

On The Collecting Table:
Sorolla and the old College of
Saint Paul's, now the Lluís Vives
Secondary School, Valencia



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Introduction by Felipe Garín

**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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Sorolla and his context

An invitation from the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum provided an opportunity to discuss an interesting painting by Joaquín Sorolla, *The Collecting Table*, which recently became part of the Museum collection. The new arrival is certainly in good company, as the Museum possesses several other fine works by the artist. The painting prompted some thoughts about aspects of the painter's life and work, very different—but by no means less attractive—than the issues Facundo Tomás and I considered in these pages some time ago concerning the portraits by Sorolla in the Museum.

On this occasion, disciple and rigorous researcher Vicente Samper, who has been studying the emblematic group of the Lluís Vives Secondary School in Valencia for some time now, with the Saint Paul chapel inside, analyzes in detail the painting and the artistic and historic circumstances that surround it.

This introduction therefore seeks to situate the painting, and others in close proximity to it, in the context of the artist himself.

In the first place we need to unpick the stale old myth about Sorolla pretty much having been “born” painting. Of course he had a natural talent for drawing, which his early teachers and close relatives (although not his parents, who died very early on) did much to encourage and nurture. Sorolla's training at various centres (as discussed in the article), particularly the several years he spent at the San Carlos Fine Arts Academy in Valencia, the time he spent in Italy on a grant from the Valencia Provincial Council and the period when he copied paintings by his great maestro Velázquez at the Prado Museum, is evidence enough of some very solid preparation in both concepts and technique. Without that training he would not have been able to handle quite so masterfully the huge panels of the Hispanic Society of America in New York or other major works.

Nor can we lightly pass over what Sorolla learnt from his maestros, teachers, fellow artists and friends. In the speech he prepared when he joined the San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts¹, he acknowledged the teachings of Francisco Domingo Marqués (“the lamp that illumined the youth of his time, not only in Valencia but in all Spain”) and Gonzalo Salvá (“I remember with real pleasure the long walks beneath the burning east coast sun in search of an effect of the light or a note of colour”). He finds room too for Muñoz Degrain,

¹ All these highly valuable comments by Sorolla can be found in *Homage to the Glorious Memory of the Hon. Joaquín Sorolla, Academy Member Elect*. In a session held on 2 February 1924 at the San Fernando Royal Academy of Fine Arts, the speech prepared by the artist on “The Valencia School” was given a posthumous reading.

Antonio Cortina, Bernardo Ferrándiz, José Benlliure and, above all, Ignacio Pinazo: “in our young days [Pinazo was 14 years older than Sorolla] Pinazo’s educational work replaced Domingo’s. If we lost something in the exchange, we also gained plenty in many other things, like the love of line and contact with the bustling life of Valencia”. Of Emilio Sala, “true maestro [...] whose works are worthy of study”, he actually said to one of his collaborators, Santiago Martínez, when he was working on the Ayamonte panel of the Hispanic Society series: “look, look at what I’ve just done, now that’s a real piece of Valencia painting for you; it looks just like an Emilio Sala”². All this, I suggest, would not have been possible if in the last few decades of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century there had not been a breeding ground with a fertile school for artists (certainly the most dynamic in Spain) flourishing in a society with a brisk economy and a very favourable cultural environment, plus an exceptional literary renaissance and an innovative bourgeoisie³.

That said, it would not be fair, bearing in mind how easy it was for him to paint, to say nothing of the effort and determination Sorolla needed to create his own personal style that evolved from the decade discussed here, once he had got past, amid successes and the occasional failure, the period of history painting and after sharing it with a phase of paintings of social criticism. Although still dubitative in other areas, but (and this is the exceptional thing) vigorous in the pleasure he took from the actual surface of the painting, he tried to combine it with the “truthism” that he could not let go of: “one must paint with fewer preoccupations and make a huge effort to get to the truth without harshness”⁴. References to Goya and above all to Velázquez are inevitable “to fix reality, the truth of what is painted”.

To end, Sorolla eventually became an indispensable reference point in Valencia, and, paradoxically, it may have been Aguilera Cerni who defined him most exactly: “Like his friend Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, he is part of the most solid, rooted mythologies of his native region, all of which is perfectly understandable, because only a lunatic could deny that together they embody, perhaps like no-one else, qualities, potential, careers—defects too—with which the people of Valencia most identify”⁵. To sum up, in the words of his great friend, “I am proud of Sorolla’s triumphs, as if I had some small part in them, because Joaquín is the personification of the people of Valencia”⁶.

But finally let us say in just praise of *The Collecting Table* that he worked hard for such success. Though it came after experiment and trials, it is already clear in the works he produced from 1890 to 1899 that his love of painting, the vigour of his brushstrokes, the primacy of aesthetics, the pleasure of sensuousness as his personal stamp, were to be cornerstones of his entire oeuvre.

Felipe Garín

2 Santiago Martínez Martín. “My maestro Joaquín Sorolla”, speech read on 17 November 1973 at the Royal Academy to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the artist’s death.

3 Two essays are essential for a global vision of the painting from that period: Catalá 2008 and Pérez Rojas 1993.

4 Letter from Joaquín Sorolla to his wife Clotilde, 12 December 1892, published in Sorolla 2009.

5 Aguilera 1986.

6 Vicente Blasco Ibáñez. “The Great Sorolla”, in *El Pueblo*, 9 June 1900 (reproduced in *El Pueblo*, 12 August 1923).

In the quiet interior of a rather gloomy church, we see several of the faithful with scapulars draped over their shoulders, praying in the typical wooden pews lined up before what appears to be a high altar, with a table decorated with five lit altar candles, a pair of flowerpots with plants intuited rather than seen and other objects. Presiding the scene is a huge gilt baroque altarpiece of which the bench and the bottom part of columns are visible, as are a shrine-like tabernacle and the lower part of a niche. To one side, in the left wall, a fragment of a large painting with a splendid frame from which an oil lamp sticks out, is distinguishable behind another table. In the foreground we see the collecting table of the picture's title, on which are two candlesticks with candles. A member of the congregation, with a distinguished-looking brown cape, leans over to leave coins on a metal plate. Seated on the other side of the table, watching over the money collected from the sale of scapulars, prints, candles and the like, are two elegantly dressed, veiled women with black mantilla shawls. This is precisely where the faintest of lights seems to enter, illuminating the table and leaving the rest of the scene in the gloom.

