



BOLDINI AND LATE 19TH-CENTURY SPANISH PAINTING

THE SPIRIT OF AN AGE

Fundación MAPFRE Recoletos Exhibition Hall
9 September 2019 to 12 January 2020

Fundación **MAPFRE**

Fundación MAPFRE is pleased to invite you to the press conference for the exhibition ***Boldini and late 19th-century Spanish painting. The spirit of an age***, to be held on 16 September at 10.30am in the Fundación's Auditorium on Paseo de Recoletos, 23 (Madrid).

The exhibition offers the first monographic presentation in Spain of the work of Giovanni Boldini while also establishing a dialogue between his work and that of various Spanish painters of his day, such as Mariano Fortuny, Eduardo Zamacois and Raimundo de Madrazo.

Taking part in the press conference will be the exhibition's curators **Francesca Dini** and **Leyre Bozal Chamorro**, the former an art historian and expert on Boldini and the latter the curator of collections at Fundación MAPFRE, in addition to **Nadia Arroyo Arce**, director of Culture at Fundación MAPFRE.

Press conference: 16 September at 10.30am

Exhibition dates: 19 September 2019 to 12 January 2020

Venue: Fundación MAPFRE, Sala Recoletos (Paseo de Recoletos, 23. Madrid)

Curators: Francesca Dini and Leyre Bozal Chamorro

Production: Fundación MAPFRE



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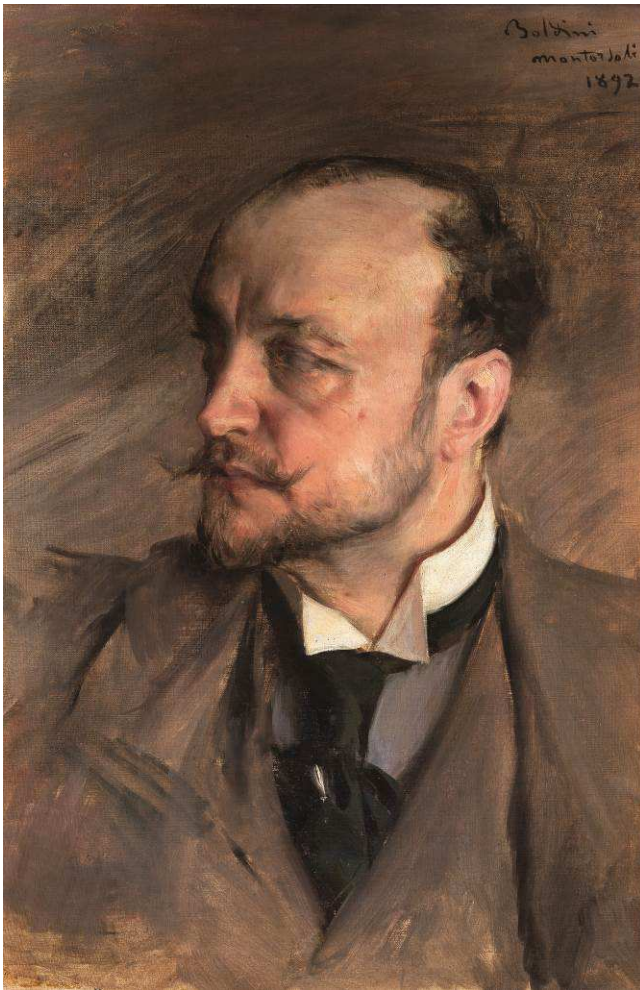
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Cover image:
Giovanni Boldini
Cléo de Mérode, 1901
Oil on canvas
Private collection

INTRODUCTION

“The past is not a lost age, but rather an era that can be relived through literature and art”, as Marcel Proust wrote in *Time regained*, the last volume of *In search of lost time*. This is also evident in the paintings in the present exhibition. Works by Giovanni Boldini, shown alongside others by Mariano Fortuny, Eduardo Zamacois and Raimundo de Madrazo, to mention just three names, convey a period now “long gone” but one that is nonetheless powerfully familiar to us, possibly because rather than a “specific event” these paintings reflect the spirit of an entire age.



Giovanni Boldini
Autoritratto [Self-portrait], 1892
Oil on canvas
Gallerie degli Uffizi, Galleria d'Arte Moderna di Palazzo Pitti,
Florence
Inv. no. 3079

For the first time in Spain this exhibition presents the work of the painter **Giovanni Boldini** (Ferrara, 1842 - Paris, 1931), the most important and prolific of the Italian painters based in Paris in the second half of the 19th century. Also on display are works by some of the Spanish artists also living in Paris at this period whose paintings established a dialogue with Boldini's. The influence on Boldini of **Mariano Fortuny** and of paintings of scenes in the 18th-century manner is one of these connections but there are others: the taste for genre paintings of agreeable, anecdotal subjects; an interest in the life of the modern metropolis; enjoyment of landscape; and above all, shared ideas regarding the updating of the genre of portraiture are all aspects that meant that these artists' works evolved in parallel during the fin-de-siècle period.

