

# AN ARTFUL PAIRING STOCKHOLM & MADRID

**F**ine Art Connoisseur's 11th adventure abroad was never going to be ordinary. This past October, 25 art-loving Americans spent nine days exploring the cultural treasures of Stockholm and Madrid. It was the magazine's first such outing since 2019: not surprisingly, the pandemic had gotten in the way of our plans for 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Though one rarely hears them mentioned in the same sentence, the linking of these two capitals — a four-hour flight apart — actually made

perfect sense. They had been selected after scoring highest in a poll of our program's alumni travelers, and soon we realized how much they have in common: world-class art museums and galleries, impressive architecture, and imperial histories that aren't so familiar to Americans as — say — those of London or Paris. Thanks to our good-natured guests, detailed planning, and agreeable weather, it all worked out brilliantly. Conceived by FAC publisher Eric Rhoads, *Fine Art Connoisseur's* tour program has existed since 2010, blending five-star culture with five-star comforts and a



Several purchases were made in the Stockholm studio of Nick Alm (second from left, next to *Fine Art Connoisseur* publisher Eric Rhoads). Photo: William Gullette



delightfully cohesive group of travelers who share with each other their passion for beauty, quality, and learning.

On our first morning together in Stockholm, I presented an illustrated lecture that set our upcoming sites (and their artworks) into historical context so they would make sense when we finally got there. (I delivered a complementary talk in Spain.) The tour program included all breakfasts

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(LEFT TO RIGHT) *Fine Art Connoisseur* editor-in-chief Peter Trippi gives an introductory lecture on the group's first morning in Stockholm. Photo: Mary Burrichter ■ The Nationalmuseum (right) is just steps away from the group's home-away-from-home, the Grand Hotel (beyond, with Swedish flags flying). Photo: William Gullette ■ The group enjoys a private tour of Stockholm's Nationalmuseum before public hours. Photo: Mary Burrichter



The magnificent stair hall of Stockholm's Nationalmuseum; photo: William Gullette





(LEFT) Renowned watercolorist Stanislaw Zoladz welcomes the group to his Stockholm studio with his wife, Elisabeth. Photo: Stephen Harris ■ (RIGHT) The ornately decorated stair hall at Drottningholm Palace, to which the group sailed on a private ferry from downtown Stockholm. Photo: William Gullette

and most lunches and suppers: we are pretty sure everyone gained at least five pounds, as the meals were always delicious and abundant. And our logistics proved remarkably easy, thanks to speedy motorcoaches and the direct flight from Stockholm to Madrid.

Although every day offered at least two organized activities, plenty of time was left open in the schedule for independent exploring and dining; it certainly helped that our luxurious accommodations — Stockholm's Grand



David Orcutt relaxes with three of the plush toys he and Peter Trippi have been given by travelers on previous *Fine Art Connoisseur* trips. Photo: Stephen Harris

Hotel and Madrid's Mandarin Oriental Ritz — are literally in the heart of town, making spontaneous adventures both easy and walkable.

## STOCKHOLM

It was an easy decision to start our exploration of Stockholm with a panoramic tour of the handsome city center, led by our friendly local guide, Elisabeth Daude, whose knowledge of art was extraordinary. (Amazingly, it turned out she had studied at the University of Minnesota, with which three of our travelers have close connections.) Much of our first day was spent on the verdant inner-city island of Djurgården, formerly a royal hunting ground and now home to an array of cultural institutions. First up was the Prins Eugens Waldemarsudde, the magnificent villa of the artist, collector, and patron Prince Eugen (1865–1947). A younger son of the Swedish king, Eugen devoted himself to culture, making superb paintings (mostly landscapes) and designing objects such as a distinctively shaped ceramic flower pot that is still used across Sweden. There we enjoyed a temporary exhibition about his contemporary the painter Ernst Josephson, and another about the prince's own possessions, which have remained in the house untouched since his death.

Located nearby is the Thielka Galleriet, named for the banker-collector Ernest Thiel (1859–1947), who supported many of the same progressive artists his princely neighbor did. Particularly exciting was his collection of works by Edvard Munch, one of the largest outside Norway. We capped the day with a private visit to the studio of painter Nick Alm (b. 1985), who has an international following and is represented in the U.S. by Arcadia Contemporary, where he is planning a solo show later this year. Nick kindly opened his doors to show us his latest works, and indeed several were acquired on the spot by our savvy travelers.

