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Eliseu Meifrén
(Barcelona 1859-1940)

Shore with figures

c. 1910

signed 'E. Meifren' (lower right)

oil on canvas

61 x 73 cm.; 24 1/8 x 28 3/4 in.

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As a result of numerous sojourns in Paris, Eliseu Meifrén was influenced by the Impressionists and is considered to be one of the first artists to have introduced the movement to Catalonia. The influence of Impressionism can be seen in both his compositions and in his technique of painting in *plein air*, as French artists of this school often did. His earlier landscapes, which were characterized by his academic training, later evolved towards a purely Impressionist style.

Meifrén travelled extensively. From 1900 his horizons were widened considerably beyond the lands of Spain and France, and he painted landscapes in the Canary Islands and South America. He tends to reduce the human presence and that of domestic animals, or they only appear in an ancillary manner, instead emphasising the grandeur of the landscape. He captures the passing of time expressed by the incessant movement of water and air. He specialized in the representation of greyish skies or ones charged with dense clouds, both of which gave life to his compositions.

The chronological and geographic classification of Meifrén's landscapes is exceedingly difficult, since he frequently did not date his compositions or give indications on the location of the site where he painted from life. One element that can orientate us in dating his works, apart from their intrinsic quality, is his signature. In his first works, until 1890 approximately, he signed in upper case letters with an initial 'M' that stood out due to its stylisation as a kind of rubric, and dated his works with only two figures. As his work matured, Meifrén stopped dating his compositions and changed his signature: he started to sign in lower case letters, apart from the initials, and in a looser fashion. However, his signature only gives us some limited indication of how to date his works, and it is necessary to concentrate on other elements as well in order to determine the chronology of the present painting.

This view of the sea or a river, signed 'E. Meifren' in very free lower-case letters, possibly represents a landscape in the northern coast of Spain. We can situate it chronologically towards 1910 owing to its general appearance. This time has been described as a 'period of

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eclosión' by Mercè Vidal,¹ who emphasises that 'there is no sign of weakness' in the works Meifrén produced then. In this period, he painted few mountain landscapes and was more attracted by the abruptness of the sea, by beaches, or by plains traversed by a river. One can note representations of beaches with extensive sandbanks, often punctuated by some beached boats and by figures in movement. The present work exemplifies the pictorial device frequently adopted by Meifrén in his mature period: the harmonious balance between sky and earth, the sea with the broad beach with sketchy figures and small boats, crowned by dense and spongy clouds in movement. Again the influence of the Impressionists is very much evident in this vibrant and animated landscape, adorned with patches of colour and visible brushstrokes. It constitutes a clear example of Meifrén's more finished work: a synthesis of all his artistic advances.

¹ M. Vidal, *E. Meifrén*, Barcelona 1991.