

Ignacio Zuloaga, La Iglesia de Maluenda (The Church at Maluenda)
Éibar 1870 – 1945 Madrid

oil on canvas, *circa* 1924
36 ¾ by 47 ¾ inches (93.3 by 121.3 cm)
signed at the lower left: 'I Zuloaga'

- provenance: Purchased from the artist by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Kerrigan, New York, 1925; sale of Mrs. Kerrigan's collection, Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, January 8, 1942, no. 52; Schweitzer Gallery, New York; to a private collector *circa* 1980.
- exhibited: (as "Monastery of Maluenda") Reinhardt Galleries, *Ignacio Zuloaga*, New York, January 4-31, 1925, no. 52.
- literature: Enrique Lafuente Ferrari, *La vida y el arte de Ignacio Zuloaga*, Barcelona, 1991, p. 238, no. 485. Benezit, *Dictionary of Artists*, Grund, 2006, vol. 14, p. 1431.
- note: Ignacio Zuloaga (fig. 1) whose name, in the Basque language of his native region, literally means "place of the caves," was born in Éibar, an industrial town in the northern Spanish province of Vizcaya. He came from a prominent family of craftsmen. His father, Placido, was a metalworker; his grandfather had been the director of the royal armory in Madrid and a friend of Goya, and his uncle Daniel was a very distinguished ceramicist. The fall of the monarchy in 1868 had dire consequences for Zuloaga's family. His grandfather lost his position at court and the family had to find refuge for some time in France, where Ignacio was able to become familiar with that country's language and culture. Zuloaga spent his youth working with his father, but from an early age showed both a talent and passion for drawing and painting. It was when he was about sixteen that a visit to the Prado determined him to become a painter. He went first to Rome but by 1888, at age eighteen, he moved to Paris, settling in Montmartre, and since he could not afford formal training, he studied on his own, associating with various artists including his fellow Spaniard Ramon Cassas, and the Frenchmen Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec. He had a success with the exhibition of his first painting at the Paris Salon in 1890, and in 1896 the Municipal Museum in Barcelona purchased one of his works. During this time he also maintained his ties with Spain, visiting the Andalusian region in the southern part of the country. And there he found such suitable folkloric subject matter as bullfights, flamenco dancers, and peasants. In 1898 he moved from Seville to join his uncle Daniel, who was working in Segovia. It was there that he was inspired by the austere landscape of Castile with its decaying towns and tawny villagers. He came to believe that "the real Spain was still present in the remote small towns where people lived in harmony with ancient customs and traditions, To one friend he wrote, "I try to be as savage as possible and forget about all the refinements of Paris."¹

Looking at the present picture, one of course immediately thinks of El Greco's greatest landscape, the moody *View of Toledo* (fig. 2), which has been in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art since being bequeathed in 1929 by Louisine Havemeyer, who with her husband had acquired it in 1909. Zuloaga had discovered El Greco in 1893-94 while living in Paris with his painter friend Santiago Rusiñol and was so inspired that he supposedly made a mad dash to Toledo to see *The Burial of Count Orgaz*; and then with Rusiñol actually began purchasing examples of the Greek-born master. By 1903 he owned a dozen paintings by El Greco, for whom Zuloaga felt such a kinship that he even characterized him as "the god of painting."² And it was Zuloaga who

encouraged the Russian collector Ivan Schukin, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, and most significantly the young Pablo Picasso to pay attention to El Greco.

