

## The Seville Museum of Fine Art

Among the many artistic treasures which Seville boasts, is the Museum of Fine Art. Its comprehensive collection of Spanish painting, particularly the 17th century Seville school, make it one of the most important art galleries in Spain.

This important museum is situated in the former convent of la Merced Descalza, close by the Puente del Cachorro, which crosses the River Guadalquivir. As an anecdote, it is worth mentioning that when the building was a convent, Fray Gabriel Téllez, better known as Tirso de Molina, creator of the renowned character Don Juan, lived there.

The building, built and finished in a mannerist style by architect Juan de Oviedo in 1612, would not become the site of the museum until 1835, when the Museum of Paintings was established, which drew its funds from the sale of church properties during the 19th century. Later private donations, plus acquisitions by the local administration have enriched the museum funds. It contains works by artists such as **El Greco**, **Brueghel**, **Lucas Cranach**, and especially, by **Zurbarán** and **Murillo**, which make the Seville Museum of Fine Art one of the country's most important art galleries.

But apart from the Museum's rich pictorial collection, there are other collections of sculpture, ceramics, silverware, furniture, etc., which enrich a visit to the premises.

Three exuberant courtyards decorated with **tiling** from different Seville convents and a great staircase structure the interior of this two-storey building, which has recently been radically remodelled.

At the entrance, the ceramics which used to belong to the Convento del Pópulo stand out. Meanwhile, the arch which gives access to the Aljibe Cloister was made by Hernando de Valladares at the beginning of the 17th century for the Convento de San Pablo. The interior of this cloister houses another interesting panel, in this case from the Convento Madre de Dios. It is the Virgen del Rosario (1577), by Cristóbal de Augusta.

### Gothic and renaissance

The ground floor gives access to Room I, where Spanish Gothic works are exhibited. Sculptures by **Pedro Millán** and Lorenzo Mercadante share this space with magnificent panels such as those made by Bartolomé Bermejo and reredos such as that of Calatrava or la Pasión, made by **Juan Sánchez de Castro's** circle.

The humanist ideology, which blossoms in the **16th century**, is reflected in art in diverse works by the Seville School, with **Luis de Vargas** and **Villegas Marmolejo** art the forefront. The noteworthy works by the first of the two are "Purification" and "Apparition of the Risen Christ"; by the second, two panels: "Holy Family" and "Saint Thomas and Saint Catherine". We must not forget "**Annunciation**" by Alejo Fernández and other works by Italian and Flemish artists, such as "**Saint Jerome Penitent**", by the sculptor **Pietro Torrigiano**, and the paintings by Lucas Cranach or Martín de Vos.

Seventeen century pieces are the main focus of this exhibition. The Sevillian school is in the middle of a transition from Mannerism to Naturalism. **Francisco Pacheco** and **Alonso Vázquez**, both subscribers to the Mannerist trend, have some of their most significant works in the museum. A good example of these is the series of paintings destined for the main cloister of the Convent of La Merced Calzada. "The last Supper", by Alonso Vázquez stands out among the rest as a representative work of Andalusian Mannerism..

## The seville baroque: murillo and zurbarán

As for 17th century sculpture, the museum holds a significant collection of figures of Baby Jesus and the head of John the Baptist, common themes of the time..

Room V, situated in the former church of the convent, is the area where the main **Seville Baroque** works are concentrated, with **Bartolomé Esteban Murillo** being the main exponent. In fact, the Seville Museum of Fine Art boasts the biggest Murillo collection in the world. Among his extensive production, the popular **"Virgen de la Servilleta"** (1665-1668), situated in a chapel of the church, and the paintings dedicated to the "Immaculates" stand out, although other works with religious themes are also worthy of note, such as "Santas Justa y Rufina" and "Saint Francis embracing Christ Crucified". From the second third of the 17th century we have the main reredos from the Convento de Capuchinos, also by Murillo.

Apart from this artist, the museum also takes us on an exhaustive tour of the work of other painters of the time, such as Juan del Castillo, Roelas and Uceda, authors of a series of reredos.

Another key figure in the Seville school is **Francisco de Zurbarán**, and the museum preserves a good collection of his paintings. The deep spirituality which characterises him can be appreciated in works such as "Apotheosis of Saint Thomas of Aquinas" and "Saint Hugo in the refectory" (1655), the latter having been painted specially for the Carthusian Monastery. "Christ Crucified" (1626-1630), "La Virgen de las Cuevas" or "Visit of the Virgen to Urbano II" are some of his other admirable canvases.

The tour continues on the top floor of the building with the Spanish Baroque painting, although apart from the Seville School we can also admire works by artists from Madrid and Toledo, such as **José de Ribera** ("Saint James the Apostle") and **Francisco de Herrera el Mozo**, the latter being responsible for introducing the height of the Baroque to Seville.

The following rooms exhibit works by Juan de Valdés Leal, such as "The Immaculate" (1672) and "Temptations of Saint Jerome", and by the disciples of Murillo: **Meneses Osorio**, **Núñez de Villavicencio** and **Simón Gutiérrez**, three of the authors who would set the direction for painting in Seville in the 18th century.

Meanwhile, the 17th century European trends were following different routes. As an example, room IX contains some works from the Old Continent, mainly from the Dutch and Italian School of the 17th century.

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## The 19th century

The beginning of the 19th century saw the rebirth of the Seville School, thanks in part, to two of the most relevant painters of the time: **José Villegas** and **Gonzalo Bilbao** (with his "Main Cloister of la Merced de Sevilla"). These and other artists, such as José García Ramos, Manuel Barrón, Eduardo Cano or José Jiménez Aranda, managed to re-establish Seville as a reference point in the national artistic panorama.

Mid-century "**Costumbrismo**" and **Romanticism** give way to new authors, some of whose works are present in the Seville art gallery: **Antonio María Esquivel**, **Gutiérrez de la Vega** or **Valeriano Domínguez Bécquer**. The latter in fact being the author of the famous portrait of his brother, the writer Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, which is on display here.

Apart from the Seville School, the Museum of Fine Art doesn't forget the work of other Spanish painters such as **Francisco de Goya**, with one of his last works, an oil portrait of "José Duaso y Latre" (1824).

The end of the collection takes us round the different Spanish movements of the first half of the 20th century, emphasising **Regionalism**, through a rich collection of paintings by painters such as **Ignacio de Zuloaga**, Gustavo Bacarisas or Daniel Vázquez Díaz.