Bernardino de Pantorba classifies *The Collecting Table* [fig. 1] as one of the paintings, that, after estate, became part of the collection of "Elena" Sorolla de Lorente, Joaquín Sorolla's youngest daughter, in a group of works "of uncertain date". After the death of her husband, Victoriano Lorente, in early 1967 Helena distributed virtually all the paintings, dividing them into lots, amongst her seven children. The fifth, with twenty-one paintings, this one included, became the property of Mercedes⁷. However, it subsequently disappeared without trace until its happy reappearance in 2013 at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, donated by the children of its last owner, Javier García-Miñaur, in his memory.

A preliminary drawing in the Sorolla Museum [fig. 2] is a rapid sketch in which, as a sort of diagram, the artist adds indications of the colour to be used in certain parts of the canvas, as in fact it was: "red with gold" in the altar and "white" and "red" respectively for the table's runner and skirt, while in the lower right angle he provides the title: "The Collecting Table / St. Anthony"⁸. The sketch is in a set of five loose-covered booklets whose drawings (some, like this, of known works) for the most part have a certain thematic coherence, and date from around 1891. We assume, therefore, that they were originally part of a single notepad.

7 Pantorba 1970, p. 160, no. 878, and p. 161.

8 Collecting tables were set up, as they still are today, on specific dates to collect funds for charity. "St. Anthony" could refer (no other reason comes to mind) to the feast day of Saint Anthony the Abbot, a major saint inspiring great devotion even today in Valencia and environs. There is a "Saint Anthony" Pantorba includes (Pantorba 1970, p. 173, no. 1166; oil on canvas. 57 x 47 cm) dedicated "To the wife of my protector, his grateful J. Sorolla", i.e. to the wife of Antonio García, and which later became the property of her nephew, Federico Moscardó. Even so, to judge by the dates (signed in Madrid in 1884), we very much doubt that it has anything to do with *The Collecting Table*.



1. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
The Collecting Table, c. 1892
Oil on canvas, 86 x 106.8 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 13/157

There is also a photograph of the painting in the Ruiz Vernacci Archive at the Historic Heritage PhotoLibrary, from the Victoriano Lorente Collection and taken on 1 April 1932 [fig. 3], and another one in the Hispanic Society of America's photo archive⁹.

Apart from knowing the work is catalogued in Pantorba's essential essay (Pantorba being one of the artist's major biographers), it is also striking or at least curious that he should have classified it as a "sketch", a conclusion he clearly arrived at because of the loose, sketchy brushstrokes used in the painting. However, if we understand the term sketch strictly as defined in the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, "project or general outline prior to the execution of a work of art", I should say that there is no other painting on this theme, or if there is I am unaware of it. Indeed, in my view this is a finished work, as I believe the handling, certainly of very sketchy strokes and line, has to do with what we might call a kind of confrontation, linking it directly to the work of another "great" artist in Valencia at the turn of the century, Ignacio Pinazo Camarlench.

Slightly older than Sorolla, Pinazo was both a friend and an acknowledged maestro who, together with Emilio Sala, and in the artist's own words, "influenced my spirit, flexible to technique, flooding my desires for progress". Much has been written, not all of it trustworthy, about the close relationship between the two, but that is not the purpose of the present essay. What is clear is that they met frequently and exchanged impressions, particularly after Pinazo's return as an acclaimed painter to Valencia from Rome, where he had been on a grant. Pinazo influenced Sorolla to the point where part of the latter's first work, in which the technique had much (or perhaps not quite so much) to do with what Pinazo learnt in his Roman period, that it was in fact mistaken for work by the former¹⁰. This is appreciable in some of his small early panels, of cityscapes and sea and beach themes, and also in some other paintings, as in the case in question here.

It is this characteristic loose brushstroke that led Pantorba astray, strokes with brilliant touches of light and figures whose profiles are intuited in lines that seem to get lost, even when the spectator still stops over specific details, like the profile of the character with the cape or the head of the man seated on the right of the work with a scapular draped on his back.

As we shall see later, *The Collecting Table* comes from very early on in the 1890s, around 1892, at a time when Sorolla may have been looking for an identity that would set him apart from the rest. Judging by what quite a few critics of the time observed, he seems to have been at something of a loss, as he frequently tried out popular themes, like others who were doing well in the genre. One particularly strong influence was Jiménez Aranda, then a close friend with whom Sorolla was in continuous contact. And it is true that, as Pantorba himself said about the Seville painter: "Not a few followed in his footsteps. Sorolla himself, somewhat lost at that time with attempts at painting remote from his brisk, realist temperament, used the work of Jiménez Aranda, whom he called 'the wisest maestro in the Spain of his time', as a guide"¹¹.

Rafael Doménech criticized what he saw as a certain lack of personality in the works Sorolla produced on his own return from Rome: "The painting *Father Jofré* is every bit as good as Sala's finest paintings. [...] *The 2nd of May* is every bit as good as the majority of history paintings that so caught the imagination of the public and the members of Exhibition juries, and before which the least offensive state of my soul is indifference.

9 Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute PhotoLibrary, inv. no. VN-38005. The Hispanic Society of America, photo 86066, RV A-58714. My thanks are due to Patrich Lenaghan and Blanca Pons-Sorolla for this information, the latter having *The Collecting Table* in her catalogue raisonné under number BPS 1671.

10 On this issue, with previous bibliography, see Alcaide/Pérez Rojas 2015. On the oversimplification of their historiographic model, Llorens 2015.

11 Pantorba 1930, p. 43.



2. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
 Preliminary drawing for *The Collecting Table*, c. 1891
 Pencil and charcoal on paper, 13.5 x 19.5 cm
 Museo Sorolla, Madrid
 Inv. no. 1219



3. Photograph of *Collecting Table*, by Joaquín Sorolla, 1932
 Spanish Cultural Heritage Institute PhotoLibrary

José Benlliure could have put his signature to *Kissing the Relic*, *The Altar Boy's Slip Up*, or *Scene of Popular Valencia Customs*. *Another Margarita*, *People Trafficking*, and the later works *And They Still Say Fish is Expensive!* and *Sad Inheritance* are works with a message, and messages are what are furthest from Sorolla's temperament. So the ten years from 1884, when he defines himself as a painter, to 1894, when he defines himself as Sorolla, are years of learning¹².

