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Ignacio Zuloaga (1870-1945) was probably the most discussed Spanish painter of the early twentieth century. All over Europe he was seen as a rising star and as one of the most important innovators of modern art. Thus, in 1904, Zuloaga was invited to take part in a great art exhibition in Düsseldorf, organised by the International Society of Sculptors, Painters and Engravers, where he was given an entire room to exhibit his paintings. He only had to share this privilege with the grand old man of German art Adolph Menzel and the widely acknowledged sculptor Auguste Rodin. However, soon his fame was eclipsed by the much more radical artistic innovations of Pablo Picasso and other avant-garde artists. He shared this fate with many other noted painters of the time, many of whom were still seen as highly innovative at the turn of the century, but have since been largely forgotten. In this chapter I will show that in the case of Zuloaga this was mainly due to the political implications of his work.

Zuloaga did not produce any theoretical writings on the implications of his art, nor did he speak out on political issues until very late in his career, when he decided to support General Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Many (art) historians have tried to study his earlier political position by analysing the connections and parallels between his work and that of the most important literary authors of the so-called Generation of 1898, such as Miguel de Unamuno, Pío Baroja, Azorín (pseudonym of José Martínez Ruiz) and Ramiro de Maeztu, drawing attention to their close personal contacts and shared sensibilities (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 301-324; Calvo Serraller 1998; Bernal Muñoz 1998; Tusell 1999, pp. 73-115). Most of these scholars implicitly interpret Zuloaga's work, like that of his literary colleagues, as a response to the collective identity crisis in which Spain encountered itself after 1898. The loss of the last main colonies after the disastrous defeat in the Spanish-American War of 1898 occasioned a profound debate on the nation's internal strengths and weaknesses, and as a consequence is seen as a major turning point in Spanish (intellectual) history. However, both Zuloaga and the main authors of the Generation of 1898 already formulated their main artistic and political ideas before the 'desastre' of 1898 (Storm 2001). As a consequence, they should be seen primarily in the context of a wider European intellectual and political reorientation, which particularly led to a new organic nationalism that can also be detected in Zuloaga.

The crisis of the *fin de siècle*

Towards the end of the nineteenth century modern art was at a deadlock. At least that was how many critics all over Europe saw it. No one who defended a modern up-to-date art wanted to return to traditional academic painting, with its conventions, strict rules for composition and *claire-obscure*, and its preference for dignified subjects. Its technique was now widely considered lifeless, unrealistic and lacking spontaneity, while its representations were found to be theatrical and lacking authenticity (Boime 1971). However, the impressionism that in the 1860s and '70s had broken with the dominant academic

conventions, had outlived itself as well. With their preference for depicting atmospheric effects, reflections of light and movement – often in a rapid, sketchy way – impressionists such as Manet, Monet, Renoir and Pissarro were interested in representing superficial, external appearances. This fascination with the rendering of atmosphere also meant that they mostly depicted a contingent, floating moment. In this way the subject became a vehicle for a particular incidence of light, converting the theme of the painting into a secondary affair. Any motif would do. As a result, they preferred simple motifs from their direct surroundings or people at leisure in and around Paris. However, these almost arbitrarily chosen 'snapshots' recorded only some outward aspects of nature or of modern urban life. As they deliberately excluded both moral lessons and implicit metaphysical references from their work, art became a kind of senseless exercise in virtuosity (Storm 2010, pp. 21-32).

This criticism of impressionism for merely representing external reality reflected a more general fin de siècle turn against the dominance of positivism and realism, both in the arts and the sciences. Philosophers of a new generation, such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson, made clear that human perception and the rational mind were merely concerned with external appearances and could tell nothing about the essence of things. As a consequence, many writers, scholars and artists showed a new interest in symbols, myths, feelings, intuition and other less rational ways of knowing and representing the world. Western civilisation was now widely viewed as decadent and superficial, and many longed for a more authentic and truthful existence (Burrow 2000, pp. 147-197). Painters such as Émile Bernard and Paul Gauguin hoped to find a more original, primitive and thus more authentic civilisation in non-European destinations. Thus in 1893 Bernard decided to establish himself in Egypt, while two years later Gauguin definitively left France for Tahiti. Here they hoped to liberate themselves from the artificial European civilisation, conventional bourgeois existence and traditional artistic formulas and explore their own deeper creative instincts (Perry 1993).

Other artists, inspired by nationalist theorists such as Julius Langbehn, Maurice Barrès and Ángel Ganivet, also looked for more authentic and primitive sources of inspiration to renew their forms of expression (Storm 2012). However, they did not go to exotic destinations, nor did they feel inspired by primitive artefacts that could be found in anthropological museums; they found their inspiration closer to home. By going to remote rural areas of their own fatherland they hoped to get to the origins not just of humankind, but of a particular (national) branch of it. This way they hoped to renovate art by reconnecting it to its native roots (Storm 2010). That this new nationally or regionally rooted type of painting was seen as a serious alternative was made clear by the German critic Karl Eugen Schmidt. In 1903, he ended his book on French painting in the nineteenth century with a chapter entitled 'Brittany'. In this chapter, he discussed not, as probably may be expected, Bernard and Gauguin's stay in Pont-Aven, but the Breton works painted by Charles Cottet (a friend of Zuloaga) and Lucien Simon, whom he considered the most promising French artists of the time. In a very sensitive way, both painters produced a 'gesunde Heimatskunst' (healthy regionalist art) that gave a very lively characterisation of both the Breton landscape and people (Schmidt 1903, pp. 150-60).