In the 1880s El Greco's *View of Toledo* was in a Madrid collection and then in 1907, it was purchased by the French firm of Durand-Ruel, who exhibited it in Paris in 1908. Zuloaga thus could have seen the painting in either Madrid or Paris as well in various publications. Beginning in the early 20th century, it served to inspire him to paint a number of somber city views, not only of Toledo (figs. 3a-b), but also of other towns with prominent architectural features such as Segovia and Sepulveda (figs. 3c- f), or even more isolated places (figs. 3g- l). In 1915 he wrote to one of his American patrons of his travels to remote and uncomfortable corners of the country, "Spain is unique in the whole world... I passed by some *paradores* that looked the same as at the time of Don Quixote."³ One of the picturesque locals he chose to depict was Maluenda, a tiny hilltop town southwest of Zaragoza in Aragon, which has three notable parish churches. The one located dramatically on the side of the hill (figs. 4a-c) is the Church of Saints Justa and Rufina. It is named for the third century AD sister martyrs from Seville, who were highly venerated in Spain and became the patron saints of that city. They possibly appealed to Zuloaga, since they had been ceramicists. The church (figs. 4d-f) is noted for its magnificent interior decoration in the Mudejar style, but for Zuloaga the vista of the plain exterior set against a darkening sky was the primary interest. As in El Greco's *Toledo* no humans are present, and the sense of isolation is palpable. Despite what has been described as the painter's "impassioned technique,"⁴ employing a palette knife to achieve the impasto texture, Zuloaga, as details reveal (fig. 5), carefully applied his pigment to achieve a complex patchwork of contrasting colors and forms. Even such a detail as the bell in the tower is clearly visible.

The rather dark sensibility evident in this painting was in tune with the notion of the Spanish spiritual tradition that was being lauded at the same time in literary sources especially by Zuloaga's fellow Basque, the writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno. He even wrote approvingly of Zuloaga's Spanish landscapes describing them as "a projection of the soul of the people that inhabit it."⁵ This sense of national identity was also echoed in the writings of the Frenchman Maurice Barrès, and on the occasion of the publication in 1913 of his book *Greco ou le secret de Tolède*, in which he presented El Greco as the key to discovering Spain's spiritual essence, Zuloaga painted one of his most impressive works presenting the writer standing before El Greco's looming hometown (figs. 6a-b). It was, in fact, as a portraitist, especially of women, that Zuloaga was to gain international fame. He became one of the leading society portraitists of his era, vying with Sargent, Boldini, and Zorn in popularity. Already while he was still living in Paris, wealthy Americans came to him for their portraits *à l'espagnole*, and he became known as "The Great Basque."

As far back as 1908 an anonymous critic in the *New York Sun* had identified Zuloaga as "the most brilliant painter alive today."⁶ The first exhibition of Zuloaga in America was held the next year when thirty-eight of his works were shown in 1909 at the Hispanic Society of America in New York City. The artist, seen as a counterpoint to his contemporary Sorolla, was found "to merit the very high rank he has taken among continental critics," and received praise for his "wonderfully natural effects and colors."⁷ This was followed by a smaller show in 1914 at the Kraushaar Galleries in New York, and then another more major one that toured the country in 1916-17 with presentations at museums in Boston, Brooklyn, Buffalo, Chicago, St. Louis, and Toledo. Zuloaga's fame was abetted by an introduction to the accompanying catalogue by John Singer Sargent that lauded the "great artist's" exhibition as "an event to be proclaimed of supreme artistic interest."⁸ Fortuitously for the artist this coincided with what has been described as the "Spanish craze," a taste for Spanish art and culture that swept across America in the 1920s.⁹

In early 1924 Zuloaga returned to live in Spain, but in December of that year he was persuaded to visit America to coincide with an exhibition of his works to be shown in January 1925 at the Reinhardt Galleries located at 750 Fifth Avenue in New York. He thus paid his one and only visit to America, having always postponed the trip due to his proclivity to seasickness. He traveled on the great transatlantic liner *Majestic* to New York City. "When," as John Russell so tellingly

observed: “Zuloaga finally arrived, there was hardly a great house on the Eastern Seaboard that would not have made him welcome. This was because in his portraits, American women stood tall in a pose that was both firmly traditional and ever so slightly provocative... Doubtless it helped that his foremost patron in the United States was Mrs. John [Alice] Work Garrett of Baltimore, who was not only a leader of fashion but a woman of enterprise and dash.”¹⁰ Zuloaga’s exhibition at the Reinhardt Galleries was hugely successful – he was hailed as “one of the most famous artists in the world,”¹¹ and it was stated that since 1909 he had become “a household name... probably the best known contemporary foreign artist in this country.”¹² The public opening was a crush, and in the end a multitude reported as 70,000 or 75,000 visitors flocked to see the fifty-two works on view.¹³ He had brought most of them from Spain, and, as was observed in the press, they included “some landscapes which have never been exhibited before.”¹⁴ In fact these landscapes described as “ribbed and gray, with castles and huts and stone walls and long twisting roads moving like snakes adroitly up the hillside, with ominous skies and flashes of sunlight,” were said by the painter to be his “most important work.”¹⁵

