

VALENTIN AUGUSTOWITSCH FELDMANN

(Russian 1864 - 1928)

Two Boys Fishing

signed in Cyrillic (lower left), indistinctly inscribed in Cyrillic and dated '1st October 1896' (lower right)
watercolour on paper
37 x 24 cm (14½ x 9½ in)

A SOFT HONEY-TONED GLOW ILLUMINATES THE watercolour and a sense of warmth and tranquil calm emanates from the scene. The muted pastel tones of the buildings and coastline pleasantly contrast with the striking blue of the sea and the bright red garment worn by the standing boy in the middle ground. The architectural forms melt seamlessly into the background and the scene is bathed in balmy sunlight from the top left of the watercolour. This melodious composition leads the eye into the background of the painting, from the darker toned foreground, to the brighter middle ground and then to the misty and muffled tones of the background. One of the figures depicted in the middle ground sits on the rocks looking down into the sea, extending his fishing rod into the flock of seagulls that swim about below them. The other figure leans casually against a walking stick; his facial features are indistinguishable but the positioning of his hat suggests that he is staring out towards the viewer. The dappled colouring of the water's surface, with dashes of bright blue, grey and white, give an illusion of movement, an effect heightened by the contrast with the still water depicted in the rock pools in the foreground. Fishing boats are scattered along the shore whilst the tired-looking buildings perch along the water's edge.

As one of the leading watercolourists of his generation, there is great diversity in the work of Valentin Augustowitsch Feldmann. However, a common theme in many of them is the study of light, *Shore of Smyrna* being a comparable example (Figure 1). Although compositionally *Shore of Smyrna, Cyprus* is a much more panoramic scene than the present work, both coastal views are drenched in sunlight. Feldmann's skilful manipulation of watercolour ensures that these coastal scenes are bleached in what feels a slightly hazy, but nevertheless, intense sunshine. *Two Boys Fishing* was probably painted in the Crimea, where Feldmann was working at the time, and in it he manages to capture the overwhelming brightness and heat of the region.

Feldmann was born into a Russo-German family near St. Petersburg, and from 1883 to 1889 he studied at the architectural department of the St. Petersburg Academy of Arts, where he earned the title of Artist of the First Degree. It was at the academy where he came into contact with the work of Luigi Ossipovich Premazzi (see inventory), who was a professor there.



Valentin Augustowitsch Feldmann, *Shore of Smyrna, Cyprus*, 1899, Private Collection (Figure 1)

The influence of Premazzi, in whose art light played an integral role, can be clearly seen in *Two Boys Fishing*. Having graduated Feldmann worked with the famous Moscow architect Alexander Nikanorovich Pomerantsev (1849-1918).

In 1891 he moved to the Crimea, where he would spend the rest of his career. Until 1905 he lived and worked in Sevastopol, where it seems likely the present work was painted. He achieved great success as an architect in Sevastopol, most notably with his *Monument to Sunken Ships*, which has become a symbol of the city, but also with his watercolours, which he exhibited annually. Eventually he left Sevastopol, spending time in Kharkov before settling in Kiev, where he spent the rest of his life.

Feldmann was highly successful both as an architect and as a watercolourist. He was a member of the Society of Russian Watercolours, and exhibited in St. Petersburg, Sevastopol, Kharkov and Odessa. He also wrote several books on the subject, including *Light and Colour Purity in Painting* and *Notes on Watercolour Painting*. After his death a posthumous exhibition was held, and his work is found in several museums throughout the Crimea and Kiev.

