

**Anthony**  
**Whishaw RA**  
**With**  
**Spain**  
**in**  
**Mind**

**RA**



**3**  
Bullfight with Falling Picador  
1951–52  
Oil on canvas  
RA Collection

### With Spain in Mind

This display spans nearly seventy years and explores the influence and importance not only of Spanish artists but also of Spain's culture and landscape in Anthony Whishaw's work. Whishaw spent most of his first nine years in Brazil and this may have contributed to him feeling familiar with Hispanic culture and comfortable with its people. His first visit to Spain took place in 1951 and he lived there in 1955–56. He returned frequently for long and short stays, visiting Barcelona, Madrid, Ibiza, Andalusia and specifically the area around Cadiz where he rented a large studio.

Travelling around the countryside on his Lambretta scooter, Whishaw drew hilltop villages, went to bullfights and got to know many local people. He discovered Spain's master painters, among them Velázquez, Zurbarán, Goya and Picasso.

The earliest work here, *Bullfight with Falling Picador*, **3** dates from Whishaw's first visit to Spain, but memories and recollections of the country permeate his work through the decades, with depictions of dusty landscapes, *pueblos* or villages as well as the influence of Velázquez's masterpiece *Las Meninas* (1656; Museo del Prado, Madrid) which is seen in many of his paintings and drawings.



**11**  
Interior Variations II  
1994–2014  
Acrylic and collage on canvas

### Working practice

Just as Spain weaves its way through Whishaw's work, so the ebb and flow of his practice gives his art a non-linear aspect. He continues to add to and alter paintings over decades as he explores different subjects and various visual languages. His is a process of discovery in which works evolve slowly, with the artist continually questioning and experimenting until finally a work is ready to leave the studio. *Interior Variations II*, **11** for instance, has been revisited over a twenty-year period.

In the early 1970s Whishaw's technique underwent a radical change when he stopped using oil paint and started working with acrylic. Its rapid drying quality and adherence to different materials suited his desire to experiment and make quick changes. He could also more easily incorporate collage, using paper, canvas, soil and strips of wood, or create raised areas with Tetrion, a fast-drying filler. All these advances allowed Whishaw a freedom to blur lines between illusion and the physicality of objects in the same way that his paintings move between abstraction and the figurative.

**At the edge of perception**  
*Still Night Sea with Gibraltar in Mind*, **1** begun in 1975, is typical of Whishaw's early work in acrylic, in which washes of deep colour evoke the Mediterranean Sea at night. Although there is no hint of perspective, his building up of horizontal layers suggests spatial recession. The famous Rock of Gibraltar is indicated by a half-circle shape echoed in several bands of colour, as well as by the grey scumbled paint surface that suggests the texture of the rock itself. It is typical of Whishaw's approach that the sea and the rock are evoked by both texture and colour and that the image lingers on at the edge of the perception of a real seascape.



**1**  
 Still Night Sea with Gibraltar in Mind  
 1975–2011  
 Acrylic on canvas

**Influence of Cubism**  
 When he returned to England from his first visit to Spain, and while he was still studying at Chelsea School of Art, Whishaw began his dramatic *Bullfight with Falling Picador*. **3** The picador tumbles off his horse still holding its reins, as the terrified animal desperately tries to escape the charging bull. Whishaw was familiar with Picasso's *Guernica* (1937; Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid) and his depiction of the horse's head, silhouetted against the sky in the centre of the picture, owes an obvious debt to this celebrated work. The painting also reveals the beginnings of the influence of Cubism on Whishaw's work, which continues to this day.



**2**  
 Horse's Head  
 1954–55  
 Oil on canvas

Georges Braque and Picasso, in their Cubist work of the early twentieth century, developed the simultaneous use of multiple viewpoints in the same picture, creating fractured paintings and sculpture that appear both real and abstract and this is a clear characteristic of many of Whishaw's paintings from this time onward. Even in the more realistic *Horse's Head* (1954–55) **2** the delicate tones of blue and grey are overlaid with black lines which flatten the image.



**5**  
 We Are Still Looking at You Looking at Us  
 2014–17  
 Acrylic and collage on canvas

### Echoes of Goya

In 1955 Whishaw returned to Spain with his girlfriend and, later, wife, the sculptor Jean Gibson. They visited the Prado in Madrid, the first time that Whishaw saw Goya's Black Paintings, a group of fourteen personal and disturbing figures painted in 1819–23. Many of them have a long, narrow format as they were originally murals in the artist's home and were only later transferred to canvas. Whishaw's *We Are Still Looking at You Looking at Us* **5** carries echoes of Goya, with its black background and distorted heads emerging from the shadows. There is, however, a playfulness in the multiple-eyed women humorously acknowledging the interchange between the viewer and the painting.

Bright ribbons and specks of colour in the foreground enhance the liveliness of this picture.

Painted over fifty years later, *At the Chepstow Races*, **4** the influence of Goya is still evident in the long format of the picture and the depiction of an excited crowd emerging from the black background.

In 1957 Whishaw married Jean Gibson and bought a studio in Kensington that had once been the Animal Studio of London, a place for artists to study and draw living animals. This became a home and a shared workplace. In 1958 he began a part-time teaching career at Chelsea School of Art and St Martin's School of Art that was to continue until 1992, and he visited Spain annually for many years.



**9**  
 Matadero Municipal  
 1983–96  
 Acrylic and collage on canvas

### Reveries and Matadero Municipal

In 1988 he travelled to a village outside Madrid that had been deserted by all its inhabitants apart from one old woman who spent her days sitting outside her house or in the countryside. The image of this lonely woman lost in her memories inspired Whishaw to make a series of large paintings entitled *Reveries* from which two smaller *Reveries* **7,8** are included here.

