

# LE CLAIRE

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GINO SEVERINI

1883 Cortona - Paris 1966

### *Paesaggio con chiesa*

Oil on panel, 1903.

Signed and dated in the upper left margin: *Severini 1903*.

9,8 x 18,0 cm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Rome (possibly a gift from the artist, by 1910) - Thence by descent

The present painting, executed by Gino Severini circa 1903 is an important and rare example of the famed Italian artist's transition between two crucial artistic movements of the twentieth century: Divisionism and Futurism.

In 1906 Severini left Italy for Paris, where he met numerous eminent members of the French avant-garde, including Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, and Juan Gris. It is these encounters with the Cubists, among others, which undoubtedly facilitated Severini's move toward Futurism in opening his eyes to the imminent directional change of European art. When the Italian native arrived in France, many innovative artists had already begun to eschew the Impressionist style which had flourished in the late nineteenth century in favour of what some critics have termed *cold* or *geometric* abstraction; a style of depiction partially inspired by the rapid modernisation of an increasingly mechanically-dependent world. Yet Severini's involvement in Futurism, the movement for which he is most widely recognised today, would only come to be after nearly a decade of artistic productivity.

Born in the small Tuscan town of Cortona, on 7 April 1883, Severini left for Rome at the age of sixteen in order to follow his passion for the arts. There he worked as a bookkeeper, and thanks to the financial support of a prelate back in Cortona, he was able to attend a school of design as well as the Scuola Libera del Nudo. This relocation would prove highly formative for Severini, as it not only inspired the young man to pursue a professional career as a painter; but it was also whilst residing in Rome that Severini would come to meet fellow artist Umberto Boccioni in 1901. Over the course of several years the pair would be taught Neo-Impressionist techniques by none other than Giacomo Balla. Both Boccioni and Balla, who would go on to play major roles in the establishment of Futurism as a movement, would have a profound impact upon Severini's entire oeuvre.

Largely as a result of Balla's teachings, Severini's early work consisted of portraits and landscape paintings executed in a Symbolist-laden means of pictorial expression known as Divisionism. At a moment in time when Italian art as a whole had lost much of its previous influence, the Divisionist movement breathed new life into the country's flagging artistic scene. A faithfulness to traditional academism was supplanted by a desire for new content and especially for original techniques of depiction, and was an essential step towards the establishment of Futurism.

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Painted prior to his sojourn in Paris but following his fateful move to Rome, Severini's *Paesaggio con chiesa* depicts the pastoral Italian countryside just outside of Rome. Although the artist was ultimately enthralled by the dynamism of human and mechanical motion, in his youth it was largely from his natural surroundings that he drew inspiration. Both Severini's and Boccioni's early oeuvres contain many landscape paintings of the outskirts of the Italian capital, and given that both were good friends and simultaneously students of Balla, perhaps such paintings were executed in each other's company.

This landscape illustrates the Divisionist fascination with the depiction of light, which was embraced as a subject in and of itself. Indeed, the effects of light, be it natural or artificial, were made central to the movement's overall aesthetic. By focusing on the rendering of this element, many Divisionist paintings can be identified by the subtle glow they seem to possess, which the artists believed imbued their paintings with the capability of rousing from the viewer a strong emotional reaction. The present painting possesses a stunning luminosity, and it seems that Severini succeeded in perfectly capturing the light of the exact time of day and location he was painting. His exceptional use of colour is also fully in line with the tenets of Divisionism. Particularly discernable in *Paesaggio con chiesa*, small, un-mixed dabs of colour are juxtaposed throughout the canvas. Reds and greens are contrasted expertly, and the earlier work also layers various blues and lavenders to create the impression of a cloudy, windy sky. These carefully divided areas of pigment, from which the movement gains its name, appear to meld together when viewed from afar.

The work is also fascinating in terms of the detailed execution of Severini's brushwork. Close examination of the painting reveals the use of delicate, discreet brushstrokes in various hues, all of which have been carefully applied to the board in a semi-impasto manner. *Each mark seems to subtly trace the silhouettes of the objects depicted, creating the illusion of the expansion of these forms into the surrounding atmosphere. This impression of growth or movement within the work together with the luminous vibrations created by the separation or 'division' of tones in the Divisionist paintings, offered a stepping stone to the fragmentation of the object and the basis for the dynamism of the young artist's canvases depicting speed, the hallmark of futurism.*<sup>1</sup>

The authenticity of this work has kindly been confirmed by Romana Severini Brunori.

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<sup>1</sup> Simonetta Fraquelli, *Italian Divisionism and its Legacy*, in *Radical Light: Italy's Divisionist Painters 1891-1910*, exhib. cat., Kunsthau Zürich and National Gallery, London, 2008, p. 18.