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ITEM NUMBER
#46

GENERATED
05 Nov 2026

The Maître d'Hôtel - oil on panel



PRICE
£6,000.00

MATERIAL
Oil on panel

DIMENSIONS
H40 x W32 cm

DESCRIPTION

In the manner of Augustin Théodule Ribot (1823 - 1891)
Placed centrally on the panel, the ruddy-faced, formally dressed maître d' is proffering a lobster to an unseen customer. In stark contrast to the shadowy background, the artist highlights the starchy whiteness of the apron, shirt front and napkin; elevating the humble subject with dramatic lighting. Similarly to Ribot's paintings, this reveals the artist's interest in the work of Spanish and Dutch Baroque masters Ribera and Rembrandt.

Théodule Ribot, 1823 – 1891 · The Painter of Cooks

Born in Saint-Nicolas-d'Aliermont, Normandy, Ribot was one of the most original and solitary figures of nineteenth-century French Realism. Largely self-taught, he supported himself through years of obscurity and persistent financial hardship — difficulties that shadowed him throughout his life.

The powerful chiaroscuro in Old Master paintings of 17th century Spain and Naples — the play of dark shadows and concentrated light — became the signature of his art,, to which he remained faithful for the rest of his life.

Ribot's breakthrough came at the Salon in 1861. Of the five works he exhibited, four depicted cooks, earning him the nickname "the painter of cooks." 19th century Paris had seen an explosion of restaurants of every class and Ribot brought the figure of the marmiton — the lowly kitchen boy or scullion — out of the servants' quarters and into serious painting. Until then the imagery of domestic service had been dominated by the maidservant; Ribot gave the male kitchen worker a new presence and dignity.

These were never mere genre scenes. In a work such as Le Cuisinier comptable (The Cook-Accountant), the cook has left his stoves to bend over his books, introducing a theme that would run through Ribot's career: money. It recurs in Le Flûteur, La Comptabilité and Les Titres de famille, and over time it darkened — a likely reflection of his own precarious finances. The cook paintings also showcased his command of black-and-white tonal painting and his love of still life: the earthenware pots set against a black ground are perfect echoes of the Spanish bodegón, and they alone justified the critics' constant comparison of Ribot to the masters of the Golden Age.

Beyond the kitchen, Ribot painted realist and fanciful portraits, religious and "fable" subjects ranging from tortured bodies to ragged philosophers, and a small number of landscapes and rare seascapes. He worked from attic studios pierced by skylights, first in Argenteuil and later in Colombes.

Annotated from the catalogue for "A Delicious Obscurity - Théodule Ribot" at the Musée des Augustins, Toulouse. October 2021

LITERATURE

Contextual reference: catalogue for "A Delicious Obscurity - Théodule Ribot", Musée des Augustins, Toulouse, October 2021.