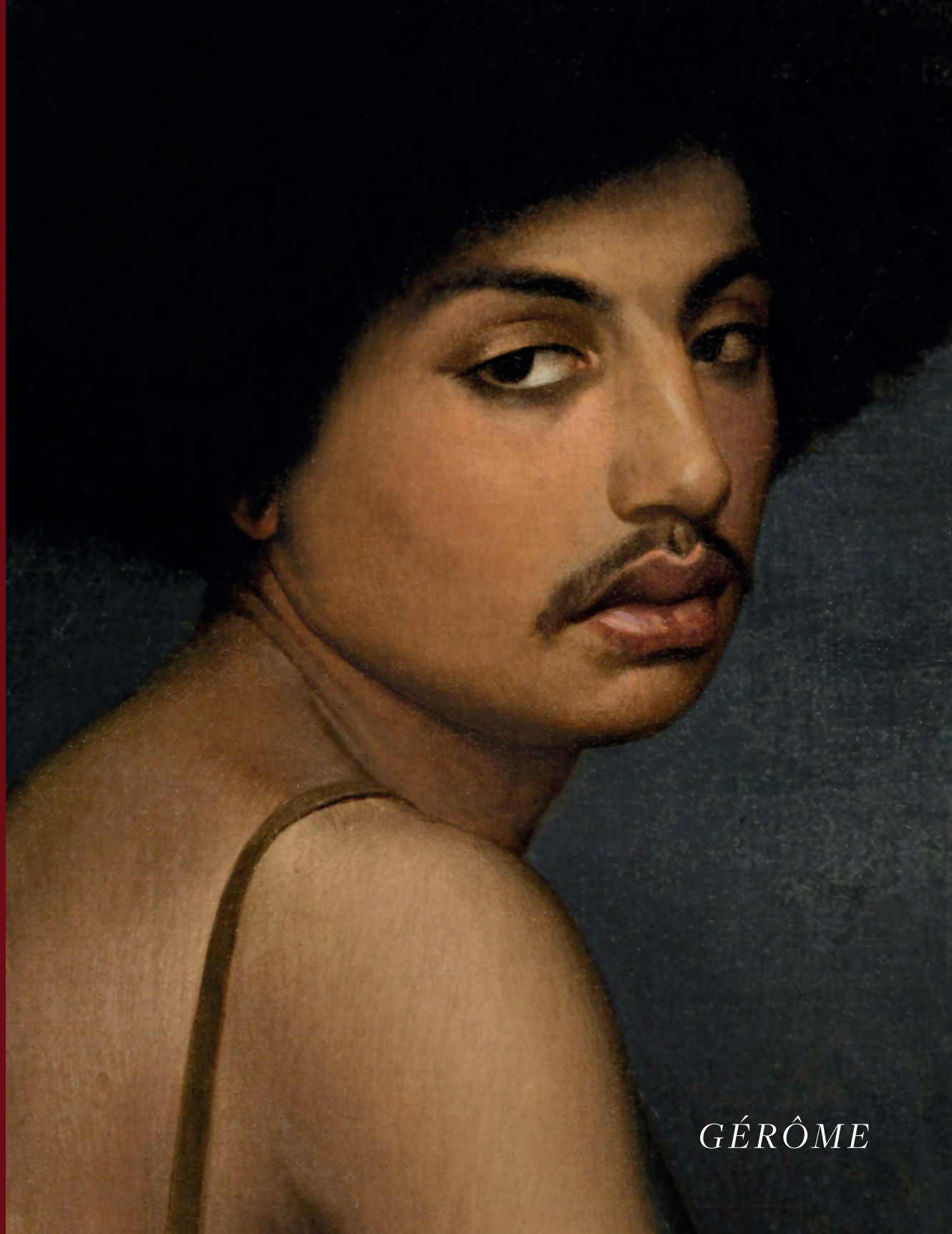


(19)

THE SPECTACULAR 19TH CENTURY



GÉRÔME



G É R Ô M E

Gallery 19C

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Auguste Bartholdi (1834-1904), *Bartholdi and Gérôme in Egypt*, 1856, salt print

“Let us mark with white this lucky year, for unto us a painter is born. He is called Gérôme. I tell you his name today, and tomorrow it will be celebrated.” – THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

INTRODUCTION

When two aspiring young French artists travelled together in Egypt in 1856, they would have had little idea of their future connections with another foreign land – America. Auguste Bartholdi and Jean-Léon Gérôme, shown opposite in a photograph taken by Bartholdi during this trip, would eventually leave their mark on the United States; Gérôme by selling his paintings to just about every prominent American collector and Bartholdi through his commission of the Statue of Liberty, France’s gift to America in celebration of the centennial of American independence. This photograph documents Gérôme’s first Middle Eastern trip, which set the stage for what would follow. When Gérôme died in 1904, he was considered the most significant Orientalist painter of the 19th century, and one of the most successful artists in France.

Gallery 19C is pleased to present our second catalogue, *GÉRÔME*. We have assembled a group of five paintings from different dates in Gérôme’s career. They highlight not only his focus on Orientalism but also his early interest in *Néo-Grec* subject matter. We have found that a common thread linking these paintings is their early American provenance, which can be traced back to important American collectors, such as Catharine Lorillard Wolfe, one of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s first benefactors. We are delighted that Emily Weeks continues to share her passion and unparalleled expertise on Gérôme in both her notes and in her essay discussing Gérôme’s relationship to America. And as an aside, Emily’s sleuth-like research has revealed that one of the earliest collectors of *Socrates Seeking Alcibiades at the House of Aspasia* was none other than Khalil-Bey, the Turkish-Egyptian diplomat, who also owned Ingres’s *Turkish Bath* and most notably Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde*.

A primary goal of Gallery 19C is to provide a visual snapshot of the wide-ranging variety of riches that define the 19th century. Jean-Léon Gérôme will always feature prominently in any discussion of the period. He was a very creative artist with a subtle sense of humor, something that is masked under his too frequently maligned Academic precision; ironically it is this unparalleled technical virtuosity of his technique that continues to attract us and beckons us to marvel at his art.

Eric Weider

Polly Sartori



Fig. 1 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Bashi-Bazouk*, 1868–9, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

AN ENDURING RENAISSANCE: COLLECTING GÉRÔME IN AMERICA

EMILY M. WEEKS, PH.D.

“There are but few French artists of modern times whose works are more known, studied, and appreciated in America than are those of [Jean] Léon Gérôme.” - LUCY H. HOOPER, *THE ART JOURNAL*, N.S. VOL. 3, 1877, P. 26

In 2012, the Metropolitan Museum of Art published the first new edition of its guidebook in nearly thirty years.¹ The picture chosen for its cover was not one of that institution’s Impressionist or Modern masterpieces, or even one of the iconic ancient or Renaissance creations that had become synonymous with its name, but Jean-Léon Gérôme’s *Bashi-Bazouk* of 1868–9, one of thirteen works by the artist in the museum’s permanent collection (fig. 1). The storied history of this painting – purchased directly from the artist by the famed publisher and art dealer Adolphe Goupil (1806–1893), handled at one time by the incomparable Samuel Putnam Avery (1822–1904) of New York,² and passed from one prominent private East Coast collection to the next until it was bequeathed to the Met in 2008 – reflects a broader phenomenon in American art history, of which the present selection of works by Gérôme is an important and instructional part.³

The five paintings featured in this catalogue constitute a remarkable group in Gérôme’s prolific and celebrated oeuvre. Remarkable first for the depth and breadth of subject matter that they display – from *Néo-Grec* to Orientalist, from classicized genre to contemporary portraiture and landscape, from the brilliantly colored and sharply delineated to the evocative and pastel, and from the scientific and the secular to the profoundly religious, personal, and devout – each also addresses America’s unique fascination with Gérôme, from the mid-19th century to the present day. In their provenance, the circumstances of their commissions, and the popularity of their themes, the history of French Academic art in America is written, and the centrality of Gérôme to this narrative confirmed. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that, in presenting this notable group of pictures for the first time together, and considering the issues that they collectively raise, Gallery 19C is leading the way in the critical reexamination of this artist – and of Academic painting more generally – in the context of this country’s modern art world.

