

Golden Triangle of Art

Three museums housing some of Europe's most precious masterpieces.



An art lovers Bermuda Triangle.

Situated in Central Madrid, a short distance from the winding cobbled streets and charming bars of Barrio Huertas, are three of the greatest museums of art in the world; and they're all within a ten minute walk from each other.

Art aficionados, no matter what their cultural, stylistic or philosophical leanings, would be downright silly to visit Madrid without wandering through the hallowed halls of at least one of these fabulous repositories.

Due to their proximity, Museo Nacional Del Prado, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia and Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum are known as the Golden Triangle of Art. Together they cover the gamut of European artistic output from the Ancient Greeks to the present. Beautifully rendered worlds, myths, religions, events and depictions of daily life provide the most pleasurable kind of history lesson, and should it all prove overwhelming, the soothing lawns and gardens of Parque del Retiro and bars of Huertas are only a short walk away.

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Museo Nacional Del Prado

This is the most impressive of them all. Situated in an imposing neo-classical building constructed during the reign of Carlos III, El Prado is a museum of pre-20th century paintings, sculptures, sketches and prints from all over Europe. The museum is in fact so big, that attempting to take it all in at once could possibly damage your health. If you're staying a few days in Madrid, we recommend taking in a few digestible portions a day: mixing art with a tasca crawl in barrio La Latina or an exploration of contemporary subcultures in the barrios of Malasaña and Chueca.

Here, the diversity of art is captivating with masterpieces hailing from various origins –Spanish, Flemish, German, French, Dutch, and Italian. In addition, feast your eyes upon the decorative paintings, sculptures, sketches and prints; all of which are further subdivided by historic periods for which specific styles, techniques, beliefs and forms of artistic patronage (the brush strokes of aesthetic finance) were predominant.

Rippled marble flesh in the Hellenistic and Roman sculpture rooms will arouse the feminine and intimidate the masculine, particularly an AD 450 Hercules by Miron. Flemish painters, like Jan Bruegel the Elder, will have you lost in a plethora of comedic visual anecdotes in canvasses depicting vast communal gatherings. Depths of dark and light will delight in the paintings of French artist, Claudio de Lorena. And, as you are in Spain, the paintings of the Spanish Romantic master of the brush, Francisco José Goya, are a must; his darker subject matter, depicting realms of pleasure and nightmare in the series of paintings known as Fantasy and Invention, certain to leave an impression.

Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia

Not far away, impressive glass prism elevators glide smoothly up and down the exterior of an 18th Century hospital that has been converted into the most important storehouse of modern Spanish art in the world.

International artists are certainly represented here, but Spanish artists rule the roost, especially the superb collections of two of Spain's greatest 20th Century artists, Salvador Dali and Pablo Picasso. Picasso's universally admired *Guernica* can be witnessed in all its glory, along with masterpieces by Dali, like the magical *Enigma Sin Fin*.

Lesser-known Spaniards, like Cubist Juan Gris, surprise the less educated: his playful perspectives twisting established views, exciting and rendering accessible to consciousness synapses capable of less familiar realms of perception. Works by Gris have sold for up to 28.6 million.

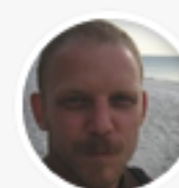
International artists represented include the bleak, but profoundly moving Francis Bacon.

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Heinrich, Baron Thyssen-Bornemisza de Kászon began collecting the works that colour the walls of Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in the 1920's. The Baron took advantage of less fortunate millionaires during the depression, amassing a bevy of exquisite European works. Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza, his son, continued to expand the collection, making it one of the greatest private collections in the world.

Now open to the public, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza nicely fills in the historic gaps left by the other two museums. Impressionists, Expressionists, plus collections of international modern art satisfy those unsatisfied with the scope of Reina Sofia's offerings, while old world greats of the English, German and Dutch schools supplement Prado's many wonders.

And best of all, when you go to sleep after a day, or days, spent exploring these fabulous art museums, your dreams will be your very own art form.



Ben Connor

Travel Writer | [Sydney, Australia](#)

Ben has travelled extensively through the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia. His features and reviews have appeared in publications and websites in the UK and Australia, including Rough Guides (Penguin Group, London, UK), The List (Edinburgh, Scotland), Tiger Beer's UK website, Australian Traveller, OUTthere and Cruise Passenger.