Many French critics also esteemed Simon and Cottet's regionally or nationally rooted art as a way out of a widely felt artistic crisis. In Germany, similar praise was given to the painters from Worspwede, who made comparable depictions of traditional village life in the North-German countryside. They seemed to rescue contemporary art from materialist superficiality and degeneration by reconnecting it with innate traditions, thus implicitly also presenting a recipe for a broader national regeneration (Mourey 1899, p. 240; Marcel 1903, pp. 123-25; Krummacher 1899, pp. 20 and 24; Bartning 1904, pp. 210 and 212). However, maybe the best and internationally most successful example of this new modernist trend was the art of Zuloaga.

In the footsteps of Gauguin?

Ignacio Zuloaga was born in 1870 to a family of noted artisans from the Basque Country. His grandfather had been the director of the royal armoury in Madrid, while his father – a specialist in damascene – continued the family's flourishing metalwork shop in the Basque town of Eibar. His father's brother Daniel, moreover, was one of the most influential ceramicists of Spain. His family thus belonged to the well-to-do urban middle classes in the Basque Country, among whom Spanish was the dominant language of communication; Basque was mostly spoken by the rural lower and middle classes. The cosmopolitan outlook of his family became evident when Ignacio was sent to France to receive part of his secondary education there (Lafuente Ferrari 1990).

During his childhood, Ignacio's great passions were drawing and painting and after a short period in Rome, he moved to Montmartre to fully dedicate himself to painting. He did not show any interest in traditional academic art and never attended an official art academy. Instead, he registered at the Académie de la Palette, one of the many private art schools in Paris, led by the successful portraitist and moderately innovative Henri Gervex. Eugène Carrière and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes were also employed as instructors by this academy. Through the young French artist Maxime Dethomas, another pupil of Gervex, Zuloaga came into contact with Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and befriended Émile Bernard. Within a few years he was well integrated into the French artistic world and was on good terms with Carrière, Edgar Degas, Jacques-Émile Blanche and influential critics such as Charles Morice and Arsène Alexandre.

During the first years of his stay in Paris Zuloaga was not sure what course to follow and tried different painting styles. He produced an impressionist landscape and a dark portrait of a porter woman à la Carrière, while in other paintings the influence of Puvis de Chavannes, Degas, Whistler, Gauguin or Toulouse-Lautrec was visible. Probably he also went through a short pointillist phase (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 239-45; Milhou 1981, pp. 20-93). Zuloaga also showed a great interest in the old masters, particularly those that could help him to find a more personal painting style. In the winter of 1893-1894 he regularly visited the Louvre with the young Catalan painter Santiago Rusiñol. He also travelled to Toledo to see El Greco's *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, and he convinced Rusiñol, who was from a rich bourgeois background, to buy two religious portraits of El Greco. Zuloaga immediately made a drawing of Greco's *Saint Peter*. This was quite remarkable, since El Greco was still relatively unknown (Storm 2011, pp. 80-84 and 96).

A year later, while he was still insecure about his own artistic future, he came into contact with the circle around Paul Gauguin and visited the weekly meetings in his house. Zuloaga also had a first small exhibition in the vanguard Barc de Boutteville gallery. Most works were portraits of proud gypsy women he had made that winter in Andalusia. In 1895 he took a decisive step when he gave up his life in the fashionable French capital, following the example of Bernard and Gauguin, who actually went to Tahiti that same year. However, unlike Bernard and Gauguin, who sought out true primitivism in more exotic destinations, Zuloaga went to Andalusia, which was generally seen as the most characteristic part of Spain. The multitude of styles and artistic options he had met in Paris had confused him. How could he find his own style? Possibly encouraged by Degas's recent interest in the French national tradition (Dumas 1997 and Reff 1987), and inspired by the 'truly Spanish' paintings of El Greco, he hoped that a reorientation on his own roots could help him in this. A stay in an 'authentic' part of his fatherland, in his case a Sevillian working class neighbourhood, would bring him into contact with the real Spain (Milhou 1981, pp. 93 and 111-12).