Gérôme’s name first appeared on American shores on December 19, 1855, in the New York-based art journal *The Crayon*. The artist’s thirty-foot wide, state-commissioned canvas *The Age of Augustus* (circa 1852–4, Musée de Picardie, Amiens), exhibited at Paris’s Universal Exposition of that year, proved impossible for even the most insular of American critics to ignore.⁴ No more substantial mention was made of the artist, however, until October 1857, when an enthusiastic arts writer visited the annual Salon in Paris and found the “finest pictures of the collection” to be by Gérôme, including *Sortie du bal masqué* (*The Duel after the Ball*) (1857, St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum) and *La Prière chez un chef Arnaut* (*Prayer in the House of the Arnaut Chief*) (1857, whereabouts unknown).⁵ Not long after, the latter painting actually arrived in New York City, along with *Egyptian Recruits Crossing the Desert* (1857, Private Collection), a picture also exhibited in the 1857 Salon (fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Egyptian Recruits Crossing the Desert*, 1857, Private Collection

Shipped to New York by the famous Belgian art dealer Ernest Gambart (1814–1902), known as “the prince of the Victorian art world,” these two paintings were included in a small exhibition of French works organized by Gambart at the International Art Union.⁶ (Instead of establishing a branch in New York, Gambart, in cooperation with art dealers and organizations throughout the United States, brought over selected works for traveling exhibitions, which he displayed at various rented or sublet venues.) Though the event was a failure owing to the disastrous economic conditions in the United States at the time (the so-called “Panic of 1857”), Gambart returned to New York with a second exhibition of 226 French and British paintings at the National Academy in 1859. This time, aided by more numerous and enthusiastic articles in *The Crayon*, *Egyptian Recruits* sold for \$1750 (7500 francs) in a matter of days.⁷ It was purchased by the Philadelphia art dealer Harrison Earl, marking one of the first sales of an original work of art by Gérôme in America. A replica of *The Duel after the Ball* was also bought – despite some doubt on *The Crayon*’s part about the investment quality of this particular composition – for \$2500 (11,000 francs) by the financier and collector William T. Walters (1820–1894), the third highest price realized in the exhibition.⁸

At the same time that the public was getting its first view of Gérôme’s paintings in oil, reproductions of his works were beginning to appear in print-shop windows in major cities up and down the East Coast (fig. 3). (By 1859, and due solely to this practice, Gérôme’s *The Duel after the Ball* was among the most recognizable modern pictures to date.) The publication and widespread distribution of these graphic images, calculated to introduce the American art-buying public to a wide variety of Gérôme’s works at different (and relatively modest) price points, as well as to promote paintings offered for sale (prints of Gérôme’s *Socrates Seeking Alcibiades at the House of Aspasia* [cat. no. 1], for example, were circulated even before the painting was officially anyone’s to sell), was indebted to one of the 19th-century art world’s most transformative and entrepreneurial figures, Adolphe Goupil. Indeed, by 1863, the same year that the artist married into the Goupil family and just four years after formalizing his contract with the firm, Gérôme earned the distinction of being Goupil’s most reproduced artist and, along with Meissonier (1815–1891), Cabanel (1823–1889), and Bouguereau (1825–1905), the most familiar to the American public by name.⁹

In addition to his successful print campaign, Goupil’s reputation as an art dealer also aided Gérôme’s American reputation and sales. In 1848, Goupil had opened a branch of his Parisian gallery in New York, specializing in modern European works.¹⁰ Located across the street from Alexander Turney Stewart’s famous (and America’s first) department store, Goupil & Co. immediately attracted the most acquisitive members of New York’s glitterati with its exhibitions, events, and, after 1854, a retail store on the ground floor.¹¹ Earnings rose from 119,651 francs in 1848 and 188,601 francs in 1849 to 569,000 francs in 1854 – testament to the firm’s outstanding marketing prowess.¹² By 1880, 53 paintings by Gérôme had been sold by Goupil & Co. to American clients, with 34 being Orientalist in subject; by the time of Gérôme’s death in 1904, the firm counted 144 paintings – almost one-quarter of the artist’s output – as now being in American hands.¹³ “Goupil is simply a geographical astonishment,” wrote one contemporary admirer, “He has no more difficulty in placing a good picture on the Pacific coast than in the shadow of his own [Paris] gallery.”¹⁴



Fig. 3 Paul-Adolphe Rajon (after Jean-Léon Gérôme), *The Duel after the Ball*, engraving

Collectors who worked with Goupil included the most distinguished names of America's Gilded Age: John Taylor Johnston (1820–1893); William Tilden Blodgett (1823–1875);¹⁵ George I. Seney (1826–1893); Catharine Lorillard Wolfe (1828–1887), famous in her day as a philanthropist, collector, and the richest single woman in America, as well as a major benefactor of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the one-time owner – thanks to the machinations of Samuel Avery – of Gérôme's remarkable *Bisharin Warrior* of 1872 (cat. no. 2); William T. Walters; Henry Gibson (1830–1891); Jay Gould (1836–1892); and Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919), to name but a few. In addition to being a beneficial neighbor, Alexander Turney Stewart (1803–1876) would also become a regular client: all five of the Gérômes he purchased through Goupil were displayed at his 1 West 34th Street home, which was outfitted with a 75-foot long picture gallery.¹⁶ This architectural addition, with its skylights, dark-hued walls, and Salon-style hang of paintings one above the other, was similar in design to the private galleries of Matthias Arnot (1833–1910), famous for the bidding wars he playfully inspired, and W. H. Vanderbilt (1821–1885), both of whom counted Gérômes in their expansive collections (fig. 4).¹⁷ (It was Vanderbilt, in fact, who owned the *Bashi-Bazouk* with which this essay began.)

The private galleries of these elite figures of the Gilded Age often had a more public role as well, as collectors saw the benefit of promoting themselves through something as admirable and time-honored as fine art. From the late 1850s to 1870s, August Belmont (1816–1890), representative of the Rothschilds banking house and the *chargé d'affaires* to The Hague, occasionally opened his private gallery at 109 Fifth Avenue to the public, all in the name of charity. His numerous Gérômes, which included the *Diogenes* (Walters Art Museum) of 1860, drew crowds “too dense at times to allow the pictures to be seen at proper distances,” according to one frustrated critic.¹⁹ In 1876, Walters began inviting guests to view his Baltimore collection as well; this springtime event required a fifty-cent admission fee, with all proceeds benefiting charity. It was Vanderbilt, however, who opened his gallery more frequently and to more guests than did any other of his peers. Accessible every Thursday between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., and available for special receptions, Vanderbilt's gallery became a regular pilgrimage site for art lovers and a staple on the New York social scene.²⁰ A generation later, Arthur Atwater Kent (1873–1949), the first recorded owner of *Prière dans la Mosquée* (cat. no. 3), brought his version of the private art gallery to Los Angeles, housing approximately 370 artworks in his 29-room home. Kent's frequent, raucous parties offered guests a rather more casual – though equally important – opportunity to view.

The progressive tastes of these early collectors of Gérôme should not be overlooked. Willing to invest in a contemporary painter – a highly speculative venture – these businessmen, real estate moguls, railroad magnates, and industrialists form an original chapter in the history of American art collecting.²¹ For those whose purchases included the artist's more exotic subject matter, moreover, a genre still relatively new to American audiences, this group of men and women may be credited with almost single-handedly popularizing Orientalism in the United States. (Generally speaking, Americans became interested in the Middle East and North Africa only much later in the century. Not having the same political or economic concerns in the area as France or England – at least during the period under discussion here – and involved in their own domestic explorations, expansionism, and of course Civil War, Americans did not venture or look overseas with any real ambition until about 1865. Mid-century collections therefore tended to focus on more familiar subjects, and in particular the landscapes of the Hudson River School.)



Fig. 4 Matthias H. Arnot's Picture Gallery, Elmira, New York, 1913 (with Gérôme's *The Marabou*, 1889, shown center left)

Gérôme began to submit Orientalist pictures to the Paris Salon in 1856, along with the society portraits and historical genre scenes audiences had come to expect from this already fashionable painter. At this time and throughout the 1860s and 1870s, Gérôme made sketching expeditions to Egypt, as well as to Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Algeria, and Spain. As a professor for nearly forty years at the École des Beaux-Arts, Gérôme influenced many of his students to also travel abroad, and his “documentary” or “photographic” style of painting would establish itself as the definitive model for Orientalist painters during the second half of the 19th century.

From the first of his travels, Gérôme made hundreds of sketches and studies and amassed an impressive collection of photographs and local goods, which were used toward the completion of oil paintings executed at his Paris studio. This carefully curated personal library yielded scores of exhibited works, with particular subjects and even specific objects becoming favorite motifs of the artist: figures at prayer, Arnaut soldiers in their distinctive, skirted dress, indeed each of the subjects featured in the four Orientalist works here, became distinctive and highly coveted subgroups within the artist’s expansive oeuvre.

What made these pictures so appealing to American collectors were, ironically enough, the similarities they saw with their own values, lives, and aspirations. High moral principles and strong religious beliefs seemed to be reflected in the artist’s prayer images, while conversely, their dependence on commerce and capitalism and their entrepreneurial spirit were complemented by Gérôme’s images of the Arab marketplace. Americans’ unflagging work ethic, moreover, seemed to be mirrored in the artist’s diligent, labor-intensive *fini*, or style. Buyers could justify the higher and higher prices dealers were demanding because they could actually see the artist’s time and effort. The amount and accuracy of specific historical details in Gérôme’s works held a certain appeal as well: reminiscent of the grand history paintings that these well-traveled art lovers had seen and admired in European museums, these were far easier to understand. Here were no lofty allegorical references or abstruse symbolic allusions, but rather a didactic – and at times humorous – presentation of what these men and women of finance and industry knew best – hard data and fact. (Gérôme’s portrait of an Arnaut soldier [cat. no. 4], with its mix of ethnographic accuracy and satirical posturing is a perfect case in point.) Finally, Gérôme’s use of pure, rich color gave to his pictures a flashy, jewel-like brilliancy that caught the eye of the *nouveau riche* set. The sheer beauty of these deeply resonant and ostensibly educational objects was, they must have felt, icing on the Orientalist cake.

