

Private donations and the collecting legacy of Luis Simarro to the heritage of Complutense University of Madrid

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Abstract

One of the most important private donations in the Complutense University of Madrid is Luis Simarro's legacy. The Simarro Foundation was formed in 1927 with a collection of paintings by Simarro's friends such as Sorolla, Berruete, Madrazo and prints by Dürer and Goya. In 1945 this legacy became part of the art collection of the General Foundation of Complutense University. Now its current location in the Faculty of Psychology does not fulfill all the requirements about conservation because it is not guarded by specialised staff.

The management of university collections strongly depends on the general budget and Unidad Técnica de Cultura is working in order to achieve a balance between human and material resources.

Complutense University of Madrid museums and collections

Museums and collections that round off the heritage (historic, artistic and scientific-technical) of the UCM came up from teaching and research. These include an important artistic legacy that was collected by Cisneros in 1499. This artistic legacy was formed of important collections of artistic works, scientific and technical instruments and ethnographic materials.

Many of the museums and collections at the Complutense University of Madrid have been formed by private donations. Typical donors are usually university teachers or people who want to leave their interesting legacy in a research atmosphere and preservation.

There are two types of private donations in the Complutense University: donations that come from private individuals and donations of pieces that come from other collections or museums. The latest private donation that Complutense University has received is an important collection of optics from which Optics Museum has been created. Histology Museum, Museum of Dentistry, Veterinary Museum, Museum of Entomology and José María Prieto Collection of Japanese art are museums that were created from private donations.

The Complutense University of Madrid has a lot of cultural and natural heritage that is enclosed in their university departments. This heritage is undervalued but it could be used to increase university prestige and to access to research and training of students.

The Complutense University of Madrid has 14 museums and 14 university collections but they have little citizen impact.

The main problem that Complutense collections and museums are facing is the little attention from university governments. The staff of the Unidad Técnica de Cultura and the heads of museums and collections split their activities between university teaching and administrative work. They also face the loss-making training in conservation and museology and the university financial resources.

Museums and university collections like Luis Simarro's legacy are complied with the Spanish laws¹, autonomous regions² and university³ whose functions are:

¹ Ley 16/1985, de 25 de junio. Ley del Patrimonio Histórico Español.

² Ley 9/1999, de 9 abril 1999. Ley de Museos de la Comunidad de Madrid, Ley 10/1998, de 9 julio. Ley del Patrimonio Histórico de la Comunidad de Madrid.

³ Reglamento de Museos y Colecciones del Patrimonio Histórico de la UCM, aprobado en el Consejo de Gobierno de la UCM del día 22 de Julio de 2009. portal.ucm.es/web/museos/normativa (accessed June 2, 2012).

- Define organization and operation guidelines for museums and collections
- Promote awareness of heritage
- Make reports on bequests, inheritances, legacies, acquisitions
- Authorize the organization of temporary exhibitions

In the case of the Complutense University of Madrid the legal laws that control its museums and collections do not require to have a number of technicians which manage the Unidad Técnica de Cultura. There currently works three specialized government employee and three scholars. There also are six government employee but they have not any training in conservation or museology so they cannot contribute to the management of university heritage. The lack of qualified staff and the small budget are two big obstacles that Unidad Técnica de Cultura should save.

Luis Simarro: professor, psychologist and art collector

Short biography of Luis Simarro (Rome 1851–Madrid 1921)

Luis Simarro Lacabra was born in Rome in the year 1851. His father, Ramón Simarro Oltra, who was an artist, was awarded a grant for the development of a papal portrait in this city. Unfortunately, Ramón caught tuberculosis (TB) and he was thirty three years old when he died. His wife, María Lacabra, was not able to put up with her husband passing and she took her own life (LÓPEZ 2007).

Luis was only three years old when he returned to Spain and was welcomed by his uncle. He put him in touch with artists such as Madrazo brothers, whose relationship became very narrow. Years later he maintained good relationship also with Emilio Sala Francés and Joaquín Sorolla and during his studies in the high school, he had a great relationship with Vicente Boix, who strongly influenced young Simarro.