Following his move to Paris in 1871 Boldini established himself as one of the leading painters in Montmartre,

the area of the city which soon became home to most of the French and international bohemian world. As such, it appears in paintings such as ***Place de Clichy***, a subject also painted by artists of the stature of Signac, Van Gogh, Degas, Renoir, Ramón Casas and León Garrido. Boldini's arrival in Paris coincided with the emergence of Impressionism but this

did not alter his manner of painting: a unique style which he maintained throughout his career and one based on an intuition of the instant and of movement, conveyed through rapid brushstrokes but always retaining an interest in depicting the sitter and his or her particular personality. Nicknamed “the little Italian” by the British upper classes, Boldini devoted his entire life to constructing his professional image given that he wished to live in a dignified manner from his art: “neither a servant, nor a courtier, nor a buffoon, nor considered a mad artist”, a notably modern attitude and the antithesis of the typical 19th-century image of the artist. He shared this attitude with other Spanish painters such as **Mariano Fortuny, Raimundo de Madrazo, Román Ribera, Joaquín Sorolla and Ignacio Zuloaga**, to name just a few.

Through their work and lifestyles all these artists reflected an image of themselves that is remote from that of the classic bohemian painter. Moving in Paris’s cosmopolitan society of the day, these painters worked for the leading art dealers of the period such as Adolphe Goupil who, between 1827 and 1920, transformed the power of the image in the fin-de-siècle period through the sale of small and medium format works on **pleasing, often picturesque subjects** that notably **appealed to the newly ascendant middle class**. In addition, the works of these painters entered some of the most important international collections, including that of the American William Hood Stewart. After his death the inventory of Stewart’s collection included examples by artists such as Meissonier, Gérôme and Corot as well as works by Mariano Fortuny, Raimundo de Madrazo, Martín Rico, Eduardo Zamacois, Román Ribera and Giovanni Boldini, among many others.

Boldini was inspired by Spanish culture and by Orientalist exoticism, reflected in compositions with **figures wearing traditional Spanish dress** or serenading with their guitars. He also participated in the creation of the “icon-portrait” so characteristic of the **Belle Époque**, bringing a new sensibility to the “*galante*” portrait that is also evident in the works of the leading Spanish painters. Together with John Singer Sargent and James Abbott McNeill Whistler, Boldini, Sorolla and Zuloaga became the **most important portraitists** of the Belle Époque and the creators of an extensive gallery of portraits that allows for an appreciation of the spirit of an era which came to an end with World War I.

THE EXHIBITION

Featuring nearly 120 works, the exhibition is organized into the following sections:

BOLDINI IN FLORENCE:

THE INVENTION OF THE MACCHIAIOLO PORTRAIT (1864-1870)



Giovanni Boldini
Mary Donegani, 1869
Oil on panel
Istituto Matteucci, Viareggio

During his time in Florence from 1864 to 1870 Boldini frequented the Caffè Doney, a meeting place for artists where he coincided with members of the haute bourgeoisie and the international aristocracy. These works, which aimed to emphasise the naturalness of the sitter in a desire to move away from earlier portrait conventions, affirmed the social status of their subjects. It was here that Boldini met his future friend and patron Cristiano Banti, a young painter and one of the Macchiaioli, a group that practised a type of painting “*del vero*” [of the true, the real] through their use of subtle, agile brushstrokes which subverted the rules of the genre and endowed the figures with a new freshness and intensely expressive qualities. During this period Boldini worked with this group of artists and was involved in the rethinking and modernisation of portraiture. In *Self-portrait looking at a Painting* and the portrait of *Mary Donegani* Boldini’s psychological study of his models is evident, as is the exuberance of a pictorial temperament which anticipated the idea of movement and transience characteristic of the works of his final period.

Following in the wake of Velázquez and of Dutch 17th- and 18th-century portraiture while also paying attention to the work of Édouard Manet, Boldini painted the portrait of Esteban José Andrés de Saravalle de Assereto, *The Spanish General*, an individual close to Isabella Falconer who was one of the artist’s best-known patrons. At this period the influence of Mariano Fortuny first became evident in his work, for example in *Page playing with a Greyhound*, which reflects Fortuny’s *preciosista* style and decorative focus through the depiction of a youthful, androgynous figure thought to be Alaide, Banti’s teenage daughter.

