

*On the Alhambra
in Modern Art*

On the cover page:

JOAQUÍN SOROLLA

(Valencia, 1863; Cercedilla, Madrid, 1923)

Alhambra, Salón de Embajadores, Granada, 1909

Oil on canvas, 104,1 × 81,9 cm

THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM, Los Angeles

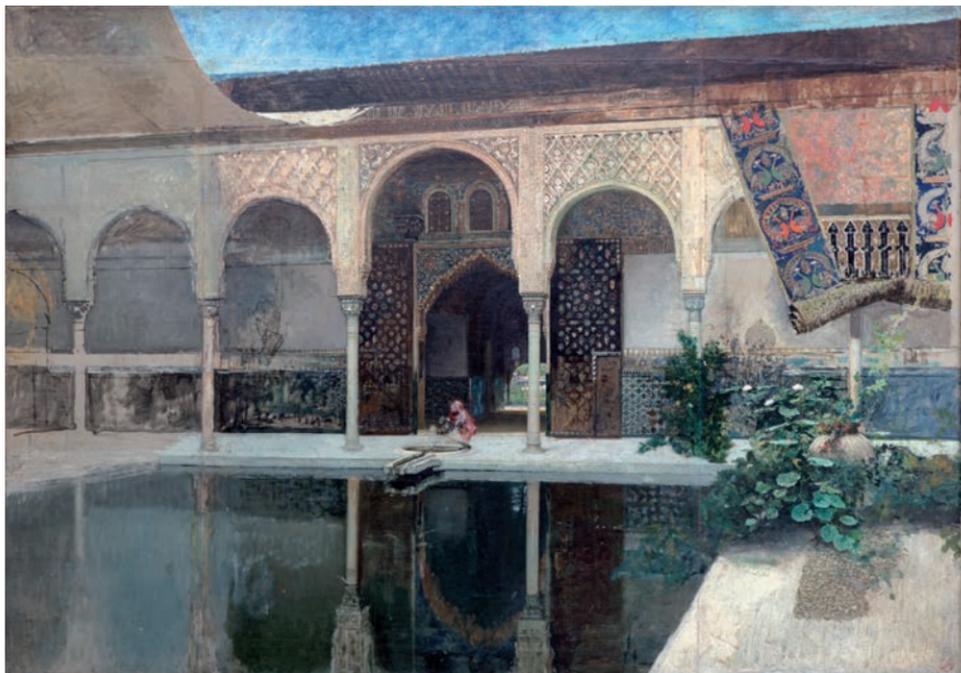
Sobre la Alhambra en el arte moderno

THE 1870s SAW the Alhambra and the Generalife reach their height as a source of inspiration for artists, who would continue to portray their fascination for the great monumental and scenic complex of Granada more than a century later. In 1870, the Alhambra was declared a national monument by the Royal Order of 12 July, while it was undergoing an intense process of restoration by Rafael Contreras. At the same time, Contreras publicised its image through numerous detailed, to-scale reproductions of the Nasrid palace produced by his workshop. In July 1870, Mariano Fortuny arrived in Granada, giving the city a new international fame through his reputation and work, the Alhambra becoming a particularly prominent theme in his painting. While all this had been set in motion since the Romantic period at least, a period of expansion began that went through all the several phases of modern awareness that developed up to almost the present day, including the most visibly confrontational phases. The Alhambra was the inspiration for literary, musical, architectural and

cinematographic creations, but, above all, photography and painting.

Listing the names of a hugely varied number of artists, predominantly painters, demonstrate this. They are, among others, Mariano Fortuny, Antonio Muñoz Degrain, Anders Zorn, Santiago Rusiñol, Aureliano de Beruete, Joaquín Sorolla, Darío de Regoyos, José María Rodríguez-Acosta, José María López Mezquita, Fernando de Amárica, Eugenio Gómez Mir, Maurice Denis, Théo van Rysselberghe, Hermenegildo Lanz, Ismael de la Serna, José Val del Omar, José Ortiz Echagüe, Manuel Ángeles Ortiz, José Guerrero, Manuel Rivera, Eusebio Sempere, José María García de Paredes, Gerardo Rueda, Antoni Tàpies, Joan Hernández Pijuan, Soledad Sevilla, Guillermo Pérez Villalta, Julio Juste and Frederic Amat.

