



Elliott Fine Art

Old Masters to Early Modern

PAINTINGS
1850-1900

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FRANÇOIS D'ALBERT-DURADE

(1804 Lausanne – 1886 Geneva)

Portrait of a Bearded Man with a Pickaxe,
against a Landscape

Signed, located and dated lower right: *Albert-Durade / Genève 1852*

Oil on canvas

65.4 x 54.2 cm. (25 ¾ x 21 ½ in.)





FIG. 1. GUSTAVE COURBET, *STONEBREAKERS*, 1849, OIL ON CANVAS, 165 X 257 CM, FORMERLY GALERIE NEUE MEISTER (DESTROYED BY FIRE IN 1945).

François d'Albert Durade's remarkable portrait of a bushy-bearded labourer was painted in Geneva in 1852. Closely-cropped by the picture plane and placed in front of a receding landscape, Albert-Durade's sitter is given a monumental grandeur. With the tool of his trade slung across the shoulder and black hat perched nonchalantly at an angle, revealing a lighter patch of skin untouched by the sun's rays, the labourer takes a pause from the day's toil, perhaps taking place on the calm shores of Lake Geneva below an atmospherically clouded sky. The fruit of his labour, a wall or building being reduced to rubble, is visible behind him. His beautifully crisp turquoise shirt remains impossibly clean, unsullied by the dust and dirt inevitably created by such hard exertion.

This Romanticised image of a dignified and heroic manual labourer stands in stark contrast to Gustave Courbet's infamous *Stonebreakers* (fig. 1), exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1850-1851.

Albert-Durade would certainly have known of the now-destroyed painting, and the polemic it caused, and one wonders if his portrait is in some ways a response to it, giving dignity back to the peasant worker who nobly toils for the good of society. Certainly Albert-Durade's sitter, with his relaxed manner and luxuriant beard, is a world away from Courbet's figures in tattered clothing, engaged in back-breaking work.

Yet can one detect a certain weariness or resignation in the tanned but serious face of this man, with his furrowed brow and piercing eyes, which lock with those of the viewer. And who is the sitter: a model posed in the studio or an actual labourer, met on a countryside excursion, as was the case with Courbet's *Stonebreakers*. Albert-Durade's painting is an enigma and, in some ways a paradox, a Realist's subject painted with a Realist's attention to detail, yet not fully reflecting the harsh reality of a peasant labourer's existence.



FIG. 2. FRANÇOIS D'ALBERT-DURADE, *PORTRAIT OF GEORGE ELIOT*, 1850, OIL ON CANVAS, 34 X 26.5 CM, NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY.

Albert-Durade was orphaned at a young age and subsequently adopted by his godfather's sister, Jeanne Sara Durade. He initially studied theology before entering the studio of Joseph Hornung, an autodidactic artist. In 1834 Albert-Durade married Julie Covelle, an accomplished flower painter. Active as both a photographer and painter, much of Albert-Durade's work aimed at preserving the history and image of Geneva as it was in his time. He was also an accomplished portraitist, sought after by prominent Genevans. Albert-Durade's best known work is his depiction of the writer George Eliot, painted in 1849 when the author lodged at his house in Geneva. The artist was a close friend of Eliot (fig. 2), one of the most famous novelists of her time, and translated her works into French. Albert-Durade later

accompanied her to London where she took him to see the works of Turner, and they would subsequently keep up a lively and erudite correspondence.

It's tempting to contemplate whether Eliot's philosophies and writings influenced Albert-Durade's approach to Realism (or perhaps vice versa). Indeed, the energising principle of Eliot's art was Realism. As she explains in her 1856 essay *The Natural History of German Life*, 'Art is the nearest thing to life: it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot'. This could serve as a fitting coda to Albert-Durade's portrait.

HENRI-JOSEPH DUBOUCHET

(Caulaire-et-Cuire 1833 – 1909 Paris)

Portrait of a Man (Bohémien)

Signed lower right: *HJ. Dubouchet*

Oil on canvas

56.2 x 43.8 cm. (22 x 17 ¼ in.)

Exhibited:

L'Exposition de la Société des Amis des Art de Lyon, 1875-1876.