Depicting Spain

In a recent dissertation on Zuloaga Dena Crosson suggests that his preference for establishing himself in the most touristic and 'oriental' area of Spain can partly be explained by his nationalist views, but also had to do with a conscious marketing strategy, which consisted in embracing the profitable role of 'painter of Spain' (Crosson 2009, pp. 27-9, 58-60, 70). However, his wish to immerse himself fully in traditional folk-life seems to have been quite genuine. Only by living for longer periods of time among the ordinary people could one understand the traditional customs and habits of the local population and their intimate relationship with the surrounding environment. Thus, in Seville he lived among gypsies, flower sellers, cigar-makers and impoverished flamenco dancers in a traditional tenement house around an open yard. He attended classes at a school for bullfighters and in the spring of 1897 he even made his debut as Ignacio Zuloaga 'The Painter'. It was not a success, but he would stay fascinated with bullfighting during the rest of his life. In Seville he painted mostly gypsies, dancers, bullfighters and other typical characters (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 70-76).

At first Zuloaga could not live from his work. This would only change towards the end of the nineties, when he had some success with his enormous *On the eve of the bullfight*. At the front of the picture plane a group of well-dressed ladies is watching the preparations for a bullfight, while at the horizon one can discern an Andalusian village. In 1899 it was awarded a first prize at an exhibition in Barcelona. However, that same year it was rejected by the commission that was preparing the Spanish contribution to the International Exhibition of 1900 in Paris. This was a great disappointment for him. Also in later years the conservative establishment would continue to oppose both his choice of topics and his modern painting style. He would have more success at progressive art exhibitions abroad. Thus, the Belgian State acquired *On the eve of the bullfight* after it was shown at the exposition of the *Libre Esthétique* in Brussels. In 1899 the equally monumental *My uncle and my cousins*, which portrayed his uncle Daniel in a traditional cloak and his two daughters dressed with *mantillas* in front of an austere Castilian landscape, caused a sensation in the Salon of the Société National (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 76-83).

The latter work was painted after Zuloaga had left Seville in 1898 and joined his uncle Daniel, who was working in Segovia. Here he discovered the sober landscape of Castile and its old, declining towns, where the past seemed to be still alive. The joyous Andalusian scenes of bullfighters and dancers gave way to tawny villagers, deformed dwarfs and religious processions, all portrayed against the background of an appropriate, arid Castilian landscape. Most of these paintings had a large format in order to attract attention among the thousands of pictures in the Parisian salons. Within a few years Zuloaga became an internationally renowned artist whose paintings could be seen in galleries and exhibitions throughout Europe and the Americas.

Zuloaga's paintings should be understood within the context of the rise of modernism. The Parisian lessons had not been in vain and he certainly was not a traditional or academic painter. He was clearly influenced by Degas, whom he considered the greatest painter of his time (Milhou 1981, p. 270). In terms comparable to those of Degas, he rejected nature as a direct source of inspiration and like the ageing Parisian painter he showed a great interest in his own national artistic tradition. However, when choosing his topics, he was closer to Gauguin and Bernard, who reproduced the authentic rural life in stylised form, and even more to Charles Cottet and Lucien Simon, who tried to capture the essence of traditional folk-life in Brittany. In contrast to the impressionists, he had a clear preference for dark colours, and usually compressed the space and flattened the perspective of his paintings, while his exaggerated outlines and heavy brushstrokes underlined the materiality of his technique. With this predilection for deformation, stylisation and synthesis he was an influential representative

of the decorative – and thus implicitly anti-naturalist – turn that painting experienced around 1900 (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 194-203; Milhou 1981, pp. 67-93; Crosson 2009, pp. 80-81, 86, 119 and 209-16).

It thus comes as no surprise that the international cultural world took Zuloaga very seriously. His wedding in 1899 with Valentine Dethomas, the sister of his friend Maxime, in which Carrière and the Spanish composer Isaac Albéniz were witnesses, was also helpful in this sense. Valentine came from an illustrious Parisian family with good political and cultural connections. From this moment, he regularly returned to Paris, where he also set up a workshop. At the same time, he began receiving invitations for all kind of social events where he became acquainted with famous writers like Barrès, Marcel Proust, Gabriele d'Annunzio, Anna de Noailles and Leon Daudet (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 83-93; Milhou 1981, pp. 173-76, 179-81 and 191-205).

Zuloaga was an artist who primarily painted for the yearly salons. He achieved his first successes at the Parisian spring salons and other international exhibitions. The Salons of the Société National of 1908, 1912 and 1914, in which his paintings such as the *Blood Christ* (see illustration), hung in a place of honour in the grand entrance hall, brought him particularly great triumphs. In this huge work he depicted, against the background of the walled town of Ávila, a priest and five members of a brotherhood who were gathered around an enormous macabre crucifix showing a bleeding Christ with real hair and a crown of thorns. Other paintings, using a similar theatrical composition, without any signs of action, showed a cardinal, a *picador* and some characteristic and unidealised villagers (Crosson 2009, pp. 74 and 80). Zuloaga did not take part in the more innovative Salon d'Automne, nor did he belong to the circle of avant-garde painters and art dealers. Although he never lacked assignments for portraits or had trouble selling his paintings for a good price, after the First World War he would receive less attention, since art magazines and international exhibitions slowly shifted their focus to the new avant-gardes (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 101-38).

