

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

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JOAQUÍN SOROLLA
1863 Valencia - Cercedilla 1923

Playa de Valencia. Día gris; c.1901

Oil on canvas. Signed lower left: *J Sorolla Bastida*.
Inscribed by another hand on the verso: *7 E*.
27.1 x 48.4 cm

PROVENANCE: The Artist's Estate, series I, no. 40, 1929, (as *Estudio de nubes*) – Elena Sorolla García (the artist's daughter) – Elena Llorente Sorolla (the artist's granddaughter) – Galería Vicens, Valencia – López Pesada, Vice President of López Quesada Bank, Madrid – The Estate of López Pesada (until 2015) – Private collection, Madrid

EXHIBITION: Probably *Exposition Sorolla y Bastida*, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, June-July 1906

This isn't painting – it's robbery of nature's light and colour¹

This delicate canvas by Joaquín Sorolla is remarkable for its broad, sweeping brushstrokes, virtuoso rendering of the sky and impressionistic composition. In a vast, indeterminate landscape a solitary, unrigged boat lies at its mooring, while grey-white and purplish-blue clouds gather above it, energising the composition. The warm tones of the landscape contrast with the darkening mass of the sky and lend the painting a deep sense of calm and tranquility. The scene is filled with the intensity of colour, movement and emotion that characterises Sorolla's paintings of places that held special meaning for him.

Sorolla mastered the representation of light early on and his challenge was then to render motion with the same level of skill. He wrote: 'It would be impossible for me to paint slowly in the open air, even if I wanted to. The sea swirls up at every instance, the cloud is deformed as it changes place, the rope that hangs from the boat swings slowly, that boy leaps, those little shrubs bend their branches and then raise them again ... But even if everything were petrified and fixed, it would be enough for the sun to move, as it goes continually, to give things a different appearance ... Painting has to be fast, because so much is lost, fleeting, never to be found again.'²

In 1885, Sorolla [Fig.1] was granted a bursary which enabled him to spend an extensive study period in Rome. That same year he travelled to Paris for the first time, where he discovered the work of the Impressionists. Under their influence he took up *plein-air* painting and his palette began to lighten. He went on to produce portraits, genre scenes and landscapes but his preferred subjects were images of rural life in Spain and sun-drenched beach scenes in his home town of Valencia [Fig.2]. Sorolla's ascent to fame began in the 1890s when he won a raft of medals and prizes at national and international exhibitions. At the Paris World's Fair in 1900 he was awarded a *Grand Prix* and received the *Médaille d'Honneur* for the outstanding overall quality of his work. From then on, his objective was

¹ Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1887), cit. in *Gracia* 1989b, p. 78.

² Bernardino De Pantorba, cited in: *La Vida y la Obra de Joaquín Sorolla, Estudio Biográfico y Crítico*, Madrid 1970, p. 60.

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to land a solo exhibition in Paris, seeing it as a career milestone with all its social and commercial opportunities.

He came into contact with a group of artists who had begun exhibiting under the informal heading 'Société internationale' at the newly founded Galerie Georges Petit in 1882. Petit was a *marchand d'exception*, a champion of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism and widely respected rival of the Paris dealer Paul Durand-Ruel. Petit's gallery offered artists one of Paris's most spacious and elegant exhibition venues. In 1906, it hosted an important retrospective of Sorolla's work which showcased some 500 exhibits [Fig.3]. They ranged from intimate family scenes to landscapes and typically Spanish motifs which show the full extent of his technical virtuosity. The stellar success of the exhibition brought him widespread critical acclaim and exhibitions in Germany, England and the USA.³

In 1909, Sorolla was invited to New York by the philanthropist Archer Milton Huntington (1870-1955), founder of the Hispanic Society of America⁴ [Fig.4] which hosted an exhibition of Sorolla's work in the same year. The show was a financial triumph - more than half the exhibits were sold. In the five months of his stay Sorolla produced some of his finest work. Today, many of his paintings are still held in the collection of the Hispanic Society.

Blanca Pons-Sorolla notes: "This painting reveals the whole gamut of emotions that Sorolla felt while he was painting – his response to tranquility and beauty, and his sensibility towards subtle changes in light conditions when he painted on the beach in Valencia at sunrise. One of Sorolla's most astonishing strengths was his ability to convey in his art the entire range of emotions that painting demanded of him.

When he painted *Playa de Valencia. Día gris* he had already reached artistic maturity, a point when – to paraphrase his own words – "his hand was carrying out what his eyes saw and what his heart felt."

