

## Information Sheet on

Ignacio de Zuloaga

(ik-NATH-yoh day thoo-loh-AH-gah, Castilian pronunciation)

(ik-NAS-you day zoo-loh-AH-gah, Mexican pronunciation)

Spanish, 1870–1945

*Basque Peasants and a Dwarf* ca. 1910

Oil on canvas, 33 1/2" by 13 1/2"

Gift of the Friends of the McNay, 1991.4



## Subject Matter

Using a restricted palette of earth colors, Zuloaga composed this painting of three Basque peasants. At the left, a peasant stands in profile facing a second peasant looking directly at the viewer. A third peasant—a dwarf—stands in front and to the right of the second peasant. The dwarf's right arm stretches out holding a walking stick away from his body. His arm, the walking stick, and his body form a triangle.

All three peasants wear cloaks over layers of other garments and hats with wide brims. With his cloak draped over his shoulders, the dwarf wears a sling wrapped across his body holding up his arm; a hint of a red garment shows near his neckline. They all wear sandals with leather thongs laced to their ankles. Their rugged, lined faces are weathered with stubble and ruddy complexions. The peasant in profile has dark hair. The center peasant stares out with a rough face, a partially closed left eye, and a bruised nose. From his mouth a cigarette dangles. The dwarf's round face with pointed chin has a defined brow line and deep recessed eyes that intensify his gaze.

## About the Artist

Born in Eibar in the Basque country of Spain, Ignacio Zuloaga descended from a family of armorers, ceramists, and painters. While his father, a famous damascene and metal engraver, wanted Ignacio to study engineering, Ignacio became interested in painting following a trip, with his father, to the Prado Museum in Madrid, where he saw works of El Greco, Diego Velázquez, and Francisco de Goya. Sent to Rome to study architecture, Ignacio followed his impulse to paint. After six months' work, he completed his first picture, which was exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1890. Continuing his studies in Paris, he lived in Montmartre from 1892 to 1899, and was an admirer of and friends with Auguste Rodin, Edgar Degas, and Paul Cézanne.

While living in France, Zuloaga divided his time between Paris and Segovia. He returned to his Basque heritage for the inspiration that defined his work, which is based on the Spanish tradition of realism embodied in the work of Francisco de Zurbarán, Velázquez, and Goya. In Segovia, he kept three studios. He painted the romantic and picturesque landscapes of medieval towns, which were in direct contrast to his peasants, dwarfs, and bullfighters. Like Velázquez and Goya, Zuloaga painted peasants and dwarfs as they let themselves be seen. His subjects are reminiscent of earlier Spanish masters because he is depicting the descendants of the Basque, Castilian, and Segovian races.

Zuloaga called himself a "verist," a member of the Generation of 98, a group of Spanish writers and artists, who claimed a national identity after the end of the Spanish American war in 1898. A member of the group, author Miguel de Unamuno, wrote that Zuloaga presented a "mirror to the soul of the patria." While he was not considered Basque enough and his paintings were disliked in Spain, Zuloaga was always aware of his Basque identity, coming from old stock with noble roots in the 16th century. His unidealized portrayals of dwarfs, beggars, gypsies, and the cruelty of the bullfight were considered unpatriotic.

In 1901, Zuloaga's paintings appeared at the International Exposition of Venice. When his paintings were exhibited at the New York Exposition in 1909, Americans interested in Spanish themes embraced his paintings that were deemed unpatriotic in Spain. Zuloaga went on to win the Grand Prix in 1911 at the

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### About the Artist continued

International Exposition of Rome. When he visited America in 1925 for the first time, American tastes had changed since his first show. Members of the upper class were interested in having Zuloaga paint their portraits. He could have had a successful career in America, but chose to return to Spain. His patrons followed him for sittings and he became a well-known painter of the aristocracy. In 1938, while living in Zumaya he won the Venice Biennial prize for painting.

Zuloaga lived in many different places during his life. Eventually he settled in Zumaya in the Basque country. He died in 1945, in Madrid, and was buried in San Sebastian. Known for his generous spirit, Zuloaga privately helped workers, supported other artists materially or spiritually, and bought their work. With the help of other artists, he built a hospital residence in Zumaya, saved churches, and established several museums that housed the works of the masters that he collected.

### Quote from the Artist

Zuloaga himself thought that he belonged to the 16th century:

*I realize that I belong to another age, that I have remained a sixteenth century person, like the surroundings in which I grew up. I have a horror of every manifestation of modernism. My distaste for things modern includes of course painting, most of which, impressionistic, pointillistic, cubistic, futuristic, or whatever you may choose to term it, seems to me feeble and neurasthenic.*

### Strategies for Tours

**Primary Grades (ages 6–8)** How many people are in the picture? Describe what they are wearing. When would you wear a cape and a hat? What kind of shoes are they wearing? Why does the small man/dwarf hold a stick? Where are they, inside or outside? How can you tell?

**Upper Elementary Grades (ages 9–11)** [Use VTS questions.] Describe what you see in this picture. Why do you think the artist chose to make the men as large as the canvas? What do you think the weather is in this picture? What season is this? What do you see that confirms your opinion?

**Middle School/High School (ages 12–18)** [Use VTS questions and others above as appropriate.] Who are these people? How can you tell? If they were able to speak to us, what would they say?

**Adults** [Discuss other artists' painting styles in Europe during the first two decades of the 20th century. Use information about his life and quote above to explain why his work is so different from the School of Paris artists, such as Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, and others. Discuss his similarity with Velázquez and Goya.]

### Sources Worth Consulting

*Ignacio Zuloaga in America 1909-1925*. The Spanish Institute, Inc., 1989.

*Ignacio Zuloaga 1870–1945*. Basque Government, Culture and Tourism Department, 1990.

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