

# COLNAGHI



José Navarro Llorens  
*Moroccan Souk, 1900*



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JOSÉ NAVARRO LLORENS  
(Valencia 1867–1923)

*MOROCCAN SOUK, 1900*

Signed lower right: "José Navarro 1900"

Oil on panel  
12 × 16 cm (4 3/4 × 6 1/3 in.)

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## Provenance

Acquired from Setdart, Lot 38, auction 12.11.2024 (Export Licence 2024/ 12238).

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## Literature

Navarro Llorens, José. *Benezit Dictionary of Artists*. Retrieved 2 Oct. 2025, from <https://www.oxfordartonline.com/benezit/view/10.1093/benz/9780199773787.001.0001/acref-9780199773787-e-00129050>

Dizy Caso, Eduardo, *Los orientalistas de la escuela española*, ACR Éditions, Paris, 1997, pp. 195.

Museo Nacional del Prado, *Maestros de la pintura Valenciana: del siglo XIX en el Museo*, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 1997, pp. 88.

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Navarro's *Moroccan Souk* from 1900, portrays a scene of daily life in a North African market, executed with the loose brushwork typical of plein-air painting. The composition revolves around an architectural framework of whitewashed vernacular buildings, forming a corridor leading to domed structures, likely a mosque, in the background. These domes punctuate the horizon beneath a vivid blue sky, while wooden awnings frame the upper part of the canvas in the immediate foreground, creating a sense of enclosure. This arrangement guides the viewer's eye through layers of architecture and human activity, from the market stalls to the distant religious structure.

The artist demonstrates remarkable skill in capturing the distinctive quality of Mediterranean light. Bright blue skies dominate the scene, creating stark contrasts between the dazzling white buildings and the cool shadows cast beneath the awnings. The interplay of warm and cool tones conveys a strong sense of heat and atmosphere, while the visible brushstrokes seem to shimmer, evoking the very air heavy with warmth and dust.

Navarro employs an impressionistic style, characterised by energetic, visible brushstrokes that convey movement and light rather than minute detail. The application of paint varies throughout: thicker impasto emphasises architectural details and the pottery in the foreground, while more fluid, translucent strokes render distant figures and atmospheric effects. This technique creates rich texture and directs the viewer's focus through the scene.

The painting's colour scheme centres around a refined interplay of contrast. The predominant whites and creams of the architecture are enlivened with subtle hints of pink and reflected light. Against this neutral base, the artist introduces brushstrokes of saturated colour: the rich earth tones and burgundies of the pottery display, the varied shades of the figures' garments: ochre, green, blue and above all, the stunning sky with its delicate cloud formations. Navarro employs atmospheric perspective expertly, with forms becoming gradually lighter and less defined as they recede into space. The architectural elements in the distance dissolve into softer, more muted tones. This gentle reduction of contrast and detail produces a convincing sense of spatial depth within a relatively compact pictorial space.

Human figures are portrayed economically throughout the composition. In the immediate foreground, a merchant tends to an impressive array of ceramics spread out on the ground: vessels, decorative plates and ornamental objects that catch and reflect the ambient light. A figure, draped in dark robes and likely a woman in traditional dress, dominates the right foreground, creating a strong vertical accent. Throughout the middle ground, clusters of figures in traditional garments populate the street, their forms suggested rather than sharply defined, becoming integral elements of colour and movement within the overall composition. The domed buildings that crown the distant skyline serve as focal points, anchoring the composition while suggesting a broader urban landscape beyond the immediate scene.

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José Navarro Llorens (1867–1923) was born in Godella, near Valencia. Little is known about his parents or early years. He studied at the Escuela de Bellas Artes of the San Carlos Academy in Valencia, where he formed friendships with Joaquín Sorolla and Ignacio Pinazo. He took part in the Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes for the first and only time in 1895, receiving an honourable mention, while Sorolla won first prize for his renowned *And They Still Say Fish is Expensive!*

Navarro travelled to Morocco, Argentina, and Brazil. In 1903, he spent several months in Brazil, achieving both commercial and critical success. In 1920, he participated in the 'Arte Gallego' exhibition in Buenos Aires. Much of his work was sold abroad and exhibited in England, the United States, and several South American countries. For most of his life, he resided in Godella, Valencia. In 1923, a posthumous exhibition of his work was held at the Salón Vilches in Madrid.

Navarro's work can be divided into two distinct phases: an early Post-Romantic period and a later phase characterised by spontaneous impressionistic sensibilities that emphasise emotional expression and immediacy over technical precision. His facility in depicting atmosphere has led to comparisons with Sorolla, firmly positioning him within the Valencian artistic tradition. Navarro is recognised for his Orientalist paintings, still lifes and local landscapes exploring many themes, including beach scenes, storms and shipwrecks, children, gypsies, Moroccan subjects, and informal Valencian scenes.

While reflecting the European fascination with North African culture characteristic of the period, Navarro's treatment eschews the exotic fantasia common to much Orientalist work in favour of observed commercial and social rhythms. He captures the vernacular architecture of the souk alongside moments of daily transaction and movement. The painting serves as both an artistic interpretation and a historical document, preserving a moment of cultural exchange in turn-of-the-century Morocco. Yet it is ultimately Navarro's synthesis of academic training with modern impressionistic sensibilities that distinguishes this work. The painting captures not merely the visual appearance of its subject but something more ephemeral, the sensory experience of a particular place at a specific moment, where colour, architecture, and human activity coalesce. It stands as a testament to the painter's ability to transform direct observation into an enduring aesthetic experience.

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