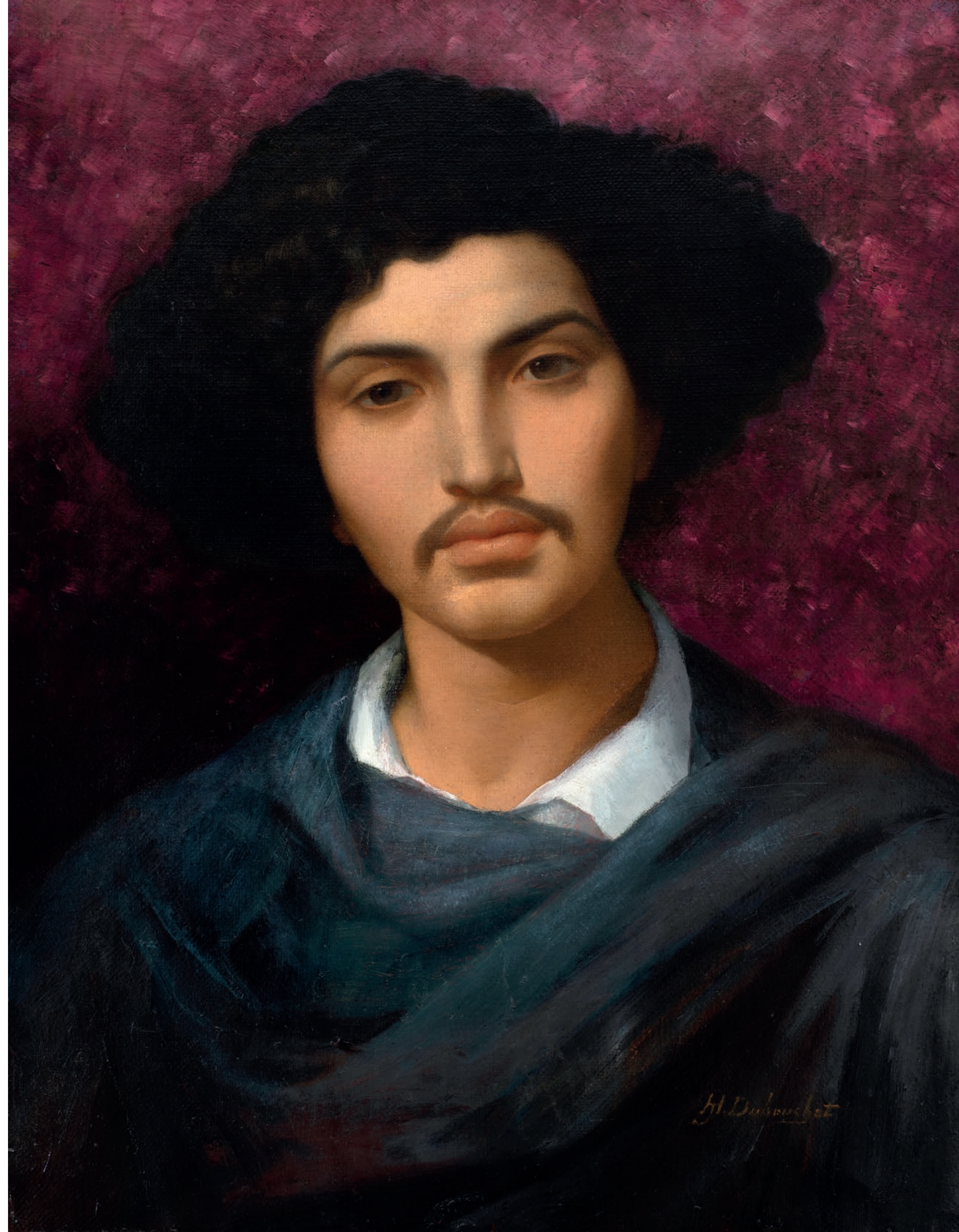




FIG. 1. JEAN-LEON GÉRÔME, *BISHARI WARRIOR*, 1872, OIL ON CANVAS, 41 X 33 CM, CURRIER MUSEUM OF ART.

This direct and striking portrait of a young man by the Lyonnais artist Henri-Joseph Dubouchet is most interesting for its connection to Jean-Léon Gérôme's two sensual depictions of a Bishari, nomads from the Nubian Desert (figs 1 and 2). With his full and fleshy lips, downy moustache, long, straight nose, heavy-lidded almond eyes and mane of black, curly hair, Dubouchet's sitter is unmistakably the same man employed by Gérôme in 1872. Dubouchet's picture, which was exhibited in Lyon in 1875-1876, must date from around the same time.

The model's identity is unknown but Gérôme must have already had him in mind when he received the Bishari commission from the American art dealer Samuel P. Avery in 1871. Gérôme was at that time staying with Avery in London, avoiding the depredations caused by the ongoing Siege of Paris, yet waited until his return to France the following year to embark upon these works. Though it has not been posited before, this man also clearly served as



FIG. 2. JEAN-LEON GÉRÔME, *BISHARI WARRIOR*, 1872, OIL ON CANVAS, 29.5 X 22 CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION.

the model for the gladiator pleading for mercy in Gérôme's monumental *Pollice Verso* (fig. 3). The painting was begun in 1869, when Gérôme presumably first encountered the model. Perhaps he was a professional, and appears in other paintings from this time, beyond Gérôme and Dubouchet's works.

Dubouchet, unlike Gérôme, portrays his sitter with no added accoutrements. Exquisite in its simplicity, all attention is focussed on the sitter's highly distinctive countenance. When Dubouchet exhibited his painting in Lyon, he did so under the title '*Bohémien*'. Though by the 1870s the term *bohémien* had usually come to mean a literary or artistic outsider living in an unconventional way, it was derived from, and still associated with, the roving Romani people who were mistakenly believed to have come to France from Bohemia. With his uncommon looks, and cloak slung around the shoulders in a vagabondic style, it is no doubt in this latter guise that Dubouchet has posed his model.

One day a Bishari, the next a Bohemian, and in between a gladiator, Dubouchet's unknown sitter is proof of the fluid identities professional models could obtain in their artistic roles in France at this period. Hopefully the model's name, no doubt listed somewhere in French archives, may someday emerge.



Dubouchet studied at the École des beaux-arts de Lyon under Victor Vibert. In 1856 the young artist finished second in the prix de Rome for engraving and it is for this activity that Dubouchet is best remembered, despite the fact that he was a talented painter as the present work, and others like it (fig. 4), attests. He visited Italy in the late 1860s and exhibited regularly in both Paris and Lyon from the mid-1850s until 1908.



FIG. 3. JEAN-LEON GÉRÔME (DETAIL), *POLLICE VERSO*, 1872, OIL ON CANVAS, 96.5 X 149 CM, PHOENIX ART MUSEUM.

FIG. 4. HENRI-JOSEPH DUBOUCHET, *ROMAN WOMAN*, 1868, OIL ON CANVAS, 43 X 55 CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION.

AUGUSTE-FRANÇOIS GORGUET

(Paris 1862 – 1927)

Portrait of the Artist Leon Ruffe,
Scrutinising an Engraving

Dedicated, signed and dated at lower edge: *A MON AMI LEON RUFFE . AUG . FRANCOIS GORGUET /
MDCCLXXXII*

Oil on panel

23.8 x 16.4 cm. (9 x 6 ½ in.)

Provenance:

Leon Ruffe (1864 – 1935), and thence by descent to the nephew of the artist.

Exhibited:

Société des Artistes Français, Exposition Universelle, Antwerp, 1894, no. 1156.

