

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Edward John POYNTER (Paris 1836 - London 1919)

Sailboats on an Italian Lake

Watercolour on board.

Signed with initials and dated 18 EJP 96 at the lower right.

268 x 367 mm. (10 1/2 x 14 1/2 in.)

Most of Edward Poynter's few landscape watercolours date from early in his career. These tend to be records of places he visited, and are among his most personal works, done for his own pleasure and seldom exhibited. (In later years, however, the artist consented to show some of his landscape watercolours at the Fine Art Society, the Grosvenor Gallery and the New Gallery.) In contrast to the more diffused forms of the work of many of his contemporaries, however, his watercolour technique remained precise and controlled, with a restrained colour scheme.

As one contemporary critic noted, 'It is not too much to claim that, as Sir Edward Poynter's more ambitious work is of [a] classic order, something of the same quality has overflowed into these small but choice water-colours which are his recreation (as he himself says), from the more severe duties of his positions as chief craftsman, instructor and governor of certain national institutions. His work is not aggressive at all; it does not even attempt sober tours de force; it is merely strong, and simple, and reposeful, and, as a rule, English. But somehow it has a way of making one want to see it again, and to pore over it – just as have his crayon studies...These water-colours are less known, but in their way they have that same reticent beauty which have those well-known figure drawings...There is a peculiar mental quality in them which is at once charming and dignified, despite its suspicion of severity.'

The present sheet is dated 1896, and would appear to depict a view in Northern Italy. As one modern scholar has noted of Poynter, 'The watercolours he produced in the late 1890s, especially in the area around Lago d'Orta, are minutely detailed and at the same time full of atmospheric effects.' Among stylistically comparable watercolours by Poynter is a view of the Isola San Giulio in Lago d'Orta, dated 1898, in the Yale Center for British Art in New Haven, and *The Approaching Storm, Lake of Orta*, likewise executed in 1898, in the collection of the British Museum.

Artist description:

One of the leading artistic figures of Victorian England, Edward Poynter made his reputation as a painter of historical subjects, often set in ancient times, in which precise archeological detail, interesting narrative themes and a polished technique were combined with great effect. His first success came with the painting *Israel in Egypt*, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1867, and his reputation continued to rise throughout his career, enhanced by such popular paintings as *A Visit to Aesculapius*, painted in 1880. His grandest production was the monumental *The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon*, painted between 1883 and 1890 and today in the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. Among the public commissions he received were for the decoration of the interior of the Palace of Westminster and the Royal Albert Hall.

Poynter also worked in watercolour and fresco, and made designs for stained glass, mosaic and ceramics. Apart from being the first Slade Professor of Art at University College in London, Poynter was appointed Director of the National Gallery in 1894 (the last artist to hold the position) and, from 1896, served concurrently as President of the Royal Academy.

A versatile and gifted draughtsman and a firm advocate of life drawing, Poynter made numerous figure studies for each of his paintings. His drawings were greatly admired in his lifetime. As one recent scholar has noted, 'By the late 1860's Poynter's graphic work was renowned for its excellence, and by the 1880s he was hailed by his contemporaries as the finest British figure draughtsman of his time.'

One contemporary writer, in a book devoted solely to the artist's drawings, noted of Poynter's preparatory studies for his paintings that 'In the bold vigour of his generalizations, in the minute and searching attention to details, and in the broad and masterly use of the material, be it charcoal, chalk, or pencil, we perceive how conscientiously he has laid to heart the example long since set by Michel Angelo.'