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SEIT 1982

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PAUL FLANDRIN

1811 Lyon - Paris 1902

### *Landscape by the River*

Oil on paper mounted on canvas. Signed in the lower left: *Paul Flandrin*.

26 x 36 cm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, France

Paul Flandrin was born on March 18, 1811, in Lyon. He has two brothers, who are also painters: Auguste Flandrin (1804–1842) and Hippolyte Flandrin (1809–1864). He received his first training in Lyon, by Jean-François Legendre-Héral (1796–1851) and Jean-Antoine Duclaux (1783–1868). From 1826 until the end of 1828 he attended the *École royale des Beaux-Arts* of Lyon, where he had Pierre-Henri Révoil (1776–1842) as his teacher. In 1829 he moved to Paris together with his brother Hippolyte. Both turned to Ingres as a teacher, which was a reciprocal choice that will accompany them throughout their lives. From 1829 until the end of 1833, Paul Flandrin received an academic formation in Paris under the guidance of the master of Montauban. He left for Italy in order to join his brother Hippolyte in January 1834 and he will remain in Italy for almost five years, until July 1838. In 1835, Ingres was nominated the director of the *Académie de France* in Rome. The trip to Italy – to the Roman countryside and the Italian cities – accelerated his vocation as landscape painter thanks to the systematic practice of work *en plein air*. Yet Flandrin had not discovered the practice of *plein air* in Italy. Already in the first years of his formation he had been trained by Antoine Duclaux to paint *en plein air* in the surroundings of Lyon. He would continue to practice it throughout his life, tirelessly “*à la chasse du motif*” during his trips which brought him to explore various districts of France in the course of a long career until the threshold of the twentieth century.

The present oil on paper dates from his French years and depicts the shores of a river, where the large riverbed reclines smoothly on the boards, and the current lingers in wide expanse of water. Some tongs from the land emerge from the shallow waters, allowing a comfortable ford to someone who might want to cross the river with dry feet, as the person in the far is doing, who is the only hint of a human being in a pure landscape painting. This is a vision of rare peace, obtained by a most fine control of the painting skills.

In this oil on paper, Flandrin reaches a climax of the expressiveness of his style. “*Néo-classique et réformateur, idéaliste*”, as Pierre Miquel defines him in his *École de la nature*. The principle is that of a poetic and

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philosophical landscape painting, learned by Ingres, in the constant search of the essential form, as opposed to the depiction of details. For Flandrin, who always starts from nature, the exercise concerns also the cleanness of the gesture, which is here expressed in an extreme rarefaction of the handling of painting. The extremely thin coat of oil painting is composed by successive layers and touches of light and shadow. The painter proceeds in his typical way: he starts by singling out the principal masses, sketched with a brush containing a little paint, very diluted, and then he moves on to give form to the principal elements, then to the *valeurs* and to the play of light, then to the profiles of the foliage of the trees, and lastly to the clouds. What surprises is the expanse of water in the foreground, with the large basin of the river in which the vegetation is reflected. The refracting effects of the water are rendered with thin brushstrokes on top of the green of the first layer, which thus emerges as a reflex of the vegetation on the riverbanks.

This is an example of a high degree of completeness for a landscape on paper, as a confirmation of the infinite degrees of accomplishment which in the mid-century a work produced on paper can present. Thanks to the chromatic harmony based upon few colors, and thanks to the great attention to the light effects and to a rigorous composition that guides also the work *en plein air*, Flandrin finds solutions of a refined lyricism, as in the present work.

The painting will be added to the *catalogue raisonné* of Paul Flandrin, which is currently in preparation.

Dr. Elena Marchetti  
Catalogue raisonné of the work of Paul Flandrin