

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Santiago Rusiñol

(Barcelona 1861 - 1931 Aranjuez)

Erik Satie playing the harmonium

Paris, 1891

oil on canvas

61 x 50 cm.;

24 1/8 x 19 3/4 in.

Provenance

With Artur Ramon Gallery, 1990;
Josep Lloveras Collection, Barcelona.

Literature

J. de C. Laplana, *Santiago Rusiñol. El pintor, l'home*, Barcelona 1995, cat. no. 6.5.12, p. 509;
Santiago Rusiñol (1861-1931), exh. cat., Barcelona 1997, cat. no. 22, p. 152;
J. de C. Laplana & M. Palau-Ribes O'Callaghan, *La pintura de Santiago Rusiñol. Obra completa*, vol. III, Barcelona 2004, cat. no. 6.4.6, p. 62.

Exhibited

Barcelona, Sala Parés, *III Exposición de pintores de fama*, 10 – 27 April 1943 (cat. no. 33, reproduced on the cover);

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Barcelona, MNAC (Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya), *Santiago Rusiñol (1861-1931)*,
October 1997 – January 1998 (cat. no. 22).

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The Greek composer approached this noble wind instrument, and in less than two minutes he had played the whole keyboard downward from the top with astonishing speed. The eight registers trembled as they were so suddenly assaulted, and from the bottom of that piece of furniture came forth notes of such gentle charm, joined together with such harmony and melodious sound, that we could not believe that the old instrument (which had been so unresponsive to our hands) had hidden in it such eloquent phrases and words which were so sweet to our ears. So we looked under the table to convince ourselves that there was no hidden organ playing instead of that ancient thing.

S. Rusiñol, 'Desde el molino. El *réveillon*', *La Vanguardia*, Barcelona, 18 January 1891, pp. 4-5.¹

Santiago Rusiñol began to paint as a self-taught artist, as his family circumstances meant that he was trained as a businessman; he came from a family of wealthy industrialists who owned a textile factory in Manlleu, 80 km north of Barcelona, which was run by his grandfather, Jaume Rusiñol Bosch. When his father died prematurely, Santiago was forced to take over the reins of the family business and devote himself to painting only in his spare time. The year 1887 marked a radical change in his life, as the death of his paternal grandfather freed him from his obligations at the helm of the family company.

From that moment on, Rusiñol's painting became his full-time job. Only a year later, in 1888, he held his first solo exhibition at the Sala Parés in Barcelona, which brought him great recognition. In September 1889 he went to Paris, where he lived in the Montmartre district with other Catalan artists who shared his interests, such as Enric Clarasó, Ramon Canudas and Maurice Utrillo. His first stay in Paris, although brief (barely six months), was a period of intense pictorial activity, producing works which he presented again at the Sala Parés in

¹ Printed in *Santiago Rusiñol (1861-1931)*, exh. cat., Barcelona 1997, p. 152.

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Barcelona in October 1890. Before the end of this exhibition, Rusiñol returned to Paris with his good friend Ramon Casas.

The two men, together with Maurice Utrillo, settled in a house in the same district of Montmartre, the Moulin de la Galette, an old disused mill which gave its name to the premises and included a *guinguette* and a dance hall. Throughout this stay, which lasted until 1892, the house became the setting for his paintings and also gave its name to the chronicles that Rusiñol published in the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia* under the title 'Desde el molino' ('From the Mill').

During those years in Paris, Rusiñol did not live in isolation from the Parisian artistic scene. On the contrary, he developed a pictorial language similar to that of his contemporaries, but oriented towards his own way of understanding painting. He admired the French artists Carrière, Billote and Helleu, as well as Toulouse-Lautrec, Pissarro and Monet, and, among the foreign artists living in Paris, Liebermann, Belleruche, Robertson, Alfred Stevens and Boldini.

Towards the end of 1890, Utrillo introduced him to the composer Erik Satie, with whom he maintained a close relationship until 1894. This friendship was reflected in various anecdotes, Rusiñol's paintings and drawings, most of which date from 1891, like the work discussed here. In fact, one of the chronicles of 'Desde el molino' called 'El réveillon', published in *La Vanguardia* on 18 January 1891, describes the New Year's Eve party held at the Moulin de la Galette. At some point during the evening, Sadi – a nickname given to Satie, which he would keep until the end of his life – played an old harmonium.

Rusiñol was among the first intellectuals to defend Satie's name and talent long before he was recognised as one of the most interesting and unusual composers of the first decades of the 20th century. In this painting, the musician is depicted half-length, facing left and playing his instrument near a window in Rusiñol's flat in the Moulin. The dim light filtering through the slits in the shutter contrasts with Satie's brown hair and black clothes. The

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composer's mane, his dark clothes and his clip-on glasses fastened with a cord were, together with his wide-brimmed hat, the most defining features of his appearance.