And it is true that, apart from Jiménez Aranda, in art circles in Valencia some artists influenced others and all of them influenced each other, while Pinazo's influence remained particularly powerful. But it was a natural thing. Of course Francisco Domingo and Emilio Sala exerted some influence; so did Antonio Cortina, and the artist from Orihuela Joaquín Agrasot, with his typical scenes of Valencia kitchen gardens and popular dances. Sorolla was certainly influenced by the Benlliure brothers, particularly José, whom Sorolla encountered in Assisi. The Benlliure influence is especially appreciable in the church interiors and scenes with women dressed in mantilla shawls, as in *The Collecting Table*.

So much has been published about all this, that we might forget Sorolla's determination to move to Madrid after his time in Italy, a short stay in Valencia and his recent marriage to Clotilde in 1888. He settled in the capital the following year, in line with his declared wish to achieve professional success away from the purely local setting. His three children arrived in short order: María in April that same year, Joaquín in 1892 and Helena in July 1895. Things would soon become complicated, particularly with regard to the health of the youngest child, which forced the couple to separate in 1891, Clotilde in Valencia and Sorolla in Madrid, thus kick-starting the prolific, frequently joyous correspondence between the two, which has fortunately been preserved and generously glossed by his grandson Víctor Lorente Sorolla and great-granddaughter Blanca Pons-Sorolla.

One interesting issue is why Sorolla spent so much time and energy on the, yes, magnificent anecdotal painting of popular scenes. The answer is of course simple: the budding artist was looking for a relatively comfortable source of funds, producing painting for which he found buyers without too much effort, even unwillingly. On occasion he confessed as much to his wife, telling her for instance how reluctant he had been

12 In "Joaquín Sorolla", *Blanco y Negro*, Madrid, 1919.

to part with his painting of the Senate. But the point was that they helped him meet his numerous expenses. And he also parted with the frequent portraits he produced at the time, some commissions from relatives or friends, which probably did not make him much—or any—money.

Without getting into arguments about the limitations of popular art scenes, a question already discussed elsewhere¹³, Sorolla also showed a preoccupation with social themes, principally because, unlike anecdotal scenes, they made people think about the crude reality of the time. Some works of social intent gave him the first of the major successes at national level he so greatly wanted: one such was *Another Margarita* (Washington University Gallery of Art, St. Louis), painted in Valencia in 1892, which won a first medal at the Madrid International Exposition that same year.

He was just then beginning to explore his famous sea and beach scenes, his first tentative incursions in the theme¹⁴, like *Peeling Potatoes* (Gavin Graham Collection, London) or *The Happy Day* (Galleria d'Arte Moderna di Udine), not forgetting the magnificent *Beach Imp* (Sorolla Museum, Madrid), painted in 1891. All this, and much more, until we arrive at the acclaimed *Bringing Back the Catch* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris) from 1894, seen by many as the turning-point in Sorolla's art.

Returning to the daily scenes he was working on at the time, the genre that Pantorba refers to, with just a hint of sarcasm, as "anecdotism", we find interesting works, some similar in size to *The Collecting Table* and many mentioned by Doménech. This is true of *He'll eat you!* (1891, private collection), of *Ex voto* (1892, private collection), of a typical Valencia-soaked theme like *Blessing the Boat* (Asturias Fine Arts Museum, Pedro Masaveu Collection), from some time later and signed in El Cabanyal, or the one also at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum entitled *Kissing the Relic* (1893), a major prize-winner in its day.

While mentioning all these examples, it would be wrong of me to ignore another magnificent painting. This is *The Baptism* (private collection), signed and dated by the artist in 1900¹⁵, but which I believe to be earlier. A preliminary sketch of the painting has survived and is in the Sorolla Museum [fig. 4]¹⁶, where the inventory dates it to 1890-1893; this time it should be understood as a sketch, as it lacks pews or figures. Pantorba catalogues it as *Interior of a Chapel*¹⁷. If he had gone on to do the painting at that time, I suggest that it might be the baptism of "Chimet", the artist's second child. Nevertheless, no one knows where this particular baptism really took place and the church shown in the painting is impossible to identify. As the discerning Blanca Pons-Sorolla points out, the elegantly dressed woman on the right of the painting is Clotilde, the same, in my view, as the one who, accompanied by the priest, comes through the doorway with her newborn and most carefully groomed child in her arms. This would not be the only time Sorolla produced a double portrait of his wife: he did the same years later in *Valencia Dance in the Market Garden* (1889-1890, Colección Villar-Mir).

In any case, whether it is or is not his son's baptism, the artist executed the work a year before the signed date, making it the last of his works in this genre and some considerable distance beyond the others, as Pantorba includes a sketch ("painted in 1899"¹⁸ for this painting) that belonged to María Sorolla and which subsequently went into a private collection. The fact that it is signed in 1900 undoubtedly has to do with the client's requirements: that was the year Sorolla, together with his good friend Mariano Benlliure, was

13 Garín/Tomás 2006.

14 On this, see Pons-Sorolla 2011.

15 Pantorba 1970, p. 181, no. 1390, BPS 764.

16 BPS 1269.

17 Pantorba 1970, p. 152, no. 645.

18 Ibid., p. 181, no. 1388.



4. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Sketch for *The Baptism*, 1890-1893
Oil on canvas, 49.5 x 71 cm
Museo Sorolla, Madrid
Inv. no. 00463

awarded the Grand Prix at the Paris Universal Exhibition. We know the purchaser, Alejandro de Anitua, also acquired another, similarly-sized painting on the same theme entitled *Baptize Him*¹⁹.

With the necessary introductions made to put *The Collecting Table* properly in context, we need to turn back again to try to verify where the scene actually occurred. The scenario is the same as the one for *The Altar Boy's Slip Up* [fig. 5]²⁰, the preliminary drawings for which are in the Sorolla Museum²¹, and which was identified by Rafael Doménech²² as the church at the old College of Saint Paul's in Valencia [fig. 6].