A hallmark of *Fine Art Connoisseur* travel programs is private access to popular sites before the public arrives, and that was certainly true on October 22, when we walked exactly three minutes from the Grand Hotel to be ushered through otherwise-closed doors for a private tour of the Nationalmuseum. This is Sweden's most important art collection, featuring treasures from every Western culture, and especially masterworks by the native talents like Alexander Roslin, August Strindberg, Carl Larsson, and Anders Zorn. There was plenty of leeway to explore after the introductory tour ended, and then it was time to take Elisabeth's outstanding tour of the Stadshus, Stockholm's city hall.

Opened in 1923 and now famous as the place where King Carl XVI Gustav presents the Nobel Prizes, this still-functional building is architect





(LEFT) Art historian and guide Alicia Forneri Nucietelli shares insights during a pause on her walking tour of Toledo. Photo: William Gullette ■ (ABOVE) Mary Burricherter enjoys a stunning view over Toledo. Photo: Mary Burricherter

Ragnar Östberg’s fascinating mashup of Italian and Swedish influences, well worth a close look. We ended the day at Millesgården, the unique blend of art, architecture, and landscape design created by the artists Carl and Olga Milles between the 1900s and 1950s. Best known for his expressive figurative sculptures in bronze — installed in plazas and lobbies across the U.S. — Carl was a beloved teacher at Michigan’s Cranbrook Academy who influenced two generations of American pupils.

October 23 found our group living like monarchs; on a pier near the Grand Hotel, we boarded a private ferry that brought us — slowly and surely — to Drottningholm Palace, where Sweden’s royal family lives today.

We had the place to ourselves, so explored its ornate Baroque interiors carefully, and then the jewel box of a theater on its grounds, built in the 18th century to entertain not only the royals, but also their “common” neighbors. Once illuminated with open flames, most theaters like this have burned down, but Drottningholm’s was brought back to life in the mid-20th century and now draws crowds every summer.

We moved on to the elegant suburban studio home of the renowned watercolorist Stanislaw Zoladz (b. 1952) and his wife, Elisabeth. Born in Poland but longtime residents of Sweden, the couple welcomed us warmly and explained the artist’s fascinating process. Again, sales ensued, and we

headed away inspired to our final visit of the day, a private look around one of Sweden’s leading commercial galleries, Åmells. There we were greeted by the scion of this respected art-dealing family, Alexander Åmell, who pointed out the most intriguing Swedish works on offer, including examples by Larsson and Zorn. If you are heading to the Netherlands this March to enjoy the famous TEFAF fair in Maastricht, watch for the Åmells stand there.

### MADRID

And just like that, it was time for Madrid. Our first day in Spain’s capital began with another easy walk: it took precisely four minutes to stroll from the Mandarin Oriental Ritz — Spain’s most prestigious hotel — for early access to the Museo Nacional del Prado, Spain’s most famous museum. Our local guide for the week was the art



The soaring ceiling of Toledo’s Santa Maria Blanca, a synagogue that was converted into a Roman Catholic church after 1492; photo: William Gullette



In Madrid, artist Nacho Vergara welcomed the group to his large studio. Photo: Stephen Harris



(RIGHT) The red walls of Madrid's Museo Sorolla are lined with the Spanish painter's creations. Photo: William Gullette

historian Alicia Forneri Nucietelli, who brought us up close to masterworks by Bosch, Velázquez, Rubens, Goya, and others before the tourist hordes descended. We then had time to explore the Prado's many treasures on our own, including a rare display devoted to the Spanish painter Eduardo Rosales (1836–1873).

In the afternoon we made the one-hour drive to Toledo, the historic city on a hill, where the sun shone as we trod its cobblestones and learned of its rich multicultural history. Our visits included not only the enormous cathedral, but also a former synagogue converted into a church (Santa Maria la Blanca) and the chapel that is home of one of El Greco's greatest paintings, *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (1586).