Luis studied medicine in Valencia University and he graduated in Madrid in 1875, at time in which discussions were held in the Ateneo of Madrid over the inheritance of Krausism. *Revista contemporáneo*, directed by J. del Perojo, pointed at positivism as being the most audacious and frightful of all potential heirs. At this time, a young and newly arrived man transformed the conditions of the discussion, which no longer assessed the danger that positivism might pose to Hegelians, Krausians and spiritualist (CARPINTERO 2003).

Luis Simarro started working at the Museum of Anthropology and then he got a position as director of the mental hospital of Santa Isabel in Leganés, Madrid. However, he resigned in 1879 because of conflicts with the clergy.

Simarro started to collaborate in the Ateneo as a member of the board of directors and as a teacher. He also taught at the Institución Libre de Enseñanza. It was founded in 1876 by a group of professors (Francisco Giner de los Ríos, Gumersindo de Azcárate and Nicolás Salmerón) (FUNDACIÓN GINER DE LOS RÍOS 2011). All of them were separated from the university for defending the freedom of chair and they refused to fit the education to the official dogmas: religion, politics or moral doctrines (CARPINTERO 2002).

In 1880 he travelled to Paris to study the new method of Golgi's dye and many years later Luis Simarro became Santiago Ramón y Cajal teacher (who was awarded the Nobel Psychology and Medicine Prize in 1906 and he shared this award with Camilo Golgi).

In 1902 Luis Simarro took possession of the chair of experimental psychology.

"The above mentioned chair of Experimental Psychology belonged to the School of Sciences, and it had to offer a course of psychology for graduated students coming from various faculties, such as the Schools of Medicine, Sciences and Philosophy" (CARPINTERO 2002).

There are many testimonies of the Simarro's work as a teacher. He used to remain long time with his pupils, in his house or in class, he had a long chat with them. Because of this, his research activity was reduced.

One of Simarro's students, J. V. Viqueira, gives us this interesting insight: "He was a great teacher, inside and outside the classroom. The students met him out of the class very often and, during long conversations, in which all the topics of human knowledge might be discussed, in a true philosophical spirit, all of us found all kinds of suggestions and ideas" (CARPINTERO 2003).

Simarro's art collection and the Complutense University of Madrid

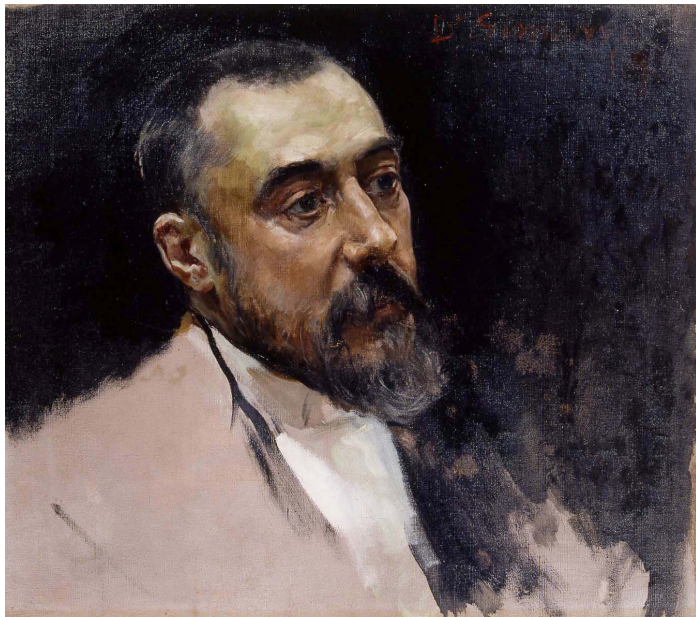


Fig. 1 - Luis Simarro by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida. Oil on canvas, 46 x 53 cm © Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Along his life, Luis Simarro accumulated an important collection: drawings of his father, own drawings, and friends' gifts. After his death he left the Complutense University this valuable collection and a large sum of money. Those goods allowed it to create a foundation that stimulated the psychological research, which was the main discipline of Simarro's life.

The decision of donating an important collection of art and giving money helped to create a laboratory of science psychology and some other improvements and facilities. Luis Simarro heritage and the General Foundation of the Complutense University were essential to create the Faculty of Psychology in Somosaguas Campus,

where there is now a great part of Simarro's donation.