But what goals did Zuloaga have with his paintings? In a letter published in 1912 he implicitly made clear that the artistic and intellectual crisis of the *fin de siècle* had strongly affected him. In his text he briefly explained why he had no penchant for painting outdoors and why he had turned away from realism and impressionism. He did not want to copy nature, for this he could use a photo camera. Unlike many realists and impressionists, he was not interested in reproducing light or atmosphere. ‘To breathe air I open the window’, he often said. What he wanted was not to copy reality, but to interpret it, to penetrate into the essence of things. His art was cerebral, aimed at providing a concise and forceful personal interpretation and thereby to arouse emotions. In this sense, what interested him particularly was to penetrate to the soul of the people, to the ‘psychology of a race’, and provide a synthesis of the ‘Spanish soul’ (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, p. 208; Arozamena 1970, pp. 18-19).

Zuloaga thought that the real Spain was still present in remote small towns and popular neighbourhoods. There people still lived in harmony with the customs and traditions that had arisen in a secular interaction between the population and the natural surroundings. He tried to portray this concord between the population, the local traditions and the landscape in his paintings by depicting traditionally dressed, characteristic individuals in front of a typical local landscape. Since his stay in Seville he had expressed himself regularly in this regard. Therefore, it was not a justification that was invented after the fact. For example, to his friend Maxime Dethomas he wrote from Seville: ‘I try to be as savage as possible and forget about all the refinements of Paris’. The aim of all this was to return to his roots and become ‘Spanish’ again (Milhou 1981, p. 277).

Zuloaga’s views on the past were quite similar to a large number of intellectuals of his generation, such as Barrès, D’Annunzio, Unamuno and Maeztu, with many of whom he

maintained friendly relations. According to them a culture could only flourish if it was an organic product of the environment and the traditions that had arisen in a specific area. Traditional folk art was the most direct expression of the spirit of the people (best characterised with the German term *Volksgeist*) and should be cherished and cultivated. However, time did not stop and the artist's mission was to uncover the true character of the people, stripped of those forms that did not harmonise with it and adapt it to his own time and circumstances. By doing so, Zuloaga hoped to reveal the essence of the Spanish soul in an updated style. By reorienting himself on his own background, he developed a personal style rooted in the national tradition that allowed him to triumph in the international arena. Although he also showed a great interest in the Basque cultural heritage, he identified himself primarily as Spanish and could even be labelled a Spanish nationalist. Good art, he believed, should reflect the *Volksgeist* and build upon the existing national artistic patrimony. However, each nation consisted of many different regions, each with its own traditions and personality. Thus his artistic glorification of the Castilian 'soul' did not imply that a Castilian identity should be imposed on the rest of the country. His nationalist views – like those of Barrès and Unamuno – were combined with an equally intense cultural regionalism. National unity was only possible by accepting an organic regional diversity. Although this type of organic nationalism (and regionalism) later on became associated with Action Française and other proto-fascists movements, it had become mainstream – both in France and Spain – since the late 1890s and was not necessarily combined with xenophobia or anti-Semitism (Storm 2010, 55-70; Thiesse, 1991; Wright, 2003).

In order to correctly interpret the 'spirit of the people', Zuloaga not only searched for its remnants in the countryside, he also sought inspiration in the Spanish artistic tradition. He especially admired the art of El Greco, Diego Velázquez and Francisco Goya (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 190-94 and 211-12). Although he was inspired by the use of colour and composition of some of their works, he was not so much interested in their virtuoso painting technique, but in the subjects they painted. From Goya he preferred his later works, which generally consisted of a very personal interpretation of all kinds of traditions and festivals. Some early works of Zuloaga were indisputably inspired by Velázquez, but this influence diminished as he increasingly focused on essence as opposed to the realism espoused by Velazquez. He came to believe that Velazquez was 'too perfect' and not Spanish enough (Plessier 1995, pp. 67 and 19-23).

In a similar way, Zuloaga did not use El Greco's oeuvre to look for techniques to reproduce reality as closely as possible. It was above all El Greco's religious works, which until then had often been disqualified as pathetic or exalted, that elicited his esteem. Zuloaga, who truly appreciated authentic emotions, including 'primitive' religious feelings, was intrigued by the skyward, mystical gaze of *Saint Peter,* the Greco that had been bought by his friend Rusiñol. In addition, he valued El Greco's strongly stylised forms, his expressive power and the profound feelings with which he imbued his pictures. After he moved his workshop from the exuberant Seville to the more austere Castilian town of Segovia and began to depict a population marked by the harsh local climate, the influence of El Greco, who had also been working in central Castile, seemed to increase. Now he also showed interest in the intense and tragic work of El Greco's last phase. In his portraits the old master from Toledo penetrated into the soul of his models, while at the same time expressing his own personal feelings. This was exactly why El Greco for him was the 'maître des maîtres' and the 'god of painting' (Milhou 1981, pp. 264-65; Gómez de Caso Estrada 2002, p. 447; Lafuente Ferrari 1990, p. 209). His own predilections were also confirmed by international art critics, who often presented his work and style as a continuation of the Spanish artistic tradition represented by El Greco, Velazquez and Goya.