The College of Saint Paul's²³ was founded by the Society of Jesus to train its novices, becoming the Jesuits' first quarters in Valencia from 1559 after the Papal Bull issued by Pope Julius III. It went ahead despite some controversy, its construction being backed by the then archbishop of Valencia Tomás de Villanueva. It was enlarged in the mid-17th century when a Seminary for Nobles of Saint Ignatius was added; in 1694, the sacristy, also known as the Sunken Chapel, was built, with three sections of pendentive vaults. Refits continued

19 Ibid., p. 181, no. 1389.

20 Signed and dated in 1892. Painted very early in that year. Included in Pantorba 1970, p. 177, no. 1260, which reveals traceability until it was lost during the Spanish Civil War, "its current whereabouts unknown". BPS 863. It was mentioned recently, however, as "Private collection" by José Luis Díez in the catalogue entry for *Ex voto* in Madrid 2009, p. 222, quote 15.

21 Pencil on paper. 13.5 x 19.4 cm (on front and back). Inv. no. 12373.

22 Doménech 1910, p. XXXII, figure 13: "The theme is Valencia-related. The back of the church was copied from the church at the old convent of Saint Paul's, in Valencia, today a secondary school".

23 For further information on this group, see the following essays: Benito Doménech/Bérchez 1983, Montoliu 1983 and in particular Gavara 1995, with archive data and unpublished documents from the Archive of the Kingdom, quoted below, from where I obtained part of the information; also, of course, the essay by Corbín 1979 and Oroval/Alós/Martínez Santo 1997; see also Gómez-Ferrer 2012. Special thanks are due to Josep-Marí Gómez, colleague and teacher at the Lluís Vives Secondary School, for allowing me access to the church and its Sunken Chapel, when I took the photographs accompanying the present article.



5. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
The Altar Boy's Slip Up, 1892
Present whereabouts unknown



6. Church of the former College of Saint Paul's, Valencia

into the 18th century with new improvements and additions, like the staircase and the dome, early on in the century. In the 1720s, the other dome was added, together with the principal doorway at its feet, subsequently blocked off. The chapel was renovated in the second half of the century, with paintings embedded in rockeries, symmetrical boughs (not asymmetrical as sometimes stated) and the decoration of the passage to the church by altarpieces inspired by Father Pozzo's treatises. The magnificently conserved tiled plinth most likely dates from around that time too. Among other things, the church's orientation was shifted after a refit by architect Lorenzo Martínez in the 1780s, when the high retablo was moved to its present location, where the original doorway used to be, blocked off after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767. The Confiscation of 1835 had a major impact, prompting the separation of the Seminary of Nobles, which eventually became, after several changes, part of the University of Valencia and finally, after stout work by Vicente Boix, the Provincial School of Secondary Education, being reformed for that purpose after a project by architect Sebastián Monleón. Work began in 1862 and was finished in 1872, although a further refit was carried out in 1973.

Happily, the old college church has survived conflict and change almost intact, even coming virtually unscathed through the remodellings that have laid so much of our heritage to waste, as all the baroque altarpieces are still there in the interior, as are virtually all the paintings, together with some magnificent elements of precious metal work, ornamentation and the like, even if today most of it is distributed in the Secondary School's rooms and offices.

Originally, direct access from the church to the cloister, as the 1862 Secondary School conversion plan shows, was gained through a magnificent stone arch still there today, visible from the interior of the church and which was subsequently blocked off, following the Monleón refurbishment, as the diagram by J. B.



7. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Kissing the Relic, 1893
Oil on canvas, 103.5 x 122.5 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 69/228



8. Church of the former College of Saint Paul's, Valencia
Interior of the Sunken Chapel



9. Relic cupboard that appears in
Kissing the Relic by Joaquín Sorolla
Private collection

Fornés dated 1876-1881 makes clear. It was a round arch undoubtedly forming part of the original oratory used by the Jesuits around 1544. The diagram also reveals a passage from the cloister to the old sacristy (also known as the Sunken Chapel), likewise closed off to the outside at the same time but still preserved in the interior, as is another at its feet, with an exit to what is today a playground, also blocked off on the outside but used as cupboard space on the inside.

We know Thomás Artigues²⁴ was responsible for the Baroque high altar retable which provides the background in *The Collecting Table*, with its three lanes and striated helicoidal columns decorated on the lower part. To judge by the documents²⁵, it was fitted into its original setting in August 1723, as were the lateral altarpieces, all gilded by Joseph Alpera, with payment made to Gaspar Martínez for the work involved in getting it into place.

It was in this Sunken Chapel, also sacristy and Communion chapel, where the prize-winning *Kissing the Relic* [figs. 7 and 8] was set; I have also managed to locate its fantastic reliquary cupboards thanks to information supplied by teacher Daniel Benito Goerlich, who told me a cupboard identical to the one in the painting was now in the Jesuit church of La Compañía.