With enthusiasm for Gérôme’s work continuing to grow, the 1870s saw a dramatic escalation in the prices of his paintings. In December 1871, *Consummatum est* (1867, Musée d’Orsay) was sold to Henry N. Smith of New York for \$9000 (39,000 francs), a new American sales record. This record was eclipsed just a few months later when Darius Ogden Mills (1825–1910) of San Francisco and New York paid \$13,500 (59,000 francs) for *Cleopatra Before Caesar* (1866, private collection). Eight months after that, James H. Stebbins of New York bought *Eminence Grise* (1873, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) directly from Goupil in Paris for \$13,863 (60,000 francs). It was Alexander Turney Stewart, however, who set the bar the highest: in 1876, Stewart commissioned a pendant – ultimately unsuccessful, in critics’ eyes – to *Pollice Verso* (1872, Phoenix Art Museum) called *Circus Maximus (The Chariot Race)* (1876, Art Institute of Chicago) (fig. 5), paying the record price of \$29,000 (125,000 francs) for the favor. This record stood for the remainder of Gérôme’s life.

Such momentum, of course, could not last. Beset by a series of new obstacles – competition with Impressionism, a renewed interest in the art of the Dutch and Flemish masters, a backlash against conspicuous consumption, of which the acquisition of high-priced paintings was an obvious part, and the triumphant return of an entire school of European-trained American artists, anxious to make their mark – led to a decline in the taste for Gérôme’s art (and Academic art more generally) almost as meteoric as its rise. In 1887, at the sale of Stewart’s widow’s estate, paintings by Gérôme struggled to reach even half of their previous sales prices, with *Circus Maximus* achieving only \$7,100 (31,000 francs), or a quarter of its original purchase price.²²

Despite the vagaries of the American art market, and the continued underestimation of Academic art even to this day, interest in Gérôme has been revitalized in recent years. (Indeed, the very fact that the group of paintings featured in this catalogue derives from a single, private American collection suggests the continued allure of the artist in the United States.) Thus, while the renowned scholar, collector, and art dealer Robert Isaacson (1927–1998) was able to purchase *First Kiss of the Sun* (cat. no. 5) in New York for \$600 in 1962 (another point during which Academic and Orientalist art were considered passé and abstraction became the order of the day), it sold in 1999 for one thousand times that much.²³ Two years later, the relationship between Goupil and Gérôme was explored in both an exhibition and a scholarly catalogue, with a particular emphasis on the role of Goupil in the mass marketing and reception of the artist in the United States.²⁴ More ambitious, and equally appreciative of Gérôme’s American presence, was the Getty Center’s *Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme*, the first monographic exhibition of the artist in the United States since 1972, when the author of Gérôme’s catalogue raisonné, Gerald Ackerman, mounted a survey of the artist’s oeuvre with works drawn largely from American collections.²⁵ Such Academic and institutional interest has done much to reposition Gérôme in the art historical canon, as well as in the popular imagination, and has reintroduced an entire generation of American art lovers to the complexities and surprising topicality of his work.²⁶ Gérôme’s enduring renaissance in this country, then, has certainly been our gain. For, in the storied histories and subject matter of his paintings, including those five here, lie the records and foundations upon which the American art world was and will continue to be built.



Fig. 5 Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Chariot Race*, 1876, The Art Institute of Chicago

¹ *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Guide*, with an introduction by Thomas P. Campbell, New York, 2012.

² A founder of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Samuel P. Avery was one of the most successful art dealers of the Gilded Age. With his own collection, Avery sought to document the art of his own day by securing one or more examples of the work of every contemporary artist he had met or of whom he had heard. The result was a collection of 17,775 etchings and lithographs, representing 978 artists. This extraordinary group of images was given to The New York Public Library in 1900, and became the foundation for the Library’s print collection. Through his international connections, Avery also helped to build the largest private collections of Gérôme in America, securing works in Europe, Britain, and all along the East Coast. His shift toward modern European art in 1867, the same year that Gérôme exhibited thirteen works at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, is considered a turning point in the history of American collecting habits.

³ Mrs. Charles Wrightsman’s bequest of *A Bashi-Bazouk* coincided with the highly anticipated reopening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s 19th- and early 20th-century galleries; interestingly, an article in the *New York Times* announcing the occasion early in 2008 featured Gérôme’s hauntingly beautiful *Prayer in the Mosque* of 1871, rather than a more familiar or “progressive” work.

⁴ The brief notice appeared in “Notes on the Universal Exposition of Fine Arts in Paris.”

Owned and edited by William Stillman and John Duran, *The Crayon* was devoted to the graphic arts and the literature related to them. Begun in January 1855 as a weekly quarto of 16 pages, the journal became a 32-page monthly in 1856; by the end of its run in 1861, it was considered the best art journal of the period. Its writers’ interest in Gérôme was to be expected; the journal espoused the “truth to nature” ideals of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and saw in the artist’s *Age of Augustus* and other works a matchless dedication to ethnographic accuracy and realistic detail.

⁵ Quoted in DeCourcy E. McIntosh, “Goupil and the American Triumph of Jean-Léon Gérôme,” *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise*, exh. cat., Paris, 2000, p. 34.

⁶ This short-lived venture was created in 1848 by Alphonse Goupil to rival the American Art Union. For a \$5 annual subscription fee, members could visit any of Goupil’s exhibition or gallery venues, and would receive a print valued at the same amount. For the Union’s mission statement, see *Prospectus of the International Art-Union*, New York, 1849.

⁷ The dollar-to-franc equivalency used throughout this essay is based on a simplification of complex historical data.

⁸ For *The Crayon*’s cautionary review, see “Sketchings,” *The Crayon*, December 1859, p. 378.

Walters would later pay 20,000 francs (about \$4600) directly to Gérôme for his acclaimed *Dead Caesar* of 1859. This painting and *The Duel after the Ball* were among the core collection that formed the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore; both remain in the Museum’s collection today.

As the exceptional price for *The Duel* attests, replicas were highly valued during the 19th century, even being regarded as improved and more nuanced versions of the original. As Patricia Mainardi explains, “In performance, we never assume that opening night is qualitatively better than later presentations – first performances are, in fact, usually weaker than subsequent ones, which gain in depth from greater experience and familiarity with the material,” (Patricia Mainardi, “The 19th-century art trade: copies, variations, replicas,” *The Van Gogh Museum Journal*, 2000, pp. 63-4.).

⁹ Also contributing to Gérôme’s growing name recognition was the rise in art criticism and journalism in America at this time. Such familiarity was somewhat ironic, given that Gérôme, unlike many French artists, did not speak English and never visited the United States.

¹⁰ Three European dealers may be credited with introducing contemporary French (and European) art into the United States: Goupil, Gambart and Alfred Cadart (1828-1875). For a detailed account of the influence of this formidable trio, see Lois Marie Fink, “French Art in the United States, 1850-1870: Three Dealers and Collectors,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol. 92, September 1978, pp. 87-100. For an excellent discussion of Goupil’s New York gallery, see Agnès Penot, “The Perils and Perks of Trading Art Overseas: Goupil’s New York Branch,” *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* (online journal), vol. 16, issue 1, Spring 2017, accessed April 2017, <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/index.php/spring17/penot-on-the-perils-and-perks-of-trading-art-overseas-goupils-new-york-branch>.

In 1857, Michael Knoedler (1823-1878) took over Goupil & Co., after managing the New York branch for two years; he retained the Goupil name (it was now legally “Goupil & Co., M. Knoedler Successor”) and the two names were synonymous in America throughout the remainder of the 19th century.

¹¹ Without a strong national museum presence, the role of the dealer in the United States in the first half of the 19th century was far different than today. As arbiters of taste and the leading purveyors of art historical information, their exhibitions, expertise, and consultancy services were profoundly influential; so too, they established an immediate and inexorable link between art and the art market that was virtually nonexistent outside of America.

¹² See Alfred Mainguet, *Résumé de la défense de M. Mainguet*, Paris, 1855, p. 45 [on microfiche], Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris; and Adolphe Goupil, “Note soumise à MM. les membres du jury par Goupil & Cie,” in *Exposition universelle de 1855*, Paris, 1855, p. 2 [on microfiche], Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

¹³ McIntosh, p. 34. For additional estimates, which fluctuate significantly depending on the source, see “Cheap French Pictures,” *New York Times*, July 13, 1884; and Paris Figaro, “American Picture Buyers: How Rich Americans Have Patronized the Artists of France,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, *San Francisco*, issue 141, Friday, March 21, 1884, p. 4. See also Susan Grant, “Whistler’s Mother was not Alone: French Government Acquisitions of American Paintings, 1871-1900,” *Archives of American Art Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1992, pp. 3-4; and H. Barbara Weinberg, *The Lure of Paris: 19th Century American Painters and Their French Teachers*, New York, 1981, p. 78.

