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Joaquín Sorolla
Elenita. Study for "Summer", c. 1904

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JOAQUÍN SOROLLA Y BASTIDA
(Valencia 1863-1923 Cercedilla)

ELENITA. STUDY FOR "SUMMER", c. 1904

Oil on canvas.
52 x 50 cm; 20 1/2 x 19 3/4 in.

Inscribed on the back "Estudio para el cuadro titulado
Verano pintado por mi padre D. Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida",
signed "María Sorolla".

Provenance

Sala Parés, Barcelona (*date unknown, label on the back*);
With Galería Jorge Juan, Madrid;
Private collection, acquired from the previous owner in 1986.



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The present painting comes with a certificate of authenticity by Francisco Pons Sorolla dated 18.02.1986. We are grateful to Blanca Pons-Sorolla for confirming its authenticity, including it in her Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida catalogue raisonné with the number BPS 3650.

Elenita. Study for 'Summer' (1904) is an intimate oil on canvas (52.5 × 50.7 cm) depicting Elena Sorolla, the artist's youngest daughter, as the central figure in Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida's celebrated painting *Summer*, now in the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana (Fig. 1). This preparatory work provides insight into Sorolla's creative process during a pivotal moment in his career, illustrating how he captured the transient moment of familial intimacy with his renowned vivid palette in a few bold strokes. Sorolla depicts Elena in a side profile, attired in a loose garment that appears to gracefully flow around her body. Although her facial features are partially obscured, the vibrant brushstrokes evoke a sense of youthful vivacity as she turns or extends her arm outwards. The application of paint around the dress is confident and energetic, characteristic of Sorolla's *plein air* technique, and while the torso and arms are modelled in slightly thicker layers of pigment, other areas are thinly painted or lightly indicated. This selective finish, combined with the exposed weave of the canvas, emphasises the painting's primary function as a study rather than a polished exhibition piece. The artist's employment of a restricted colour palette, encompassing pale blues, soft yellows and browns, along with warm flesh tones, serves to evoke the sunlit clarity that characterises a significant proportion of his beach scenes. The resulting effect is one of spontaneity, as if the viewer is witnessing a fleeting moment in motion.

The reverse annotation, "Estudio para el cuadro titulado Verano pintado por mi padre D. Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida" (Fig. 4) penned by the artist's daughter María Sorolla, asserts the painting's direct association with *Summer (Verano)*, a large painting that was completed in 1904. Indeed, in the final composition, Elena occupies a prominent central role, her light dress and gestural pose anchoring the canvas's sun-drenched atmosphere. Through vigorous preparatory sketches such as *Elenita*, Sorolla honed the precise gestures, arrangement, and colour harmonies that appear in the larger work. The Havana museum's masterpiece exemplifies Sorolla's fascination with everyday life along the Valencian coast, replete with bright costumes, rippling shoreline, and a cast of family members or local people. In 1904, Sorolla - already lauded internationally - was pushing his exploration of sunlight, color, and movement. He had garnered acclaim internationally for his luminous, *au premier coup* brushwork. By transitioning from the social themes that characterised his early works to vibrant depictions of family leisure, Sorolla advanced a more personal, life-affirming artistic vision. As Blanca Pons-Sorolla observes, it was during these years that Sorolla

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reached the fullest articulation of a "luminous and modern approach to painting".¹ In the broader context of 1904, Sorolla was perfecting a series of Valencian beach paintings that would further raise his international profile. These airy compositions typically present family groups or local children playing by the shore, all captured under a blazing Mediterranean sun (see Figs. 2-3). *Summer* stands among his most accomplished examples of this theme, translating playful scenes into a sweeping panorama of life, movement, and colour.

Study for "Summer" is a clear example of the artist's development of major canvases through smaller oil sketches, whereby he tested compositional balance, refined figure placement and calibrated his tonal relationships. This approach combined immediacy with methodical planning, ensuring that the finished work would radiate freshness while retaining clear design. In this canvas, the viewer's gaze is drawn to the interplay of soft shadows on the girl's garment and the subtle tonal contrasts between her hair, complexion, and the sunlit folds of cloth. These concerns with atmospheric unity and coloured shadows derive partly from Impressionist principles, yet Sorolla's rapid, broad strokes differ from traditional French Impressionism. The artist's background in academic draftsmanship is evident in the solid underlying structure of Elena's form, ensuring that even the loosest brush marks do not dissolve her figure into abstraction. The painting also offers insight into Sorolla's domestic sphere, as Elena Sorolla was a frequent model for her father's works, and the affection he held for his children often infuses his preparatory sketches with an unmistakable warmth. The straightforward pose and sense of casual immediacy give Elenita a candid sincerity, highlighting Sorolla's delight in observing his daughter's spontaneous gestures. While intended primarily as a study, its deft execution and charming subject matter lent it an aesthetic value in its own right.

¹ See B. Pons-Sorolla, *Sorolla: The Masterworks*, New York, 2012.

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Fig. 1. Joaquín Sorolla, *Summer*, 1904, oil on canvas. National Museum of Fine Arts of Cuba.



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Fig. 2. Joaquín Sorolla, *Children on the seashore*, 1903, oil on canvas. Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Fig. 3. Joaquín Sorolla, *Valencia, Two Little Girls on a Beach*, 1904, oil on canvas. Private collection.

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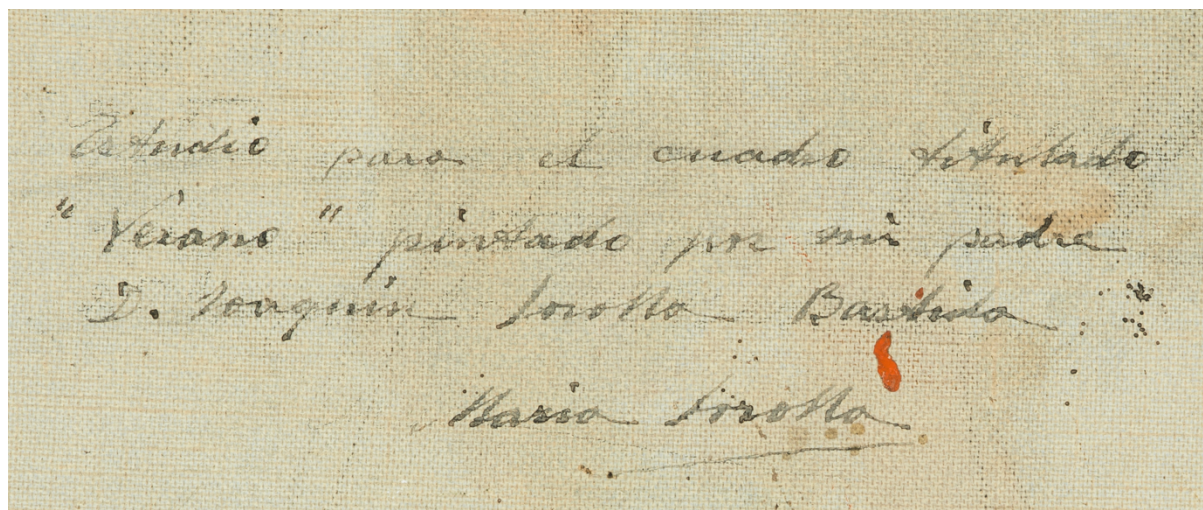


Fig. 4. Inscription on the reverse of *Elenita*. Study for "Summer" signed by the artist's daughter María Sorolla,

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