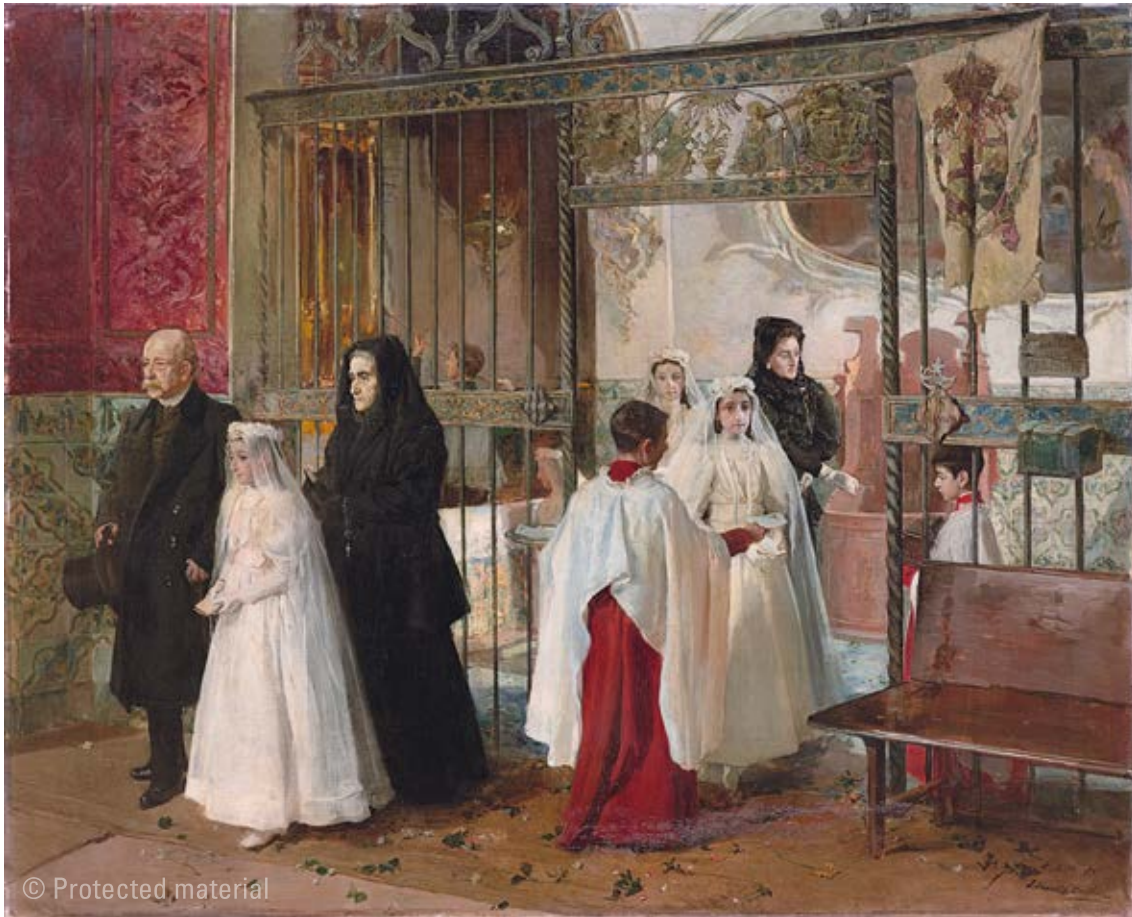
There were in fact not one but two cupboards flanking the Saint Francis Xavier retable, set into the hollows on either side. On the left is the one we see in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum painting, today in a private collection although without its columns [fig. 9]; the other is now in private quarters in the residence next to the church of La Compañía. These are without doubt the sacristy reliquaries made by Tomás Paradís mentioned in the records²⁶. Indeed, Orellana, besides several altarpieces, mentions "the two fitted wooden cupboards next to the chapel of the Immaculate in the Professed House of the Society of Jesus in Valencia"²⁷.

24 Orellana 1967, p. 402. Although the documentary evidence does record architect and sculptor Andrés Robles's participation in the construction. According to the records, Robles was paid for carving new candlesticks and a reliquary of Our Lady of Sorrows (Gavara 1995, p. 240).

25 Arxiu del Regne, Section: Clergy, *Extraordinary Expenses from the 15th of June 1707, to the 22nd of May 1726, with other things, and the definition of accounts to the last of the Purchase supervised by Bro. Sabater all that time as shown in, Box 5, Bundle 132, fol. 21 and ff.*

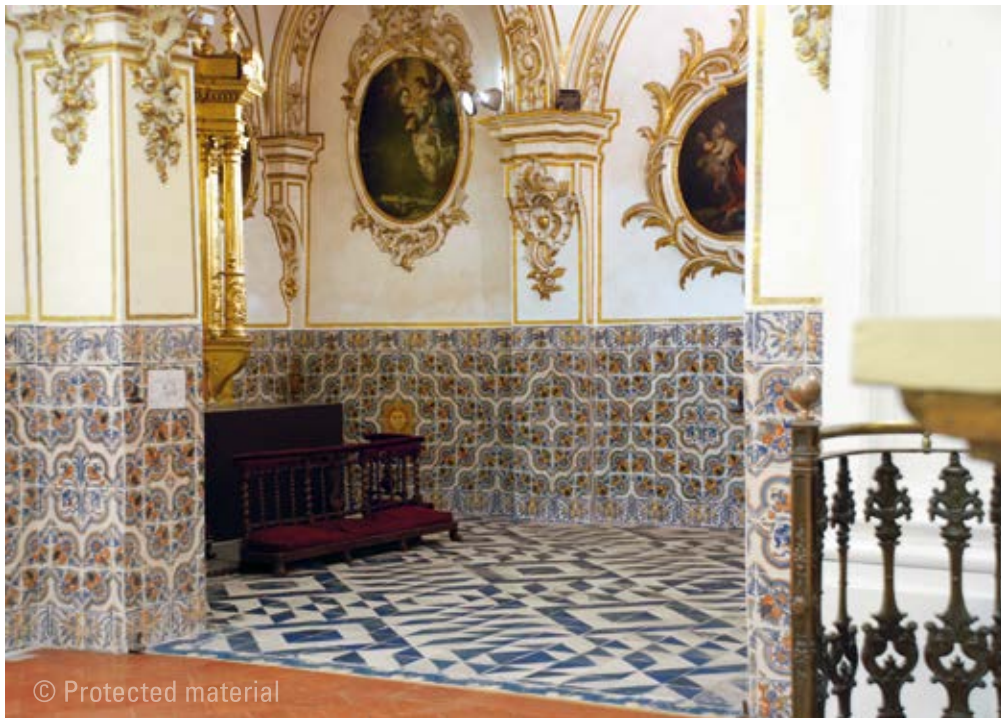
26 Gavara 1995, p. 243. My thanks to this author for the location of the private collection reliquary.

27 Orellana 1967, p. 584.



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10. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Carmen Magariños' First Communion, 1896
Oil on canvas, 100 x 125 cm
Masaveu Collection



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11. Church of the former College of Saint Paul's, Valencia
View of the Sunken Chapel from the church



12. F. de Pablo
Portrait of Unknown Man, c. 1890
 Albumen print, 15.4 x 12 cm
 Museo Sorolla, Madrid
 Inv. no. 81265

And it is from this same chapel that Carmen Magariños emerges after making her First Communion in a painting in the Masaveu Collection [figs. 10 and 11]²⁸ and included by Pantorba²⁹, who tells us it was sold to Ricardo Magariños in 1896, the year it appeared signed, in Madrid, although it was almost certainly painted before. With his wife and granddaughter we see the principal portrayed; although here he has clearly aged, his face is taken from a photograph of “person unknown” [fig. 12] in the collection of old photographs at the Sorolla Museum³⁰ and whose likeness appears again in a work by Sorolla a year later.