Zuloaga, who was fluent in English, certainly made the most of his American visit, even meeting with President Coolidge in Washington. He and his triumphant exhibition in reduced form traveled also to Boston, Miami, Palm Beach, and then to Havana, after which he returned home. But he remained well known in America and was elected an honorary corresponding member of the National Academy of Design in 1933.¹⁶ When he died at age seventy-five in 1945, the *Art News* reported that “he had outlived by nearly two decades one of the most fantastic vogues of popularity and high prices enjoyed by a painter in modern times.” And it concluded its notice by observing, “Supposedly *persona non grata* with the Franco Government, he nonetheless was commissioned last December at the government’s behest to paint a portrait of the U. S. Ambassador. Still energetic, still popular in Spain, he painted until his death.”¹⁷

In New York City one of the socialites who patronized the freshly arrived Spanish master was the extremely wealthy Esther “Hope” Slater Kerrigan (1892-1951). She was from a Boston family of artists, her grandfather being the painter William Morris Hunt and her great uncle the architect Richard Hunt, but it was the Slater textile mills that had produced the real money. In 1915 (fig. 7) she married Benjamin Sumner Welles (1892-1961), a scion of a well-connected New York political family, who had just graduated from Harvard, where her brother was his roommate. A friend of FDR, Welles was to have a distinguished diplomatic career until in 1943 he was forced out of government service after it was revealed that he was bisexual. But their marriage, despite two children, had already ended in 1923 when she obtained a divorce in Paris “on grounds of abandonment and refusal to live with his wife.” Both, however, quickly rebounded. In 1925 he married the noted international beauty Mathilde Scott Townsend, whose portrait had been painted by Sargent; and the previous year Esther married another banker diplomat, Joseph Kerrigan, who shared her love for art. Together in 1926 they purchased and remodeled a mansion at 53 West 77th Street in Spanish-medieval style and filled it with an extensive art collection.¹⁸

Thus Mrs. Kerrigan, who was an active member of fashionable society in New York, Newport, and Palm Beach, was certainly one of those who previewed Zuloaga’s exhibition in January 1925, and she and her husband purchased from the painter the present painting, another called *The Loge* (fig. 8a),¹⁹ and also for \$14,000 the 1923 *Victims of the Fiesta* (fig. 8b),²⁰ which in 1928 she gave to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In addition, it seems that as a reward for her largesse, Mrs. Kerrigan was, at least according to *Vanity Fair*, the only American sitter to be painted by Zuloaga in the course of his American visit (fig. 9).²¹ Their relationship continued as she subsequently visited the artist in Paris, and there he did another portrait painting as well as a drawing of her.²² He also dedicated to her his charcoal drawing of *The Gypsy Agustina* (fig. 10), which likewise has entered the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.²³ She also owned a 1929 *Study of Flowers*.²⁴ And in addition Zuloaga in 1930 sold the Kerrigans one of his supposed El Grecos - a *Mary Magdalen in Penitence* (fig. 11).²⁵

In 1942 Mrs. Kerrigan decided to sell her extensive painting collection at auction, and the three days of sales brought in \$171,107.²⁶ The brooding “Monastery of Maluenda,” as it was called by

The New York Times sold to a private collector for \$1,400.²⁷ Later that same year in a curious incident Mrs. Kerrigan was slightly injured when she fell under a BMT subway train at the Fifth Avenue station.²⁸ The Kerrigans divorced in 1947, and Esther, resuming her maiden name, moved to Florida, where in 1951 she passed away. She left her estate to her children by Sumner Wells, leading to the contesting of her will by her Kerrigan heirs. However, it is certainly for her collection of notable works by Ingres, van Gogh, Degas, Gauguin, and of course Zuloaga that she will be best remembered.