¹⁴ Quoted in Edward Strahan [Earl Shinn], ed., *The Art Treasures of America being the Choicest Works of Art in the Public and Private Collections of North America*, Philadelphia, 1879-80, vol. 2, p. 47. This epic survey of major art collections in cities across America, written by Gérôme’s former student, was published in a series of 10 fascicles that subscribers had bound into a 3-volume folio set. Impressively, paintings by Gérôme were listed in nearly every documented collection, attesting to his dominance of the American art market.

¹⁵ Blodgett would later be among the first to buy Gérômes from dealers other than Goupil.

¹⁶ By the 1870s, New Yorkers could see original works by Gérôme in any number of art galleries attached to private residences. Indeed, so fashionable was this architectural addition that numerous publications included a section devoted to their design and content. In “The Distribution of Pictures at Home,” for example, readers were told that the drawing room, as the most important public area, should contain pictures of the “highest conceptions in elegance, purity, and cheerfulness.” Inappropriate were “human corpses, dying and suffering saints, anything lacerating the feelings, and occasioning painful emotions. These should be in public galleries only to elucidate the triumph of the artist either in expression, composition, or theoretical requirements of high art.” Also unacceptable were “paintings of impure nudity and some Dutch pictures because of their repulsive vulgarity or indecency.” “No work of art,” the author continued, “can be called an ornament to the drawing room which a parent cannot contemplate in company with his daughters,” (*Art Amateur*, vol. 7, no. 4, September, 1882, p. 77).

¹⁷ In the early 1880s, Strahan [Earl Shinn] undertook documenting the art collection and household of W. H. Vanderbilt, published under subscription at \$400 a set. He spent 1882 in Paris supervising the hand-colored illustrations in folio size, and approved the first volume for publication in 1883.

Like many of his peers, Vanderbilt employed Samuel Avery to fill his mansion at 640 Fifth Avenue with European, especially French, art. Vanderbilt’s conservative taste, made explicit to Avery, is evident throughout the collection: no nudes, preferably pictures that tell a story, painted in an exacting style.

¹⁸ Since at least the Renaissance, when the formation of private personal picture galleries became widespread among the wealthy, the possibility of art to impart a sense of culture, intelligence, and sophistication on an individual was recognized.

¹⁹ Wolff Pamphlet Collection II, item 16. Belmont’s impressive list of accomplishments also consisted of introducing Thoroughbred horse racing to America and chairing the national committee of the Democratic Party between 1860 and 1872.

²⁰ For an excellent discussion of Vanderbilt's private gallery, see Leanne Zalewski, "Art for the Public: William Henry Vanderbilt's Cultural Legacy," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* (online journal), vol. 11, issue 2, Summer 2012, accessed April 2017, <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer12/leanne-zalewski-william-henry-vanderbilts-cultural-legacy>. For a history of earlier residential art galleries, see Anne McNair Bolin, "Art and Domestic Culture: The Residential Art Gallery in New York City, 1850–1870," Ph.D. diss., Emory University, Atlanta, 2000.

²¹ While the acquisition of European works of the past had long been encouraged, both for the caché that such pictures offered and the certainty of their holding their value, the patronage of living European artists was seen as being in direct competition with – and therefore a threat to – American art. In 1833, in an attempt to protect its native artists, the American government levied a 33% tariff on imported artworks; shortly after, French Salon officials exacted their revenge, moving "that no recompense should be awarded to any [American] this year." This tariff was reinstated (though ultimately unsuccessfully) in 1866, in direct response to the success of Gambart, Goupil, and Cadart in shifting the focus of American art collecting. Ironically, many of the artists who this tariff sought to protect were the same individuals who traveled to Paris to study with contemporary masters such as Gérôme, thereby eroding any visible national distinction in their art. For more on this topic, see Fink, pp. 91–2.

²² Sale: American Art Association, New York, March 23, 1887, lot 60, to Henry Hilton for \$7,100 [buyer according to *New York Evangelist* 1887; price according to an annotated sale catalogue in the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, The Hague]. After 1895, the average price for a work by Gérôme would sink to \$1200 (5,000 francs). For more on Gérôme's status in America in these later years, see "J. L. Gérôme in American Collections," *Collector*, no. 18, September 1, 1890, p. 150.

²³ In 1966, Isaacson purchased the *Solomon's Wall, Jerusalem (The Wailing Wall)* (circa 1875, private collection) for \$6000; at his sale on May 6, 1999, it sold for \$2.3 million.

²⁴ *Gérôme & Goupil: art and enterprise*: [exhibition] Bordeaux, Musée Goupil, October 12, 2000 – January 14, 2001; New York, Dahe Museum of Art, February 6 – May 5, 2001; Pittsburgh, the Frick Art & Historical Center, June 7 – August 12, 2001. For the catalogue, see *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise*, exh. cat., Paris, 2000.

²⁵ *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904)*: [exhibition] The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, June 15 – September 12, 2010; Musée d'Orsay, Paris, October 19, 2010 – January 23, 2011; Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, March 1 – May 22, 2011. Dayton, Ohio, The Dayton Art Institute; Minneapolis, Minnesota, The Minneapolis Institute of Art; and Baltimore, Maryland, Walters Art Gallery, *Jean Léon Gérôme (1824-1904)*, 1972–3. For the Getty catalogue, see Laurence Des Cars, Dominique de Font-Relaux, and Edouard Papet, eds., *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904)*, exh. cat., Milan, 2010.

²⁶ Arguably, the complexities of Gérôme's paintings were first suggested by Edward Said in 1978, when he pointedly chose the artist's *Snake (Serpent) Charmer* (circa 1880, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute) for the cover of his most famous, provocative, and highly influential work, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon/Vintage).



1 Jean-Léon Gérôme

FRENCH, 1824 — 1904

SOCRATES SEEKING ALCIBIADES AT THE HOUSE OF ASPASIA, 1861
signed and dated J.L. GEROME. MDCCCLXI (center left)
oil on canvas
25 1/8 by 38 1/4 in. (63.8 by 97.2 cm.)

PROVENANCE

Commissioned from the artist by Sultan Abdülaziz (ruled 1861–76), Turkey
Goupil, Paris, 1863
Khalil-Bey (1831–1879), Paris, 1866
Possibly, W.A.C. Guthirer, Duart Castle, Scotland
Possibly, Francis Ley (1846–1916), Epperstone Manor, Nottinghamshire, England
H. Gordon Ley, Bt., England, before 1920
Sale: Corporation Art Gallery, Derby, England, 1920, lot 25 (incorrectly titled as *Pericles and Aspasia*)
Agnew & Sons, London
Robert A. Isaacson (1927–1998), New York, from 1965
Sale: Christie’s, New York, May 6, 1999, illustrated no. 11
Private Collection, California

EXHIBITED

Paris, Salon, 1861, no. 1249
London, French Exhibition (in conjunction with the Universal Exhibition), 1862
Derby, England, Corporation Art Gallery, 1920, no. 25 (incorrectly titled as *Pericles and Aspasia*)
Poughkeepsie, New York, Vassar College Art Museum, *Jean-Léon Gérôme and his Pupils*, 1967, no. 3

LITERATURE

Théophile Gautier, *Abécédiare du Salon de 1861*, Paris, 1861, pp. 180–2
Thomas Eakins to Fanny, Paris, April Fool’s Day, 1869, letter quoted in *The Paris Letters of Thomas Eakins*, ed. William Innes Homer, Princeton, 2009, p. 245

“Jean- Léon Gérôme,” *Appletons’ Journal of Literature, Science and Art*, November 20, 1869, p. 439

“The Art Gallery: Jean- Léon Gérôme,” *The Art Amateur*, September 1, 1879, p. 70
Edward Strahan [Earl Shinn], *Gérôme, A Collection of the Works of J.-L. Gérôme in One Hundred Photogravures*, New York, 1881-3, n.p.