One of our group's favorite Spanish artists is Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (1863–1923), whose unique blend of realism and impressionism has made his sunlit scenes popular around the world. (See page 61 for his greatest work in America.) On October 26 our group spent a morning exploring the Museo Sorolla, the master's studio home, which has been lovingly preserved and somehow blends both grandeur and intimacy. On view there was a special exhibition devoted to his plein air landscape paintings. (This was complemented the next day by a show of his summertime scenes mounted by the Fundacion MAPFRE, where we were welcomed by chief curator Casilda Ybarra Satrustegui.)



The afternoon was dedicated to the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, about an hour's drive northwest of Madrid. A massive palace and religious complex, built at vast expense on a windswept hill, it became the nerve center of 16th-century Spain's global empire, and we toured every possible part of it, including the impressive underground mausoleum where most of the Habsburg and Borbón royals rest.



(CLOCKWISE) Flamenco performers at El Corral de La Morería in Madrid; photo: William Gullette  
 ■ All travelers got their own *Fine Art Connoisseur* shoulder bag and insulated vest. ■ Over dinner in Stockholm, Irene Natow makes a point to (left to right) John McCabe, Mary Burrichter, Robert Bimonte, and Allen Natow. Photo: Stephen Harris

Madrileños were just beginning their evening (the Spaniards stay up late), so we stopped to admire them and promised ourselves we will return to this great city as soon as possible. Indeed, many of our travelers remained in Spain on their own, though others headed back to America or to other parts of Europe.

The following day allocated lots of free time for independent exploring, but many of us took the opportunity to visit the brand-new, just-unpacked studio of artist Nacho Vergara (b. 1990), who makes figurative paintings with a conceptual edge. Over a light lunch featuring Spain's beloved jamón ibérico (the Spanish cousin of prosciutto), we learned about Nacho's career and insights on the Spanish art scene today. Once again, acquisitions were made, and we celebrated them that evening by during a breathtaking performance of flamenco dance and music at the famous dinner club El Corral de La Morería.

Our final day together began with an unexpected bonus. We knew we would love our private tour of the newly opened Palacio de Liria, the opulent home base of Spain's best known noble, the Duke of Alba, and his family. (See page 59 for Goya's portrait of the Duke's larger-than-life ancestor, the Duchess of Alba.) But we did not know that our visit would include a popular new exhibition of high-style fashion worn by the Albas over the centuries, including spectacular gowns designed by Charles Frederick Worth (1825–1895). Staying with the opulence theme, we headed to the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, home to hundreds of masterpieces acquired by the noble family behind the German industrial conglomerate Thyssen and then bought by the Spanish state in 1993. From Van Eyck, Dürer, Titian, and Caravaggio to Van Gogh, Cezanne, O'Keeffe, Hopper, Picasso, Dalí, and Pollock, this museum owns a "greatest hit" in nearly every category.

All good things must come to an end, of course, so we bade each other farewell at a delicious private dinner served in the Ritz's Felipe V Room. Down the hall, a boisterous ballroom full of beautifully dressed

#### MORE TO COME

As always, it was bittersweet to part with friends old and new. This was an exceptionally merry group, their mood surely lightened by our peerless travel coordinator, Gabriel Haigazian (CTP Group, California). Fortunately, we will meet again, as plans for the future are underway: our next trip, in October 2024, *Fine Art Connoisseur's* 12th, will explore Zurich and Venice. Zurich is the ideal gateway to Switzerland, with the country's largest airport offering nonstop flights to cities across the U.S. It is home to great art museums and galleries, yet also perfectly situated for easy motorcoach trips to the superb art cities of Basel and Winterthur, and of course stunning Alpine scenery around Luzern. We will then take a one-hour flight to Venice and explore its many artistic wonders.

Even if you know *La Serenissima* already, there is always another aspect to discover — perhaps a gem-like museum or church in the shadow of the famous ones, a temporary exhibition at the Ca' d'Oro, or an artist's studio not open to the public. For details on this upcoming adventure, please contact Gabriel Haigazian via 818.444.2700 or gabriel@thectpgroup.com. Our official website, [finearttrip.com](http://finearttrip.com), will be active in February. We look forward to seeing you then. ●

**PETER TRIPPI** is editor-in-chief of *Fine Art Connoisseur*.