19th century English fishing boats moored by the coastline at Night with Moonlight

William Thornley

$3,950

David Brooker Fine Art
UK: +44 (0)7870 851 498 • US +1 203 232 2807
info@davidbrooker.com • www.davidbrooker.com

REF: 2353

Height: 38.09 cm (15")

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Width: 33.01 cm (13")

Description

William Thornley
(British, 1857-1935)

Fishing Boats at Night
Circa 1890
Oil on panel
Unsigned

A moody and atmospheric nocturne attributed to William Thornley, this evocative harbour scene captures the quiet poetry of working boats gathered at dusk. Under a darkening sky, the last light of day lingers low on the horizon, casting a silvery path across gently rippling water. The composition is anchored by a cluster of fishing vessels to the left, their sails furled and hulls massed in shadow, while a solitary rowboat with two figures glides across the luminous foreground.

The handling of light is central to the painting's effect. Thornley was particularly adept at rendering transitional hours-sunset and twilight-when sky and water merge in subtle tonal harmonies. Here, smoky greys and muted umbers dissolve into a soft golden glow at the centre of the composition, suggesting either the dying embers of sunset or the first hint of moonrise. The reflection across the harbour is treated with fluid, horizontal strokes, contrasting with the darker, more sculptural treatment of boats and shoreline.

Although unsigned, the work bears the hallmarks of Thornley's marine subjects: intimate scale, careful attention to rigging and vessel form, and a restrained palette that heightens mood over detail. The scene may well depict a French coastal harbour-Thornley frequently painted along the Normandy coast-yet the sentiment is universal: the day's labour concluded, the tide settling, and figures moving quietly across still water.

Executed on panel, the surface retains a crispness and immediacy that enhances the nocturnal atmosphere. The intimate format invites close viewing, rewarding attention with delicate passages of reflected light and finely observed maritime detail.
Framed in a new hand made English Frame

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