¹ Eric Storm, *The Discovery of El Greco*, Chicago, 1916, p. 82; and also Mayi Milhou, *Ignacio Zuloaga et la France*, Bordeaux, 1981, p. 277.

² Milhou, 1981, pp. 264-5; M. Gomez de Caso Estrada, *Correspondencia de Ignacio Zuloaga*, Segovia, 2002, p. 447; Lafuente Ferrari, 1990, p. 209. See also Eric Storm, "Santiago Rusiñol, Ignacio Zuloaga y el redescubrimiento del Greco..." in Nadia Hernandez and Vincent Panyella (eds.), *El Greco: La Mirada de Rusiñol*, 2014.

³ Quoted in the exhib.cat. *When Spain fascinated America*, Fundación Zuloaga, Madrid, 2010, p. 145.

⁴ Lafuente Ferrari, 1991, p. 280.

⁵ Quoted in A. Philip McMahon, "Some Aspects of Ignacio Zuloaga," *The Art Bulletin*, 1925, p. 128. Unamuno published his comments in "La labor patriótica de Zuloaga," *Hermes*, 1917, p. 8.

⁶ *The New York Times*, November 1, 1945, p. 23.

⁷ *The New York Times*, March 21, 1909, p. X6.

⁸ John S. Sargent, "Foreword," *Exhibition of Paintings by Ignacio Zuloaga*, 1916, p. 7.

⁹ See Madrid, 2010, p. 73.

¹⁰ John Russell, "Spanish Sensuality in Paintings by Zuloaga," *The New York Times*, March 10, 1989.

¹¹ *The New York Times*, January 5, 1925, p. 23.

¹² *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 4, 1925, p. 29.

¹³ *The New York Times*, January 15, 1945, p. 19 says 70,000; but McMahon, 1925, p. 118 gives the number as 75,000.

¹⁴ *The New York Times*, December 16, 1924, p. 15.

¹⁵ *The New York Times*, January 4, 1925, p. SM10.

¹⁶ *The New York Times*, April 1, 1933, p. 13.

¹⁷ A. B. Louchheim, "Sic Transit Zuloaga," *Art News*, November 1, 1945, p. 22.

¹⁸ *The New York Times*, February 22, 1998, p. 474.

¹⁹ Reinhardt exhibition of 1925, no. 26; and sold in the Kerrigan sale of 1942, lot 286, as "During the Intermission."

²⁰ *New York Herald*, *New York Tribune*, January 18, 1925, p. 19; Lafuente Ferrari, 1990, no. 505, who gives the title of this painting as *El Patio de los Caballos*.

²¹ See "Ignacio Zuloaga's Portrait of Mrs. Kerrigan," *Vanity Fair*, November 1925, p. 71. According to Aline B. Louchheim, "Sic Transit Zuloaga," *Art News*, November 1, 1945, p. 22 at least two other wealthy American women also had their portraits painted by Zuloaga at this time. But Lafuente Ferrari, no. 523 believes the portrait was actually painted at Zuloaga's home at Zumaya in 1924. The average price for one of Zuloaga's portraits was \$15,000; see Lafuente Ferrari, 1991, p. 130.

²² Lafuente Ferrari nos. 577 and 5789.

²³ Accession no. 1975.1.981.

²⁴ Lafuente Ferrari no. 576.

²⁵ See Harold Wethey, *El Greco and his School*, Princeton, 1962, vol. 2, p. 249, no. X-412; it was also sold in Mrs. Kerrigan's 1942 auction, no. 51.

²⁶ *The New York Times*, January 10, 1942, p. 6.

²⁷ *The New York Times*, January 9, 1942, p. 24.

²⁸ *The New York Times*, May 13, 1942, p. 12.