In 1997 started a project in order to make an inventory of the Simarro's legacy. It was a very laborious work because of the limited technological resources. The count was finished in 2003 but at this time many other projects of Unidad Técnica de Cultura of Complutense University were opened. This fact caused that Simarro's Legacy comparison could not be finished completely.

During 2011, university staff made an exhaustive comparison and check of the information about the previously held material and some outstanding mistakes were discovered:

- Misprints in the last comparison without inventory number;
- Location changes;
- Works in unknown place.

After observing those problems, resolution phase was started:

- To correct and to update the check of the Legacy by defining and relating the inventory numbers, work and title.
- To update the new locations.
- To investigate the places of the unfounded works: other locations, in conservation departments, in exhibitions.

The check should be done work by work, trying to confirm and comparing its location and number of inventory.

Simarro's legacy comprises more than one thousand pieces, many of them with a high artistic value and they are very requested for temporary exhibitions outside Complutense University. The most demanded pieces are Sorolla's and Sala Francés paintings. Scientific tools and histological preparation slides are also very demanded because Simarro was working for scientific shows.

If the Unidad Técnica de Cultura wants to lend the works for temporary exhibitions it is necessary to have an updated information about conservation status, location and availability. Simarro's Legacy is extraordinarily extensive and it should be checked annually at least.

Conservation proposals and recommendations of Simarro's legacy

Simarro's legacy comprises 1,200 pieces that are preserved in the Library of Psychology Faculty. All of them are graphic documents but also we find a great deal of supports made of cellulose. In this collection are conserved photographs, watercolors, ink, ballpoint pen, pencil and charcoal – lots of different techniques that suffer different ageing.

In addition, not all works have been preserved in the same way: some of them are restored and framed and others are placed in mat boards. Finally, we can find pieces that have not any reinforcement.

However, the most valuable and important works (about 30) are kept in directors offices because the university does not have a suitable museum to hold them. For example, some drawings made by Sorolla participate in temporary exhibitions all around Spain and they are subjected to many movements.

Conservation status is good despite of having storage areas that are necessary to improve and some works should not participate so often in exhibitions.



Fig. 2 - Drawings are accumulated in folders inside the drawing file cabinet.

Diagnosis

Works of art that are kept in offices are subjected to fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity as well as constant lighting changes. However, despite this alarming situation, most of them are in good conditions and only few paintings had knocks or the canvas is loose due to lack of maintenance and care.

Drawings, sketches, engravings, watercolors that are stored in the Library of Psychology Faculty have alterations such as oxidation of the cellulose support, *lepisma saccharina* attack, inks erosion, impurities, tears, stains, oil and grease, all of them caused by improper handling.

Proposals for conservation

The management of university collections strongly depends on the general budget. So the choice between spreading and conserving the works is not clear. Nowadays the legacy has a wide exhibition activity in Spain, but the action of spreading implies risks during transportation and exhibition.

Most of Simarro's drawings (about 1,200 works) are preserved in the library of Psychology Faculty without conservation control. We created a conservation project not exceptionally novel or innovative but it was so simple and effective because it fitted with limited budget and storage conditions that artworks needed.

1. Works stored in the library of Psychology Faculty

Some of the works are framed and in other cases they are simply protected with acid free tissue that is too small.

In other cases, some works are introduced in conservation folders that are deformed by weight.

It is proposed to maintain the drawing file cabinet following the division into folders that Simarro did. To prevent slippage of the folders on the surface of the drawing file cabinet is recommended to make Plastazote⁴ barriers (TACON 2008a).

We propose a division of the legacy in five groups depending on technique and packaging of works:

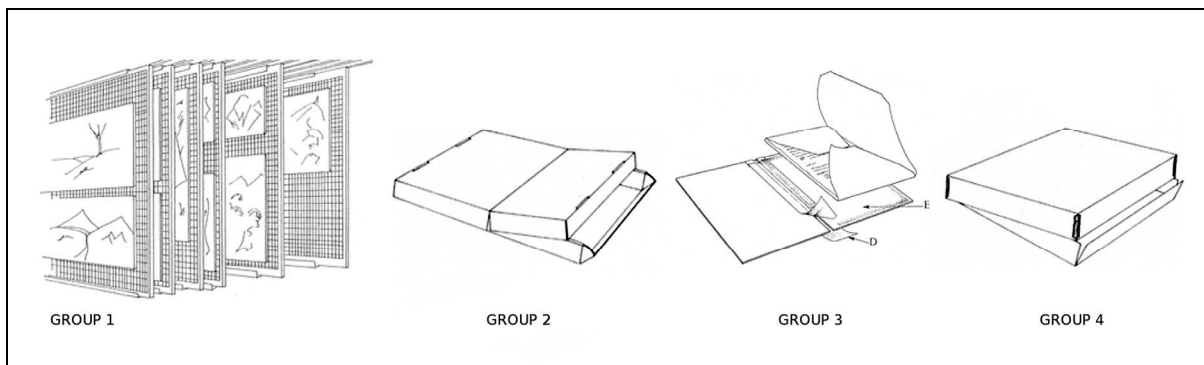


Fig. 3 - Group 1 (sliding screen), Group 2 (conservation boxes), Group 3 (conservation folders), Group 4 (photographs conservation boxes) © Government of Canada, 1993–1996

Group 1: Framed works

It would be advisable to place these pieces in a vertical position on the wall, for example, using a sliding screen.

Sliding screens are a very common storage method for paintings. Paintings can be suspended from the screens by appropriate hooks or other hardware. Such systems use floor space economically, and are efficient for examination and retrieval purposes (VERGARA 2002).

Screens are made of perforated metal or rigid wire mesh supported on a metal or wooden frame. Each screen is attached to an independent overhead and floor track that allows it to be pulled out, thus giving easy access to the paintings. Installing extra guides on the upper track will minimize swaying

⁴ Plastazote foam is a closed cell cross-linked polyethylene foam available in a wide range of polymer combinations. These combinations allow the material to exhibit different characteristics such as increased rigidity, improved temperature resistance and improved moulding ability. Lightweight, tough, flexible, moisture resistant, C.F.C. & H.C.F.C. free, that is easily fabricated, chemically inert and resistant to oils, solvents, dilute acids, UV light etc. Plastazote is available in a wide range of colours and used in many applications.

and jarring. The suspended racks can be operated easily, and the screens can be slowed and stopped manually. Two people are normally required to remove paintings from the rack (CCI 1995).

Group 2: Graphic document stored in folders

It is important to place these pieces in a horizontal position inside the drawing file cabinet and protect them with lining free unbuffered Japanese paper⁵. After this, we propose to introduce/get in works in archival boxes made of corrugated mat board⁶ with 6mm thickness (TACÓN 2008b).

All boxes would be identified with acid-free laser labels for file folders (Perma Seal labels⁷) and permanent pen (Pigma Micron Pen⁸), the best way to prevent reagents that could damage adjacent documents.

Group 3: Graphic documents mounted in mat board

It would be advisable placing these documents in a horizontal position inside the drawing file cabinet and protect them with unbuffered Japanese paper and long-fibred and mounted in conservation boards (ROTAECHE 2008). To prevent the interleaving sheets from moving, it is necessary to fit them inside the storage container. Place one sheet between each work.

Group 4: Photographs stored in folders

It is important to place these documents in an horizontal position inside the drawing file cabinet. Due to the different paper sizes we propose to envelop them in Silversafe Photostore⁹ and store them in archival boxes (MACCLEARLY & CRESPO 1997).

Group 5: Original folders of Simarro

It is recommended these be wrapped with long-fibred unbuffered Japanese paper and stored in individual cases with Polyfelt¹⁰ and a cotton tape.

2. Works kept in offices

Works of art that are hanging in offices should be repositioned in relation to accidental damage from knocking (CCI 1993):

- Avoid hanging close to shelves, furniture or where people can knock it.
- Avoid hanging behind doors, or in busy corridors where the painting may easily be damaged.
- Works should rest face out against a clear wall on a padded surface.

⁵ High quality paper, acid-free, handmade in Japan according to ancient processes, with natural fibres such as Gampi, Kozu, Mitsumata.

⁶ Corrugated mate board is made from 100% rag or lignin-free cellulose. Sometimes those labelled as 'museum board' or 'conservation board' are not of the highest quality. Alkaline buffered boards are not sufficient if the board contains wood pulp.

