

# COLNAGHI



Joaquín Sorolla  
(Valencia 1863 – Madrid  
1923)

*Beach of Valencia,*  
1910

Oil on canvas  
18 7/8 x 22 in (48 x 55.9  
cm)

Signed and dated 'J  
Sorolla 1910' (lower left)

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## Provenance

Frederick Forrest Peabody Collection, Santa Barbara (acquired 1911);  
Max Schweitzer Gallery, New York;  
Fernando Guereta Collection, Buenos Aires;  
Private Collection, Spain (acquired from the above in 1970s);  
Private Collection, Valencia.

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## Exhibitions

Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, Paintings by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, February 14 - March 12, 1911, no. 145 (later travelled to Saint Louis).

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## Literature

Bernardino de Pantorba, *La vida y la obra de Joaquín Sorolla*, Madrid, 1953, nº 1728;  
Blanca Pons Sorolla y Mark Roglán (eds.), *Sorolla and America*, cat. exh., Dallas, 2013, nº 215 (illustrated on p. 316);  
Blanca Pons Sorolla, 'Paintings sold and portraits painted in America, and Portraits painted in France for Americans: Not included in the exhibition', in *Sorolla and America*, cat. exh., Meadows Museum, Dallas; The San Diego Museum of Art, 2013, p. 316, nº 215, illustrated.

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A certificate issued by Blanca Pons Sorolla on 9 February 2024 will be given to the buyer. The inventory number of this work in the catalogue raisonné is BPS1969.

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The magnificent *Beach of Valencia* was painted in late summer 1910 by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida on the beach of El Cabañal, Valencia. The subject revolves around one of Sorolla's hallmarks: fishermen landing the day's catch. The artist began to explore such maritime scenes in the early 1890s, when he painted the monumental *The Return of the Catch* (1894), which was critically praised when it was exhibited a year later at the Paris Salon; today it is part of the esteemed permanent collection of the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

In fact, it was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that Sorolla began to gain recognition and achieve significant professional success. In 1906, the Galerie Georges Petit in Paris organised a solo exhibition of nearly 500 works by Sorolla. It included early paintings as well as recent works covering a versatile range from portraits to landscapes. Visitors were astounded by Sorolla's prolific output, and the exhibition was both a critical and financial success. This colossal display of Sorolla's artistic virtuosity eclipsed his earlier achievements and led to his appointment as an officer of the Ordre National de la Légion d'honneur.

He subsequently organised major exhibitions in Germany and London. In 1908 he met the American scholar and philanthropist Archer Milton Huntington, who founded the Hispanic Society of America and made Sorolla a member. In 1909, just the year before painting *Beach of Valencia*, Sorolla made a successful solo debut in the United States at the Hispanic Society of America in New York. Another exhibition of major proportions, 195 of the 356 paintings were sold. Sorolla spent five months in America painting more than twenty portraits; the critical acclaim with which they were received earned him a coveted commission to paint President William Howard Taft in 1909. When Sorolla returned to Spain, he bought a beach house on the shores of the Mediterranean in Valencia. The present work, *Beach of Valencia*, is a highlight of his corpus of this time and place.

*Bach of Valencia* represents a brief but important period in Sorolla's oeuvre. For a concentrated period in 1910, Sorolla was immersed in his home region between international travels and prestigious commissions. This relatively truncated period in his native Valencia was interrupted by Sorolla's stays in the United States. In early 1911 Sorolla returned to America, where the Saint Louis Art Museum exhibited 152 of his new paintings, followed weeks later by an exhibition of 161 paintings at the Art Institute of Chicago. That same year, Sorolla and Huntington met in Paris; the artist signed a contract with the magnate to paint a series of oil paintings depicting life in Spain. The fourteen impressive murals still adorn the Hispanic Society of America building in Upper Manhattan. Each scene is between three and four metres high, and the gigantic project measures a total of 227 metres in length. This important commission was one of the main objectives during the last years of Sorolla's life.

The Spanish painter had developed a style that was a unique variant of Impressionism. Like other important Impressionist artists - Edgar Degas, for example - Sorolla's work reveals a lively dialogue with the photographic medium. However, rather than depicting contemporary Parisian life or the movement of ballet dancers, Sorolla's best-known works, such as the present one, vividly portray the sun-drenched Valencian coast. As a teenager he apprenticed in the photographic studio of Antonio García del Castillo in Valencia, whose daughter Clotilde García del Castillo he later married. He also befriended numerous photographers, including Anna Christian of Minneapolis, whom he met through Huntington in New York, and whose own photographs taken in Spain around 1913-1915 reveal Sorolla's influence.

Sorolla has received the greatest recognition for his genre and landscape paintings. His most archetypal works are characterised by a skilful depiction of people,

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landscapes and water in the bright Spanish sunlight. *Beach of Valencia*, painted plein air in situ, evokes both the warmth of the Mediterranean sun and the bustling atmosphere of the Valencian beach. The upper register of the composition is dominated by the billowing cream-coloured sails of the fishermen's boats. The compressed perspective of the lower half of the painting focuses on the foreground of a beached red-and-black boat and some oxen or cows standing on the right; behind it are two other boats in the water.

Sorolla combined the Impressionist style with narrative and anecdotal subjects. One of his main sources of inspiration was the dazzling light of the waters beside his house; his beach scenes are marked by strong contrasts of light and shade, bright colours and rapid brushstrokes. *Beach of Valencia* is defined by the immediacy of the technique. The loose, swirling, heavily impastoed pigments create a strong sense of movement and dynamism, capturing the mood of the invigorating salt air whipping through the sails. Sorolla has elevated a humble, prosaic vignette of everyday local life with his fluid brushstrokes and rich, luminous application of paint. The depiction of the figures is swift and superficial, and a rough blue-grey sweep represents the sky. Sorolla's world is at once simple and sumptuous, welcoming yet vigorous and bold. *Beach of Valencia* was painted at a very specific moment in Sorolla's career, which would continue to inform and shape his fundamental technique and predominant subject matter.