Zuloaga also actively propagated Spain's artistic heritage, and in particular that of Goya and El Greco. He thus undertook a campaign to honour the memory of Goya. Around 1907 he ensured that a plaque was placed at the house in Bordeaux where Goya spent his last days and in 1913 he took the initiative to transform Goya's birth-house in Fuendetodos into a museum (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 98 and 109-15). Zuloaga was more eager to establish El Greco as a national hero and one of the greatest painters of all times. Already in his early years in Paris he had become very enthusiastic about El Greco and when from about 1899 his international successes brought him more financial leeway, he began to form a collection of old Spanish masters whose nucleus was formed by works of the Toledan painter. His first purchase was a Greco. In 1901 he already owned five Grecos and by 1903 he had a dozen, including *The Fifth Seal of the Apocalypse*, a late masterpiece.

To people who visited him in his workshop he preferred to present his Grecos, rather than showing his own works (Milhou, 1981, p. 253; Lafond 1902, pp. 181-2; Alexandre 1903, pp. 28 and 47). Zuloaga defended the work of El Greco whenever he could and he strongly encouraged his international friends to visit Spain, especially to see the old master's paintings in Toledo. Bernard and Rodin were not convinced of El Greco's qualities; Zuloaga had more success with the Russian art collector Ivan Shchukin and the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who both became infected with the Greco fever (Milhou 1981, p. 124; Plessier 1983, pp. 12 and 53; Storm 2011, pp. 95-102 and 144-47). Also among the visitors to his workshop was the young Picasso, who like many other promising Spanish talents received Zuloaga's warm support. Picasso was strongly attracted by El Greco and his *The Fifth Seal of the Apocalypse* most probably inspired him to make decisive changes in the designs for his ground-breaking *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, the painting that initiated his cubist phase (Richardson 1991, pp. 403-31; Rubin 1994, 98-102). Zuloaga, thus, can be clearly defined as a (cultural) nationalist, but at the same time he remained aloof of politics and was a very cosmopolitan figure.

The identity of Spain

The reception of Zuloaga's work in Spain can probably tell us something more about its political implications. In general, his work was not seen in a very positive light and soon a fierce debate began about the topics of his paintings. Did he depict his fatherland in a dignified way? This question was all the more relevant because of his international success. Many conservative critics, most of whom still favoured academic art, disagreed with his subject choice and even argued that his work was unpatriotic because he perpetuated the myth of Spain as a backward and barbaric country. Whereas in many ways Spain was a modern European country, Zuloaga only showed the decadence of the Spanish countryside and the misery, barbarity and stupidity of its population. His 'ferocious caricatures' did not reflect reality and only made his country look ridiculous in the eyes of the civilised world (Salaverría 1910; Vegue y Goldoni 1910). He was consequently boycotted by the traditional Spanish art establishment and his work could only rarely be seen in his native country.

Other authors did not so much criticise Zuloaga's presentation of the Castilian countryside as the heartland of the nation, but its interpretation. Instead of his gloomy, tragic pictures of poor and sometimes even deformed Castilian villagers, they preferred the cheerful, luminous images by his main rival Joaquín Sorolla. This Valencian painter was the best known Spanish representative of the international *juste milieu* painters and had already celebrated one of his first artistic triumphs at the Parisian world fair of 1900. He was an extraordinarily virtuoso artist who depicted contemporary themes in bright colours, with a technique similar to that of the French impressionists and Velázquez. When in 1911 Sorolla received the commission to decorate the library of the Hispanic Society of New York with a

series of large scale canvasses, he decided to represent the different regions of Spain by depicting joyful people in traditional costumes against the backdrop of a sunny and richly coloured landscape. It was clear that he wanted to give a different image of Spain than the dark and gloomy countryside of Zuloaga. Their rivalry was magnified by supporters of the two painters and framed in other dichotomies. Thus, Sorolla's naturalism was opposed to Zuloaga's idealism, sensuality to spiritualism, and the vital joy of the Mediterranean coast with the tragic seriousness of the Castilian plains. The discussion about what the two most famous Spanish painters of the time chose as subject matter did not restrict itself to the specialist magazines, but around 1910 became a hotly debated topic in the national press (Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 299-325; Tusell 1999, pp. 73-155; Calvo Serraller 1998, pp. 195-233). What was at stake was the discovery of the country's true identity, its *Volksgeist*. This was done by defining both the nation's most characteristic cultural heritage and the most authentic folk traditions, which henceforth should guide the way to national regeneration

