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Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida
Fiesta Valenciana, 1893

JOAQUÍN SOROLLA Y BASTIDA
(Valencia 1863 – 1923 Cercedilla)

FIESTA VALENCIANA, 1893

Signed and dated lower left: '*J Sorolla / 1893*'

Oil on canvas
122 x 190 cm
48 x 74 ¾ in.

The authenticity of this work has been confirmed by Blanca Pons-Sorolla, who will be including it in the forthcoming Sorolla catalogue raisonné (BPS 740).

Provenance

Private collection (acquired directly from the artist in 1896);
Juan March Ordinas (1880–1962), Palma de Mallorca;
Bartolomé March (1917–1998), Madrid (by descent from the above, his father, by 1970);
Banca López Quesada, Madrid (by 1978);
Anonymous sale, Sotheby's, Madrid, 9 February 1984, lot 15;
Private collection, Madrid.

Literature

Pantorba, B. de, *La vida y la obra de Joaquín Sorolla. Estudio biográfico y crítico*, Madrid, 1970, p. 20, a detail illustrated; p. 177, no. 1280, listed.
Pons-Sorolla, B., *Joaquín Sorolla. Vida y obra*, Madrid, 2001, p. 130, fig. 49, discussed and illustrated; p. 729, catalogued.
Díez, J. L. and Barón, J., *Joaquín Sorolla*, Madrid, 2009, p. 212, cited.
Joaquín Sorolla y la pintura valenciana de su tiempo. Diálogos y contrastes, exh. cat., Museo de Bellas Artes de Alicante, Alicante, 2023, pp. 46, 56.
Sorolla y el renacer de la Escuela Valenciana, exh. cat., Museu de Belles Arts de Castelló, Castellón, 2023, pp. 63–66.

Exhibitions

I centenario del nacimiento de Sorolla, Casón del Buen Retiro, Madrid, 1963, no. 11;
Pintores de fama, Galería del Cisne, Madrid, 1973, no. 1;
Pintura española siglo XX. Dos años en Valencia. Exposición conmemorativa de pintores valencianos, Banca López Quesada, Valencia, 1978, no. 7;
The Painter Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, IBM Gallery of Science and Art, New York; Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis; The San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego; Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Valencia, 1989–1990, no. 8;
Joaquín Sorolla y la pintura valenciana de su tiempo. Diálogos y contrastes, Museo de Bellas Artes de Alicante, Palacio Gravina, Alicante, 9 January – 25 June 2023;
Sorolla y el renacer de la Escuela Valenciana, Museu de Belles Arts de Castelló, Castellón, 25 January – 7 April 2024;
Sorolla: A Celebration of Life, Colnaghi, Madrid, 30 May – 19 June 2024.



Painted in 1893, *Fiesta Valenciana* depicts a popular gathering in the open air. In the shade of a large tree in the Valencian countryside, a group of men and women in traditional dress have gathered around a rough wooden table and rush-seated chairs. On the left, a young woman in a silk skirt and pale shawl leans on the table, resting her chin on her hand as she meets the gaze of an older *labrador* in a yellow headscarf and red sash, who leans towards her with an open, persuasive gesture. Behind them, a second woman watches the exchange with a smile. At the centre, a man in a broad black hat, a striped *manta* over his shoulder, plays the guitar, while a tambourine rests on the bench beside him; to the right, another group, partly turned away from the viewer, follows the music. Courtship and music-making give the scene the festive character announced by its title.

The painting belongs to a decisive moment in Joaquín Sorolla's career. Having settled in Madrid in 1890, after his years of training in Valencia, Rome and Paris, the artist was still building his reputation through large, carefully composed canvases intended for national and international exhibitions. In 1893 he showed *Isabelita and Thor* (fig. 1) at the Biennial of the Círculo de Bellas Artes in Madrid and sent five paintings to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where *Another Marguerite* (fig. 2) won a medal and was purchased by the collector Charles Nagel for the museum in Saint Louis. Like many painters of his generation, Sorolla had absorbed the naturalism of Jules Bastien-Lepage (fig. 3), whose posthumous retrospective he had seen in Paris in 1885, and shared its emphasis on form, verisimilitude and, above all, the need to depict one's own land.

The painting shows Sorolla negotiating between two ways of working. Faces, hands and costumes are drawn with the precision of a figure painter trained for the exhibition hall: the brocaded silks of the women's skirts, the flowered waistcoat of the *labrador* and the woven stripes of the guitarist's *manta* are described with evident pleasure. Yet the whole is conceived in terms of outdoor light. Sunlight filters through the foliage, catches the whites of the shirts and shawls and falls in broken patches on the dusty ground, while the palette lightens towards the bright sky and the pale bank behind the figures. The composition is equally telling: the figures are cut by the edges of the canvas, the chair in the foreground is set on a sharp diagonal, and the viewer enters the scene as if stepping into it rather than looking at a stage. Instantaneity and the fragmentation of space, built upon a traditional technique, would become hallmarks of his mature work. When the painting was shown in Alicante in 2023, it was presented as a key work from the moment in which Sorolla "evolves towards full naturalism".[1]

[1] "cuando evoluciona hacia el naturalismo pleno"; 'La luz de Sorolla ilumina el Mubag y enciende el año dedicado al pintor valenciano', *Alicante Plaza*, 9 January 2023.

Scenes of Valencian life recur throughout Sorolla's career, and *Fiesta Valenciana* anticipates the attention he would give to the costumes and customs of his native region, culminating two decades later in the monumental *Vision of Spain* (1911–19; fig. 4), commissioned by Archer M. Huntington for the Hispanic Society of America. Here, however, the figures are individuals rather than types, and their relaxed poses and exchanged glances convey the warmth of a shared, everyday pleasure rather than a folkloric tableau.



Fig. 1: Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, *Isabelita and Thor*, 1893, oil on canvas, 201 x 141.3 cm (79 ⅛ x 55 ⅝ in.), National Gallery of Art, Washington, inv. no. 2025.5.1



Fig. 2: Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, *Another Marguerite!*, 1892, oil on canvas, 130.5 x 200.5 cm (51 ⅜ x 79 in.), Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University in St. Louis, Saint Louis, inv. no. WU 2930



Fig. 3: Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Haymaking*, 1877, oil on canvas, 160 x 195 cm (63 x 76 ¾ in.), Musée d'Orsay, Paris, inv. no. RF 2748



Fig. 4: Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida, *Vision of Spain: Valencia*, 1916, oil on canvas, The Hispanic Society of America, New York, inv. no. A1805

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