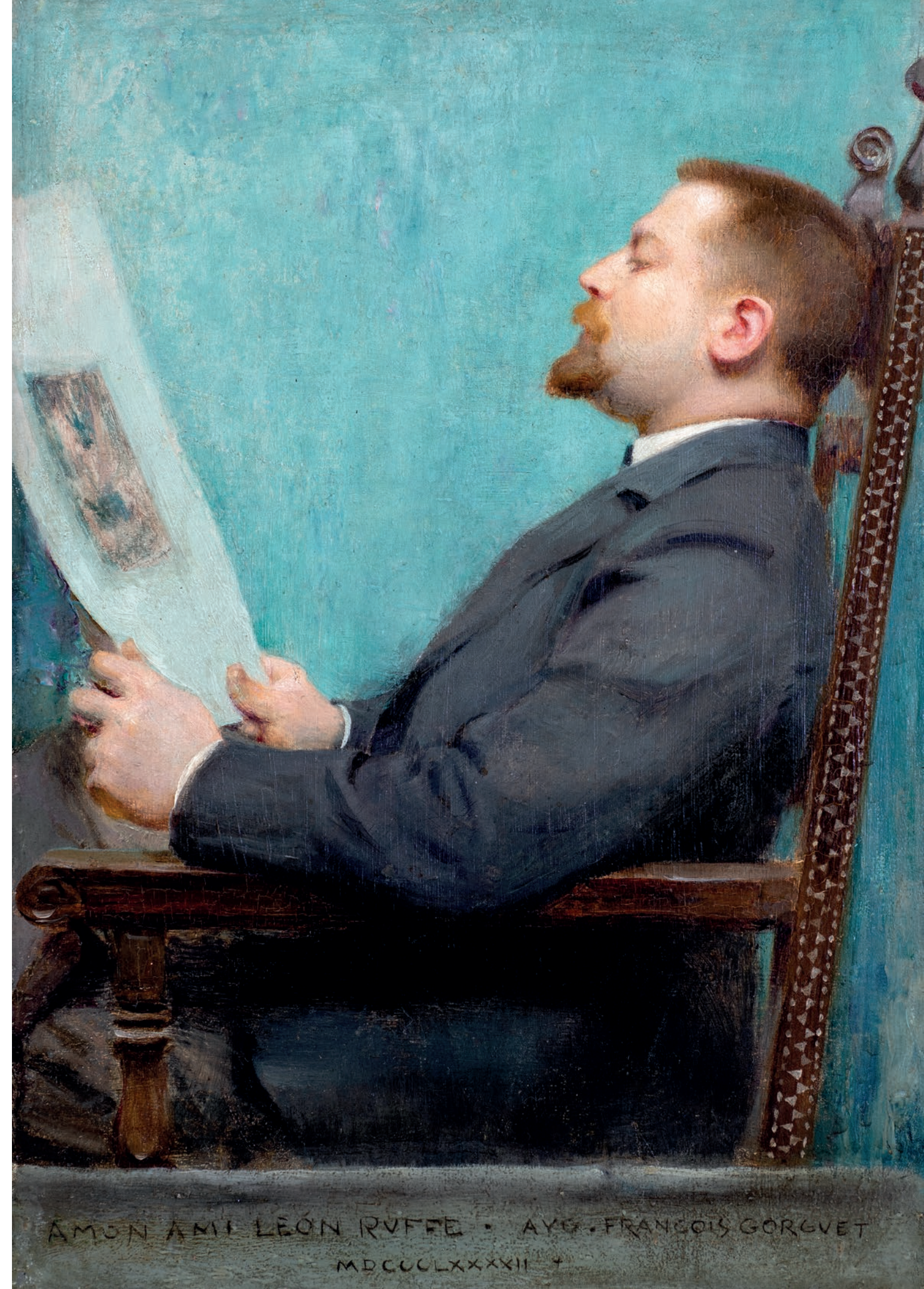


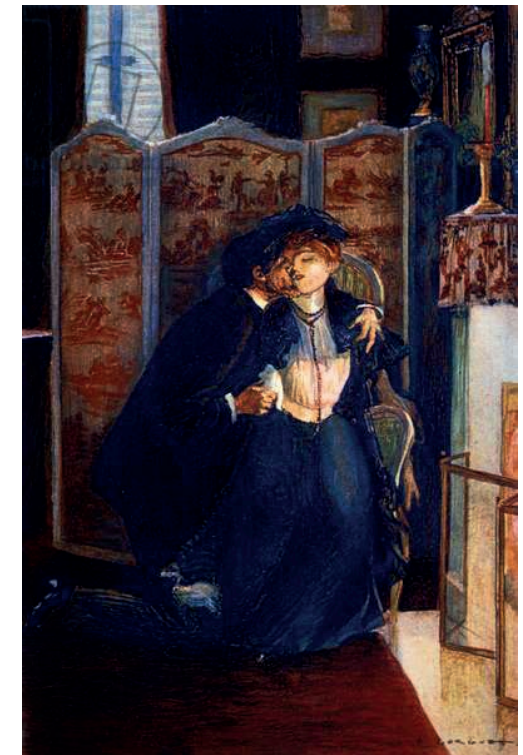


FIG. 1. PHOTOGRAPH OF LÉON RUFFE, 1900.

Auguste-François Gorguet depicts his friend, the artist Léon Ruffe, deep in concentration, as he scrutinises an engraving, possibly one of his own. Completely absorbed, he leans back into a high-backed chair with inlay, looking down in rapt concentration. Ruffe's strong profile stands out in stark contrast against the monochromatic backdrop composed of an unusual turquoise hue. A photograph of Ruffe from 1900, eight years after he was portrayed by Gorguet shows the same closely cropped hair and goatee.

Though utterly forgotten today, Ruffe had quite a successful career, winning medals at the Exposition Universelle of 1900, as well as being named an officer of the Legion of Honour and appointed as inspector des Beaux-Arts. Active as a painter, engraver and illustrator, he worked in a typical, though multifaced, Belle Époque style.

His friend and portraitist Gorguet has been equally neglected. Like Ruffe, Gorguet worked as a painter and illustrator, achieving early success with his book and magazine illustrations (fig. 2), as well as poster designs for plays and operas which capture the spirit of the fin-de-siècle. Studying at the École de Beaux-Arts under Gustave Boulanger, Jean-Léon Gérôme, Aimé Morot and Léon Bonnat, Gorguet's artistic output is hugely diverse, though often unified by an eye for quirky detail. Amongst his best works are his intimate, small-scale portraits of friends in informal settings, of which the present work is lovely example. Gorguet exhibited with success, receiving numerous prizes and awards, including a travel grant that allowed him to visit and study in Italy, Spain and North Africa in 1894, the year this idiosyncratic and charming portrait was exhibited in Antwerp at the Exposition Universelle.

FIG. 2. AUGUSTE-FRANÇOIS GORGUET, ILLUSTRATION FOR ANATOLE FRANCE'S *LYS ROUGE*.

PAUL LAZERGES

(Paris 1845 – 1902 Asnières-sur-Seine)

Study of a Camel



Signed lower right: PAUL LAZERGES

Oil on hardboard

27 x 36.5 cm. (10 ½ x 14 ¼ in.)

Paul Lazerges' charming oil sketch of a camel, a subject of predilection for the artist, was painted in Algeria at the close of the 19th century. Not connected to any larger composition, it therefore appears to be an autonomous study, painted for no other reason than the pleasure in swiftly capturing the likeness of a dromedary standing in the heat of the North African sun.

The camel is saddled-up, either waiting for an excursion, or at the end of one, standing in a simple enclosure of mud brick walls. The painting is a symphony in ochre, giving a sense of the tonal monotony of life on the edge of the Sahara. A sliver of bright blue at the upper edge indicates the open skies of the desert, and the relentless power of the sun.

The dromedary, the single-humped genus of camel native to North Africa and the Middle East, were ubiquitous to Biskra, the Algerian province which Lazerges frequented, and were the essential mode of transport there. Lazerges was clearly intrigued by their form and gait, depicting camels and camel caravans at numerous reprises, crossing the open deserts in the heat of the day, at dusk, or under the night's sky (fig. 1).

