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| Rbati, Mohammed Ben Ali (1861-1939) |
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| Mohammed Ben Ali Rbati was an early (if not the first) Moroccan painter. While often referred to as an easel painter, he eschewed canvas in favour of using watercolours on paper. Rbati received early support from European artists in Tangier, where he lived for most of his life. In 1903, Rbati became the cook for Sir John Lavery, a royal portrait painter from England, and he began painting in the years that followed. Rbati had his first exhibition at the Goupil Gallery in London in 1916. Although Rbati had no formal arts training, his exposure to painting and the availability of watercolours in Tangier as a result of the sizeable British population awakened within him a desire to paint the daily scenes he was surrounded by. Rbati’s figurative watercolours on paper focus on Tangier, its Kasbah, and its inhabitants. The paintings depict a wide swath of the population, showing people walking through the streets or gathered in public squares, as well as scenes in cafés and other lavish interiors. Many of the watercolours have large groups of men or women, and the focus is often on the larger scene than on individualising details. Rbati consistently signed the front of his canvases, always in Arabic. |
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| Further reading:  (M'Rabet)  (Maroc)  (Rondeau, R'bati and Slaoui) |