

HISTORY AND HUMANITIES IN DERMATOLOGY

[Translated article] Sun Protection in the Paintings of Sorolla

La protección solar en la pintura de Sorolla

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Introduction

Among the challenges that all dermatologists face is that of properly explaining sun protection to the general public.^{1–3} To that end, we have been organizing a 1-day symposium for the staff and patients of Hospital Universitario Infanta Sofía since 2009. The message we use when announcing the symposium is, “If you care for your skin, you’ll care for your life,” and the image that accompanies that message on posters is a 1909 painting by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida: *A walk at the seashore* (Fig. 1).

Sorolla was born in Valencia, Spain, in 1863 and died in Cercedilla, near Madrid, in 1923. He became an international success after the Hispanic Society of America in New York City commissioned a series of large paintings depicting the regions of Spain and her peoples. The models for many of the figures in Sorolla’s paintings were members of the artist’s family: his wife, his children, and his father-in-law.^{4,5}



Figure 1 *A walk at the seashore* (1909).

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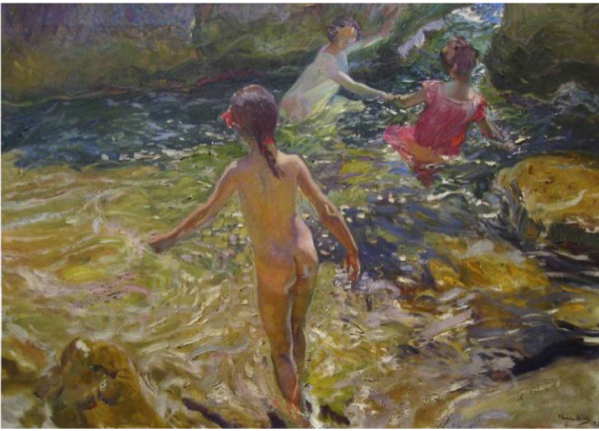


Figure 2 Bathing at Jávea (1905).

Sorolla's work has been categorized variously. For some he was clearly an Impressionist, while for others he was a Postimpressionist or a Luminist. There is no doubt, however, that he handled light masterfully, even though that skill could not have been foreseen based on his earliest work.⁶⁻⁸

An analysis of Sorolla's paintings can provide us with an understanding of the Spanish population's customary approach to sun protection during the painter's lifetime.

Objective

This study aimed to analyze sun protection behaviors as depicted in Sorolla's paintings.

Material and Methods

The study was based on a review of the literature on Sorolla's work and an examination of paintings relevant to sun exposure and protection.

Results

Sorolla painted scenes at some of the most popular seaside holiday settings of his day: the Malvarrosa, Cabañal, and Jávea beaches of Valencia; the Caleta beach of Malaga; the beaches of San Sebastián; and those of Zarauz and Biarritz in the Spanish and French parts of the Basque Country, respectively.

The male and female figures correspond to different social classes and ages.

When young girls appear—as in *Bathing at Jávea* (1905) (Fig. 2), *Two sisters* (1909), and *Girl at the beach* (1910)—they are nude, whereas the women in these paintings wear dresses with short sleeves, and none of them cover their heads.

Where young boys are featured—as in *Sad legacy* (1899),⁹ *The white boat* (1905), *The sloop* (1909), and *Boys at the beach* (1910) (Fig. 3)—they are likewise nude and their heads uncovered.

This approach to sun protection can also be seen in paintings where children of both sexes present: *Children at the seashore* (1903), *Sea idyll* (1908), *Running along the beach*



Figure 3 Boys at the beach (1910).



Figure 4 Boy carrying fish (El pescador) (1904).

(1908), and the aforementioned *Boys at the beach* (1910) (Fig. 3).

Workers—usually fishermen—also appear in Sorolla's paintings, allowing for an analysis of social class differences. Working men or boys may or may not be wearing a shirt, but they do wear wide-brimmed hats, as in *Valencian fishermen* (1895) and *Boy carrying fish (El pescador)* (1904) (Fig. 4).

However, when working women are shown—as in *The 3 sails* (1903), *A fisherwoman and her child* (1908), and *Valencian fisherwomen* (1915) (Fig. 5)—they are appropriately clothed but tend not to wear a brimmed hat. A woman might, however, wear a large scarf over her hair.

When upper class summer vacationers are depicted, both men and women might be wearing hats. Such scenes with adults at the Valencian seashore include *After bathing* (1902), *Clotilde at the beach* (1904), *A walk at the seashore* (Fig. 1), *Elena at the beach*, and *Antonio García at the beach* (1909). Scenes at the Zarauz seashore include *Under the sun shade* (1905), a 1910 painting by the same title (Fig. 6), and *On the sand* (1910). A similar composition at the beach in San Sebastian is depicted in *Under the sun shades* (1906). The following paintings show scenes of the seashore at Biarritz. All were done in 1906: *Snapshot of Biarritz*, *Maria at the beach* (also known as *Against the light*), *Biarritz beach*, *Clotilde under a sun shade*, *Elena at the beach in Biarritz*, *Elena in Biarritz at low tide* (or just *Low tide*), and *At the beach in Biarritz* (or *Figure in white*). Both men and women can be seen wearing brimmed hats. The women often



Figure 5 Valencian fisherwomen (1915).



Figure 6 Under the sun shade, Zarauz beach (1905).

also have veils or carry parasols. They generally wear long dresses with long sleeves, and the men are often wearing suits with white jackets.¹⁰

Conclusions

Sorolla's paintings show some of the differences in sun protection habits used by different members of the Spanish population in his day. Girls take more precautions than boys, and members of the upper class tend to protect themselves more carefully than workers.

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