

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Théodule Ribot

(Saint-Nicholas-d'Attez 1823 – 1891 Colombes)

Studies of the artist's hands

Monogrammed and dated lower right and dated: *6.9bre 84*

Pen and ink on paper

17 x 22 cm. (6 ¾ x 8 ½ in.)

Provenance:

Paris, Rossini, 14 April 2021, lot 8.



This spirited and vigorously executed sheet of pen and ink study of Théodule Ribot's hands can be linked to a group of drawings by the artist from the 1880s (figs. 1, 2 and 3), all using his favoured medium of pen and sepia ink sometimes combined with a sepia wash, as in one of the sheets in Beauvais (fig. 1). Like many of his great Renaissance predecessors, the French realist artist Ribot seems to have been fascinated throughout his life with drawing the human hand, exploring the possibilities of differing viewpoints and showing the hand in various positions: with fingers extended, or curled, relaxed or in tension. There are also several surviving drawings by him showing studies of his wife and daughter's hands.

In the Beauvais sheets Ribot seems to be portraying his own left hand, a frequent subject for artists. However, in the present, unusually elaborate sheet of studies, Ribot has also included a study of his right hand holding a pen and in the process of drawing, a detail which gives an added sense of vivacity to the sheet by suggesting that we are witnessing both the subject being studied by the artist (his left hand in various positions) and the process by which these studies were recorded on paper.



Fig 1. Theodule Ribot, *Studies of the artist's left hand*, pen and brown ink with sepia wash, 1880, Beauvais, Musée de l'Oise



Fig 2. Theodule Ribot, *Studies of the artist's left hand*, pen and brown ink, 1880, Beauvais, Musée de l'Oise

Son of a civil engineer and a pupil of Auguste-Barthélémy Glaize, Ribot dazzled his contemporaries with his artistic variety and individuality. And yet it was this originality which hampered Ribot in his efforts to gain commercial success and official recognition. His work was rejected by the Salon jury four times before eventually being accepted in 1861, though, when finally accepted, Ribot was praised by the prominent art critic Théophile

Gautier no less, who eulogised Ribot's verve and originality.¹ Gautier also astutely cited Velasquez in connection with Ribot, who, along with other figures of the Spanish Golden Age visible in the Louvre, was undoubtedly an important source of inspiration for the French artist. The impact of these artists is reflected in Ribot's use of chiaroscuro and his energetic technique, as well as the general sense of stillness and timelessness which pervade his diverse output, whether that be his religious compositions, portraits, still lifes, genre scenes and occasional land- and seascapes.



Fig 3. Theodule Ribot, *Study of the artist's left hand*, pen and brown ink with sepia wash, 1891, Private Collection

¹ T. Gautier, *Abécédaire du Salon de 1861*, Paris 1861, p. 318.