

THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

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May 2011

ALHAMBRA'S HISTORICAL ALLURE FOR ARTISTS AND WRITERS EXPLORED IN EXHIBITION OF RARELY SEEN MATERIALS

*Presentation features some of the earliest images of the legendary Spanish palace,
as well as materials related to Washington Irving's stay there
and the creation of his literary classic The Alhambra*

May 21–August 21, 2011

Historical Views: Tourists at the Alhambra, presented as part of **The New York Botanical Garden's** multifaceted exhibition *Spanish Paradise: Gardens of the Alhambra*, explores the fascination that this legendary Islamic palace in Granada, Spain, has held for international travelers, artists, writers, and photographers through the centuries. The selection of manuscripts, prints, drawings, photographs, and objects—many exhibited here for the first time—is drawn primarily from the holdings of **The Hispanic Society of America**, one of the country's preeminent repositories of materials relating to Spanish history and culture. Additional loans have been made by Historic Hudson Valley and the New York Public Library.

Dating from the 11th through the early 20th centuries, the works in the exhibition range from early Flemish and Dutch topographical prints, to unabashedly romantic views by 19th-century English artists, to some of the earliest photographic images of the storied palace and its magnificent gardens. A special section focuses on Washington Irving—who lived at the Alhambra in 1829—and the creation of his literary classic *The Alhambra* (1832), which made the palace a byword for the exotic and mysterious.

Organized by Susan Fraser, Director of the LuEsther T. Mertz Library, and curated by Patrick Lenaghan, Ph.D., Curator of Prints and Photographs at the Hispanic Society, *Historical Views: Tourists at the Alhambra* will be installed in the Mertz Library's William D. Rondina and Giovanni Foroni LoFaro Gallery from May 21 through August 21, 2011. The Mertz Library is a short walk from the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, where a 15,000-square-foot interpretation of the gardens of the Alhambra—the largest component of *Spanish Paradise*—

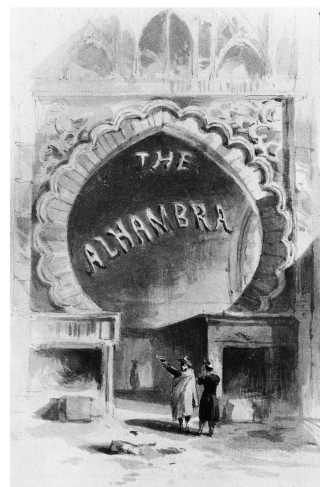


Illustration by Felix Octavious Carr Darley for *The Alhambra*, by Washington Irving, 1848–50
Courtesy of Historic Hudson Valley, Tarrytown, New York.

will be on view. Thus, visitors will have the unique opportunity to experience for themselves the sights and scents that so captivated Irving and his fellow visitors to the Alhambra.

The Alhambra

Completed in the 14th century by the last Muslim rulers of Spain, the Alhambra is a massive fortress-palace complex dramatically sited on the hills overlooking Granada. An



Distant View of the Sierra Nevada;
John Frederick Lewis, 1836
Courtesy of The Hispanic Society
of America.

example of Medieval Spanish architecture at its most refined, the palace was intended as an earthly paradise and abounds in lush gardens and courtyards with fountains and reflecting pools. Following the reconquest of Spain in 1492, the Alhambra served as a palace for the Christian monarchs. Eventually it was abandoned and fell into disrepair, but was “rediscovered” during the 19th century, thanks to the Romantic era’s fascination with Moorish culture and all things exotic. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Alhambra is one of the principal tourist attractions of southern Spain.

Historical Views: Tourists at the Alhambra

The travelers represented in *Historical Views* were drawn there for many reasons. For some it was an architectural masterpiece, for others a horticultural wonder, for still others it was a place of romance, mystery, even danger. The exhibition, which is organized chronologically, begins with one of the earliest depictions ever made of the Alhambra, an engraved topographical view by Flemish artist Joris Hoefnagel, included in his *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (Cities of the World, 1572). About a century later (ca. 1665–68), French artist Louis Meunier created a series of prints that are among the first interior scenes of the palace, showing elegantly dressed courtiers milling about in the courtyards. A luxurious fold-out plate of the Alhambra with insets of architectural details, from a 1775 book by English travel writer Richard Twiss, reveals the perception among the English of the time that Islamic architecture was one of the precursors to their own Gothic cathedrals.

The Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1808 brought French visitors to the Alhambra in ever-increasing numbers. Among them was Comte Alexandre de Laborde, who traveled with Napoleon’s entourage and included picturesque views of the Alhambra’s gardens and courtyards in a lavishly illustrated book on Spain, published in 1806–20 and on display in *Historical Views*.

During the Romantic era, with its penchant for Orientalist subjects and picturesque ruins, the Alhambra held an almost irresistible allure. Works by 19th-century British artists



Tower of the Seven Vaults; after David Roberts, 1835
Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America.

David Roberts and John Frederick Lewis evoke a poetic and often melancholic mood in pictures such as Roberts' *Tower of the Seven Vaults* (steel engraving, 1835), showing crumbling battlements eerily illuminated by a crescent moon.

But it was *The Alhambra*, a book by New York writer Washington Irving first published in 1832, that created the popular image of the palace as a place of mystery and enchantment. Much of this collection of observations, historical essays, and legends was drafted during the summer of 1829, when Irving lived at the Alhambra, roaming its deserted rooms and swimming in its courtyard pools. The exhibition explores Irving's unique experience and interpretation of the Alhambra through such materials as a diary he kept during his time in Spain; a notebook in which he practiced the Arabic language; and the dagger he kept during his stay—a protection against bandits said to lurk in the palace. Also on view will be a copy of the first illustrated edition of *The Alhambra* (1851), and original drawings for the work by Felix O. C. Darley.



Washington Irving (1830)
Gilbert Stuart Newton
Courtesy of Historic Hudson
Valley, Tarrytown, New York.

The advent of photography offered a compelling new medium for documenting and disseminating images of the Alhambra. Pioneering British photographer Charles Clifford's view of the famous Court of the Lions, published in his *Album de Andalucía y Murcia* (1863), is among the earliest photographic images of the Alhambra, while examples by Frenchmen Jean Laurent include a remarkable photograph (ca. 1881) of the fountains and lush gardens of the Generalife, once the summer residence of the Nasrid sultans. German photographer Kurt Hielscher's view of the Generalife (1914–19), which concentrates on the play of light and shadow through an arcaded loggia, typifies the more self-consciously artistic approach of early 20th-century photographers. Also on view will be a selection of watercolors—an ideal medium for capturing the sparkling effects of the Alhambra's sun-drenched courtyards—made by American artist Florence Robinson during a visit in the 1920s.

The visual impact of the Alhambra will also be evoked through a selection of decorative and architectural objects, including an eleventh-century basin of a type found throughout Islamic Spain, colorful ceramic tiles from the palace, and a 14th-century marble capital, intricately carved with foliate designs typical of those at the Alhambra.



Vase neck, ca. 1400
Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America.

Exhibition Support

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The New York Botanical Garden

The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road. The Garden is open Tuesday through Sunday and Monday federal holidays, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. During *Spanish Paradise: Gardens of the Alhambra*, the best way to enjoy the Garden is with the *All-Garden Pass*, which includes admission to the grounds as well as to seasonal gardens, exhibitions, and other attractions: \$20 for adults, \$18 for seniors and students with ID, \$8 for children ages 2–12, free for children under 2. A *Grounds-Only Pass* is also available: \$6 for adults, \$5 for adult Bronx residents, \$3 for seniors and students with ID, \$1 for children ages 2–12, free for children under 2. Grounds-only admission is free all day on Wednesdays and from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit nybg.org

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Press Information

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Image Captions

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Pencil and wash on paper, Felix Octavius Carr Darley (1822–88), 1848–50
Courtesy of Historic Hudson Valley, Tarrytown, N.Y.
- p. 2: *Distant View of the Sierra Nevada*
Colored lithograph, John Frederick Lewis (1805–76), from *Lewis's Sketches of Spain & Spanish character: Made during his tour in that country in the years 1833–4*
London: F.G. Moon and John F. Lewis, 1836
Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America
HSA Prints and Photographs Q 4215
- p. 3, top: *Tower of the Seven Vaults*
Steel engraving after David Roberts (1798–1864), from *Tourist in Spain. Granada. Illustrated from drawings by David Roberts*, by Thomas Roscoe (1791–1871)
London: Jennings and Co., 1835
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- p. 3, bottom: Washington Irving (1830)
Oil on canvas, Gilbert Stuart Newton (1790–1835)
Courtesy of Historic Hudson Valley, Tarrytown, N.Y.
- p. 4: Vase neck
Tin-glazed earthenware with cobalt and luster, Málaga (kingdom of Granada), ca. 1400
Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America
HSA Museum E 576