Lazerges, who studied under his father Hippolyte Lazerges, made his Salon debut in 1867. He took part in the Salon regularly until his death in 1902, winning medals in 1884 and 1898, as well as obtaining a medal at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900. Lazerges initially made his name through society portraits, the most famous of which was his 1880 portrait of Sarah Bernhardt, and Barbizon-type paintings. From the late 1880s onwards, having visited Algeria regularly and at length, his palette was transformed by the light of the desert, and he increasingly focussed on scenes of life in Biskra, which he exhibited at the Salon.



FIG. 1. PAUL LAZERGES, *CAMEL TRAIN BY MOONLIGHT*, 1899, OIL ON CANVAS, 81 X 100 CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION.

GUSTAVO SIMONI

(Rome 1846 – 1926 Palestrina)

Portrait of a Man, wearing a pink
cap and orange burnous

Signed lower right: *G. Simoni*

Oil on canvas

41.6 x 29.9 cm. (16 ½ x 12 in.)





FIG. 1. GUSTAVO SIMONI, *THE HALT OF THE CARAVAN*, OIL ON CANVAS, 61 X 90 CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION.

A leading late 19th-century Italian Orientalist, Gustavo Simoni is best known for his large-scale watercolours depicting caravans, souks and carpet dealers, the type of North African scenes favoured by his European clientele. This penetrating bust-length painting is therefore a rare example of portraiture within Simoni's oeuvre, though still corresponds with the artist's interest in documenting the unvarnished daily life of the people of the Maghreb.

The sitter, with his distinctive pink cap and voluminous cloak, was very likely the model for the figure bending over to attend to a camel in Simoni's painting of 1885, formerly in the Najd Collection, showing a caravan at rest (fig. 1). In the portrait, texture and surface are depicted skilfully, and the impact of the sitter's weathered face is enhanced by the vibrant colours of his cap and cloak. The sitter gazes uncompromisingly at the viewer, his direct stare conveying a sense of the hardship of his

life. Here Simoni demonstrates his ability to capture the human physiognomy, and indeed psyche, and the highly successful result makes one wish the artist had tried his hand at portraiture more frequently.

Born to a Roman barber, Simoni studied at the Academia di San Luca in 1861. From 1877 Simoni travelled widely, first in France and Spain, and then in North Africa, visiting Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. Simoni first visited Algeria in 1879, eventually buying a house in the city of Tlemcen, where he settled for a few years, regularly welcoming artists and friends from Italy. In his own lifetime, Simoni was highly acclaimed, winning the gold medal at the Paris Salon of 1889 for his monumental *Fire of Persepolis*. He received patronage from the highest circles, counting King Umberto of Italy as a client, eventually setting up a studio in Paris and a school of Orientalist painting in Rome.

LOUISE ABBÉMA

(Étampes 1853 – 1927 Paris)

Portrait of a young Egyptian boy
wearing a fez, in profile

Signed, dated and located upper right: *Caire (1889) / Louise Abbéma*

Oil on panel

27.1 x 21.4 cm. (10 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.)





FIG. 1. LOUISE ABBÉMA, *Portrait of Jeanne Samaray*, 1879, oil on canvas, 124 x 84 cm, Musée Carnavalet.

FIG. 2. LOUISE ABBÉMA, *Portrait of Sarah Bernhardt*, 1875, oil on panel, 28 x 23 cm, Musée Carnavalet.



Though executed with a vivacity and zest typical of Louise Abbéma, this profile portrait of an Egyptian boy in a fez is unique within the artist's oeuvre, since it seems that Abbéma painted no other Orientalist pictures. Furthermore, the inscription 'Caire' is intriguing, given that Abbéma is not known to have travelled to Egypt.

Very likely therefore the work relates to Sarah Bernhardt's international tour of 1888-89. The celebrated actress, who was the life-partner of Abbéma, arrived in Cairo in late December 1888 by way of Istanbul. The Egyptian leg of her journey was a sensation and the actress performed many of her most famous plays in the Cairo Opera House to massive acclaim. As there is no evidence that Abbéma accompanied the actress to North Africa, the portrait is perhaps based on a photograph or a postcard that Bernhardt brought back with her, or which Abbéma found in Paris and used to commemorate Bernhardt's tour. That said, it should not be entirely discounted that the portrait is from life, in which case Abbéma might have employed a model.

The face of the boy is beautifully rendered, from the soft lips to the delicate eyelashes, and the glint of light on his forehead, and his profile has been placed against a hazy background of pastel pinks and blues, suggestive of a dusky evening glow. Abbéma's virtuosity is on show throughout, though above all in the boy's vibrant robe, sketched out with spontaneous-seeming impasto brushwork in Impressionist hues.

Abbéma was born to a wealthy and aristocratic family with links to Parisian artistic circles. From a young age her father, viscount Émile Abbéma, encouraged his daughter's painterly ambitions. She began studying with the history painter Louis Devedeux, before moving into the studios of Charles Chaplin

and Carolus-Duran at the age of fifteen. Though picking up stylistic and tonal elements from these two important salon painters (fig. 1), Abbéma quickly developed her own highly individual idiom and by the late 19th century was one of the best-known French artists of her time, exhibiting regularly at the Salon from 1874 to 1926, as well as being nominated 'Official Painter of the Third Republic' and receiving the 'Legion d'Honneur' in 1906. Crediting Rosa Bonheur as a major source of inspiration, Abbéma would equal the celebrated animal painter in terms of her public success and adulation.

Abbéma met Sarah Bernhardt in 1871 when the actress was already renowned, and the two would remain life-long confidants and romantic partners. In 1875 Abbéma painted her first portrait of Bernhardt (fig. 2), which she showed at the Paris Salon of that year. It was an instant success, propelling the young painter into the limelight alongside her famous subject. From then onwards, Abbéma became Bernhardt's official portraitist and received a flood of commissions from wealthy and fashionable clientele. Brash, confidant, cigar-smoking and dressed in men's clothing (fig. 3), it was Abbéma's flamboyant and unconventional behaviour, as much as her art, which brought her such wide acclaim.



FIG. 3. PHOTOGRAPH OF LOUISE ABBÉMA IN HER STUDIO, 1912.

JUANA ROMANI

*'Her way of painting, which derives from Roybet as much as Henner, sometimes more one than the other, depending on the picture, is very serious and of an extraordinary facility.'*¹

*'Mlle Romani...has never done a better painting than Pensierosa, which is quite simply exquisite...she has left her mark on the Salon... One can say, with applause, that she should not be afraid of measuring herself against Velazquez.'*²

Though Juana Romani's life was ultimately tragic, for a brief time in fin-de-siècle Paris her star shone very brightly. Venerated by poets and eulogised by the most severe Salon critics of the day, Romani (fig. 1) achieved great fame and success at first as a muse and then as an artist in her own right, praised for the technical brilliance demonstrated by her idiosyncratic images of sumptuously attired femmes fatales. Paranoid hallucinations, which began in 1904, led to the artist being confined to asylums for the last two decades of her life, plunging her into obscurity. Thankfully, though there is still some way to go, Romani is once again starting to receive the attention that her unique talents deserve, with two monographic exhibitions devoted to her in



FIG. 1. FERDINAND ROYBET, *Portrait of Juana Romani*, c. 1890, oil on panel, 55 x 45.5 cm, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires.

the last few years and accompanying scholarly catalogues.³ Hopefully the two works presented here will also help in introducing a few more people to the brilliant Juana Romani.