L. Viardot, *Masterpieces of French Art*, Philadelphia, 1883, vol. I, n.p., illustrated; vol. II, p. 5

Fanny Field Hering, *The Life and Works of Jean- Léon Gérôme*, New York, 1892, pp. 95–6

Gerald M. Ackerman, “A Gérôme Exhibition at Vassar,” *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 109, no. 771, June 1967, p. 376

Robert Isaacson, “Jean-Léon Gérôme,” *Art and Artists*, August 1967, n.p., illustrated (black and white)

Gerald M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme*, Paris, 1986, pp. 54–5, 210, no. 131, illustrated p. 57 (color), illustrated p. 211, no. 131 (black and white)

Cheryl Glenn, “Sex, Lies, and Manuscript: Refiguring Aspasia in the History of Rhetoric,” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 45, no. 2, May 1994, pp. 180, 194

Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme : monographie révisée, catalogue raisonné mis à jour*, Paris, 2000, illustrated

Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise, exh. cat., Paris, 2000, pp. 20, 25, 94, 96, 165

Laurence Des Cars, Dominique de Font-Relaux, and Edouard Papet, eds., *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904)*, exh. cat., Milan, 2010, pp. 92, 104, 110, illustrated p. 110, no. 53 (color)

Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Breaking the Mold: The Legacy of the Noah L. and Muriel S. Butkin Collection of Nineteenth-Century French Art*, exh. cat., Indiana, 2012, pp. 136–7

ENGRAVINGS/REPRODUCTIONS

Charles-Jean-Louis Courtry, etching, 1872, Bourdeaux, Musée Goupil, reproduced in *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise*, exh. cat., Paris, 2000, pp. 96, 152, cat. no. 38, illustrated p. 97 (black and white)

Multiple photographic/photomechanic reproductions by Goupil, after 1862: “Photographic Gallery,” “Goupil Museum,” “Carte” de visite,” “Cabinet card” (see *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise*, exh. cat., Paris, 2000, p. 152)

Photogravure, by Goupil & Co., *Selected Works by J-L. Gérôme*, plate 22, 15 x 23 cm., 6 francs; 1877 – after 1909



“*Nothing can be more complete than the completeness with which the painter gratifies [the viewer’s] curiosity. Everything is given – the physiognomies, the costumes, the actions, the furniture, the surroundings in such an exhaustive manner, that whatever the archeologists may say, by observing the details of the picture one is made to feel quite sufficiently ‘seized and possessed’ of all the information desired.*”

– EDWARD STRAHAN [EARL SHINN], *GÉRÔME, A COLLECTION OF THE WORKS OF J.-L. GÉRÔME IN ONE HUNDRED PHOTOGRAVURES*, NEW YORK, 1881–3, N.P.

Considered a “masterpiece” by the late Gerald M. Ackerman, renowned expert on Gérôme and author of the artist’s catalogue raisonné, *Socrates Seeking Alcibiades at the House of Aspasia* marks one of the last works in Gérôme’s *Néo-grec* or *Pompéiste* period and one of the earliest examples of his interest in the narrative potential of the odalisque, or reclining female nude. Gérôme’s seamless combination here of archaeological accuracy, historical eclecticism, and creative liberty is, moreover, an important herald of what would become the distinguishing characteristic of his mature art, and what would earn him the enduring title of France’s leading 19th-century Academic artist.

Though best known as an Orientalist artist, Gérôme began his career as a leader of a group of young painters studying in Paris with Charles Gleyre (1808–1874) and Paul Delaroche (1797–1856). Inspired by Greek art and the recent discoveries of frescoes at Pompeii and Herculaneum (sites that Gérôme himself had visited during his extensive international travels), as well as by contemporaries’ love of narrative (laced with a modicum of scandal), these *Néo-grecs* painted antique genre scenes with a salacious touch and a distinctive, sun-drenched palette. Such subjects were the perfect vehicle for Gérôme to display his lifelong love of drama, theater, gesture, and costume – elements which appear in abundance in this key image – and to indulge his developing and seemingly divergent interests in color, light, and the precise reconstruction of the classical and, later, Eastern world.

The esteemed critic Théophile Gautier (1811–1872) praised these qualities when *Alcibiades* was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1861. (Gérôme exhibited six highly acclaimed paintings at the Salon in this year, making Gautier’s extended consideration of the present work all the more remarkable.) “Such is the title of the second Greek picture of M. Gérôme,” Gautier began,

“Alcibiades lounging on a couch beside Aspasia does not appear greatly inclined to follow his master, which can easily be conceived; philosophy is not worth as much as love above all when Aspasia is the inspiration. A young slave, an artful, roguish beauty in transparent drapery, tries to keep back the spouse of Xantippe, and on the threshold of the door an old woman smiles sardonically. In the foreground a magnificent hound stretches himself out – the same dog whose tail Alcibiades cut to furnish matter for Athenian gossips. No specialist in animals could achieve its like. Placed as he is, he gains perhaps too much importance, but the dog of Alcibiades is himself a personage and not an accessory. The background represents an atrium decorated with that antique elegance so well understood by the artist. It is a restoration, in every sense of the word, of an exquisite rarity, and evincing a knowledge that in no wise detracts from the effect. The figures stand out boldly against the architecture, luminous and gay with many colors, in which one can find no fault save perhaps that of too much richness,” (*Abécédiare du Salon de 1861*, Paris, 1861, pp. 180–2). Two decades later, the critic and art historian Edward Strahan [Earl Shinn] (1837–1886) was still expounding upon Gautier’s words, while also incorporating his own, even more overt appreciation of Gérôme’s sophisticated scholarship and ethnographic skill: “Nothing can be more complete than the completeness with which the painter gratifies [the viewer’s] curiosity. Everything is given – the physiognomies, the costumes, the actions, the furniture, the surroundings – in such an exhaustive manner, that whatever the archeologists may say, by observing the details of the picture one is made to feel quite sufficiently ‘seized and possessed’ of all the information desired,” (*Gérôme, A Collection of the Works of J.-L. Gérôme in One Hundred Photogravures*, New York, 1881–3, n.p.).

The subject of Gérôme’s work was both a familiar and, as these contemporary descriptions suggest, a creatively conceived one. The fifth-century BC Milesian scholar and philosopher Aspasia, here presented as a fetching Greek odalisque, lays atop Alcibiades, her hand at his breast and her head on his lap. He, wreathed in laurel, reaches out to grasp Socrates’ hand, his eyes averted from her gaze. (The figure of Alcibiades may have been based on Apollo in Raphael’s *Parnassus* [1511, Apostolic Palace, Vatican City], indicating Gérôme’s eclectic library of references.) The pair are shaded by an awning and are surrounded by figures in various states of dress and undress, a polychromed villa in the background. (This was the house that Aspasia shared with Alcibiades’ guardian and her lover, Pericles.) As Alcibiades struggles with the decision at hand – to enter a sober life of scholarship or indulge each of his five senses in the environment that Aspasia has provided for him, with her own body as the climax of the event – an attentive Afghan dog looks intently his way. (Preparatory sketches for this work reveal that the dog was added only later in the artist’s development of the composition.) Its devotion and steadfastness provides a provocative commentary on the scene, and demonstrates, yet again, Gérôme’s consummate skill as both an objective painter of historical and cultural fact and a highly imaginative storyteller.

Alcibiades was commissioned in 1861 by the Turkish Sultan Abdülaziz (ruled 1861–76), an enthusiastic patron and practitioner of the arts and a figure Gérôme had become acquainted with during his Middle Eastern travels. Shortly after its completion, it was purchased by the great Ottoman diplomat Khalil-Bey (1831–1879) (see Getty Research Institute, Goupil sales ledgers, book 2, no. 833). Gérôme’s provocative subject matter would certainly have appealed to the collector, and

found a choice place in his Parisian home: Khalil-Bey already owned Ingres’s *Turkish Bath* (1862–3, Louvre, Paris) and had commissioned one of the 19th-century’s most scandalous works, Courbet’s *L’Origine du monde* (1866, Musée d’Orsay, Paris), just months before.

The popularity of Gérôme’s works among Turkish and Middle Eastern collectors – a phenomenon that continues even more emphatically today – was mirrored by a seemingly insatiable demand among American and European audiences during the artist’s lifetime. Numerous prints of this painting were circulated by the celebrated firm of Goupil & Cie. in an attempt to satisfy Gérôme’s increasingly international clientele; indeed, a year before it was sold to Goupil, reproductions were already being published, in a wide array of formats and at various price points. At least two oil sketches and two preparatory drawings for this work are known, all but one of which is in or on loan to a museum collection.

This catalogue note was written by Emily M. Weeks, Ph.D.



2 Jean-Léon Gérôme

FRENCH, 1824 — 1904

BISHARIN WARRIOR, 1872
signed J.L. GÉRÔME (on shield)
oil on canvas
11 5/8 by 8 5/8 in. (29.5 by 21.9 cm.)

