

100 years ago, two extraordinary women left their mark on the history of Madrid, not because of their titles or their wealth, but because of the generosity with which they devoted their fortune to those most in need. Carlota de Santamarca y Donato, Countess of Santamarca and Duchess of Nájera, devoted her immense inheritance to founding an orphanage for orphaned children, which opened its doors in 1928. Three years earlier, Antonia González y Pérez had established another orphanage to shelter and educate two hundred destitute girls, which was inaugurated in 1926. This exhibition brings together the highlights of the extraordinary art collection bequeathed by both founders, including the complete series of Francisco de Goya's six '*Children's Games*', along with notable works from the Flemish, Italian, and Spanish schools. It offers an exceptional visual testimony to 19th-century Madrid and the early decades of the 20th century, while also bearing witness to the generosity of two extraordinary women who dedicated their artistic and human legacy to the education and care of those most in need.

Carlota de Santamarca y Donato: The Duchess and Her collection

Carlota de Santamarca y Donato was born in Madrid in 1849. She was the only daughter of Bartolomé Eladio de Santamarca, a banker and the first Papal Count of Santamarca, a title that Queen Isabella II converted into a royal title in 1864. It was her father who began the family art collection, gathering works from the Spanish, Flemish, and Italian schools. In 1870 Carlota married Juan de Zavala y Guzmán, a military officer who held the titles of Marquis of Sierra-Bullones and Duke of Nájera. Upon the death of her father in 1874, she inherited the title, the fortune, and the collection, which she herself expanded with new acquisitions. The series *Children's Games* by Francisco de Goya was added to the Santamarca collection by the Duke of Nájera, as attested by a label on the reverse of each piece.

Living in the family palace on Alcalá Street, Carlota was a prominent figure in Madrid society during the Restoration, renowned for her charitable work. On September 7, 1907, she executed a holographic will bequeathing her entire estate, valued at around twenty million pesetas, to the creation of an orphanage for poor orphaned children in Madrid, stipulating that the collection of paintings remain permanently attached to the institution. She died on January 17, 1914, at the age of 64. The following day, the press reported on a will that astonished the city: that of a great lady who had kept nothing for herself.

The Santamarca Foundation: From will to School

Carlota de Santamarca's wishes were not fulfilled until fourteen years later, delayed by legal disputes with a relative, the sale of the houses on Alcalá Street to Banco de

España in 1923, and the search for suitable land in northern Madrid area. The project was commissioned in 1918 to architect Manuel Ortiz de Villajos, and construction began in June 1921 on the grounds of Las Cuarenta Fanegas, between the Prosperidad Neighbourhood and Ciudad Lineal. The Neo-Gothic building, with a capacity for two hundred children, was inaugurated on April 7, 1928. The religious order the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul took over its management, remaining in charge for seventy-six years.

From its opening, the Santamarca Asylum Foundation carried out intensive educational and welfare work, caring for more than two hundred children of both sexes and offering vocational workshops and general education. The collection of paintings was installed in the building and during the Civil War was transferred to the Prado Museum and the National Archaeological Museum for protection, before being returned in its entirety at the end of the conflict. Over the decades, the institution evolved from an orphanage into a state-subsidised educational centre until its integration, in 2007, into the foundation that today brings together the two historic institutions.

Antonia González y Pérez: Discreet Philanthropy

Antonia González y Pérez was born in Madrid in 1852. She married Ramón Palláres y Prats, a native of Morella (Castellón), who built up a considerable fortune through the textile trade and by transforming the Matheu Thermal Baths in Alhama de Aragón into one of the most important spa establishments in Spain. The couple had no children. Ramón Pallarés died in June 1918, leaving Antonia as the sole heir to all his assets.

Unlike Carlota de Santamarca, Antonia González left no trace in the society columns. She was described as a woman of ‘unblemished virtues, charitable sentiments and an affable manner’. In 1922, she secretly executed a sealed will bequeathing almost all her assets—more than fifteen million pesetas—to the creation of an orphanage for two hundred orphaned girls in Madrid. She appointed the priest Julián Roldán Luis as sole executor, granting him broad powers to carry out her wishes. She died on June 5, 1925, without having seen the building completed, even though construction was already underway in the northern Madrid area.

The San Ramón and San Antonio Orphanage Foundation: An Institution for the Girls of Madrid

The San Ramón and San Antonio Orphanage Foundation was established on September 9, 1925, by the executor of Antonia González’s will. The name honoured the first names of both spouses: Ramón and Antonia. The building, designed by the architect Leopoldo Ulled on the Cuarenta Fanegas site, was inaugurated on June 13, 1926, in the presence of King Alfonso XIII and Queen Victoria Eugenia, by which time the orphanage was

already home to its first fifty residents. From 1927 onwards, its management was entrusted to the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Guardian Angels, founded by the blessed Rafaela Ybarra, which administered the institution until 1992.

The institution focused its work on the holistic development of the girls through primary education, vocational training—sewing, embroidery, dressmaking—and domestic education, with the aim of ensuring that each resident could support herself upon leaving the centre. The income from their work was deposited into a savings account that was handed over to them when they left the institution. Over the decades, like the Santamarca Asylum, it evolved into state-subsidised educational centre until its integration, in 2007, into the foundation that now brings together both historic institutions.

A shared legacy: The Schools, Today

In December 2007, the boards of trustees of the Santamarca Foundation and the San Ramón and San Antonio Foundation approved their merger, which was formally established on August 5, 2008. The new non-profit organisation assumed ownership of the two state-subsidised schools, and the two children's residences created almost a century earlier in the northern Madrid area, maintaining the founding objective of both institutions: the care and education of children with special needs, particularly those lacking financial means or a stable family environment.

Today, the Santamarca, San Ramón and San Antonio residences and schools continue their work in the same historic buildings in the Prosperidad Neighbourhood, offering state-subsidised education from pre-school through to Bachillerato (upper secondary education) and Formación Profesional (vocational training), with a firm commitment to inclusion and diversity. The art collection bequeathed by Carlota de Santamarca, preserved for almost a century at the Santamarca school, is today one of the most significant collections of old master paintings in private hands in Madrid. Its public dissemination—of which this exhibition is an example—forms part of the institution's commitment to the society from which it arose.

***Children's Games* by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes**

The Santamarca Collection preserves a series of paintings known as *Children's Games*, painted by Francisco de Goya y Lucientes around 1785-1786. This is the most complete known series, comprising six paintings.

The paintings became part of the Santamarca collection through the Duke of Nájera, husband of the Countess of Santamarca, as attested by a paper label affixed to the

reverse of each work, which reads: 'ES PROPIEDAD DEL EXMO. SR. GRAL. DUQUE DE NÁJERA' ('property of His Excellency General Duke of Nájera').

Although they were once studied as possible sketches for tapestry cartoons, these small scenes are now considered independent works forming a coherent series—*Boys Playing at Soldiers*, *Boys Playing Bullfighting*, *Boys Fighting and Playing on a Seesaw*, *Boys Playing Leapfrog*, *Boys Fighting over Chestnuts* and *Boys Searching for Birds' Nest in the Ruins*.

The six scenes depict children from working-class and humble families immersed in action and movement, exercising a wide range of skills and physical abilities—jumping, climbing, bullfighting— as well as engaging in rough and physical play: fighting. They convey the unrestrained energy and vitality of childhood. These are scenes of play, without material cost, rooted in custom and in the children's imagination. The figures range in age from toddlers of two or three years old to boys of twelve or thirteen, already on the threshold of adolescence. These works were most likely painted by Francisco de Goya for sale.