



Jean Léon Gérôme  
1824-1904

The Harem boat trip  
Oil on canvas signed lower left  
Dimensions : 85 x 150 cm  
Dimensions : 33.46 x 59.05 inch

Literature : Catalogue raisonné Jean Léon Gérôme by Gerald M.Ackerman ACR EDITION reproduced on p. 89 for the painting held at the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia

Exhibition : Jean-Léon Gérôme exhibition at the Lusail Museum in Doha from November 2, 2024 to February 22, 2025

Exhibition at the Bassam Freiha Art Foundation, Abu Dhabi, "Constructing the Orient, fragments of a western dream" from October 25, 2025 to May 31, 2026

Origin : Jean Léon Gérôme Collection by descent



Dimensions with frame : 114 x 178 cm  
Dimensions with frame : 44.88 x 70.08 inch

Our painting is the first version of the one exhibited at the Salon des Beaux-Arts de France in 1869, entitled *Excursion du Harem*. It is now in the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia, and was included in the major Gérôme exhibition at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris a few years ago (catalog raisonné Ackerman p 89). Only a few details change in the composition of these two works, in particular the light, which appears to be dusk in the Norfolk painting instead of dawn in ours.

In 1856, Gérôme spent half of his eight-month visit in Cairo and the other half navigating the Nile, sketching the fabled waterway and its exotic river traffic. Thereafter the Nile became a favored setting for his Egyptian genre pieces, as can be seen in the well-known *Excursion of the Harem* of 1869, in which a delicate private pleasure craft ferries a sultan's seraglio along the river. Gérôme exhibited the painting at the Salon of 1869, where it was warmly received. The Empress Eugénie, wife of Napoleon III, hoped to buy it but demurred when told its price - 30,000 francs. After viewing the *Excursion*, the critic Théophile Gautier marveled at its atmospheric and luminary subtleties: The boat slips over the clear transparent water, along the misty shore in a sort of luminous fog which produces a magical effect. The bark seems to float at the same time in the water and in the air....the delicate tones of the "land of light" are rendered by Monsieur Gérôme with absolute fidelity. "

## 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 property 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



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 of 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