PROVENANCE

Goupil & Cie., Paris (acquired directly from the artist February 6, 1872, stock book 6, no. 7566, for 2000 francs)
Samuel Putnam Avery (1822–1904), New York, 1873 (acquired from the above through the intermediary Everard & Co., for 4000 francs)
Sale: S. P. Avery’s *Catalogue of Oil Paintings, on exhibition, No. 625 Broadway. At Private Sale*, New York, 1876, no. 148 (as A *Bishari*, and described as “Just from the easel of this distinguished artist, and painted for S. P. Avery,” p. 38)
Catherine Lorillard Wolfe (1828–1887), New York (acquired at the above sale)
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1887 (gift from the above; deaccessioned 1956)
Sale: Parke-Bernet, New York, October 24–26, 1956, lot 382
Albert Duvannes (1881–1962), Los Angeles (acquired at the above sale)
Sale: Parke-Bernet, New York, September 24, 1969, lot 143
Possibly, Galt Gallery, New York (?) (for \$1250)
The Fine Art Society, Ltd., London, 1967 (?)
Mr. and Mrs. Joseph M. Tanenbaum, Toronto
The Fine Art Society, Ltd., London, 1979
Sale: Christie’s, New York, October 31, 2001, lot 6, illustrated
Private Collection, United Kingdom (until 2003)
Private Collection, California (acquired from the above)

EXHIBITED

New York, S. P. Avery’s *Catalogue of Oil Paintings, on exhibition, No. 625 Broadway. At Private Sale*, 1876, no. 148, as A *Bishari*
London, The Fine Art Society, *Travellers Beyond the Grand Tour*, June 23 – July 25, 1980, no. 57, as A *Boy of the Bichari Tribe*
Washington, D.C., Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 19th century *Orientalist paintings from the Collection of Terence Garnett*, November 8–30, 2007, no. 6
Los Angeles, Getty Center, *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904)*, June 15 – September 12, 2010, no. 159

LITERATURE

Lorinda Munson Bryant, *French Pictures and their Painters*, New York, 1922, pp. 104–5, illustrated opposite p. 106, fig. 67, as *Boy of the Bischari Tribe* (black and white)
James Harding, *Artistes Pompiers: French Academic Art in the 19th Century*, New York, 1979, p. 18
Gerald M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme*, Paris, 1986, p. 232, no. 224 (as also *Boy of the Bisharin Tribe*), illustrated p. 94 (color), illustrated p. 233 (black and white)
Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean Léon Gérôme, His Life, His Work*, Paris, 1997, p. 98, illustrated (color)
Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme : monographie révisée, catalogue raisonné mis à jour*, Paris, 2000, p. 281, no. 224, illustrated p. 98, no. 224 (color)
Adrienne L. Childs, *The Black Exotic: Tradition and Ethnography in Nineteenth-Century Orientalist Art*, Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2005, pp. 101–2, illustrated fig. 24
Laurence Des Cars, Dominique de Font-Relaux, and Edouard Papet, eds., *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904)*, exh. cat., Milan, 2010, p. 277, illustrated (color)
Joseph Allen Boone, *The Homoerotics of Orientalism*, New York, 2014, p. 344, illustrated p. 345, fig. 7.30

ENGRAVINGS/REPRODUCTIONS

Photogravure, by Goupil & Co., *Selected Works by J-L. Gérôme*, p. 66, approx. 22 x 18 cm., 6 francs; 1878 – after 1909



“Gérôme’s picture is one of those fine portraits of his own where he reveals individual traits through his intellectual understanding of racial characteristics . . . Never did Gérôme paint a finer bit of genre than this young giant.” – LORINDA MUNSON BRYANT, *FRENCH PICTURES AND THEIR PAINTERS*, NEW YORK, 1922, PP. 104–5

This extraordinary portrait is one of two portraying a Bisharin warrior, ordered by the American art dealer Samuel P. Avery (1822–1904) from Gérôme in 1871, while the artist sought refuge with his family in London during the siege of Paris. Finding himself without a satisfactory model in that city, Gérôme completed the pictures once he returned to Paris.¹ (As Avery noted in his diary on May 6, 1871, “Gérôme accepts order to paint me pair of heads 8 ½ x 10 ½ at 4000 each to be done on his return to Paris.” The other picture, ultimately somewhat larger but depicting the same model and also dated 1872, is now in a private collection.) An Arab “head” was picked up by Avery’s Paris agent, George Lucas (1824–1909) in early 1873, who framed it and sent it on to New York; this may be a reference to the present work.²

Avery’s order was likely inspired by Gérôme’s highly successful series of *bashi-bazouks*, or irregular Ottoman mercenaries, begun a few years before.³ Also portrayed as isolated figures with various picturesque accessories and weaponry, and often glossed by a sardonic tension between ferocity and apathetic languor, these military subjects were well known to American audiences through the efforts of the dealer and printmaker – and the artist’s father-in-law – Adolphe Goupil (1806–1893), and had become a favorite of Avery’s himself. (In 1873, Avery purchased a stunning portrait of a *Bashi-bazouk* from Henry Wallis [1805–1890] of the French Gallery, London, for £550. This painting is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

A combination of ethnography and favorite studio props – photographs of Gérôme’s workplace show a virtual library of Middle Eastern souvenirs, architectural fragments, and unusual artifacts, including *kaskara* swords and at least one hippopotamus-hide shield similar to that in *Bisharin Warrior* mounted high on the wall – these images

also demonstrated Gérôme’s unique ability to individualize figures of a racial type.⁴ As one writer noted, “Gérôme’s picture is one of those fine portraits of his own where he reveals individual traits through his intellectual understanding of racial characteristics . . . Never did Gérôme paint a finer bit of genre than this young giant,” (Lorinda Munson Bryant, *French Pictures and their Painters*, New York, 1922, pp. 104–5).⁵ A third portrait of an Arab “head” painted in this year, this time of a black servant girl (private collection), suggest Gérôme’s intense interest in this project, and the confidence he had in its widespread appeal.

Native to Northeast Africa, the nomadic Bisharin were admired in the 19th century for their round faces, straight noses, full lips, and large eyes, all of which are emphasized in Gérôme’s work to great effect. (Today this nomadic Sufi Muslim tribe is known principally for its skill at farming and animal husbandry.) The curve of the model’s back, reminiscent of Ingres’ sensuous odalisques, is echoed by the curve and ornamentation of his shield. Though he is equipped with the tools of war, his splay-fingered grip is not convincing; this adolescent boy, with his heavy eyelids, sensuous lips, juvenile moustache, sidelong glance and graceful twist, is surely more beauty than bite.

The remarkable provenance of *Bisharin Warrior* includes several of the most prominent collectors, independent galleries, and museums in the 19th-century American art world. Its deaccession by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1956 was a direct response to the rise of Abstract Expressionism and figure painting’s fall from grace; its volatile history, then, reflects that of Academic art in America, adding art historical import to the work.

This note was written by Emily M. Weeks, Ph.D.

¹ Gérôme’s memoirs indicate that he encountered the same difficulty with other works at this time, including *The Moorish Bath* (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) (see Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme: monographie révisée, catalogue raisonné mis à jour*, Paris, 2000, pp. 92, 272).

² Gerald M. Ackerman Archives, folder for *Bisharin Warriors*, typewritten note, November 11, 1979.

³ In the urban setting of Cairo, Gérôme took a particular interest in elaborate depictions of the Arnauts, descendants of the Albanian soldiers brought to Egypt by the Pasha Muhammad ‘Ali (circa 1769–1849, ruled 1805–48), and their most colorful division, the Ottoman irregular mercenaries known colloquially as *bashi-bazouks* (literally “damaged head”, meaning leaderless or without discipline). These military subjects were the infamous remains of a fearsome force that Muhammad ‘Ali had decimated years before, in an effort to consolidate his power. Gérôme’s portraits of these soldiers, often glossed with an element of humor or subtle derision, would form a distinctive and popular subgroup within his Orientalist oeuvre after 1867.

⁴ As Ellen Strain and others have noted, the field of ethnography was only loosely defined by the middle of the 19th century, and bordered on anecdotal or popular knowledge (Ellen Strain, “Exotic Bodies, Distant Landscapes: Touristic Viewing and Popularized Anthropology in the Nineteenth Century,” *Wide Angle*, vol. 18, no. 2, April 1996, pp. 70–100). Gérôme’s efforts to faithfully record the features and costumes of those he encountered first-hand during his travels stand as noteworthy attempts to elevate this practice to science.

⁵ The artist’s other major painting of this year, the epic *Pollice Verso* (Phoenix Art Museum), though also rigorous in its carefully researched detail, followed a different philosophical and artistic trajectory.

3 Jean-Léon Gérôme

FRENCH, 1824 — 1904

PRIÈRE DANS LA MOSQUÉE, circa 1875–91
signed *J. L. GEROME* (lower right)
oil on canvas
16 1/4 by 13 in. (41 by 33 cm.)

PROVENANCE

Private Sale: Roos, Amsterdam, April 4, 1891, lot 33, illustrated
(as *La Mosquée*)

Van Eeghlen (acquired at the above sale)

Arthur Atwater Kent, Sr. (1873–1949), Los Angeles (and sold,
his sale, with auctioneer Roy J. Goldenberg, Los Angeles,
November 3, 1949)

Private Collection (acquired from the estate of the above, 1949)

Thence by descent

Sale: Sotheby’s, New York, November 3, 2015, lot 53, illustrated

Private Collection, California

LITERATURE

Le Figaro illustré, July 1901, illustrated

Oeuvres de J. L. Gérôme, (Bibliothèque nationale, Paris) (possibly
listed by Ackerman as *Paris Photographs*), III, p. 4

Gerald M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme*,
London, 1986, p. 294, no. 510, illustrated (black and white)

Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme, monographie révisée, catalogue
raisonné mis à jour*, Paris, 2000, p. 366, no. 510 (as lost),
illustrated p. 367, no. 510 (black and white)



“... [Gérôme] reproduces not only the strange coloring, the magnificent sculptures in wood and marble, and the graceful groupings and postures, but also the profound religious sentiment which is ingrained in these simple Mussulmans, so faithful and unpretentious in their worship.” – FANNY FIELD HERING, *THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JEAN- LÉON GÉRÔME*, NEW YORK, 1892, P. 126

In the 1860s, Gérôme began one of his most successful Orientalist series, depicting Muslim men at prayer. Set outdoors, on rooftops, and inside religious and domestic structures throughout the Middle East, these meditative images became virtually synonymous with the artist’s name, and are today among the most coveted in Gérôme’s oeuvre. The present picture, sequestered from sight in American private collections for most of the 20th century, is a leading example of this illustrious group.