Born Giovanna Carolina Carlesimo in Velletri in 1867, a small town in the Roman Campagna, Juana Romani, as she renamed herself at the age of nineteen, moved to Paris in 1877 with her family. Since her parents were of little means, by 1882 Romani had found employment as an artist's model, first working for the sculptor Alexander Falguière and then Victor Prouvé, Carolus-Duran, Jean-Jacques Henner (fig. 2) and Ferdinand Roybet. The latter two would have a significant and lasting impact on Romani's life and career.

Spending so much time in the studios of these leading artists allowed Romani to develop her painterly talents and by the late 1880s she had largely given up professional modelling to concentrate on her own artistic career. First studying at the Académie Colarossi, by 1887 Romani was being taught directly by Henner and then by Roybet, with whom she began an enduring romantic relationship.

Romani exhibited at the Salon of 1888 to instant acclaim. Though sometimes initially criticised for her reliance on Henner and Roybet, she was unanimously praised for her virtuoso technical skill and considered to be a rising star. By the mid-1890s, after developing her own unique style (fig. 3) and having exhibited regularly at the Salon, and with great success, Romani was quite famous and considered a personality of the day, her work and image visible on advertising campaigns across France. However, by 1904, the last year that she exhibited at the Salon, Romani had begun to suffer from psychiatric problems, exacerbated in 1905 with the death of Henner. In 1906 Romani was interned in a hospital in Ivry-sur-seine and she remained in various clinics until her own end in 1923.

NOTES

1. F. George-Morot, 'Au pays des cimaises. Virtouses' in *La Presse*, no. 2597, 8 July 1899, p. 3, 'Sa science de peintre, qui procède autant de Roybet que d'Henner, certaines fois plus de l'un que de l'autre, selon le tableau, est très sérieuse, elle est d'une habileté extraordinaire.'
2. É. Trogan, 'Les Salons de 1894' in *La Semaine des familles: revue universelle illustrée*, 9 June 1894, p. 154, 'Elle n'a jamais fait de mieux que sa *Pensierosa*, qui est tout simplement exquise... Elle a sa marque au Salon... On le dit, et en applaudissant, [qu'] elle n'a pas craint de se mesurer avec Velazquez.'
3. *Juana Romani 'La Petite Italienne'. Da modella a pittrice nella Parigi fin de siècle*, Convento del Carmine, Velletri 22 December - 28 January 2018 and *Juana Romani (1867-1923): modèle et peintre, un rêve d'absolu*, Musée Roybet Fould, Courbevoie 5 May - September 2021.



FIG. 2. JEAN-JACQUES HENNER, *Hérodiade*, c. 1886, oil on paper, 109 x 68.5 cm, Musée Henner, Paris.

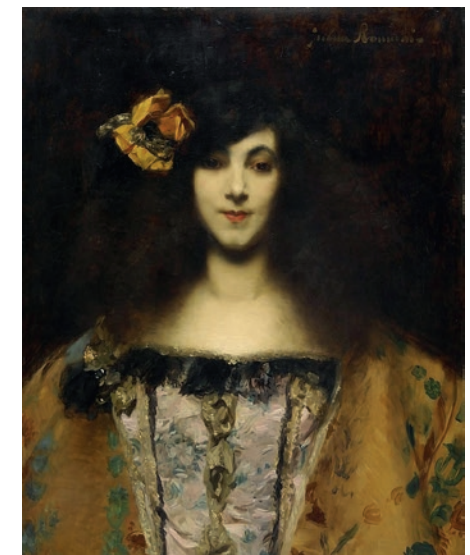


FIG. 3. JUANA ROMANI, *Femme au noeud jaune*, 1893, oil on panel, 81 x 64 cm, Private Collection.

JUANA ROMANI

(Velletri 1867–1924 Paris)

La Vénétienne

Inscribed on the reverse: *Henner f.*

Oil on panel, cut down

42 x 33.7 cm. (16 ½ x 13 ¼ in.)

