

# My favourite painting Nicky Philipps

## *El Jaleo* by John Singer Sargent



*El Jaleo*, 1882, by John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), 93in by 138½in, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, USA



Nicky Philipps is a portrait painter whose new portrait of The Queen is on show at Fine Art Commissions Ltd, Duke Street, St James's, London SW1, along with an exhibition of her work, until June 28

‘I saw this picture while in Boston painting a judge. It is huge, and fabulous, and wonderfully atmospheric. I love the romance of all things Spanish anyway, and as a painting, it is just incredibly extravagant.’

### Art critic John McEwen comments on *El Jaleo*

IN 1874, the young Sargent settled in Paris, where he enrolled at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and entered the *atelier* of the painter Carolus-Duran. Carolus-Duran taught a spontaneous, *au premier coup*, technique, citing Velázquez as the supreme exemplar, the old master revered by the Impressionist avant-garde.

Sargent duly travelled to Spain with two artist companions, principally to copy the Prado's Velázquez masterpieces. The trio then travelled on horseback through Andalusia, where Sargent was enthralled by flamenco (from the Provençal, ‘flaming’), the wild, dancer-led, gypsy music of the south.

*El Jaleo* is a word for the general rhythmic hubbub that accompanies a flamenco performance. The huge picture was the sensation of the 1882 Paris Salon, along with Manet's *A Bar*

at the *Folies-Bergère* (Courtauld Institute). Manet, a leading populariser of Velázquez and the Spanish school, was much admired by Sargent. It has been suggested that the dancer's refreshing orange on the empty chair is an artistic doffing of the cap to the older artist, who liked to include a still-life vignette.

To paint a despised social group such as gypsies on such a grand scale, and in the high style of such regal portraitists as Velázquez and Goya, was, in itself, a challenge to convention, in keeping with the defiant flamboyance of the subject.

The picture was bought from the Salon exhibition by a marital relation of Mrs Gardner. She eventually prised it out of him by building a Spanish Cloister in her art-palace home specifically to house it, where it still hangs.