

News RELEASE

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## **The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo Acquires August Strindberg's *Inferno* and Joaquín Sorolla's *The Drinking Jug***

In 2022, the National Museum of Western Art (NMWA, director: Tanaka Masayuki, 7-7 Ueno Koen, Taito-ku, Tokyo) acquired the painting *Inferno*\* by August Strindberg (1849-1912) and the painting *The Drinking Jug* \*\* by Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923).

Strindberg was a major 19th century Swedish author known primarily for his play *Miss Julie* who was also active as a painter. Using a palette knife to create bold, thickly applied strokes, his experimental paintings characterized by abstraction, and their extemporaneous inclusion of unexpected effects. These works are considered to be precursors to the various avant-garde art movements of the 20th century, and their remarkable re-evaluation continues today. This work *Inferno* (1901) based on Dante's *Inferno* and dubbed "my Inferno painting" by the artist himself is considered one of Strindberg's most important paintings.

Joaquín Sorolla, on the other hand, was a nationally renowned Spanish painter, active from the end of the 19th century through the beginning of the 20th century. Internationally he was known for his depictions of the lands and people of Spain in the brilliant light of the Mediterranean. Working primarily en plein air, he created his own unique paintings that were dubbed Luminism for their evoking the sensations woven from the play of sunlight. Sorolla contributed to the modernization of Spanish art. *The Drinking Jug* is considered to be one of his major works and is the first of his paintings to enter the NMWA collection. The painting will be displayed this year, with 2023 marking the 100th anniversary of his death.

The NMWA's acquisition of works by the Swedish author Strindberg and the Spanish painter Sorolla helps diversify the geographic range of the NMWA's latter half of the 19th century to early 20th century collection which is largely French art. We hope that these new works will provide visitors with an all the more diverse viewing experience.

Strindberg's *Inferno* is now on display in the NMWA Permanent Collection Galleries, and Sorolla's *The Drinking Jug* will be displayed in the special exhibition *Imaged and Imagined: Spain Seen through Prints from Japanese Collections* (July 4 (Tues) – September 3 (Sun.), 2023).

\* For details on this painting, see its NMWA collection database entry,  
<https://collection.nmwa.go.jp/P.2022-0001.html>

\*\* For details on this painting, see its NMWA collection database entry,  
<https://collection.nmwa.go.jp/P.2022-0002.html>

■August Strindberg's *Inferno*



August Strindberg

*Inferno*

1901

oil on canvas

100 x 70 cm

Signed and dated (lower right): Aug S-g 1903

P.2022-0001

**About the Painting:**

This novel composition features what appears to be a windswept maelstrom beyond a grotto-like opening, surrounded by dense green foliage. Strindberg created this ragged, wild composition

when his third marriage to the young actress Harriet was suddenly plunged into a serious crisis. This inferno-like dark grotto can be seen as reflecting Strindberg's own sense of despair. The artist himself saw the work as a type of psychological self-portrait, and it hung on the wall of his own home for many years. Later the work was long on deposit at Sweden's Nationalmuseum and at Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

### **About the Painter:**

August Strindberg (Stockholm, 1849-1912)

Strindberg was a major Swedish playwright and novelist. He wrote more than 60 plays over the course of his life, as well as novels, poems, art critiques, and books on history, science and alchemy. Along with his writing, Strindberg was also known for his distinctive paintings and photographs. Strindberg did not have formal art training, but rather diverted various periods in his life to the production of painting (1892-94, 1901-02, 1903, 1905). These times overlapped periods when he found it hard to write, such as those which saw the breakdown of his marriages or political strife. This timing led to the sense that his paintings were autobiographical, expressionist works.

■Joaquín Sorolla's *The Drinking Jug*



Joaquín Sorolla

*The Drinking Jug*

1904

oil on canvas

151 x 98 cm

Signed and dated (lower left): J. Sorolla y Bastida / 1904

P.2022-0002

**About the Painting:**

Sorolla created this work on the beach of his hometown Valencia, in the late summer of 1904, his mature period. A small simple hut by the shore is the setting for a young woman giving a child a

drink of water from a jug. The half-open door in the background lets in a single ray of bright sunlight. The painting reflects Sorolla's affection for children, and his magical command of colors that capture the effects of light. This work was featured on a postal stamp issued by Spain in 1964 to commemorate the centenary of his birth.

**About the Painter:**

Joaquín Sorolla (Valencia 1863 – Cercedilla 1923)

Born in Valencia, Sorolla was a proudly Spanish painter, greatly renowned both in Spain and overseas for his depictions of the scenery and people of his homeland bathed in bright Mediterranean light. Sorolla was first recognized for his social realist paintings in the national art exhibitions held in Madrid, and also made a name for himself in international public exhibitions. He later received numerous commissions for portraits, and around 1900 he developed his own distinctive style, using swift brushstrokes to convey sunlight's myriad sensations. Sorolla worked en plein air, depicting the seaside customs and scenery around him. Today his home and studio in Madrid are open to the public as the Sorolla Museum.

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