BOLDINI'S INITIAL FRENCH STYLE (1871-1879)

Following his arrival in Paris in 1871 Giovanni Boldini abandoned portraiture for almost a decade in order to focus successfully on the “fashionable” painting. One of his favourite models whom he portrayed in different urban contexts was Berthe, his lover for ten years and a young woman who represented a type of beauty typical of this period, mid-way between provocative, sensual and modest. Berthe thus became a minor icon of the Parisian bourgeoisie and an expression of the well-being achieved by certain sectors of society under the Third Republic. Whether dressed in the 18th-century style (a “vintage” taste in painting of the period) or in modern clothing, the figures in these scenes stroll through royal gardens - *The Park at Versailles* - or inhabit splendid interiors and exteriors - *Elegant Man* and *On a Bench in the Bois*. The latter depicts Berthe sitting on a bench in the park in all her tender, innocent beauty, which is contradicted by the expression of her half-open mouth, revealing a false innocence and undoubtedly hinting at a romantic affair. The contrived simplicity of Boldini's scenes also led him to produce genre scenes of the exotic type so popular in France at this period and in which the “typically Spanish” was an intrinsic part, for example, *Couple in Spanish Dress with Parrots* or *Indolence*.

Place Clichy, one of the works acquired by the influential collector William H. Stewart, depicts this Parisian square in a wealth of detail that gives Boldini's work the air of a “fresco” of modern life. As such it can be related to *Conversation in the Café*, in which elegantly dressed women - Berthe and Countess Gabrielle de Rasty - dressed in tones of grey and black reveal how Boldini had moved away from his initial Parisian period towards the type of portraits for which he became better known at the fin-de-siècle.



Giovanni Boldini
Place Clichy, 1874
Oil on canvas
Private collection

ECHOES OF BOLDINI IN SPANISH FIN-DE-SIÈCLE PAINTING

In the second half of the 19th century Paris was considered the international epicentre of art and a large number of foreign artists gathered there. Painters such as Zamacois, Madrazo and Fortuny arrived with the intention of completing their training and of engaging with the cultural laboratory that Paris had become. They soon began to be recognised for their small-format works (*tableautins*) that so delighted middle-class collectors. The result was a large number of depictions of picturesque genre subjects, the majority set in the 17th and 18th centuries - Fortuny's *Choosing the Model*, for example - interior scenes - Egusquiza's *Daydream during the Dance* - popular, anecdotal ones - Zamacois's *Return to the Monastery* and *Seated Buffoon* - and depictions of leisure activities - Madrazo's *Leaving the masked Ball* and Ribera's *Leaving the Dance*.



Mariano Fortuny
Playa de Portici, 1874
Óleo sobre lienzo, 69 × 130 cm
Meadows Museum, SMU, Dallas
INV. MM.2017.03

In addition to works of this type, landscapes and outdoor scenes became increasingly popular. In Fortuny's *The Beach at Portici*, one of his most important landscapes and among the last he painted before his death, the artist gives full rein to his interest in colour, offering a plein air work that brings him close to the Macchiaioli and the Impressionists through a "synthesis of his summer" expressed in a notably free way, far from the "constrictions" that he felt to be imposed upon him with his commissioned works.

BOLDINI, PAINTER OF MODERN LIFE (1880-1890)

Boldini's artistic intuition allowed him to introduce the sensibility of the society around him into his work, with the result that in the late 1870s he became one of the most important of the so-called "society portraitists". Crucial for this change of direction in his career was his relationship with younger artists such as Paul César Helleu, John Singer Sargent and Jacques-Émile Blanche, with whom he shared the idea of rethinking and updating the genre. No less important were his contacts with the Spanish artists also present in Paris, such as Joaquín Sorolla.



Raimundo de Madrazo Portrait of Aline Masson, ca. 1870
Oil on canvas
Private collection

From the early 1880s Boldini painted the French capital in all its splendour: its squares, streets and café terraces and the bustle of its carriages, resulting in a stylistic freedom evident in works such as *Return from the Market*. In the same spirit he painted colourful, half-length female portraits that constitute a gallery of faces and social types of Parisian society. These aspects of Boldini's output reveal his closer personal ties with the Spanish colony active in the capital, in particular Raimundo de Madrazo whose portraits of Aline Masson are surprisingly comparable to Boldini's. Another close connection was Ramón Ribera, whose scenes of everyday life have in some cases been attributed to Boldini until recently due to their striking stylistic similarity.



Giovanni Boldini
Place Clichy, 1874
Oil on canvas
Private collection

In 1882 Boldini exhibited at the Georges Petit gallery in Paris in the first exhibition of the Société Internationale de Peintres et Sculpteurs, to which he belonged (together with Ribera, Sargent, Egusquiza and Julius LeBlanc Stewart), while in 1886 he took over Sargent's house on the Boulevard Berthier after the latter had left Paris. It was there that he painted his earliest portraits of Countess Gabrielle de Rasty and of the Concha de Ossa sisters, works that were defined as paradigms of "supreme femininity, irresistible, captivating and at the same time artlessly correct and modest, the true lady, the *grande dame*."