In aesthetic and formal terms, their works on the Alhambra and the Generalife range from an early non-avant-garde Modernism defined by a true cult of the natural, immediately after and in opposition to the Romantic revolution —albeit assuming part of its subjectivity and even fantasy— to full Modernism, a serene continuity of the historical avant-garde. In the second half of the 20th century, this full Modernism would imply a complete victory over any possibility of traditional academic art; a full Modernism later nuanced by a Postmodernism that would be a continuity of itself, more or less discharged of the dogmatism of past times.



MARIANO FORTUNY

(Reus, Tarragona, 1838; Roma, 1874)

El Patio de la Alberca en la Alhambra, 1870-1872

Oil on canvas, 121,92 × 170,18 cm

PRIVATE COLLECTION



ANDERS ZORN

(Mora, Dalarna, 1860; Mora, Dalarna, 1920)

En el parque de la Alhambra, 1887

Watercolour on paper, 50,5 × 35,3 cm

ZORN MUSEET, Mora, Dalarna



SANTIAGO RUSIÑOL

(Barcelona, 1861; Aranjuez, Madrid, 1931)

Canal del Generalife (Granada), 1906

Oil on canvas, 100 × 125 cm

MUSEO NACIONAL DE ARTES VISUALES, Montevideo

Another distinction can be made among these artists, based on their greater or lesser dedication to the Alhambra, occasional in the case of Tàpies and almost obsessive for Sorolla, shown only by an apparent disproportion in the number of his works, which is exactly the opposite: proportion.

A survey of all the works on display reveals the artistic culmination, especially in painting, of the landscape myth or mythical landscape of Granada as regards the Alhambra and the Generalife, its main protagonists together with other aspects of the city, especially the Albaicín, Sierra Nevada and the fertile plain. Where this myth was centuries old in literature, from Romanticism onwards it took shape with no less intensity in the plastic arts, in painting, but also in music, led by figures such as Isaac Albéniz, Claude Debussy and Manuel de Falla, as well as in architecture, with the landmark *Alhambra Manifesto* in 1952, the manifesto of avant-garde architecture in Spain after the Civil War and the immediate post-war period.

With their inherent abstraction, these musical and architectural forms illustrate the evolution in terms of language of the plastic, pictorial cycle, fundamentally shown in the panorama on display. If, at first, the Alhambra participates in the works as a subject of unique beauty approached with languages not connected to it, previously formed, essentially naturalistic, over time it becomes such

a powerful motif that it redefines those languages and gives rise to new, essentially abstract expressions in certain artists. Manuel Rivera always emphasised this in relation to his mature language, achieved in the 1960s, with which he gave visible form to many other suggestions beyond the Alhambra or the landscape of Granada. Before him, another artist from Granada, Ismael de la Serna, had identified the most abstract aspect of his painting with this landscape, as did another artist also from Granada, Manuel Ángeles Ortiz. But the first of them to put it into practice was La Serna, with a collection of truly pioneering works in 1932 and 1933.

Generally, the works of all these artists reveal a certain fundamental process in modern painting, highlighted by Simón Marchán, whereby the subject became the motif, the pretext for a purely plastic, highly abstract investigation, leaving behind any documentary or descriptive function, which was seen as a burden. However, this process of abstraction does not mean that the Alhambra and the Generalife cease to be recognisable in almost all these works as the object of fascination behind them, as their source of inspiration.

The exhibition in which they are displayed, *On the Alhambra in Modern Art*, develops its discourse in five chapters corresponding to the five spaces of the Chapel of the Palace of Charles V. They are as follows.