On another visit to Spain Whishaw came across a disused slaughterhouse, and this became the inspiration for *Matadero Municipal*, **9** which won the Korn Ferry Carre Oban International Picture of the Year in 1996.

The long, narrow format was again borrowed from Goya's Black Paintings but the vibrant colouring of oranges and reds is Whishaw's evocation of blood and the earthy colours of Spain. Scattered across the work are the skull of a bull, cattle-branding symbols and letters from the painting's title, which means municipal slaughterhouse. The painting is further dissected by parallel lines both painted and collaged. These accents were to become an increasingly important part of Whishaw's art, creating a framework for the viewer, leading the eye around a painting. The inspirations for these stripes were varied: the weatherboarding on the exteriors of Kent houses, Cubist paintings and even the flickering images of old black-and-white television screens.



**10**  
Margarita and Maid of Honour  
1984–85  
Acrylic and collage on board

### Responding to Velázquez

Perhaps surprisingly, *Matadero Municipal* also acted as an inspiration for a whole new series of works in response to Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (The Maids of Honour; 1656). Whishaw realised that the small door or window on the left of his slaughterhouse picture had its origins in Velázquez's famous painting. From the early 1980s he started using elements from *Las Meninas* to explore ideas of reflection and distortion in pictorial space, playing with the shapes of windows, doorways and mirrors to create ideas for strong contrasts of light and dark. In *Margarita and Maid of Honour* and *Maria Barbola and Dog* **10, 12** figures are included and the whole picture plane is fractured with striations of strong accents in black and white,

while in other paintings, such as *Interior Variations II*, *Blue Interior with Window* and *Interior with Figure*, **11, 16, 21** windows and doors become the main subject. In all these works strong Cubist elements combine to create shifting planes that twist and turn and splinter the pictorial space.

During his travels in Spain Whishaw covered thousands of miles on his Lambretta scooter, following dirt roads that wound between villages and dusty fields. Several early works in this display, such as *Chiclana de la Frontera* and *Pueblo*, **16, 20** show memories of such villages. Executed in earthy browns, the *pueblos* appear almost to be absorbed by the landscape.



**15**  
Blue Road Northwards II  
1967  
Oil on board

### Blue Road Northwards II

In the late 1960s Whishaw's palette changed, darker browns and ochres giving way to a stronger and brighter range of colours. In *Blue Road Northwards II*, **15** sky blue is juxtaposed with accents of orange and jade. The picture is a memory of travelling through the landscape with tiled roofs, ochre fields and small trees jumbled together, just as memory pulls together the experience of a journey. Whishaw recalls that he painted the road blue as this was his visual recollection of the sun reflecting the blue sky onto the road in a heat haze. Later recollections of the *pueblos*, such as *Rooftops*, **17** become a Cubist panorama of interlocking roofs.

Whishaw's work has embraced many different styles and subjects and has at its heart a tension between the abstract and the figurative. He experienced the huge impact Abstract Expressionism had in England in the 1960s and spent many years exploring whether he should fully embrace abstraction. However, the pull of the emotive force that figuration gave to his work was too strong and it is this that gives his paintings their complexity and makes Whishaw such a singular artist. His experience and memories of Spain are as multi-faceted as his art and run through his work in this display like the path through the *Blue Road Northwards II*.

All paintings

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Unless indicated, all works are on loan from Anthony Wishaw and family

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Photograph  
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### Display cases

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Wishaw was much influenced by Constant Permeke (1886–1952), a Belgian expressionist who used a dark palette and thick brushwork to paint heavy figures. Wishaw's early sketches, in black ink and washes, reflect this influence.

The photographs show Wishaw on one of his visits to Spain with his wife Jean Gibson and his Lambretta scooter. As well as depicting the Spanish landscape and people in his sketchbooks, Wishaw also visited bullfights, but there is no attempt to glamorise this ancient ritual.

Wishaw has always enjoyed flamenco dancing and on his return to Britain he endeavoured to capture the new dance craze of the twist.

### Acknowledgements

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### Biography

Anthony Wishaw RA lives and works in London. He has a home and studio in Kensington, and a larger studio in Bethnal Green.

Wishaw was born in London in 1930 but soon after went to Brazil, where his father was working. He returned to England just before the outbreak of the Second World War and was evacuated to Cornwall, where he started drawing. Encouraged by his school art teacher, he went on to study at Chelsea School of Art 1948–52 and then at the Royal College of Art 1952–55.

Wishaw first visited Spain in 1951 and was able to live there in 1955–56 having won RCA Travelling, Abbey Minor and Spanish Government Scholarships.

His first solo exhibition was in Madrid in 1956 and was followed by regular exhibitions in London and throughout the UK, at venues including the ICA (1971), Kettle's Yard, Cambridge (1982), the Royal Academy of Arts (1987), the Barbican Centre (1994) and King's Place (2010).

Wishaw has won numerous awards, including the Arts Council of Great Britain Award (1978) and the Korn Ferry Carre Oban International Picture of the Year (1996) and his work is in many international museums and private collections. Alongside his own practice, he taught part-time at Chelsea School of Art and St Martin's School of Art between 1958 and 1992.

He was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1980 and a Royal Academician in 1989.

**Anthony Whishaw RA**  
**With Spain in Mind**

Royal Academy of Arts  
Tennant Gallery  
14 February – 5 July 2020

**Free taster talks**

Monday 16 March 2020  
Monday 23 March 2020  
2–2.15pm  
Meet in the Tennant Gallery

**Free curator's talks**

Friday 24 April 2020  
Tuesday 12 May 2020  
Tuesday 16 June 2020  
2–2.30pm  
Meet in the Tennant Gallery

**Further reading**

For a full bibliography please visit  
[www.anthonywhishaw.com](http://www.anthonywhishaw.com)

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