Regarding this work, there is a painting in the Sorolla Museum entitled *Interior of a Church* [fig. 13]³¹, dated around 1892, which, although smaller, deals with the same theme. Lacking figures, it is more of an unfinished work than a sketch, the rest of the painting being finely executed; for some reason he simply stopped working on it, perhaps because Magariños (or possibly the artist) was unhappy with it. Even so, I would suggest, given the chronology and the smaller size, that this may well be the “little painting” Sorolla mentions in one of his letters to his friend Pedro Gil-Moreno, dated 9 August 1895, when commenting on a couple of works he was near to completing: “I am just now finishing the two small paintings and they don’t look so bad... the other is irritating because the light is so bad in the church”³². The Museum also has a definite sketch³³ of this work, which the artist titles, at bottom right, *The First Communion*.

28 BPS 904. For the identification of the place see the file on this work drawn up by Carlos G. Navarro in Valencia 2002, no. 40, pp. 248-250.

29 Pantorba 1970, p. 179, no. 1317, as “First Communion”, sold in 1896 for 4,000 pesetas to Ricardo Magariños and subsequently sold, in 1920, by his widow to Adolfo Velíns. Sorolla is known to have painted a portrait of Magariños, who acquired it from the artist in 1897 for 2,000 pesetas (Ibid., p. 202, no. 1892), and also that *The Jealous Suitor*, present whereabouts unknown (Ibid., no. 1241), appears as the property of a “Mr M” (Magariños?) in 1891.

30 For the communicants, the painter probably took notes from the anonymous photograph entitled *Day of the First Communion*, in the Sorolla Museum (gelatin POP. 12.7 x 5.8 cm, inv. no. 81642).

31 Linked to *Kissing the Relic* and mentioned by Pantorba as a “sketch” in the group of works of uncertain date from Sorolla’s son’s inheritance (Pantorba 1970, p. 150, no. 587).

32 Valencia 2007, p. 131 (edition by Felipe Garín, Facundo Tomás, Sofía Barrón and Isabel Justo). Amongst the many drawings in these letters, owned by the Consortium of Museums of the Community of Valencia, is *Churching*, signed in 1895 (Pantorba 1970, p. 178, no. 1304), where Sorolla used Clotilde as a model; some other notes for this painting are kept in the Sorolla Museum, but I have not seen it. It would not be surprising to find that the scene is set in the church of Saint Paul’s, as in so many works Pantorba associates with religious themes from around that time.

33 Charcoal on paper. 9.9 x 12.6 cm. Inv. no. 14319. Part of a group of preliminary drawings for paintings, as is the case with *He’ll Eat You!*, painted very early on in the 1890s.



13. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Interior of a Church, c. 1892
 Oil on canvas, 38 x 49.5 cm
 Museo Sorolla, Madrid
 Inv. no. 00317

One gets the feeling that, while he took notes for *The Altar Boy's Slip Up*, Sorolla turned the camera 45 degrees to the left to paint, years later, *The First Communion*, as we can see that the formidable wrought iron gate, which is no longer there, is exactly the same in both paintings, as is the collection plate tied to it, the proceeds of the collection apparently destined for Our Lady of the Carmen, and the wooden pew and the banner, in the second painting with the crossed rod. The latter painting shows a rather unusual confessional at the back, which is still in the church [fig. 14] and which is also there, albeit merely sketched, in the unfinished picture.

Likewise, the friar's chair (from which the parish priest, startled by the lad's pratfall, leaps in *The Altar Boy's Slip Up*) is exactly the same, including the casings, as one of a variety of pieces of furniture in the Sorolla Museum [fig. 15], perhaps one of the three red, fine gold-ribbed and gilt studded velvet chairs registered in the available documents³⁴. In short, everything seems so real that one might almost say that one of the three acolytes featured in *The First Communion* is the one who comes a cropper in the other picture; the altar-boy with his back to the spectator is almost identical to the one in *Blessing the Boat*, signed in the same year.

³⁴ Archive of the Kingdom, Section: Clergy, bundle 132, box 5, *Extraordinary Expenses...*



14. Confessional of the church of the former College of Saint Paul's, Valencia



15. Chair with arms, 19th century
Walnut, 101 x 60.5 x 50.5 cm
Museo Sorolla, Madrid
Inv. no. 30119

A brief digression. Seeing the child on the floor, censer included, inevitably brings to mind *Accidenti!!*, a sculpture by Mariano Benlliure. Basically, it is an attractive “illustration of a funny story”, as Pantorba would say, the altar-boy theme being a favourite one in Spanish painting of the time and in painting in Valencia in particular.

Returning to *The First Communion*, the gate might actually cause some confusion, as here it looks much larger, almost idealized, as do other elements in the painting. The picture was painted in Madrid, which surely means the space is closer to its real dimensions in *The Altar Boy's Slip Up*. The painter really went to town on the details, particularly the wrought iron, once having worked in his uncle José Piqueres's locksmith's workshop. As Sorolla himself acknowledged in a 1917 interview, “... even today I'm still fascinated by everything to do with the locksmith's trade. I'd like to be an artist and a locksmith at the same time”.

Although, sadly, the imposing gateway has now disappeared, the hinges are still anchored in place. Once again, documents from the Archive of the Kingdom confirm that the gate was designed by Tomás Paradís, who received payment for “making the new railing for the Communion”. Joseph Alpera was paid “for adding ochre and walnut...”. Curiously, the document consulted mentions the railing “for the Communion” between “squares and rings of iron”, with the same number of balusters as in the painting. Orellana also mentions “the chancel screen in the chapel of the Communion at the parish church of Saint Martin, which reveals his great intelligence and skill in that art”³⁵, and draws attention to “his skill and art in the fine scagliola work, imitation of jaspers and marbles”. Paradís was followed by one of his sons, Andrés by name³⁶, a Jesuit assistant known to have worked at the Professed House. I therefore suggest this architect and sculptor, or more likely his son in view of the dates, or even both together, could also have been entrusted with the

35 Orellana 1967, p. 353.

36 See Gutiérrez Pastor 2012.



16. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Mourning, c. 1892
 Oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm
 Museo Sorolla, Madrid
 Inv. no. 00318