JOSÉ MARÍA LÓPEZ MEZQUITA
(Granada, 1883; Madrid, 1954)

Patio de los Arrayanes, 1904

Oil on canvas, 124 × 108 cm

MUSEO DE BELLAS ARTES DE GRANADA
Colección Museística de Andalucía



JOAQUÍN SOROLLA

(Valencia, 1863; Cercedilla, Madrid, 1923)

El ciprés de la Sultana, Generalife, Granada, 1909

Oil on canvas, 106 × 82 cm

PRIVATE COLLECTION



DARÍO DE REGOYOS

(Ribadesella, Asturias, 1857; Barcelona, 1913)

El cerro de San Miguel desde un carmen, 1910

Oil on canvas, 60 × 73 cm

PRIVATE COLLECTION

I

THE ALHAMBRA IN THE WORLD

This chapter summarises the modern expansion of the Alhambra's prestige by different artistic means from the 1870s, after the time of the first Romantic travellers, until a century later. The sequence of works shows the Alhambra in the advance of what Walter Benjamin called the age of mechanical reproduction, from the rich editions of *L'Espagne* by Charles Davillier, with illustrations by Gustave Doré, and the issues of the magazine *Le Tour du monde* between 1862 and 1873, to the posters of the Ministry of Information and Tourism a century later, with spectacular photographs by various authors, or the film by José Val del Omar titled *Granada 1974*, about an Alhambra visited by an unprecedented number of international tourists.

There are other works such as architectural models by Rafael Contreras and José María García de Paredes; photographs by Charles Mauzaisse, Jean Laurent, Rafael Garzón, José Ortiz Echagüe, Otto Wunderlich, Manuel Torres Molina, Juan Miguel Pando and Francesc Català-Roca; books by Washington Irving, José Zorrilla, Ángel Ganivet and Emilio García Gómez; illustrations and designs by Joseph Pennell, Santiago Rusiñol, Miguel Rodríguez-Acosta, Jaume and Jordi Blassi and Julio Juste; paintings by Santiago Rusiñol and Joaquín Sorolla; scores by Ruperto

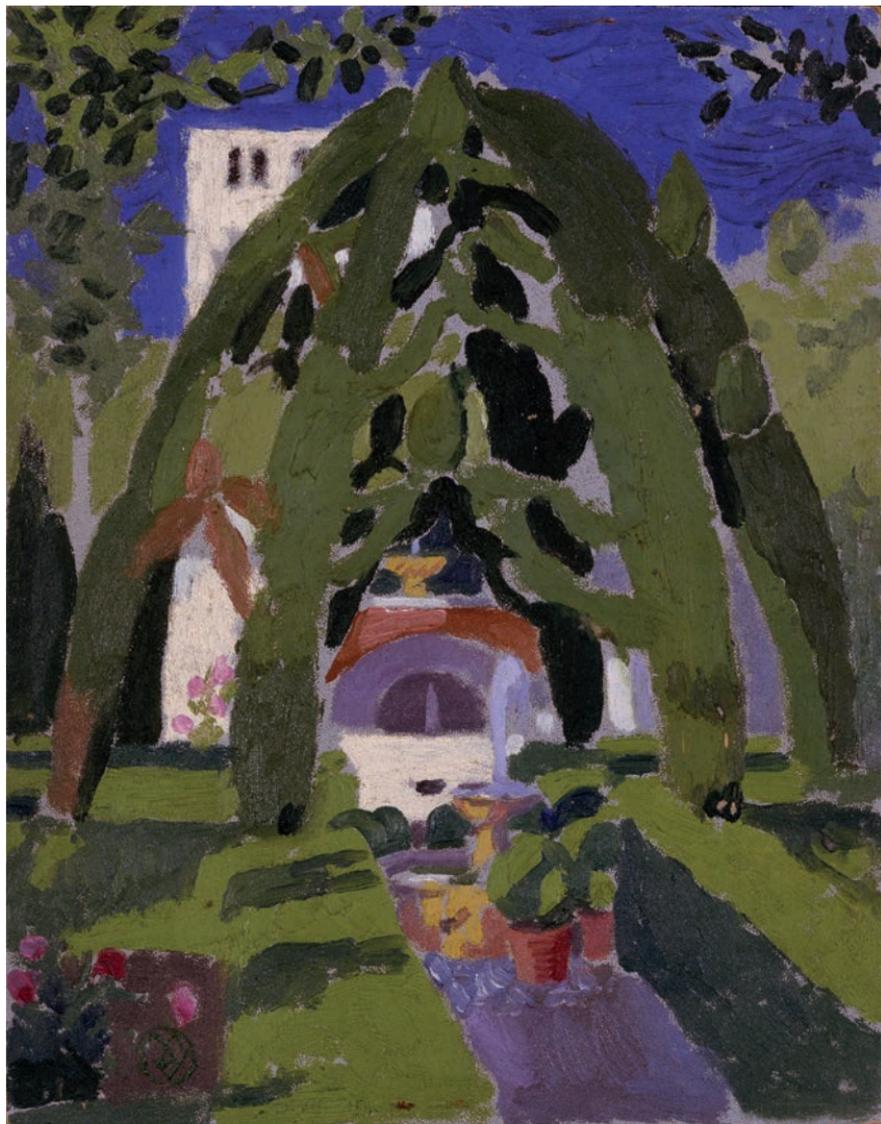
Chapí, Isaac Albéniz, Francisco Tárrega, Claude Debussy and Manuel de Falla; and prints by Hermenegildo Lanz and Eusebio Sempere.

