Holiday Powers

Word count 293

Rbati, Mohammed Ben Ali (1861-1939) *Rabat, Morocco*

Mohammed Ben Ali Rbati is known as one of if not the very first Moroccan painters. He is often referred to as an easel painter, though he eschewed canvas for watercolors on paper. Rbati received early support from European artists in Tangier, where he was based 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 at some point in the following years. 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 watercolors in Tangier thanks to the sizeable British population awakened within him a desire to paint the daily scenes that he was surrounded by. Rbati’s figurative watercolors on paper focus on Tangier, its Kasbah, and its inhabitants. The paintings show 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 watercolors have large groups of men or women, and the focus is often more on the larger scene than on individualising details. Rbati consistently signed the front of his canvases, always in Arabic.

References and further reading:

M’Rabet, K. (1989) *Peinture et Identité: L’expérience marocaine,* Paris: L’Harmattan. (This book contains significant contextual information.)

Rachdi, M. (2011) *Partager: une collection d’art ouverte au public,* Casablanca: Espace d’art-Société Générale. (This is the catalog of an exhibition of a collection that includes Rbati.)

Rondeau, D., Slaoui, A. and de Pontcharra, N. (2000) *Mohammed Ben Ali R’bati: un peintre à Tanger en 1900*, Casablanca: Fondation Aberrahman Slaoui. (This is one of the rare books that has been published focusing on Rbati.)