The successful naturalist novelist Vicente Blasco Ibáñez defended the work of Sorolla, who was his fellow townsman and friend. In a lecture he gave in 1909 he presented Sorolla as a worthy heir to the Spanish artistic tradition, with El Greco, Velázquez and Goya as the main representatives. In his view, the main goal of art was to reproduce nature and in that sense Velázquez was the unsurpassed master. In *Las Meninas* one could even perceive the air in the room. In contrast, El Greco, whom he linked to Zuloaga, was too restless. El Greco's preference for elongated figures and his contempt for the rules of drawing resulted in rather artificial reproductions of reality. In the lower half of his *Burial of the Count Orgaz*, where he only depicted thin and ascetic gentlemen, El Greco gave a very one-sided picture of sixteenth-century Spain. According to Blasco Ibáñez, Zuloaga too presented a distorted image of his fatherland by depicting caricatures instead of real Spaniards. Sorolla, on the contrary, reflected life and, therefore, was a worthy successor of Velázquez (Blasco Ibáñez 1909, p. 276).

Nevertheless, there were also authors who sided with Zuloaga and who thought that it was time that the work of the Basque painter was shown to a broader public. Zuloaga's oeuvre was primarily defended by neo-idealist writers from his own generation of whom Maeztu, Azorín and Unamuno are the best known. Azorín and Maeztu did not always praise Zuloaga's choice of subject, but in general they agreed that the rural Spain represented in his paintings was indeed the real Spain. Maeztu was aware that the 'bullfighters, gypsies, hunchbacks and beggars' depicted by Zuloaga horrified many Spaniards. However, in an article from March 1910 he argued that precisely because the paintings 'offend our vanity, [they] strengthen our longing for reform' (Maeztu 1910a).

Francisco de Alcántara, the art critic of the country's most influential liberal newspaper *El Imparcial*, defended Zuloaga a few days later by saying that Spain was not just the relatively civilised urban society that many citizens and politicians had in mind. By depicting the rural parts of the country Zuloaga showed what Spain really looked like (Alcántara 1910). Thus, his depictions of the countryside should not merely be interpreted as a glorification of the remnants of all kinds of national traditions that were still present in the more remote parts of the country, but also as a plea for political and economic reforms to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants of the countryside. Ramiro Maeztu could broadly agree with the view of Alcántara (Maeztu 1910b), but his old friend Azorín, who also entered the debate, did not. In his opinion, Zuloaga's work, unlike that of El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, Santa Teresa and Cervantes, reflected the negative image of Spain as it existed abroad (Azorín 1910). In a new article, Maeztu showed his disagreement (Maeztu 1910c; Maeztu 1910d). However, he expressed himself more frankly in a letter to Zuloaga by ranging Azorín, who was born in Alicante, within the Mediterranean camp of Blasco Ibáñez and Sorolla. According to Maeztu, these (realist) Mediterranean painters and writers

possessed an almost photographic perception that enabled them to focus sharply on details, but it also made them lose sight of the bigger picture. Basques like Zuloaga and himself had an artistic eye that penetrated into the essence and did not stick to the surface (quoted in Tusell 1999, p. 119).

Unamuno also joined the debate. This versatile writer, and professor of Greek at the University of Salamanca, is considered the greatest thinker of the Generation of 1898. He had very clear ideas about the character of the Spanish nation and the cultural manifestations that were in accordance with it. Human beings are always conscious of finitude, he argued. Although people craved for life after death, one could never get any assurance about it. Therefore, Don Quixote was the true and profoundly Spanish personification of this tragic desire for immortality. In 1905 Unamuno devoted an entire book to the protagonist of Cervantes' literary masterpiece, while his main philosophical work, *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1912), ended with an ode to Don Quixote (Storm 2001, pp. 205-38).

Already in 1908 Unamuno had praised Zuloaga's paintings in the Argentine newspaper *La Nación* as a continuation of this truly Spanish spiritual tradition. In his view, Basques like Zuloaga and Baroja – and of course himself – were among the few who did not yield to the dominant superficiality and who tried to resurrect the old Spanish literary and artistic traditions. Some years later, in the same daily, he further developed this idea, which had also been expressed by Maeztu. In modern Spanish painting an idealist, 'Basque-Castilian' school, with Zuloaga as its most important representative, faced a more realist 'Valencian-Andalusian' one led by Sorolla. Through their choice of topics and their painting technique both schools gave their own interpretation of the nation. Sorolla painted a cheerful Spain, healthy, happy, bright and colourful. Zuloaga, like Unamuno and Baroja, showed the more dark and tragic sides, by employing a sober technique and strong chiaroscuro contrasts. It was obvious what Unamuno preferred (Unamuno 1908, pp. 732-4). A few years later he even claimed that in few works of art the Spanish 'soul' was better reflected than in Zuloaga's paintings (Unamuno 1917).

