2001b

— . "El depósito del museo Sorolla", *El museo Sorolla visita Valencia*. [Exhib. Cat., Valencia, Museo del Siglo XIX]. Valencia : Generalitat Valenciana, 2001, pp. 63-92.

Tomás/Garín 2006

— . *Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)*. Madrid : TF, 2006.

Tomás/Garín 2007

— . "La visión de Joaquín Sorolla noventa años después", *Sorolla : visión de España : colección de la Hispanic Society of America*. [Exhib. Cat.]. Valencia : Fundación Bancaja, 2007, pp. 11-90.

Unamuno 1912

Miguel de Unamuno. "De arte pictórica", *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, 21 July and 8 August, 1912 (reproduced in Miguel de Unamuno. *En torno a las artes : (del teatro, el cine, las bellas artes, la política y las letras)*. Madrid : Espasa-Calpe, 1976, pp. 46-62.).

Unamuno 1991

— . *Epistolario inédito*. Laureano Robles (ed.). Madrid : Espasa-Calpe, 1991.

Valencia 2007

Sorolla : visión de España : colección de la Hispanic Society of America. [Exhib. Cat.]. Valencia : Fundación Bancaja, 2007.