Gérôme’s intense interest in the art and architecture of Islam is evidenced by the numerous architectural and ethnographic sketches he made abroad and by the calculated itineraries he followed, particularly in Egypt and Turkey. In Istanbul in 1875, Gérôme visited and drew at least fifteen mosques as a guest of the Sultan. Among Gérôme’s favorites were the New Mosque (Mosque of the Valide Sultan), the Sultan Ahmet (Blue) Mosque, Rüstem Pasha, and Hagia Sophia, arguably Istanbul’s most popular attraction among 19th-century travellers and artists. The Ottoman *tughra* (medallions filled with the sultans’ calligraphic monograms) in this work recall the interior decorative schemes of this awesome site, as do the dimly lit columns and arcades in the distance. Such compelling architectural details suggest that Gérôme’s picture dates between 1875 and 1891, when the artist could supplement his vast library of photographs, scholarly publications, and souvenirs of travel with sketches made on the spot.

Against this distinctive architectural backdrop, a single figure is silhouetted, his silken robes crafted from the most vibrant of confectionery colors. He raises his hands, palms facing outward, as if to recite “*Allah-o-Akbar*” (“God is Great”). This expressive gesture –

a favorite of the artist’s, who repeated it in numerous complementary works – was part of the prayer ritual, and was usually made during *Qiyam*. The man’s back is turned to the viewer – a provocative conceit that Gérôme had considered and abandoned in at least one other of his prayer paintings, for reasons of convention and popular appeal. (In a letter to the dealer Knoedler, Gérôme explained: “*Prayer in the Mosque* had been reserved by Monsieur Simon and I remember that he made me put a figure facing the spectator, by saying that since all the others were seen from the back or in profile, it would not sell. I did as he wanted because his reasons were commercially sound,” [Letter to Knoedler, June 8, 1903, Custodia foundation, Fritz Lugt collection, Netherlands Institute, Paris].) The fact that the standing figure does not face the intricately carved wooden *minbar*, as do the other seated Arabs who listen intently to the oral delivery of the Friday sermon, also defies expectation; rather than providing the rote documentation of a religious practice, Gérôme removes his painting from the confines of reality and elevates it to the realm of a highly creative art – a sure sign of his growing confidence as Orientalism’s greatest practitioner.

Prière dans la mosquée was sold in 1949 as part of Arthur Atwater Kent’s estate auction held at Capo di Monte, his hilltop estate in Bel-Air, Los Angeles. An American success story in the world of manufacturing and design, Kent would eventually amass a collection of around 370 paintings by artists as diverse as Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792), John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), and Jean-Léon Gérôme.

This catalogue note was written by Emily M. Weeks, Ph.D.



4 Jean-Léon Gérôme

FRENCH, 1824 — 1904

A BASHI-BAZOUK CHIEFTAN (ALSO AN ALBANIAN SMOKING),
circa 1881–2
signed *J. L. GÉRÔME* (upper left)
oil on canvas
23 5/8 by 28 7/8 in. (60 by 73.3 cm.)

PROVENANCE

(Possibly) Mr. Mackay, 1882 (acquired from Galerie Georges Petit,
Paris, *Exposition internationale de la peinture, organisée par un groupe
d'artistes, première année*, 1882, no. 14)

Private Collection, New York

Sale: Parke-Bernet, New York, January 12, 1955, lot 40
(as *The Harem Guard*)

(Possibly) Schweitzer Gallery, New York, between 1960 and 1975

Andrew Sordoni, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Andrew Sordoni III, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania (by descent from
the above until 1981)

The Fine Art Society, Ltd., London, 1983

Sale: Christie's, New York, October 31, 2001, lot 10, illustrated

Private Collection, United Kingdom (until 2003)

Private Collection, California

EXHIBITED

(Possibly) Paris, Galerie George Petit, *Exposition internationale de la
peinture, organisée par un groupe d'artistes, première année*, 1882, no. 14
(as *Bachi-Bazouk*)

Dayton, Ohio, The Dayton Art Institute; Minneapolis, Minnesota,
The Minneapolis Institute of Art; and Baltimore, Maryland, Walters
Art Gallery, *Jean Léon Gérôme (1824–1904)*, 1972–3, no. 17 (incorrectly
dated circa 1865)

Washington, D.C., Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, *19th century
Orientalist paintings from the Collection of Terence Garnett*, November
8–30, 2007, no. 2 (as *An Albanian Smoking*)

Kansas City, Missouri, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, *Gérôme and the
Lure of the Orient*, 2014 (as *An Albanian Smoking*)

LITERATURE

(Possibly) Edward Strahan [Earl Shinn], *Gérôme, A Collection of
the Works of J.-L. Gérôme in One Hundred Photogravures*, New York,
1881–3, n.p)

(Possibly) Fanny Field Hering, *The Life and Works of Jean- Léon
Gérôme*, New York, 1892, p. 242 (as *Arnaut Chief*)

Gerald M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme*, Paris,
1986, p. 249, no. 304 (as whereabouts unknown), illustrated p. 109
(color), illustrated p. 249, no. 304 (black and white)

Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean Léon Gérôme, His Life, His Work, Paris*, 1997,
p. 114, illustrated

Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme : monographie révisée,
catalogue raisonné mis à jour*, Paris, 2000, p. 304, no. 304, illustrated
p. 119 (color)

Luan Rama, *Les Albanais de Léon Gérôme | Shqiptarët e Léon Gérôme*,
Albania, 2016



“Assuredly they [the Arnauts] are there from love of ornamentation and to please us painters, for, studying this group of soldiers decked out in brilliant costumes, one is tempted to question their strategic utility as regards the security of the city. While awaiting a new conquest of Egypt by no matter whom, these decorative soldiers, these sentinels of comic opera, have no other orders than to stop photographers whom they would honor with their confidence.” – PAUL LENOIR, QUOTED IN FANNY FIELD HERING, *THE LIFE AND WORKS OF JEAN- LÉON GÉRÔME*, NEW YORK, 1892, P. 120

Considered the greatest and most knowledgeable Orientalist painter of the 19th century, Jean-Léon Gérôme regularly created series of works that examined and perfected a single theme. Among the most memorable of these artistic investigations was his documentation of the colorful figure of the Arnaut, or Albanian soldier, silhouetted against an austere backdrop and engaging in a subdued or noncombatant act. In the present work, painted at the height of Gérôme’s long and prolific career, the artist demonstrates his unique ability to combine the fields of ethnography, costume study, and penetrating portraiture. The similarity of this subject with other pictures in Gérôme’s oeuvre, moreover, creates an intriguing dialogue between his painted surfaces and offers a compelling example of his inimitable, and profoundly personal, Orientalist style.

Gérôme’s interest in recording ethnic types was sparked long before his Eastern travels, during a trip down the Danube in 1854. Three years later, viewing some of the works that this voyage had inspired, the noted critic Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) praised the artist for his “ethnographic veracity,” and suggested that his paintings should be utilized by scholars: “M. Serres, the anthropologist would be able to consult with absolute certainty these specimens of unrecorded race,” (“Salon de 1857 IV,” *l’Artiste*, July 5, 1857, p. 246). So too, Gautier continued, Gérôme should be commended for fulfilling contemporaries’ passion for precise and reliable information about the human race: “M. Gérôme satisfies one of the most demanding instincts of the age: the desire which people have to know more about each other than that which is revealed in imaginary portraits. He has everything which is needed in order to fulfill this important mission,” (op cit).

