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Jean Léon Gérôme

1824-1904

« The Akaba Golfe »

Oil on canvas / signed lower left

Dimensions : 27 x 36 cm

Dimensions : 10.63 x 14.17 inch

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Biography

Jean Léon Gérôme was a major French painter, and already a renowned artist at the age of 25. In 1840, at the age of 16, he came to Paris and joined Paul Delaroche's studio. He also started the Fine Arts School in order to complete his education with his master. Delaroche closed his studio in 1844 and settled in Italy with his pupil who considered him as his mentor. He came back to Paris and then joined Charles Gleyre's studio. At that time he became the leader of a new artistic movement called "neo-grec" which also attracted Jean Louis Hamon and Henri Picou.

The painting "The Cock Fight" exhibited at the 1887 Salon launched his carrier. He won a third-class medal and the painting became the proprety of the State. Without regards to this first success, he immediately worked on an other genre and came back the next year with two very different subjects : "The Virgin, The Baby Jesus and Saint John the Baptist" and "Anacreon, Bacchus and Love". He was awarded for the second time the same year.

Despite the difficult political situation, Gérôme continued his path to success and obtained official commissions. His fame increased and he established his popularity among the visitors of the Salon. He switched from a theme to another with the same brightness and showed in 1851 three paintings which raised a scandal, including the "Greek Interior". The Neo-grecs forecasted his fall. And yet Prince Napoleon, the cousin of the emperor, bought the painting which described by Theophile Gautier as the only painting that could reach the greatness of "Statonice" by Ingres.

From 1855, Gérôme regularly travelled to the East coast of the Mediterranean Sea. In 1857, he travelled alongside Emile Augier and August Bartholdi in Egypt. In the aftermath of this journey, we can find the great variety of the subjects treated by the artist at the 1857 Salon. His Orientalist carrier eventually began. In 1859 he showed the first Egyptian genre painting at the Salon, showing an innovative view of the Middle-East. Gérôme also exhibited three historical works: "King Candaules", "Ave Caesar" and "Death of Caesar".

Between 1862 and 1867, his journeys in Egypt and Syria inspired him a lot and the artist met a great success every year at the French Art Salon. One of his greatest painting, "The Prisoner" was exhibited for the first time in 1863. An art critic said about the masterpiece: "The entire Orient is here, with its unrelenting fatalism, its passive surrender, its constant tranquillity, its brazen insults and its ruthless wickedness."

Gérôme's carrier was at its peak by the end of the Second Empire, and the painter started teaching at the School of Fine Arts and joined the Institute in 1865. Finally, in 1867, he was awarded with the Medal of Honor and appointed Officer of the Legion of Honor. The artist settled in London in the 1870s and exhibited at the Royal Academy as an honorary member. From 1871, he travelled, went to Turkey in 1873, crossed Spain and then headed to Alger. Back in Paris in 1874, he showed a set of works warmly welcomed and won a golden medal.

Jean-Léon Gérôme was the most famous French painter of his time. In 1893, he was appointed as the honorary president of the Orientalist Painters Society, together with Benjamin-Constant.

Museums

Musée de la Picardie, Amiens
Musée Condé, Chantilly
Musée du Louvre, Paris
Musée d'Orsay, Paris
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes
Musée national du château, Versailles

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Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam
Wallace Collection, Londres
Walters Art Museum, Baltimore
Museum of Fine Art, Boston
Museum of Art, Cleveland
The Art Institute, Chicago
Memorial Art Gallery of the University af Rochester, New York

Bibliography

Gerald M. Ackerman, "Jean Léon Gérôme/ les orientalistes volume 4", Edition ACR, 2000
"Jean Léon Gérôme", Shirka Flammario et musée d'Orsay, 2010
Najo collection, "Collection of Orientalist painting", 1991