II

FROM ROMANTICISM TO NATURALISM

This chapter will show the splendour of a pictorial naturalism focused on the Alhambra and the Generalife, increasingly distant from the Romantic heritage that still defines Mariano Fortuny and, after him, only Antonio Muñoz Degrain. A new architectural model by Rafael Contreras is followed by paintings by Mariano Fortuny, Antonio Muñoz Degrain, Anders Zorn, Santiago Rusiñol, Aureliano de Beruete, Darío de Regoyos, José María López Mezquita, José María Rodríguez-Acosta, Joaquín Sorolla and Fernando de América.

Almost all of them are major works by these painters among their landscapes. Although it is difficult to single out any one of them, it is possible to mention several that were never exhibited in Granada, where they were painted, such as Fortuny's *El Patio de la Alberca en la Alhambra*, 1870-1872, on loan from a private British collection, or Sorolla's *Alhambra, Salón de Embajadores, Granada*, 1909, on loan from the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Undoubtedly, special mention must be made of the important number of canvases by



MAURICE DENIS
(Granville, 1870; París, 1943)

Jardín del Generalife, la glorieta ojival, 1905
Oil on cardboard, 33 × 25 cm

PRIVATE COLLECTION



ISMAEL DE LA SERNA
(Guadix, Granada, 1895; París, 1968)

La Alhambra, 1932

Tempera on cardboard, 52 × 32 cm

PATRONATO DE LA ALHAMBRA Y GENERALIFE, Granada



JOSÉ GUERRERO
(Granada, 1914; Barcelona, 1991)

Alcazaba, 1973

Oil on canvas, 178 × 141 cm

CENTRO JOSÉ GUERRERO, Granada

Sorolla, the painter of the Alhambra par excellence, unrivalled by any other painter of stature.

III

THE CRISIS OF NATURALISM

This chapter shows the crisis of naturalism or realism in the works themselves, thinning out into what, in the general artistic evolution, will become avant-garde and, finally, abstraction. There are paintings by Eugenio Gómez Mir, Maurice Denis, Théo van Rysselberghe and Ismael de la Serna, as well as the films *El Dorado*, made by Marcel L'Herbier in 1921, and *Vibración de Granada*, made by José Val del Omar in 1935.