SPANISH PAINTERS AND PORTRAITURE: THE SPIRIT OF AN AGE

Joaquín Sorolla painted nudes such as *Resting Bacchante* during his time as a grant student in Rome, influenced by the freedom of artists such as Mariano Fortuny. Paintings of this type, which transmit a more or less overt sensuality, differ from those Sorolla would paint years later, for example *Female Nude*, which reveals the corporeality and intimacy of a woman who is nonetheless seen objectively. The viewer has ceased to be a voyeur, in contrast to the case with most of Boldini's nudes, as the female figure is no longer an object of desire but rather a companion. Not only had the approach to depicting the nude changed but the genre of portraiture as well. The image of the different social classes, specifically that of the dominant bourgeoisie, became extremely popular at the fin-de-siècle. The portrait was a means to affirm the sitter: someone who through their own efforts and with determination could rise socially, and the city, the capital and its outskirts provided them with the appropriate context.



Joaquín Sorolla presented his daughter María in a garden at La Granja, while Ignacio Zuloaga painted the modern and elegantly dressed Adela de Quintana Moreno out walking in an unidentified location. Sorolla in turn depicted the actress Catalina Bárcena seated in an interior and again used an interior setting to portray his wife Clotilde's natural elegance. The painter Manuel Benedito depicted an almost Symbolist Cléo de Mérode who differs notably from Boldini's version of her. Finally, Ramón Casas presents a woman without any context or setting: *The Parisian Woman* is simply present, which is all that is required.

Ramón Casas *La parisienne* [*The Parisian Woman*], ca. 1900
Oil on canvas
Museo de Montserrat. Donación Josep Sala Ardiz, 1980
Inv. no. 200.389

Both Zuloaga and Sorolla specialised in elegant portraits of this type. Influenced by the tradition of Velázquez, they were - together with Sargent, Whistler, Antonio de la Gándara, Blanche and Boldini - some of the most important portraitists of the Belle Époque period at a moment. All these artists aimed to modernise a genre that was by its very nature closely linked to the past, creating a gallery of portraits located mid-way between tradition and innovation and one which accurately reflects the spirit of a worldly society and a decadent world that came to an end with World War I.

BOLDINI, PORTRAITIST OF THE BELLE ÉPOQUE (1890-1920)

In 1897, when Giovanni Boldini arrived in New York to exhibit at the branch of the French gallery Boussod et Valadon on 5th Avenue, he was already known for his initial “French manner”. Sargent’s recent return to the United States had made the American public aware of the modern sophistication of European portraiture of which Boldini was the undoubted master.

In his portrait of *James Abbott McNeill Whistler* Boldini associated the by now mature painter with the cosmopolitan dandy type by depicting Whistler in elegant evening dress and with a top hat. Despite presenting him seated, Boldini enlivened his male subject by depicting him with a gesture that would clearly identify him even among a crowd. He used a comparable pose for *Madame Veil-Picard* who is seen seated, her elbow resting on the back of a chaise longue and her head resting on her hand. The shape of her body, elegantly clad in the gleaming black silk that sensually envelops her, contrasts with her gaze, which seeks out connection with the viewer.

Giovanni Boldini
James Abbott McNeill Whistler, 1897 Oil on
canvas
Brooklyn Museum, New York. Donated by A.
Augustus Healy
Inv. no. 09.849



Boldini applied his increasingly free and dynamic brushstrokes to portraits but also to still lifes and studies of female hands, as in *Pansies*, as well as to views of his studio. In the so-called *Self-portrait at Montorsoli*, which the artist donated to the Gallerie degli Uffizi in 1892, he enhanced his not particularly attractive features and presented himself in a proud Spanish manner inspired by Velázquez. The great Spanish master’s use of colour provided Boldini with the basis for an art of an elite nature that was accompanied by an evolution which brought him to the highest levels of virtuosity.

EXHIBITION INFORMATION

ADDRESS

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TICKET PRICES

Standard ticket: 3 Euros per person

Free entry on Mondays (except public holidays) from 2pm to 8pm

Free entry to the permanent display “Espacio Miró” with the purchase of a ticket

Should a temporary exhibition not be on display, the price of an entry ticket is 3 Euros per person

OPENING TIMES

Mondays from 2pm to 8pm

Tuesdays to Saturdays from 10am to 8pm

Sundays and public holidays from 11am to 7pm

GUIDED TOURS

Mondays at 5.30pm

Tuesdays to Thursdays at 11.30am, 12.30pm and 5.30pm

Price: 5 Euros

AUDIO GUIDES

Audio guides: Spanish/English

Price: 3.50 Euros