Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Federico BELTRÁN MASSES (1884 - 1949)

Landscape with a Stormy Sky

Watercolour, over pencil, on blue paper.
Signed F. Beltran Masses at the lower right.
253 x 363 mm. (9 7/8 x 14 1/4 in.)

This spirited, vibrant watercolour is a rare surviving example of the artist's interest in landscape. While Beltrán Masses remains best known as a portrait painter, the early part of his career was spent mainly working as a landscape painter in Spain, under the influence of Sorolla. He also exhibited at the Royal Watercolour Society in London in 1934.

Provenance:

Private collection, Spain.

Literature:

Jose Manuel Arnáiz, et al., Cien Años de Pintura en España y Portugal (1830-1930), Vol.I, Madrid, 1988, illustrated in colour on pp.294-295.

Artist description:

Born in Cuba to a Spanish military officer, Federico Armando Beltrán Masses returned with his family to Barcelona in 1899. There he studied at the Escuela de Bellas Artes, where he became a disciple of the Valencian painter Joaquín Sorolla. In 1905 he visited Madrid to study at the Prado, and until 1909 spent much time travelling around the province of Asturias, where he painted landscapes and genre subjects. After winning a prize at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1916, Beltrán Masses launched his career as fashionable society portrait painter. Living in Paris, he painted numerous portraits of princes, noblemen, financiers, cultural figures and society beauties, in which the subjects were depicted in a bold and overtly theatrical manner, often with more than a touch of latent eroticism. (As one contemporary critic noted of the artist, 'He has no fear of a touch of exaggeration in form nor even of slight distortion (think again of El Greco) in order to symbolize the mood engendered in him by the actual presence of an interesting sitter.') A superb colourist, he was particularly fond of a distinctive shade of deep blue in his paintings, which came to be known as 'Beltrán blue'. Apart from portraits, Beltrán also painted subjects of a mythological or allegorical nature, works that have been aptly

described as ‘decadent and perversely sensual’, exemplified by a scandalous painting of an exotic nude Salome, exhibited at the Biennale in Venice in 1920.

Beltrán enjoyed a very successful career, receiving numerous portrait commissions from patrons all over Europe, America and as far afield as India. Among the portraits he painted were several of Rudolph Valentino, who first encountered the artist’s work at an one-man exhibition at the Wildenstein gallery in New York in 1924, as well as the actors Douglas Fairbanks and Pola Negri, the Shah of Persia, Kings Alfonso XIII of Spain and George VI of England and several members of European nobility. Beltrán exhibited his work throughout Europe, winning several awards and prizes. He gained a particular level of success in England, where his first gallery exhibition in London drew around 20,000 visitors. Self-portraits by the artist are today in the Uffizi, and other paintings by Beltrán Masses are in the Musée d’Orsay in Paris and elsewhere.