

Jean-Baptiste Olive (1848-1936) - Rocks on the Mediterranean coast



Oil on wooden panel signed lower left

Dimensions : H. 32,5 x W. 41 cm (with frame : H. 50,5 x W. 59 cm)

Jean Baptiste Olive was born in Marseille in 1848. He began his classical apprenticeship in the studio of Antoine Vollon where he learned to render the realism of still life. He went to Paris where he created decorations for the winter circus and the Sacré-Coeur in Montmartre. At the age of 23, he exhibited his first landscapes at the Salon des Artistes Français de Paris. The painter lived between the capital and Marseille where he kept a studio on the Canebière. At the 1886 Salon, Jean Baptiste Olive won a medal for a landscape of Marseille. This marked the beginning of a great recognition of his painting marked by the bright light of the sun. In 1889, he executed decorations for the pavilions of the World Fair.

Jean Baptiste Olive was undoubtedly one of the greatest masters of the Marseille school at the end of the 19th century, along with Paul Guigou and Adolphe Monticelli. The landscapes of Provence provided him with most of his subjects for seascapes and harbor views, but Olive also left us some beautiful still lifes. Thick subject matter, impressionistic lighting effects, and skillful staging characterize the art of this luminous painter, many of whose works are preserved in major museums

Our painting is exceptionally powerful. In this modernist work, Jean Baptiste Olive used a wooden panel to deposit the pictorial material directly from the tube. He visibly used both a brush and a knife. As on a painting palette, the painter has mixed his colors directly on the panel, also leaving parts in full pate of pure color. The gesture is spirited and confident: Jean Baptiste Olive is in full procession of his art when he creates this little gem. Contrary to his habit, Olive did not prepare the panel; he painted this marine "in reserve", leaving the support to appear in multiple places, playing with the color of the wood. It is

important to realize what this technique, which will be widely used by the Post-Impressionists, means: the painter applies his colors almost without any preparatory drawing or only after a quick sketch on the wood. The subject is the one that touches me the most in Olive's work: this painter from Marseille adores the sea, he has observed it all his life; he paints like no one else these waves formed by the Mistral, and which foam at their crests before breaking on the rocks. In this intelligent composition, Olive shows his talent and knowledge of the Mediterranean Sea, whose colors vary according to the sea bed, the sky and the wind. The sea passes in front of and behind the rocks, the indented coastline causes this white foam that illuminates the painting. From blue to purple, from pure white to green, the waters are moving. Finally, the coastline and the rocks are painted with the same freedom where the impressionist treatment is based on an undeniable quality of drawing. This painting is in an absolutely perfect condition, no accident or repainting is to be reported. The beautiful wooden and gilded stucco frame is original, it has been perfectly restored.

Museums :

Paris Orsay Museum, Aix en Provence, Béziers, Nîmes, etc...

Bibliography :

E. Bénézit, Gründ edition, Volume 10, page 357.

Jean-Claude and Gérard Gamet : Jean-Baptiste Olive : his life, his work, Frébert edition, Marseille, 1977.