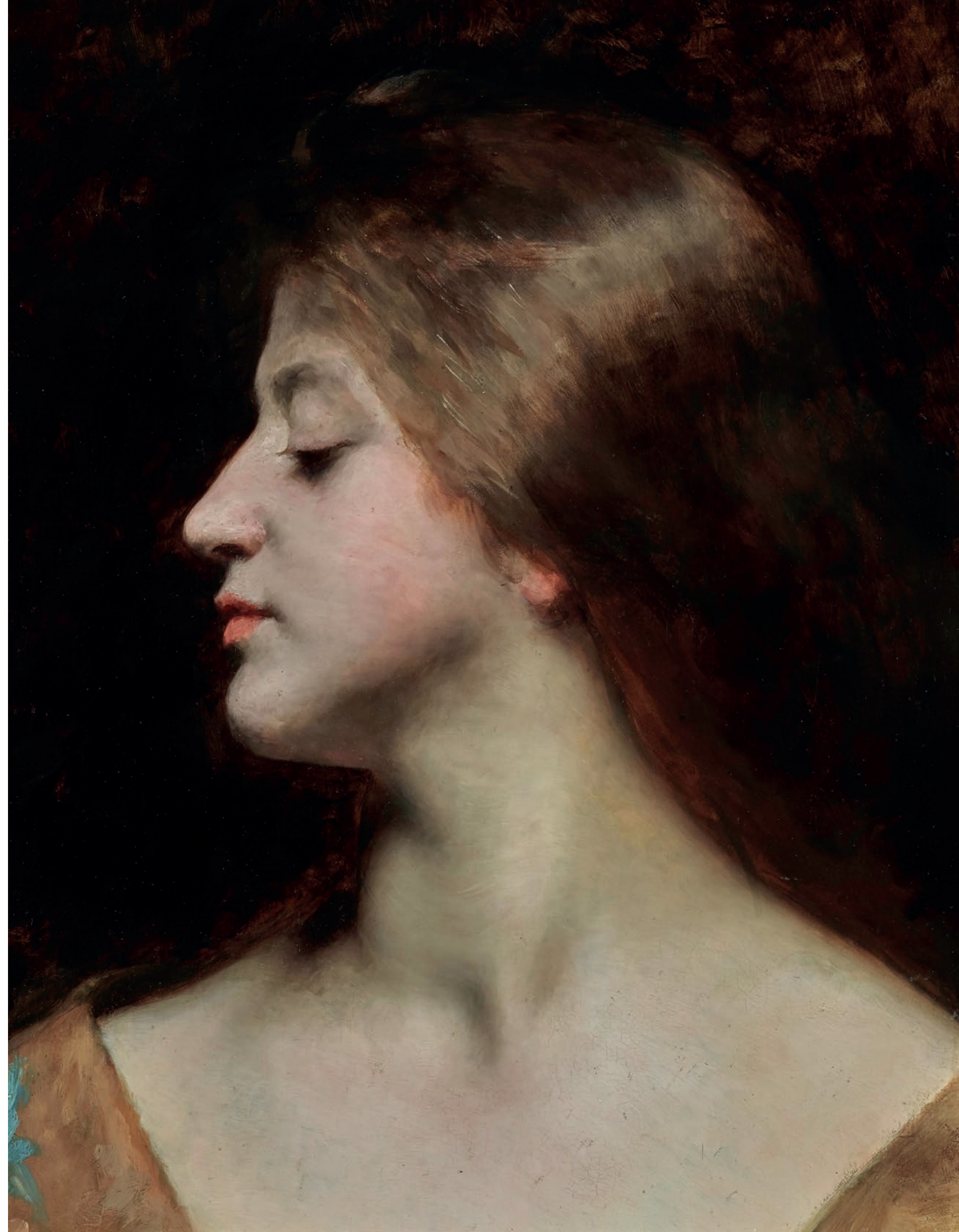




FIG. 1. EMILE BERNARD, *Mlle Juana Romani (Detail)*, 1892, albumin print, Petit Palais.



FIG. 2. JUANA ROMANI, *La Vénétienne*, albumin print, Musée Roybet Fould.

Juana Romani's depiction of a porcelain skinned beauty turning her head in profile is a significant rediscovery within the artist's oeuvre, marking an important step in her stylistic development as well as shedding light on her links with Jean-Jacques Henner. The painting, cut down on all sides, is known as *La Vénétienne* and is visible behind the artist in the famous photograph taken of her by Edmond Bernard in 1892 in Ferdinand Roybet's studio on rue du Mont-Thabor (fig. 1). *La Vénétienne* is also known from a black and white photograph in the archives of the musée Roybet Fould (fig. 2), in which Romani's cursive signature is clearly visible at the upper right.

Why was the panel cut down? Damage would seem to be the most likely explanation. However, though extreme, it might have been reduced by an unscrupulous dealer or owner who wanted to totally remove all traces of the signature and then sell the work as a Henner. Indeed, '*Henner f.*' has been inscribed onto the reverse (fig. 3), confirming that at one point Romani's painting was passed off as a work by her master. Henner's paintings were more valuable than Romani's in their lifetimes (and indeed only now is that dynamic reversing) and, as we shall see, Romani's style in the

late 1880s and early 1890s was close enough to Henner's that an untrained eye could be fooled by this kind of duplicity. Paradoxically, though, *La Vénétienne* is a key work in Romani's stylistic evolution away from Henner. Even in today's art market works by Romani, sometimes with fake signatures or inscriptions, mistakenly pass under the guise of Henner.¹ This is understandable given the obscurity she fell into after her breakdown in 1906 and only now is Romani starting to receive the scholarly attention which enables the separation of her work from that of Henner.

From 1887 Romani spent time in Henner's studio not only as a model but also as a student and the two developed a closeness, perhaps linked by a shared love of Italy, that would remain until Henner's death in 1905. Indeed, out of all the artist's Romani befriended, she seems to have learned the most from Henner, telling him at one point that she 'wanted to visit your studio everyday'.² Her early Salon entries were criticised for their reliance on Henner's distinctive idiom. This was justifiable, as Romani's earliest works, depicting flame-haired femmes fatales bathed in chiaroscuro and emerging from the darkness, did certainly lean heavily on Henner, if not

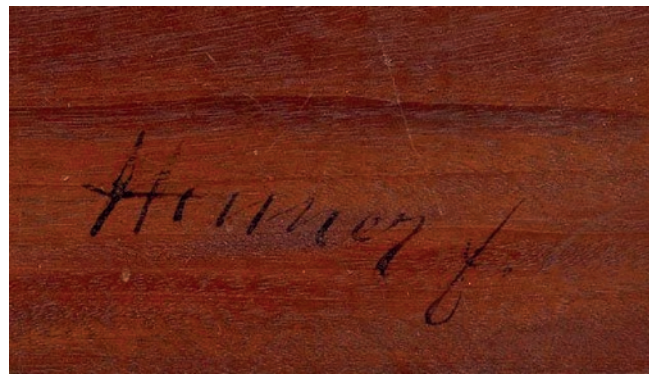


FIG. 3. LATER INSCRIPTION ON THE REVERSE OF *LA VÉNÉTIENNE*.

technically then certainly compositionally (fig. 4). Two separate reviews of the Salon of 1890 called both of her inclusions there 'pastiche'³ of Henner and one critic even went so far as to say, ironically enough given the discussion in the above paragraph, that Romani had 'opened a shop for the production of fake Henners'⁴

Although these Salon entries were lauded by other critics, who eulogised her virtuoso technical skills, the harsher reviews probably spurred Romani on to develop her own distinctively individual style and by the mid 1890s she had ruptured quite completely with Henner. *La Vénétienne*, alongside the related *Bianca Capello* (fig. 5) also of 1892, is an important milestone in this development. Whilst still reminiscent of Henner in some



FIG. 4. JUANA ROMANI, *MARIE MADELEINE*, c.1890, OIL ON PANEL, 63 X 50 CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION.

ways, most notably in the earthy palette and sense of enigma, here we start to see more of a synthesis of various influences independent of those of Henner and Roybet. Evoking a temporality reminiscent of Gothic or Byzantine art, Romani experiments with a horizontal format, allowing her to create a voluminous drapery which hangs off the wide and sloping shoulders of her figures. Though no longer visible due to its fragmentary nature, in *La Vénétienne* one would have originally been able to see the skill and delight with which Romani accurately renders luxurious fabrics, a talent for which the artist would soon be widely fêted. The title too, and that of *Bianca Capello*, evinces Romani's fascination for the powerful and seductive women of the Renaissance courts of her home country.



FIG. 5. JUANA ROMANI, *BIANCA CAPELLO*, 1892, OIL ON PANEL, DIMENSIONS AND LOCATION UNKNOWN.

