

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Johann Gottfried Eiffe (Hamburg 1773 - 1818)

*Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Riché, Comte De La Grande-rivière-du-nord (1780 - 1847),
c. 1816-1818*

Oil on canvas

28 x 35.5 cm (11 x 14 in.)

Provenance

Anonymous sale, London, Lyon & Turnbull, 30 October 2019, lot 55 (as 'French School,
19th Century');

Private collection, UK.



This outstanding military portrait, datable to circa 1816-18, during the period of the Kingdom of Haiti (1811–20), depicts Jean-Baptiste Riché on horseback, dressed in full military regalia and surrounded by his officers in a Haitian landscape.¹ Riché is one of the foremost names of Haitian history from the 19th century, a formative period in the annals of the Caribbean Island. Riché made his name as an officer under King Henri I of Haiti (1767-1820), fighting on the independent monarch's side during the conflict between the Kingdom and Republic of Haiti (1807-20), and later becoming the 6th President of Haiti (fig. 1).

Riché was born a freeman in the North Province of Saint-Domingue, a province in the then-French colony in the western portion of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, modern-day Haiti. The son of a sergeant in the Colonial Militia, Riché followed in his father's footsteps by joining the War of Independence in 1802. He would become a pivotal leader in the war, playing his part in numerous, key battles. During the siege of La Crête à Pierrot, Riché was struck by a projectile, which blinded him in his right eye. After Emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines' (1758-1806) assassination by his generals, Riché took command of the troops of Dessalines' former supporter, Henri Christophe - later King Henri I (the only Monarch of the Kingdom of Haiti). Christophe promoted Riché to the rank of General and made him Deputy-Commander of his forces.



Fig. 1. Image extracted from page 163 of *Dictionnaire géographique et administratif universel d'Haiti illustre ... ou guide général en Haiti ...*, by S. Rouzier.

Original held and digitised by the British Library.

Following Dessalines' demise, two factions emerged among the Haitian Revolutionaries: those who supported Alexandre Pétion, who advocated a change to more democratic foundations for a new regime, and Henri Christophe, who sought to consolidate absolute power in himself, as Dessalines had done. Riché fought relentlessly on behalf of his new commander, eventually assisting in the defeat of Pétion at Port-au-Prince. Riché was ennobled by Christophe for his efforts, becoming Comte de la Grande-Rivière-du-Nord in Christophe's newly established Haitian peerage.

Like the Empire that preceded it, the Haitian Monarchy was short-lived and in 1820, a new Republic was formed under Jean-Pierre Boyer (1776-1850). The new president reunited the north and south of the country into the Republic of Haiti in that year, later annexing the newly independent French Haiti (Santo Domingo, formerly Saint-Domingue), which brought all of Hispaniola under one Haitian government by 1822. Ever the canny diplomat, Riché maintained his post and kept his title under the new president until 1845, when Jean-Louis

¹ We are grateful to Dr. David Patrick Geggus for his help with cataloguing this painting.

Pierrot (1761-1857) - a fellow former general of Riché's under Christophe's rule - became the new president. Pierrot's intended reforms, and his attitudes towards the Dominicans (the residents of the former French colony), were not popular with his people, who did not want yet another war with their neighbours and who disliked a number of his government appointments. A comparatively peaceful revolt led to Pierrot's voluntary resignation and Riché, in the final year of his life, was declared President of Haiti on the 24th of March, 1846.²

One of Riché's first acts as president, was to restore the 1816 Constitution, re-establishing the two separate branches of legislative power: the Chamber of Deputies, and the Senate of the Republic. Despite his conservative reforms, the political situation in Haiti remained tempestuous, with internecine conflict ongoing between the disparate factions and political activists. Mere months into his premiership, Riché lost the support of his backers, and, less than a year after taking office, Riché died in Port-au-Prince, likely the victim of poisoning.³

Although Riché was given little chance to achieve anything as President of Haiti, he was nevertheless a remarkable man and a key figure in the turbulent first half of the 19th century in Haiti. His presidency marked a turning point in Haitian political history, opening the way for subsequent leaders' consolidation of power and the removal of the weakly representative government that Riché, and his predecessor Pierrot, had supported.



Fig. 2. After Johann Gottfried Eiffe, *Portrait Henri Christophe of Haiti*, oil on panel.
Sale, Auctionata Berlin, 2 December 2014, lot 42.

With regard to the author of the present picture, Johann Gottfried Eiffe's (1773 - 1818) career culminated in an intense, if brief, engagement with the royal court of post-revolutionary Haiti.⁴ In 1816 he accepted King Henry I's invitation to join the newly established Kingdom of Haiti, which actively recruited European artists with the promise of substantial remuneration to help articulate its monarchical identity. Resident at Cap-Henri, Eiffe produced numerous portraits and decorated interiors of the royal palace. A small oil portrait of Henry I, known today through a version formerly with Auctionata in Berlin (fig. 2), is generally attributed to him and provides a crucial point of comparison for his wider Haitian oeuvre, including portraits of the king's officers and nobles such as Jean-Baptiste Riché.

² R. D. Heintz and N. Gordon, *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1995*, Lanham 1996, p. 183.

³ Ibid. p. 184.

⁴ See S. Geese, "Eiffe, Johann Gottfried" in F. Kopitzsch and D. Brietzke (eds.), *Hamburgische Biografie*, Göttingen 2006, vol.3. pp. 108-109.

Eiffe's eventual dismissal, once his intention to return to Germany became known, and his death in extreme poverty in 1818 underscore the volatility of Christophe's regime and the consequent precarious position of foreign artists at his court.



Fig. 3. Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussy-Trioson, *Portrait of Jean-Baptiste Belley, Deputy from Santo Domingo*, 1797, oil on canvas, Versailles, Musée national du Château de Versailles.



Fig. 4. Comte Alexandre François Louis de Girardin, *Portrait de François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture (1743–1803) portant un chapeau orné d'une cocarde, en buste*, 1804–5, oil on canvas. Sale, Christie's Paris, 21 November 2024, lot. 37.

The present work belongs to a small but highly charged corpus of images that sought to visualise Black military and political authority in the wake of the Haitian Revolution. In this respect, it stands in dialogue with Anne-Louis Girodet's *Portrait de Jean-Baptiste Belley, député de Saint-Domingue* (1797, fig. 3) and the recently re-emerged *Portrait de François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture* attributed to Alexandre-François-Louis de Girardin (Christie's, Paris, 2021, fig. 4), as well as with Richard Evans's portraits of King Henry I (Henri Christophe) and his son Prince Jacques-Victor-Henri, painted at Cap-Henri around 1816 (figs. 5-6).



Fig. 5. Richard Evans, *Henry Christophe, King of Haiti*, c. 1816, oil on canvas. San Juan, University of Puerto Rico, Alfred Nemours Collection of Haitian History.



Fig. 6. Richard Evans, *Royal Prince Jacques-Victor-Henri Christophe*, c. 1816, oil on canvas, San Juan, University of Puerto Rico, Alfred Nemours Collection of Haitian History.

Eiffe's equestrian image of Jean-Baptiste Riché, produced under the Kingdom of Haiti, participates in and extends this visual tradition. Whereas Girodet and Girardin fashioned their images for audiences still located within the French imperial sphere, Evans and Eiffe worked within a sovereign Black monarchy that actively commissioned European artists to fashion a courtly imagery commensurate with its claims to legitimacy.