The two works by Denis stand out for their novelty, for their unprecedented character, as can also be said of Van Rysselberghe's. Those by Ismael de la Serna are among the first clearly avant-garde visions of the Alhambra.

IV

FULL MODERNISM

This chapter shows full Modernism as a serene continuity of the historical avant-garde, developing achievements in complete victory over any possibility of traditional academic art. It does so through important works by Manuel Ángeles

Ortiz, José Guerrero, Manuel Rivera and Eusebio Sempere, as well as the films by José Val del Omar, *Aguaespejo granadino* and *Granada 1968*.

Passing from this room to the next, the Patio de los Arrayanes can be seen through the central arch of the south portico.

V

POSTMODERN EPILOGUE

Finally, this chapter shows the arrival of Postmodernism that can be seen in the final works of artists who had done almost all their work in that full Modernism, artists as characteristic as Gerardo Rueda and Antoni Tàpies. This can also be seen, in slightly different ways, in other artists such as Joan Hernández Pijuan, Soledad Sevilla, Julio Juste, Frederic Amat and Guillermo Pérez Villalta. The exhibition contains selected works by all of them. Particularly interesting are the sketchbook pages drawn or painted by Frederic Amat and Guillermo Pérez Villalta as travelling artists in the Alhambra, as if linking up with those made by Doré and Pennell at the turn of the 19th century.



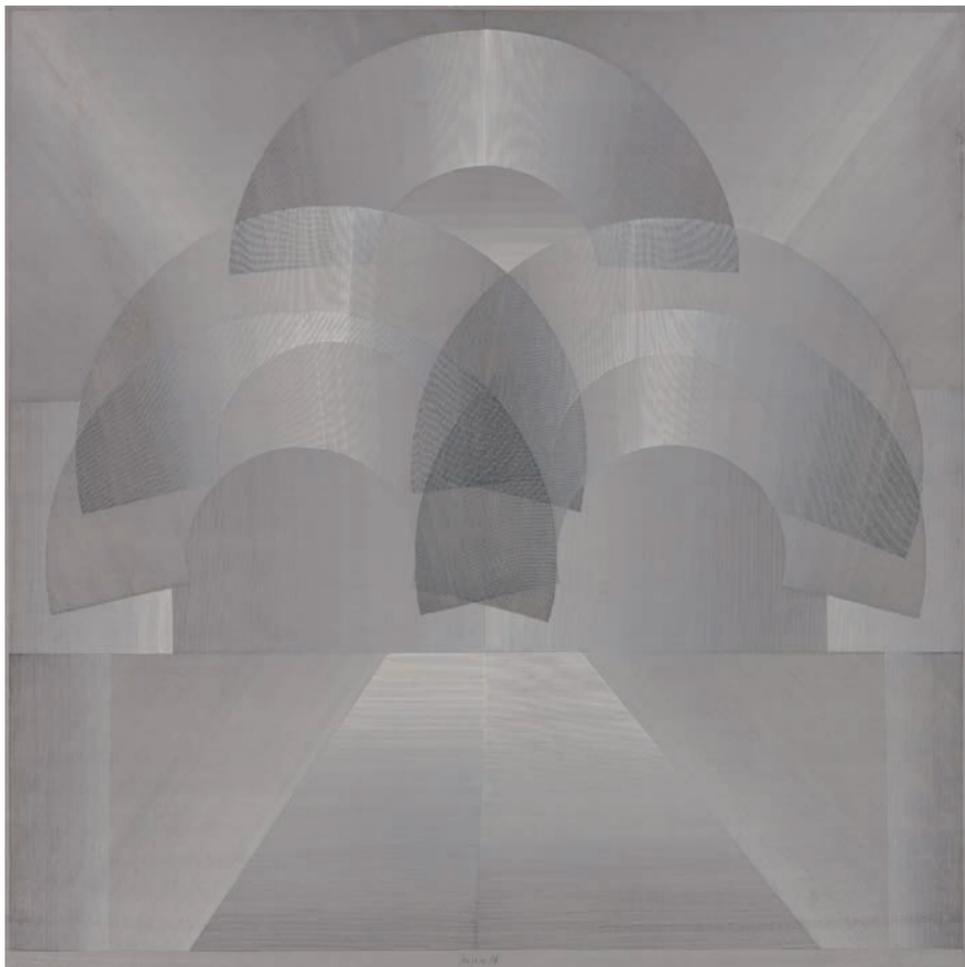
MANUEL RIVERA

(Granada, 1927; Madrid, 1995)