Romani built upon all these themes, taking them further in the years to come and she would, in time, have her own pasticheurs, imitating her distinctive style. Indeed, by 1901, when Romani was at the height of her short-lived fame, the critics Félix Gautier and Louis Papon felt able to talk of a style 'Romani' just as one was able to discuss a style 'Henner' or 'Roybet'.⁵ The year 1892, within which *La Vénétienne* was painted, was a crucial moment in this artistic independence, and her Salon entries for that year were described as 'remarkable' works by a 'young and brilliant artist'.⁶

NOTES

1. The same phenomenon may also be observed in relation to Romani's other teacher, and romantic partner, Ferdinand Roybet, whose name is also sometimes inscribed on her works.
2. É. Durand-Gréville, *Entretiens de J.-J. Henner. Notes prises avec Émile Durand-Gréville après ses conversations avec J.-J. Henner (1878-1888)*, Paris 1925, p. 208, 'Je voudrais rester tous les jours dans votre atelier'.
3. A. Wolff, 'Le Salon' in *Le Figaro*, no. 120, 30 April 1890, p.2; P. Véron, 'Le Salon en partie double' in *Le Charivari*, 1 Mai 1890, p. 1.
4. M. Champimont (René Morot), 'Le Salon' in *Le Voleur Illustré*, no. 1714, 8 May 1890, p. 297, '[Romani] a ouvert une échoppe pour la fabrication du faux Henner'.
5. F. Gautier and L. Papon, 'Autours des Salons de 1901. Intérieur d'artistes' in *La Vie illustrée*, no. 133, 3 May 1901, p. 71.
6. Anonymous author, 'Paris-Noël' in *L'Art français*, no. 268, 23 December 1892, n.p., 'La jeune et brillante artiste...expose elle-même deux figures remarquables...'

JUANA ROMANI

(Velletri 1867–1924 Paris)

Femme au fond rouge

Signed upper left: *Juana Romani*

Oil on panel

81 x 64.2 cm. (31 ³/₄ x 25 ¹/₄ in.)

Provenance:

Anonymous sale, Mercier-Velliet-Thuillier, Lille, 26 March 2000, lot 351;

Private Collection, Lake Geneva;

Au bord du lac: An interior by François-Joseph Graf, Christie's, London, 26 January 2022, lot 74.





FIG. 1. AFTER JUANA ROMANI, *FEMME AU NEUD ROUGE*, 1903, LITHOGRAPH, BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE.



FIG. 2. JUANA ROMANI, *LA FILLE DE THÉODORA*, 1892, OIL ON PANEL, 81 X 63 CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION.

'Mlle. Juana Romani, pupil of Henner and of Roybet, has retained only the sense of mystery of the former and, thankfully, has rid herself of the false window dressing and stiltedness of the latter. Mlle Romani shows a series of female figures, clothed in the rich fabrics of the Middle Ages, with Velazquez bows and waves of golden hair. Though these faces can be psychologically shallow, they are pure motifs and an exquisite symphony of tonalities, painted with pearly whites à la Henner...and executed with a striking facility. She has a sense of scintillating luxury which her master Roybet is far from possessing...With her marvellous virtuosity she perfectly understands how to illuminate and harmonise the cold tones on a face, whose flesh radiates like an open fruit...Mlle. Romani's pictorial temperament is of an energy very rare amongst female painters, yet is however not weighed down by masculine pretensions.'¹

Camille Mauclair's passage of purple prose extolling the talents of Romani, written in 1901, both encapsulates the type of work for which she was becoming famous by the turn of the century, the present painting being a particularly beautiful example, and the very high regard in which she was held by some of the leading art critics of the day, who almost unanimously praised her virtuoso talent with the brush.² Mauclair was not the only critic to believe that Romani had surpassed Roybet, no mean feat given his commercial success and the very high regard in which he was held by some members of the elite, although he did have his detractors it is fair to say. No less a critic than Louis Gonse wrote a few years earlier in 1896 that Romani was more technically talented than Roybet, who was himself well-known for his accomplishments in this regard. Gonse went on to say that Romani had more 'grace, elegance, finesse and charm' than Roybet and that her 'impetuous audacity and joy would disarm even the most austere critic.'³ Many more quotes along these lines could be cited.

Femme au fond rouge, whose original title is lost but would almost certainly have been that of an Italian literary or historical heroine, likely dates to the last couple of years of the 19th century or the first few years of the next. In terms of its quality and impact, the painting, in near perfect condition, is without a doubt one of Romani's highest pictorial achievements. It can be compared with, for example, the *Femme au noeud rouge*, now lost but known through a lithographic poster published in 1903 in a calendar by the department store La Samaritaine (fig. 1)

In comparison to *La Vénétienne*, which is, as discussed, a transitional work moving away from Henner, *Femme au fond rouge* is very much in the distinctive and idiosyncratic 'style à la Romani'. From 1892 onwards, Romani's works tend to depict bust-length and otherworldly beauties, sometimes in profile but more often than not engaging directly with the viewer, head at a slight tilt, always clothed in sumptuous fabrics, and everything executed with daring, fluid and incredibly skilled brushwork. An early work in this series is *La Fille de Théodora* (fig. 2), shown at the Salon of 1893. Over the course of the 1890s Romani's palette moves from colder hues of green, silver and blue to hotter yellows and reds, the latter visible in the background, full lips and gorgeous bow of the present painting. *Femme au fond rouge*, alongside the Samaritaine lithograph, distinguishes itself in the vibrant and patterned backdrop, at odds with Romani's more usual scumbled, darker tones. Though how well she would have known their work it is difficult to say, there are certain parallels which can be drawn between Romani's works from the turn of the century and the pre-Raphaelites active in Britain a couple of decades before.

It is almost impossible to pick out a highlight from *Femme au fond rouge*, given that everything has been painted with such exquisite beauty, but perhaps the red and dark blue ribbon is a tour de force above all else, mesmerising in its folds, textures and highlights. These bows are a recurrent motif in Romani's work and, to judge from some of Roybet's many portraits of her, the artist seemed to enjoy wearing them herself, at a time when they were very much in vogue. They are often worn, for example, by the elegant ladies depicted around the same time by Boldini (fig 3), an Italian compatriot of whose paintings Romani would have very much been aware. As Mauclair noted too, these bows may also derive from Velazquez (fig. 4), an artist Romani clearly felt an affinity with.

In *Femme au fond rouge* we see Romani at the height of her talent and fame, just a few years before her hallucinations would confine her to a psychiatric hospital, leading to her subsequent obscurity, which is only now being overturned.



FIG. 3. GIOVANNI BOLDINI, *MISS BELL* (DETAIL), 1903, OIL ON CANVAS, 205 X 101 CM, MUSEI DI GENOVA.