Other authors more explicitly saw the countryside as the main source of national regeneration. The Basque critic Juan de la Encina even asserted that 'the creative fibre of the old national spirit' had almost completely disappeared in Spain's upper classes and that it could only be found in 'anarchical and anachronistic forms' in Spain's 'steppe fields and somnolent towns', where painters like Zuloaga attempted to revive it (Encina 1919). After having expressed doubts in earlier years, in 1912 Azorín described Zuloaga as a painter who tried to capture the most permanent and fundamental characteristics of the Spanish 'spirit'. He even maintained that artists were obliged to discover and express this vigorous and powerful Spanish reality (Azorín 1912). Implicit in all these remarks was the conviction that a reorientation to idiosyncratic national characteristics, which were best preserved in the countryside, could help the nation be more faithful to its own spirit and thus regenerate its strength and vigour.

Zuloaga himself seemed to have agreed with the interpretation of his paintings by authors such as Maeztu, Azorín and Unamuno. In 1913, during an unforeseen encounter with Maeztu in Pamplona, he explained that Parisian refinement only meant calculations, numbers and decadence, whereas in the traditional Spanish countryside one could still find strength, passion and vitality. On this occasion Zuloaga was accompanied by the famous composer Maurice Ravel and some other modern French intellectuals, who according to Maeztu were all supporters of Bergson's philosophy and Barrès's writings (Maeztu 1913). In fact, Zuloaga maintained close contacts with Barrès, the main French propagandist of a new organic nationalism. On the occasion of the publication of Barrès's book *Greco ou le secret de Tolède*, Zuloaga in 1913 even painted a huge portrait of the French author with El Greco's hometown Toledo in the background. In his book Barrès presented El Greco as the key to

discover Spain's spiritual essence. He portrayed Spain as profoundly catholic country that had remained true to its essence and which therefore could function as a source of inspiration for France, where modern materialism had already begun to divert the country from its true course (Storm 2011, pp. 111-118).

It is not clear if Zuloaga at this point agreed with the right-wing political implications of Barrès's organic nationalism, which – unlike Zuloaga's public and private statements – was tinged with anti-Semitic and xenophobic elements (Sternhell 1985). The painter in fact almost never made a remark on day to day politics. Nevertheless, it is clear that his organic nationalism could have rather conservative implications. This became apparent when in July 1936 he was forced to choose sides because of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. He had accepted the fall of the monarchy in 1931 and the subsequent rise of the Second Republic, and in the wake of the elections of February 1936, which would result in a narrow victory for the left-wing Popular Front, he still complained about the 'damn politics'. The left, he wrote his American friend and patron Alice Garrett, would bring 'sovietisme', while the right would only mean 'royauté' (Crosson 2009, p. 135). That fall, however, he would begin to paint the *Siege of the Alcázar*, which celebrated one of first and highly symbolic victories of the Nationalist camp. It represented the city of Toledo where republican forces during several weeks attacked the old castle, which was the last local bulwark of the insurgents. Franco's troops, however, arrived just in time to rescue the defenders.

In September 1937, Zuloaga even published an 'Aviso al mundo' (Warning to the world), in which he publicly denounced the destruction of Spanish art by 'Moscow and her Spanish slaves'. He now clearly distinguished between the 'New Spain, that of Franco' and the 'destructive policy' of the Bolshevists and the Reds, by which he meant the loyalists who defended the Second Republic (Crosson 2009, pp. 139-40). Zuloaga thus totally identified with the Franco side. At the end of the war he wrote to Garrett that thanks to God and Franco the war was over. He hoped that everybody would now collaborate 'to rebuild a new Spain (free, great and united) to Hispanicise Spain, and get rid of all the outside influences so that we can preserve our great personality' (Crosson 2009, p. 153). In the subsequent years Zuloaga would make a huge portrait of Franco, while he also polychromed the crucifix for the basilica of the huge, Francoist war monument at the Valle de los Caídos (Novo González 2006). Although he probably did not become a full-blown fascist, his organic nationalism now for the first time showed clear xenophobic traits, while his new, but fierce anti-communism apparently impeded him to support the democratic Second Republic. During the Second World War, however, he would not sympathize with the Nazis as Franco did. He identified with France since his wife was French and his children were born in Paris. In October 1939, he thus assured his American friend that they were one the same side (Crosson 2009, p. 154).

Losing out against Picasso

Although around the turn of the century Zuloaga undoubtedly was a highly innovative painter, in later years he was rapidly surpassed by avant-garde artists such as Henri-Matisse and Pablo Picasso. Compared to their revolutionary works his paintings soon looked traditional and maybe even old fashioned. However, it was not only the rise of a new, more radical avant-garde that began to affect his reputation as a relevant innovator: the success of a new way of judging art had similar consequences. Critics like Roger Fry and Julius Meier-Graefe introduced a new formal way of analysing art, which would radically alter the understanding of (modern) art. They only focused on visual aspects, while ignoring the cultural context of a specific work of art and its eventual narrative aspects, moral lessons and political implications. This way they largely redefined the canon of modern art, and although they presented this as an apolitical manoeuvre, in the long run it meant that nationalist painters like

Zuloaga were excluded. The first to apply this new type of criticism to Zuloaga's paintings was the young philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. Being born in 1883, he was much younger than the other participants in the Spanish debate and he was quite critical of the excessively inward looking nationalism of Unamuno, Azorín and Zuloaga. Ortega found a necessary intellectual foothold in Germany, where he studied between 1905 and 1907. He attempted to broaden Spain's horizon by introducing a large number of new intellectual trends from the rest of Europe, such as German neo-Kantianism and Husserl's phenomenology, but later on also the ideas of Freud, Einstein, Keynes and a large number of other foremost intellectuals and scientists. At the same time he also tried to draw attention to the valuable components of the Spanish cultural traditions. As a result he voiced his opinion on all kinds of Spanish cultural topics, among them the work of Zuloaga.