Estanque del Partal, 1969

Wire mesh, wire and metal on wood,
painted with oil, 162 × 114 cm

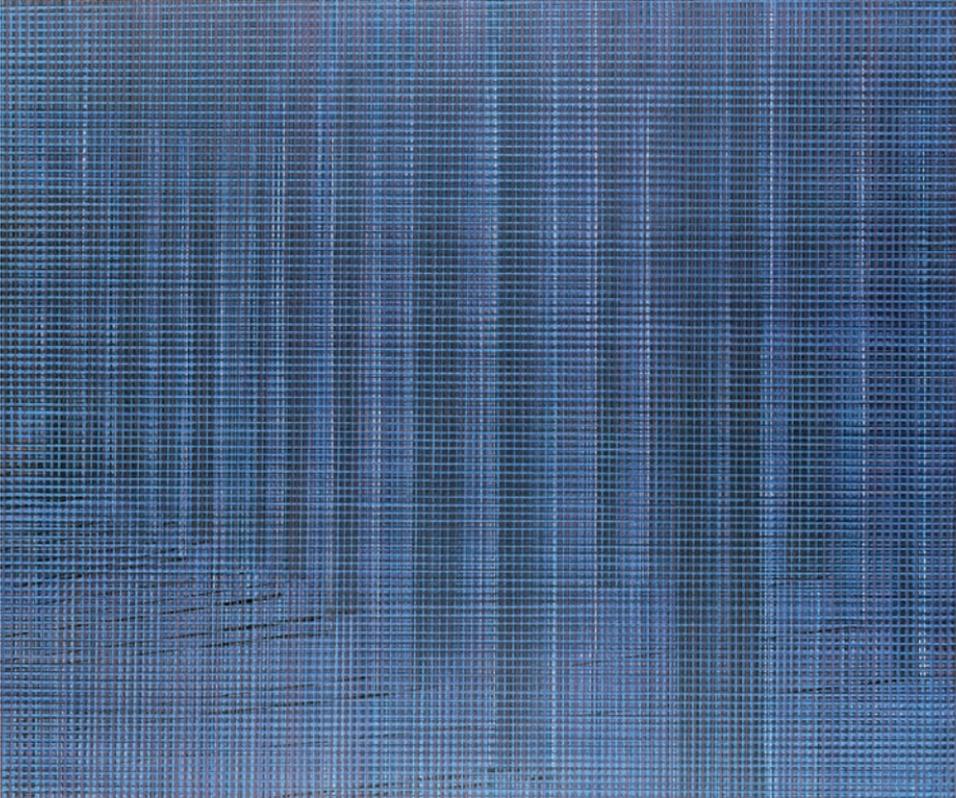
BANCO SANTANDER



EUSEBIO SEMPERE
(Onil, Alicante, 1923; Onil, Alicante, 1985)

La Alhambra, 1978
Tempera on wood, 58 × 60 cm

PRIVATE COLLECTION



SOLEDAD SEVILLA
(Valencia, 1944)

Legado que hace leves a los montes, 1986

Acrylic on canvas, 186 × 220 cm

DIPUTACIÓN DE GRANADA, Granada

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TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

11 March to 15 May 2022

Chapel of the Palace of Charles V. Complex
of monuments of the Alhambra and Generalife

Opening times

Monday to Sunday

March: 10 am to 6 pm • April and May: 10 am to 8 pm

Free admission