⁷ PEL Perma/Seal and Perma/Seal foil back laser labels provide archivists, conservators, curators and other collection care specialists with a variety of acid free label formats for their laser printers. All feature a non-yellowing, pressure sensitive acrylic adhesive. The foil back version provides an extra barrier between the acid-free paper and the adhesive to prevent bleed through and to enhance the ability of the label to adhere to rounded or other irregularly shaped items.

⁸ Pigma Micron pens are acid-free and archival, making them ideal for paper crafts, journals, illustration, crafts, or any application requiring precision and permanence. Unlike dye-based ink found in most pens and markers, Pigma ink will not feather or bleed, even through the thinnest paper. Pigma ink is derived from a single pigment to ensure color consistency, and is fade proof against sunlight or UV light. Pigma inks will not clog or dry out like most mechanical pens.

⁹ This paper is free from chlorines, sulphates and any other chemicals that could damage photographic materials. The paper is unbuffered, and smooth to prevent scratching, this paper is sized with a neutral curing dimer and passes the A.N.S.I. photographic test (PAT). Used for the storage of photographic materials and in the construction of envelopes, folders and interleaving. Also used for the storage of silver artifacts textiles particularly silk and wool where the presence of an alkaline buffer could be detrimental.

¹⁰ Polyfelt® is non woven geotextile, which made from continuous filament of 100% UV stabilized polypropylene with bonding by needle punched (mechanically bonded). They are characterized by a high resistance to installation damage, high water permeability and increased UV resistance.

Storage environment

To retard the deterioration of artworks, it is important to control temperature, relative humidity, and light (CCI 1995):

- Do not store or display works of art in areas of potentially high humidity or water leakage.
- Relative humidity (RH) over 60% accelerates chemical and biological deterioration. It also promotes the distortion of paper. Therefore, the recommended RH level for general paper collections is below 50%.
- Avoid areas where temperature and humidity fluctuate, or where there is poor air circulation.
- A low temperature in the storage area slows the rate of deterioration of paper and increases the lifespan of paper. However, where human comfort and cost are a consideration, the maximum acceptable temperature is 21^o C.
- Do not hang artworks over or under radiators, heating and cooling vents, active fireplaces, humidifiers, and vaporizers.
- Try to avoid direct and excessive daylight (light damage is cumulative and irreversible). Exposure to both natural and artificial light can cause photochemical deterioration of paper and of images on paper. This may result in pigments and dyes fading, and in the paper substrate discoloring. Filter out damaging ultraviolet rays present in sunlight and in fluorescent lights. Turn off lights in storage areas when the areas are not in use. In areas where paper artifacts are exposed to light, the ultraviolet component should not exceed 75 microwatts/lumen. Block light from windows with blinds or drapes. If windows cannot be blocked, use ultraviolet filtering material.
- Whether in storage or on display, it is necessary to reduce the amount of light and to restrict the exposure time for paper artifacts. The recommended level of illumination for sensitive materials, such as watercolors, colored prints, and works on poor-quality paper, is 50 lux or as low as possible. A maximum level of 150 lux is recommended for works without light-sensitive materials, such as stable carbon inks on good-quality paper.

Conclusions

Thanks to private donations like Simarro's legacy the heritage of a public university is enriched and it allows the public to know about university museums and collections. However, Unidad Tecnica de Cultura and Complutense University of Madrid should take some simple steps to promote circulation and preservation:

- It should take down the artworks from offices and departments and make easier their exhibitions in places fit for purpose.
- It is necessary to guarantee a good conservation statement of the most valuable works.
- If the university wants to make a widespread coverage about its works of art it should take care of them. For example, trying to get a good storage environment and to avoid direct and excessive daylight.
- It would be valuable that Unidad Tecnica de Cultura and university staff be in contact giving a report, for example, detailing works of art location changes or accidents.
- It is important to educate university staff showing them how to put into practice some conservation guidelines.
- Unidad Tecnica de Cultura should encourage staff technical knowledge and to assign skilled and specialized personnel to specific tasks.
- It would be very interesting if university government is aware of the great and valuable heritage that Unidad Tecnica de Cultura and other university staff take care. Therefore, the budget may be increased and a better maintenance of the art works could be possible.

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