Gérôme’s “mission” was confirmed and amplified during the course of his Eastern travels. In the cosmopolitan setting of Cairo, a city visited by the artist on numerous occasions in the 1860s, ‘70s, and ‘80s, Gérôme set his ethnographic sights on the Arnauts, descendants of the Albanian soldiers brought to Egypt by the Pasha Muhammad ‘Ali (circa 1769-1849, ruled 1805-48), and Ottoman irregular mercenaries, known colloquially as *bashi-bazouks* (literally “damaged head,” meaning leaderless or without discipline). These military subjects were decorative remnants of a force that Muhammad ‘Ali had decimated years before, in an effort to consolidate his power. Paul Lenoir, who accompanied Gérôme on two of his master’s tours of Egypt (in 1868 and 1881, during which time he died in Cairo), described these men in his journal:

Their costumes artistically open at the breast, their arms “*de luxe*” as brilliant as inoffensive, their proud and disdainful attitudes, their least gestures, everything about them seems to have been most carefully studied. Nothing, however, is more natural than these interminable moustaches “*à la grecque*,” which cut their visages in two like the two enormous horns of the buffalo, and which form the most appropriate ornament of these energetic faces, bronzed in the sun. The moustache, which has nothing Arab in its principle, is with the soldier of Cairo a sign of Albanese origin . . . It was an innovation in a land in which the beard is held in the highest esteem, and where the respect which is due to a man is measured by the length of this hirsute ornament. Soldier, *en amateur*, however, he acquits himself of his role with care; and he has become the indispensable furniture of the door of a mosque or of the entrance to a palace. He is like the “Swiss,” [Swiss guards

outside of the Vatican] the chasseur of our ancestors, but having instead of the halbert about ten or a dozen weapons, sabers and pistols, artistically intercrossed in the compartments of a vast girdle of red leather, which gives him the aspect of one of the show-windows of the Divisme on the boulevard Haussmann. (quoted in “Arnaud of Cairo,” in Edward Strahan [Earl Shinn], *Gérôme, A Collection of the Works of J.-L. Gérôme in One Hundred Photogravures*, New York, 1881-3, n.p).

The impotence of these once ferocious figures was not lost on Gérôme. In several of his pictures, weapons are hung on walls as decorative ornaments, often mimicking the postures of the subjects themselves, who are shown in moments of unprepared and even drugged relaxation. In this image, however, Gérôme seems to walk a finer line between respectfulness and mockery: The importance and station of the figure is suggested by his richly colored green and gold turban, and by his conspicuous display of guns and daggers. Despite the voluminous frills of his distinctive skirt, moreover, seemingly sculptured out of sunlight and shadow, and his bare feet and casual pose – a state of relaxation underscored by the presence of a *hookah* or smoking pipe – the man’s tight sleeves indicate a strong musculature, and his arrogant stare is more calculating than glassy-eyed.

The remarkable precision of Gérôme’s depiction suggests a first-hand knowledge, but it also reveals the vast library of resources the artist had compiled by 1881. The Arnaut skirt may be the earliest use of a new property in Gérôme’s large costume collection; from the mid-1860’s the artist had painted this distinctive attire, but the first skirt he owned and used as a model was far less ample. Gérôme’s large

photographic collection was also evidently in play: The Musée d’Orsay houses several of the artist’s personal photographs of a model in Arnaut costume, adopting similar poses in the courtyard of a house. As with so many of Gérôme’s subjects, this ethnographic component, coupled with a gloss of sardonic humor over the artist’s inimitable, highly polished Academic style, appealed to American collectors in the late 19th century and, given the provenance of this work, into the 20th and 21st as well.

This catalogue note was written by Emily M. Weeks, Ph.D.



5 Jean-Léon Gérôme

FRENCH, 1824 — 1904

THE FIRST KISS OF THE SUN,
(LE PREMIER BAISER DU SOLEIL), 1886
signed J.L. GÉRÔME (lower right)
oil on canvas laid down on board
21 ¼ by 39 ½ in. (54 by 100.3 cm.)

PROVENANCE

Boussod Valadon & Cie., Paris
Crist, New York
George I. Seney (1826–1893), New York (before 1887)
Sale: American Art Association, New York, George I. Seney
Collection, February 13, 1891, lot 246
P.A.B. Widener (1834–1915), Philadelphia (acquired at the
above sale for \$6000)
Possibly, Knoedler & Co., New York
Scott & Fowles, New York (before 1943)
Patrick A. Valentine, Greenwich, Connecticut
Sale: Parke-Bernet Galleries, New York, April 18, 1962, lot 76
Robert Isaacson (1927–1998) (acquired at the above sale for \$600)
Sale: Christie’s, New York, Isaacson sale, May 6, 1999,
lot 9, illustrated
Private Collection, Connecticut (acquired at the above sale)
Sale: Christie’s, London, June 19, 2003, lot 20, illustrated
Private Collection, California (acquired at the above sale)

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Brooklyn, New York, Brooklyn Art Association, *Mr. George I. Seney’s
Collection of Paintings*, April 16–23, 1887, no. 86
Cincinnati, Ohio, *Centennial Exposition of the Ohio Valley and central
states*, 1888 (lent by George I. Seney)
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, “Gallery of Modern
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Poughkeepsie, New York, Vassar College Art Museum, *Jean Léon
Gérôme and his Pupils*, 1967, no. 4
Greenwich, Connecticut, Bruce Museum, *Elegance and Opulence:
Art of the Gilded Age*, 1999

Washington, D.C., Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 19th century
Orientalist paintings from the Collection of Terence Garnett,
November 8–30, 2007, no. 4

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Gérôme,” *Arts Magazine*, vol. 60, issue 5, 1986, p. 84, illustrated p. 85,
fig. 12 (black and white) (incorrectly dated 1880)
Association française d’action artistique, *Album de voyage des artistes
en expédition au pays du Levant*, Paris, 1993, pp. 33–4, illustrated p. 34
Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme: His Life, His Work, 1824–
1904*, Paris, 1997, p. 133, illustrated p. 131
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Jersey, 2001, pp. 107, 205
Leanne M. Zalewski, *The Golden Age of French Academic Painting in
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“From out the horizon, the golden rays of an ascending tropical sun fill the upper air with radiance and
just tip with rose light the very topmost stones of the Pyramids. In the middle distance are tents, around
which no sign of life is visible – not even among the flock of reclining camels. The immediate foreground
is the desert waste of dry sand.” – NEW YORK TIMES, APRIL 24, 1886, P. 1

Exhibited at the Salon of 1886, well after the last of the artist’s
Middle Eastern travels, this picture has been called “full of poetry”
(C. H. Stranahan, *A History of French Painting from its earliest to
its latest practice* . . . , New York, 1888, p. 318) and “. . . the most
beautifully composed and painted of Gérôme’s landscapes,” (Gerald
M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme*, London, 1986,
p. 258). The rising sun brightens the western sky, illuminating the
peaks of the pyramids at Gizeh. Their confectionary colors allude
to the efforts by the artist to capture the extraordinary palette
of the Egyptian landscape, and, more broadly, to the important
contributions that Orientalism would make to Impressionist painting.
(Indeed, Gérôme’s study of the effects of emerging sunlight on
various surfaces compelled contemporary critics in France, England,
and America to laud him as a “colorist,” as well as France’s finest
ethnographic painter.) The Sphinx is barely perceptible in the middle
distance – a curious compositional decision, as most artists made
this impressive monument their focal point. Gérôme focuses instead
on the unexpected gentleness of this harsh desert landscape, and the
close connection between nature and culture. Camels rest, their legs
bundled underneath them. Tents echo their shapes, and those of each
of the pyramids beyond: the Great Pyramid of Cheops, built at Gizeh
during the Fourth Dynasty (2680–2565 BC), and the smaller pyramids
of Chepren and Mycerinus. Despite these projecting forms, everything
in the composition is horizontal, undulating, and sedate. It is indeed
a beautifully composed and tinted vision, and a crowning moment in
Gérôme’s long and prolific career.

But this is also a record of fact, and a poetic illustration of Gérôme’s
travels with his student, Paul Lenoir. (At least two sketches for this
work exist, apparently done on the spot.) As Lenoir recalled upon their
arrival at the site:

“By the orders of the dragoman, and almost in a traditional
manner for those of us who had visited Egypt before, our tents
arose, as if by enchantment, under the shade of an enormous
sycamore, which insisted on flourishing in the midst of the sand;
supplemented by three palm trees . . . Camels, donkeys, tents,
escort, donkey–boys, camel–drivers, our luggage, and ourselves all
found ample room under its benevolent branches . . . While the
novices in this joyous band hastened away at daybreak to pay a
formal call to the Sphinx, scramble to the top of the Great Pyramid
and explore its interior, as well as some of the numerous tombs
which lie scattered around, Gérôme remained alone to make the
sketch which was afterward reproduced in his exquisite painting
called *The First Kiss of the Sun*,” (quoted in Fanny Field Hering,
The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme, New York, 1892, p. 131).

A part of prestigious East Coast collections since at least 1887, the
provenance of *First Kiss of the Sun* indicates the enduring strength
of Gérôme’s reputation in America, even despite a wildly fluctuating
art market. In 1962, the work was purchased for \$600 by the
renowned New York scholar, collector, and art dealer Robert Isaacson
(1927–1998), who has been credited with single-handedly restoring
the reputations of such “unfashionable” Academic artists as William-
Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905) and Lawrence Alma-Tadema
(1836–1912). Just three decades later, Gérôme’s picture sold for one
thousand times that amount.

This catalogue note was written by Emily M. Weeks, Ph.D.





“I am truly sorry for the artists gifted with imagination who can never have any idea of this virgin sublime nature...I can only look forward with sadness to the moment when I shall leave forever the land of beautiful orange trees covered with flowers and fruit, of the beautiful sun, of the beautiful eyes and of a thousand other beauties.”– EUGÈNE DELACROIX *(written during his voyage to North Africa in 1832)*



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