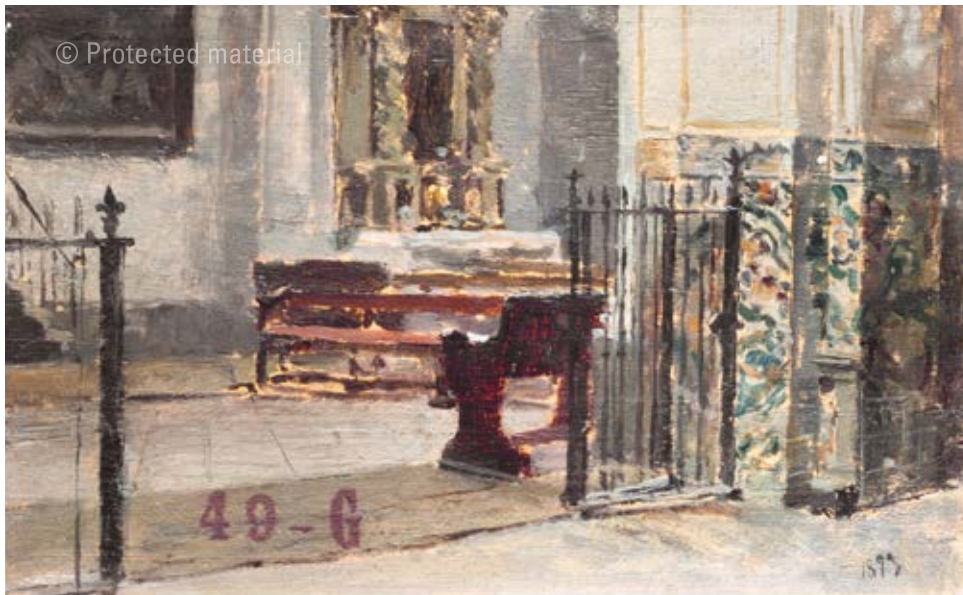


17. Church of the former College of
 Saint Paul's, Valencia
 Interior of the Sunken Chapel

chapel's plasterwork referred to above, also associated, in the most recent historiographical research, with the plasterwork in the old church of Saint Andrew.

This exception aside, the gilded altarpiece visible on the left in *The First Communion*, which the altar-boy approaches with a snuffer to put out the oil lamps that are still there today (as is, surprisingly enough, the snuffer itself, long handle included), is the one we see entire in the background in *Mourning* [figs. 16 and 17], entitled thus in the Museum, with no further reference, and which Pantorba³⁷ once again (presumably for the reasons explained above) describes, revealingly, as a "sketch" when it is not. This retable altarpiece is one of those that allude to plate illustrations by Father Pozzo and served as a high altar, including the tabernacle, as the chapel was used independently by seminarists and nobles. The open door visible at the back led to the cloister.

³⁷ Pantorba 1970, p. 150, no. 584.



18. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
Church, Valencia, 1893
 Oil on panel, 11 x 16.5 cm
 Museo Sorolla, Madrid
 Inv. no. 00319



19. Church of the former
 College of Saint Paul's, Valencia
 View of the church from the Sunken Chapel

Viewed from a different angle and with a greater field of vision—the image being taken from the interior of the chapel looking towards the church—the painting includes another small work in the Sorolla Museum entitled *Church, Valencia* [figs. 18 and 19]. In the background, painted with loose brushstrokes, the retablo of the Immaculate Conception is visible, with braided shaft columns and plant-like decoration; to its left is a large painting in grisaille of what appears to be a *Christ on the Path to Calvary* which the school still owns and which is here hung on a wall that has now disappeared. In its place, a powerful stone arch has recently been uncovered; this was the door of the first building and is visible, together with sturdy buttresses, in Father Tosca's 1704 plan. Also, in the lower left part one gets a glimpse of the start of the staircase and railing that led upwards to a pulpit in the same wall, now conserved in the choir.

Here Sorolla saves his energy and replaces the wrought iron gate between the chapel and the rest of the church with a simpler chancel screen. This is something he also does in *Interior of a Church*, in the preliminary drawing for *First Communion* and, once again, although barely perceptible, behind the women seated to the left of *The Collecting Table*.



20. Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923)
In the Sacristy, 1893
 Oil on canvas, 39.5 x 57.6 cm
 National Fine Arts Museum, Argentina
 Inv. no. 5532

A further addition can be made to this already long list of paintings set in the Sunken Chapel, this time by entering on the right. The addition is a better known work, signed and dated 1893, called *In the Sacristy*, in the National Fine Arts Museum of Argentina [figs. 20 and 21]³⁸, where it arrived in 1910 after a donation by Ángel Roverano. Here Sorolla presents two priests lighting up a cigarette, ignoring the ban on smoking written on the sign in the upper right hand, “SE PROIV... / FUMAR E... / SACRIST...” (Smoking in the sacristy is not allowed), a notice which appears, although slightly differently, in a note in the Sorolla Museum³⁹: “Smoking in the ‘Sacritania’ (sic) is not allowed”.

This work portrays three paintings on the same wall, “paintings within a painting”, as Julián Gállego would say. The one hung highest may be the work that is still there, showing the imposing figure of Saint Paul: a great *bocaporte* painting by Esteban Romaguera⁴⁰ which covered the niche of the high altar retable, although, to judge by its size and frame, it may actually be a *Descent of Christ from the Cross*, now in one of the offices at the Secondary School. I have identified one of the two oblong or horizontal format paintings (the one on the right) as undoubtedly being the *Apparition of the Madonna and the Child to a Jesuit Saint*, also conserved with this title. Above both paintings, as a sort of decoration, are two wooden carvings that I have not been able to locate, boards mentioned in the documents situated above the sacristy chapel cupboards, gilded by Joseph Alpera, the same as, or very similar to the ones made by sculptor Vicente Borja for

38 Mentioned by Pantorba as one of the works not located, sold for 1,000 pesetas (Pantorba 1970, p. 177, no. 1272). From 1914 to 1944 it was deposited at the Caraffa Museum, in Córdoba (Argentina).

39 Charcoal on paper. 12.9 x 9.9 cm. Inv. no. 14334, on the back. Belongs in the same range of drawings as the above-mentioned *The First Communion*, among many others. And I simply cannot pass over the annotation in the upper part of this drawing, “The Holy Patroness of the place”, taken as a kind of memory aid for *The Altar Boy’s Slip Up*, which features the Virgin of the Defenceless, patron of Valencia.