In an article published in April 1910, Ortega agreed with Alcántara and Maeztu that a retrospective of Zuloaga's oeuvre in Madrid was desirable. His paintings incited the viewer to reflect on the character of the Spanish people and as such they were very useful. But it was to be seen whether his images were also of high artistic value. In order to assess this, it was necessary first to determine the function of painting (Ortega y Gasset 1910a). Therefore, a week later, Ortega began publishing a series of more theoretical articles that appeared in *El Imparcial* in which he explained his formal approach. Ortega argued that, unlike science and ethics, art was concerned with the individual and the particular. The artist gives an interpretation of reality, which means that from the infinite number of relations between a particular object and those surrounding it; he only chose those links that he deemed particularly significant. Therefore, the artist did not copy reality, but rather created a new, subjective reality. For this, the painter could dispose of colours, shapes and light. And these were his sole means. According to Ortega – reflecting the ideas of Meier-Graefe whom he had met during his trip to Spain – El Greco and Cézanne in particular had managed to create a new, significant world purely by using pictorial resources (Ortega y Gasset 1910b; Storm 2011, pp. 173-180).

Thus, according to Ortega, a painting should not try to provide comments on passing social or ideological issues; other media were more suitable for that purpose. True art elevated temporary and particular elements to a higher, non-localised plane. However, Zuloaga limited the problem of mankind to a national type, to an anecdote, and that was not the function of art (Ortega y Gasset 1910b). A year later, he repeated his criticism. In an article on Zuloaga's *Gregorio el Botero* (The Dwarf Gregory, the Wineskin-maker), Ortega wrote that this painting was not a great work of art, since it lacked the necessary pictorial unity. In addition, the subject was too topical. In brief, Zuloaga's paintings left much to be desired in terms of theme and execution. Instead of painting timeless masterpieces he produced works that commented on passing, local affairs. Spain would benefit more from painters like El Greco, who had developed his full artistic potential and had not let himself become distracted by all kinds of topical issues (Ortega y Gasset 1911).

As a consequence of the rise of this new formal interpretation of modern art, the anecdotes and the nationalist implications of Zuloaga's work and his now somewhat dated style began to have a negative impact upon his reputation among progressive artistic circles. His friendship and association with all kinds of nationalist ideologues also placed him increasingly in a conservative and traditionalist camp. Barrès, Daudet, D'Annunzio and Maeztu became involved in rabidly nationalist movements and they are even seen as forerunners of fascism. However, this was much less the case with Unamuno and Ortega y Gasset, with whom Zuloaga also established close contacts. The final blow to his reputation came after he associated himself with the Franco-regime and when he showed his willingness to let his work be used for propagandistic purposes.

Thus, after the success of Picasso's *Guernica*, which denounced the brutal Nazi air raid against the Basque town of the same name, at the pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the Parisian world fair of 1937, the Francoist authorities asked Zuloaga to represent Nationalist Spain at the Venice Biennale. He eagerly sent in 29 paintings including the *Siege of the Alcázar*, which now began to be seen as kind of Francoist response to the *Guernica*. Not surprisingly, it was awarded a Gran Premio Mussolini (Crosson 2009, pp. 141-52; Lafuente Ferrari 1990, pp. 142-3). Shortly after winning the Civil War, Franco thanked Hitler for his grand-scale military aid by sending him three paintings by Zuloaga. The dictatorship also honoured the painter with various individual exhibitions (Novo González 2006). After his death in 1945, Zuloaga was even immortalised, first in 1947 when his portrait appeared on a postal stamp. Seven years later, he was portrayed on the new banknotes of 500 pesetas, and in 1971 eight of his paintings were used for a new series of postal stamps.

Conclusion

Paradoxically, while the innovative young Zuloaga had been totally ignored by the conservative art establishment in Spain, towards the end of his career he was hailed as a great national hero by an extreme reactionary regime although his painting style had not changed much since the beginning of the century. At the same time he was removed from the canon of modern art, which had changed fundamentally since the start of his career. A formal approach to art had made moral and political ideas largely redundant, while his type of organic nationalism became associated with fascism. His choice for the Francoist camp during the Civil War seemed to confirm the reactionary and semi-fascistic nature of his political ideas. As a consequence, he was crushed between Gauguin and Picasso.

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