Hispanic Heritage Self-Guided Tour

This tour celebrates the rich artistic heritage of Spanish-speaking people within the United States, Mexico, and Spain. It also acknowledges the artistic accomplishments of Indigenous cultures who were conquered and colonized by the Spanish Empire, and whose Spanish-speaking descendants live on in Mexico and Peru. (Gallery maps with artwork locations are on the last page.)

Aztec, Mexico, Chalchiuhtlicue, c. 1200-1521

What word or words would you use to describe Chalchiuhtlicue?

The Aztec Empire inhabited the southern area of Mexico at the time the Spanish arrived to conquer and colonize the region in 1519. This sculpture is thought to be either Chalchiuhtlicue, the goddess of water, or the corn goddess Chicomecoatl. Like Chalchiuhtlicue, she wears a wide headband with large tassels. However, her pose, standing with her hands extended, is typical of Chicomecoatl. This stone sculpture would have been the focal point of an Aztec shrine.

Chimu, Peru, Ear Spools, c. 1150-1450

How do you imagine it would have felt to wear these?

Many ancient Andean societies, including the Chimu, believed their ruler was a living representative of the gods. A Chimu ruler once wore these decorated gold ear spools to broadcast his status and power to those he ruled. While gold was not valued as monetary currency by the Chimu, its symbolic connection to the sun gave it powerful spiritual currency—especially when made into jewelry. On the spools, we see a ruler in a feathered headdress being carried by two well-dressed monkey-attendants. The Chimu rulers were conquered by the Inca Empire, which in turn fell to Spanish invaders in 1532. In 1821, Peru was liberated from Spain by José de San Martín and his army.

Unknown sculptor, Spain, Crucifixion, c. 1180

What emotions are expressed in this scene?

Jesus is shown dead on the cross while his mother, Mary, and the Evangelist Saint John mourn below. This Crucifixion was made by an unknown sculptor in the Romanesque period, when many Catholics traveled on holy pilgrimages. People originally viewed this Crucifixion above while entering a church and felt the emotional power communicated through the contorted body of Christ and mournful figures. The style of carving resembles other sculptures found in northern Spain, along the still-active pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, where the remains of the apostle St. James the Great are located.
Luis de Morales (called El Divino),
Man of Sorrows, c. 1560

How does the figure of Christ here compare with the figure of Christ in the Crucifixion sculpture?

Luis de Morales was a gifted Spanish artist of the 16th century known for painting emotional religious scenes. He was called “El Divino” for his skill in giving visual form to spirituality. In this painting, Jesus sits and contemplates the instruments of his torture and death: the column to which he was tied during the Flagellation and the cross that he carried and to which he was nailed. Luis de Morales shows Christ removed from those events, meditating on the objects that had inflicted his pain. In this way, Christ serves as a model and mirror image for the devout viewer.

Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes,
Self-Portrait with Dr. Arrieta, 1820

Take a close look at this painting. How does Goya show us he is very sick?

In 1819, Goya fell seriously ill and his doctor, Eugenio García Arrieta, nursed him back to health. On recovering, Goya presented Arrieta with this painting. The inscription at the bottom reads “Goya gives thanks to his friend Arrieta for the expert care with which he saved his life from an acute and dangerous illness which he suffered at the close of the year 1819 when he was seventy-three years old.” This inscription gives the canvas the look of an ex-voto, a type of religious painting still popular in Spain, which expresses gratitude for deliverance from a crisis.

Joaquin Sorolla y Bastida, Before the Bullfight, c. 1900

What is going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that?

Sorolla loved to paint scenes from his native town of Valencia, Spain. Here, he chose to paint a bullfight, but did so in a surprising way. Instead of the dangerous action, he shows us the anxious, hushed tension of the bullfighters and other participants before the spectacle. He used light to add to the drama, contrasting the shaded foreground with the light-filled arena. Peeking into the arena, you can see the cheering crowds awaiting the thrills of the bullfight.
Salvador Dalí, Aphrodisiac Telephone, 1938

Imagine how it would feel, holding the lobster receiver in your hand. How does it compare to our phones today?

Here is the ultimate conversation piece! Salvador Dalí was a Spanish Surrealist artist. Surrealist artists embrace the irrational, sometimes imaginatively transforming common household items. Dalí created this modified telephone in association with the British interior designer Syrie Maugham, for the home of their patron, Edward James. In all, eleven telephones were modified for the home. Some telephones were altered with white lobsters, while others were with red lobsters. The insides of the plaster lobsters were hollowed out to fit on to the receivers, with a hole made for the telephone cords.

Pablo Picasso, Baboon and Young, 1951

What are some unusual details you notice?

The Spanish artist Pablo Picasso was always innovative, regardless of the medium in which he worked. As a sculptor, Picasso pioneered the technique of assemblage, constructing works of “found” objects. Here the artist used toy automobiles, a storage jar, and a car spring to create a playful image of parenthood. The two metal cars, undersides together, are the baboon’s head; the round earthenware pot, with its high handles, makes up the torso and shoulders; and the curving steel spring forms the backbone and long tail. The rest of the body and the figure of the baby were modeled from clay, and the whole piece was cast in bronze.

Errol Ortiz, Astronaut Targets, 1965

What kind of shapes and colors do you see repeated throughout the painting?

Errol Ortiz is a Latino artist who grew up in Chicago. His work is influenced by popular culture, and he expresses his ideas with bright bold colors. When he was young, Ortiz was fascinated by Chicago’s Riverview Amusement Park, with its flashing multicolored lights, large cut-out painted figures, fun houses, and carnival games. For this dynamic painting, Ortiz was inspired by the space race of the 1960s, painting two astronauts as if they were a target game at the amusement park. Ortiz thought of the circle designs on their shoulders as planets spinning in orbit.