

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Joaquim Sunyer  
(Sitges 1874 - 1956)

## *The Theatre*

Paris, 1901

pastel and paper on canvas

61 x 50 cm.;

24 1/8 x 19 3/4 in.

signed and dated lower left: *Sunyer / 1901*

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



---

LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760

In 1901, after several years of abject poverty, Joaquim Sunyer's fortunes changed and he began to be known on the Parisian art circuit. After leaving Montparnasse and Belleville to settle in Montmartre, he came into contact with the gallery owner Berthe Weil (1865-1951) and the art dealer Kleimann. The latter began to market Sunyer's works depicting the Rue Lepic, the Jardin du Luxembourg and certain interiors and music hall and cabaret scenes.

Sunyer's pastels depicting the interiors of music halls, cabarets and theatres are the second most typical and important series of works he painted in the Ville Lumière. *The Theatre*, painted in 1901, is a fine example of the quality of this type of composition. Sunyer demonstrates his mastery of the pastel technique, following formulas commonly found in works by Degas and Daumier. He divides the composition into two areas that define two groups of characters and actions in one space. The area on the right depicts in detail the faces of a group of women chatting at a table. The four figures create an intriguing rhythm punctuated by the four heads and their hats and add dynamism to the whole composition, contrasting with the area on the left, in which Sunyer portrays the human figure in a more dramatic, if less detailed, light, intent as he is on capturing the look and mood of the crowd. If the ladies are chatting quietly and seem oblivious to what is happening on stage, the shapeless crowd – recreated with a very rich interplay of dark lines and shadows with many nuances – moves towards the stage where a can-can dancer is raising her legs. The dancer is rendered in an absolutely modern way. There is no silhouette, in fact, there is not even a figure as such. She seems to emerge from a yellow nebula, which is also the focus of light for the whole work, in which a barely hinted green torso is cut out and extended, and two red lines stand for her legs kicking up the can-can.

Sunyer emphasises the interplay of gender roles in Parisian theatre at the turn of the century. The female characters show their indifference to the can-can dancer, either by chatting, oblivious to the show, or by leaving the room, like the two ladies exiting on the left, away from the crowd. The human mass in the stalls, on the other hand, is most probably made up of men who gaze in ecstasy at the erotic and provocative dance of the can-can.