We are grateful to Blanca Pons-Sorolla for her invaluable help in preparing this catalogue entry, and for confirming the authenticity of the painting, which will be included in her forthcoming Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida catalogue raisonné as no. BPS 4897.

³ Véronique Gerard Powell, 'Sorolla und der Pariser Kunstmarkt. Die Einzelschau in der Galerie Georges Petit 1906', in *Joaquín Sorolla. Spaniens Meister des Lichts*, exhib. cat., March 2016 – March 2017, Munich, Giverny and Paris, p. 81 ff.

⁴ The Hispanic Society of America was founded in 1904 by Archer Milton Huntington with the object of establishing a free, public museum and reference library for the study of the art and culture of the Spain, Portugal, Latin America and the Philippines. The collections of the Hispanic Society are unparalleled in their scope and quality outside of Spain, addressing nearly every aspect of culture in Spain, as well as a large part of Portugal and Latin America, into the 20th century.



Fig.1: *Self-Portrait*, 1909.
Oil on canvas, 70.3 x 50.3 cm.
Museo Sorolla, Madrid, inv. 840



Fig.2: *Día gris en la playa de Valencia*, 1901.
Oil on canvas, 64 x 96 cm.
Private collection, Spain

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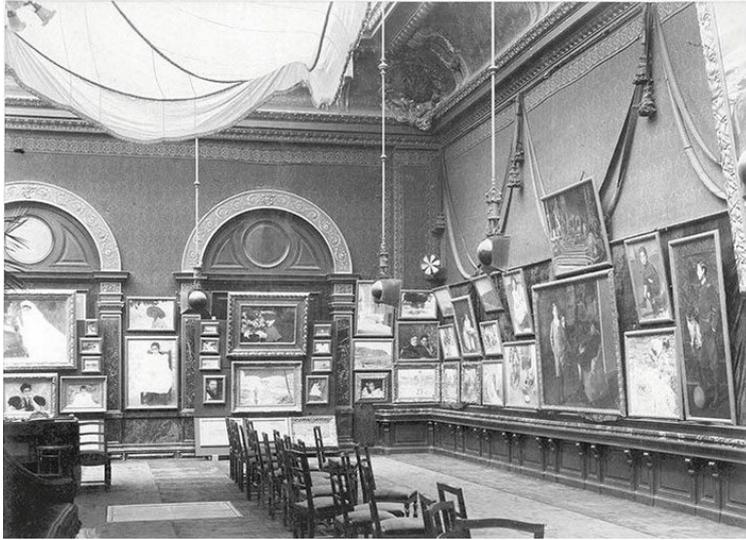


Fig.3: *The Sorolla Exhibition at Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 1906.*
Photograph, 16.8 x 22.9 cm.
Museo Sorolla, Madrid, inv. AFMS 81314

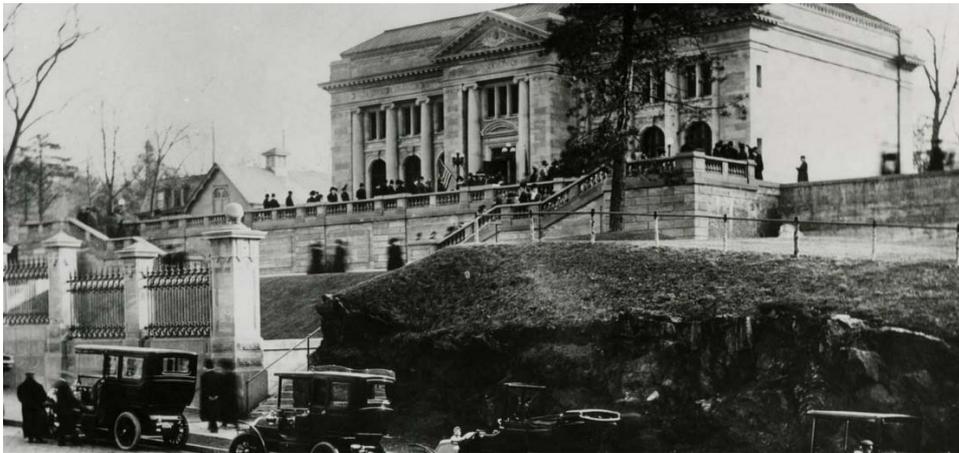


Fig.4: *Queuing for the Sorolla Exhibition at The Hispanic Society, New York, 1909.*
Photographer unknown.
The Hispanic Museum & Library, New York