40 Gavara 1995, p. 240.



21. Church of the former College of Saint Paul's, Valencia
View of the Sunken Chapel

the doors of the old presbytery, all removed at some point. Above the large commode, amongst altar cards and the like, rests and enormous crucifix, today on the high altar above the tabernacle.

Clearly, there are plenty of scenes set in this church or in the convent. To these I now add *The School Playground*⁴¹ (present whereabouts unknown), a view of the present-day Lluís Vives Secondary School, which Sorolla presented together with two other watercolours and which won him his first known prize, a "Third Class Medal" in the 1879 Regional Exhibition of Valencia, when he was just 16 years old.

What all this shows is Joaquín Sorolla's very close relationship with this church, its chapel and the College of Saint Paul's, where, given the proximity to his home, he must surely have studied. Actually, very little is known for sure about the painter's early education⁴²; what we do know is gleaned from information provided by his earliest biographers, some of them actual acquaintances of the artist from when "Chimet", as he was also known in the family, was around 12 years old.

These sources say that Sorolla went to the Normal School, indistinctly called the Higher Normal of Valencia, a former teachers' college which, after its official creation in Valencia in 1845, originally set up in premises of the College of Saint Paul's, loaned to the school before it found a place of its own⁴³.

According to these biographers, the headmaster of the school, Baltasar Perales, aware of the young Sorolla's great promise, encouraged him to study at the Craftsmen's School. This information has been verified in the Historic Archive at the University of Valencia, although there is no record of Perales being the headmaster at

41 Pantorba 1970, p. 172, no. 1114, referred to as a "watercolour". BPS 226.

42 Apart from Guillot Carratalá's 1950 contribution, when he said Sorolla started school at the age of 7, though with no further documentary evidence. This information was included by Blanca Pons-Sorolla in the most complete essay published on the painter to date: Pons-Sorolla 2001, p. 75, quote 55.

43 Sáez Fernández 1986-1989 (on the building, vol. 1, pp. 54-77).



22. Diploma obtained by Joaquín Sorolla in Geometric Drawing, September 1876
 Museo Sorolla, Madrid
 Inv. no. DA00504

the time, the post being held by Cesáreo Antolín Viñé. Baltasar Perales y Boluda⁴⁴ became “Master Regent”, not Headmaster, from 1872 after passing the requisite exam at what was known as the Practical School, attached to the Higher Normal, which Sorolla attended in his early period of education.

He would later start at the Craftsmen’s School, officially known as the Industrial School for Craftsmen⁴⁵, founded in 1868, and which was also located at the College of Saint Paul’s, then only recently closed down. Here a range of educational levels were offered free, although not officially backed, thanks to the disinterested aid given by teachers at the Secondary School. Expenses were partly defrayed by funds obtained from the college’s income. These non-academic studies, which were also attended by people from the middle class who paid their way, included night classes clearly addressed to craftsmen, like those of a primary or elementary school. As far as I can tell, people could also enrol in a single subject. There is documentary evidence of some students going on from there to the Normal School for Masters, while others chose the Academy of Fine Arts.

44 Archive of the University of Valencia, General Archive, box 1387/44. See also Mayordomo/Agulló 2004, pp. 179 and ff. Baltasar Perales y Boluda (Moixent, Valencia, 1835-Valencia, 1906) was previously a teacher at rural schools and later Geography and History teacher at the Normal School in the 1861-1862 academic year. From 1864 to 1867, he also ran a school for adults at the Economic Society of Friends of the Valencia Region, before winning the post of head of the Practical School, which he would hold until 1899.

45 See the interesting essay Sirera 2015. Also, by the same author, see Sirera 2011.

Joaquín Sorolla attended class at the Craftsmen's School while working as his locksmith uncle's assistant. He won second prize in both "Geometrical Drawing" and in "Geometry Applied to the Arts" on 30 September 1876, as recounted in the *Report on the 1875 to 1876 Academic Year, Secondary School, read at the solemn inauguration of classes for the 1876 to 1877 academic year by the Right Hon. Mr. Vicente Boix*. Diplomas issued by the school, with the official seal of the "Secondary School. Royal College of Saint Paul. Valencia", are kept in the Sorolla Museum archive [fig. 22]. The school Board also awarded him another ordinary third-class prize in his last year, in December 1879, for his "constant assiduousness and good behaviour", plus a second place for the gold medal, all this just before moving on to the School of Arts & Crafts, a sister institution also operating at the Secondary School. One or two of the many diplomas held in the archive suggest Sorolla was also studying at the Economic Society of Friends of the Valencia Region, a benchmark in the city's artistic circles even then.

Apart from this, there is no record of Joaquín Sorolla going through intermediate education, as his name does not appear amongst the huge number of files revised to date, not even amongst the failures⁴⁶. To access that level, pupils had to be at least 10 years old, besides submitting to the headmaster a handwritten letter requesting permission to go to the school, provided they passed oral and written exams beforehand.

As Sorolla himself acknowledged in a 1913 interview, he went to several schools, although he "spent so much time painting that I gave up any other kind of training". Finally he enrolled at the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts, while he was attending the last course at the Craftsmen's School, and that same year he painted *The School Playground*, although that is another, much better known story.

Author's Note: After submitting this article to the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, Blanca Pons-Sorolla (to whom I am most grateful for the information, and for facilitating the "BPS" numbers of her cataloguing in each duly documented work) told me about four more works linked to this particular theme, also set in the interior of the church of Saint Paul's or the Sunken Chapel, and now all in private collections.

These are BPS 4903, a painting with almost exactly the same "take" as in *The Collecting Table*, although without figures and less sketchy handling of the paint; a *First Communion* (BPS 3884), the sketch for which would be the one mentioned in the text as *Church, Valencia; Churching* (BPS 896), a scene, as I guessed without having seen it, is set in the interior of the Sunken Chapel, with the Saint Francis Xavier retable at the back, and in which we see, this time closed, the relic cupboard from *Kissing the Relic*. And finally, the fourth painting, *The Altar Boy* (BPS 0754), from 1897, in which we can make out the large painting, still there today, of Saint John Nepomucene, with the cloth of the high retable also visible to its left.

46 Historic Archive of the Community of Valencia. My thanks to F. J. Sánchez Portas for this information.

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