



## Biography

Born in Paris in 1845, Benjamin-Constant studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Toulouse where he was the student of Jules Garipuy. He learned anatomy, drawing from the ancient statuary and the composition of history painting. His brilliant studies were rewarded by the great painting prize he shared with his friend the painter Jean-André Rixens.

Benjamin-Constant became Alexandre Cabanel's student at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, where he entered in 1867. His first subjects were mostly inspired by ancient history. Admirer of Delacroix, Rubens and Watteau, he already showed his style and his taste for color. He left the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and participated at the Salon of 1869 with romantic subjects. He obtained a quick recognition, since his painting "Hamlet and the King" (1867) was bought by the state. This dark-colored painting highlighted the painter's interest in the dramatic function of light.

In 1870, he made a long trip to Spain and then to Morocco with Georges Clairin and Henri Regnault. In 1871, he made a second trip of eighteen months to Morocco. These travels, from which he brought back many precious objects, were essential for this artist who made Orientalism his specialty. The city of Tangier with picturesque streets, architecture and light particularly inspired the painter. The famous white terraces where the women of the harems were sitting and lying down inspired his most famous compositions.

On his return to Paris, he exhibited at the Paris Salon paintings of Orientalist inspiration that met a great success. Two of his first Orientalist works received a medal at the Salon: a third class medal in 1874 for "Moroccan Prisoners" and a second class medal for "Sultan Mehmet II's Entrance to Constantinople", whose large format impressed the critics. Several museums received from the State paintings by Benjamin-Constant: Bordeaux (1875), Toulouse (1876), Lille (1878) and the Luxembourg Museum in 1880 with "The Last Rebels". His brilliant career allowed him to share with Jean-Léon Gérôme the place of Honorary President at the Society of French Orientalist Painters, whose inaugural exhibition was held in 1893.

In the 1880s, Benjamin-Constant started monumental decoration. He painted the wall of the Hall of the Capitol of Toulouse, the ceilings of the City Hall of Paris, the National Theater of the Opera Comique and several murals of the Sorbonne in Paris.

From 1888, the artist travelled regularly to the United States and Canada where his work was highly appreciated. He became a teacher at the Académie Julian. In the 1890s, following his trip to the United States, the artist received many orders for portraits. The commissioning of the portrait of Queen Victoria (1899) was considered the crowning of the artist's career.

## Museums

Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Musée du Petit Palais, Paris

Hôtel de Ville, Paris

Opéra Comique, Paris

Musée national du château, Versailles

Musée des Augustins, Toulouse

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lille

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Besançon

Musée d'art et d'histoire, Narbonne

Musée des Beaux-Arts, Carcassonne  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes  
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Montréal  
Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires  
The National Gallery of Art, Washington  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

#### Bibliography

Nathalie Bondil (dir.), " Benjamin-Constant. Merveilles et mirages de l'orientalisme " Musée des Augustins de Toulouse du 4 octobre 2014 au 4 janvier 2015, musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal du 31 janvier 2015 au 31 mai 2015, Hazan, 2014, 440 p.

"Promenade de peintre aux salons de 1898", 1898