FIG. 4. DIEGO VELAZQUEZ, *LAS MENINAS* (DETAIL), 1656, OIL ON CANVAS, 318 X 276 CM, PRADO

NOTES

1. C. Mauclair, 'L'art des femmes peintres et sculpteurs en France' in *La Revue*, 1901, p. 515-19.
2. Even if critics found it impossible to divorce female artists from their sex, and see them simply as artists, as Mauclair's last sentence confirms.
3. L. Gonse, 'Salon de 1896' in *Le Monde moderne*, vol 4. 1896., 'elle a plus d'élégance, de finesse et charme, son audace a quelque chose d'impétueux et de joyeux qui désarmerait la critique la plus austère'.

FRANÇOIS SCHOMMER

(Paris 1850 – 1935 Neuilly-sur-Seine)

Study of a woman seen from behind



Dedicated, signed and dated: *à Monsieur Vigneron / son ami reconnaissant / F. Schommer . / 1893*

Oil on canvas

35.5 x 27.5 cm. (14 X 10 ¾ in.)



FIG. 1. FRANÇOIS SCHOMMER, *CÆSAR AUGUSTUS AT THE TOMB OF ALEXANDER*, OIL ON CANVAS, 145 X 113 CM, ÉCOLE NATIONALE SUPÉRIEURE DES BEAUX-ARTS.

This dynamic, vibrant and enigmatic oil sketch displays the technical and compositional ability that allowed François Schommer to win the Prix de Rome in 1878, at the time France's most illustrious prize for young artists. Born in Paris, Schommer studied at the Académie de Beaux-Arts under Isidore Pils and Henri Lehmann, both prominent academic painters. He exhibited at the Salon from 1870 right up until the end of his life in 1935. Other than his prize-winning painting in 1878 (fig. 1), Schommer also won medals at the Universal Expositions of 1889 and 1900. Named to the Légion d'honneur in 1890, he became a professor at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1910 and was elected to the Institut de France in 1924. All in all Schommer had a successful career, full of the typical milestones expected of the leading academic artists of his generation, many of whom, like Schommer himself, are today largely forgotten.

The subject of the oil sketch is intriguing but ultimately difficult to decipher with no further clues. With her white chemise, rendered with a beautiful impasto, falling from her shoulders, a kneeling lady's porcelain back is bared. The red backdrop forms a veil through which her left forearm ethereally disappears. Possibly the painting is a preparatory work for a larger picture, knowledge of which would of course give meaning to the subject depicted here. That said the dedication to the otherwise unknown Monsieur Vigneron might suggest that the oil sketch is an end in itself, whose arcane subject would make sense to few but Schommer and his friend.

FRANS DAVID OERDER

(Rotterdam 1867 – 1944 Pretoria)

Portrait of a Zulu

Signed and dated upper left: *F.D. Oerder / '97*

Oil on canvas

53 x 42.9 cm. (20 ³/₄ x 16 ³/₄ in.)





FIG. 1. FRANS DAVID OERDER, *MY GARDENER*, OIL ON CANVAS, 40.5 X 30.4 CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION.

Frans David Oerder's portrait of a Zulu man, one of a small group of works painted by the artist during his trip to Zululand in 1897-98, surely counts amongst the finest portraits painted in South Africa in the late 19th century. Painted at a tumultuous moment in South Africa's history, the picture is highly important in being one of the earliest, non-ethnographic, portraits of a Zulu painted by a European artist.

Oerder was born in the Netherlands, studying at the Rotterdam Academy from 1880 to 1885 and winning the prestigious King William III Gold Medal and Bursary. Following further study in Italy and Belgium, the young artist moved to Pretoria in 1890, then the capital of the precariously independent Boer Transvaal Republic. Opportunities were initially very hard to come by and Oerder first worked as a house painter, before getting a job painting poles along the Delagoa Bay railway line. In 1894 he took a teaching post at a school in Pretoria, eking out a living on the side as a newspaper cartoonist.

In late 1897 and early 1898, with war brewing, Oerder went on a trip to Zululand, finishing about thirty oil paintings depicting the Zulu people and their way of life. These are amongst the most beautiful and important works of his career. With the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Boer War in 1899 Oerder was appointed to the post of official war artist by the Boer President Paul Kruger, though was soon captured by the British and interned in the prisoner of war camp at Meintjeskop. Following his release in 1903, Oerder travelled the East African coast and in 1905 he was elected a member of the South African Society of Artists, leading to numerous important landscape and portrait commissions. However, finding post-war conditions in South Africa difficult, with Pretoria having been annexed by the British in 1902, Oerder decided to return to the Netherlands in 1908, eventually marrying and settling in Amsterdam. During this stable period Oerder focussed primarily, and successfully, on floral still lifes. In 1938 Oerder returned to Pretoria, where his work was now highly acclaimed, remaining there for the last six years of his life.

Oerder's early South African works of the 1890s reflect the artist's exposure to the Dutch masters and the French Impressionists and marked him out as the leading artistic talent then active in South Africa, alongside his friend, the sculptor Anton van Wrouw. These works, consisting largely of genre scenes and landscapes, are the first paintings to authentically capture the Transvaal. Yet, as attractive as these are, it is Oerder's rarer portraits of indigenous South Africans, comparatively little studied within his oeuvre, which should today be considered as his most significant artistic undertakings (fig. 1).

The present work was painted in late 1897 in Zululand. Zululand, to the north-east of Durban, was the area encompassed by the Zulu Kingdom, which had risen to prominence in the early 19th century under Shaka Zulu.



FIG. 2. GEORGE FRENCH ANGAS, *UYEDWANA*, WATERCOLOUR, 32.7 X 23.7 CM, BRITISH MUSEUM.



FIG. 3. FRANS DAVID OERDER, *ZULUS COOKING*, OIL ON CANVAS, 46 X 40.5 CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION.

By the time Oerder visited, the Kingdom had ceased to function as an independent entity, having been incorporated by the British into the Colony of Natal following the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. The bravery and military ingenuity displayed by the Zulu in fierce battles such as Isandlwana, Rorke's Drift and Ulundi ensured that the war, and the Zulu people, immediately became legendary in the British imagination. Oerder's portrait would surely therefore have had wide appeal when exhibited in either Cape Town or Pretoria on his return.

Though other European artists had ventured into Zululand, most notably the naturalist George French Angas (fig. 2) in 1847, Oerder was the first artist to portray the Zulu and their way of life from a non-ethnographic point of view. His works are markedly different from these ethnographic illustrations, depicting the Zulu simply as people, rather than as picturesque or 'exotic' beings. The small handful of genre scenes reveal the daily and unvarnished lives of the Zulu, cooking in the open (fig. 3) or eating porridge in a dark interior.

In the present work, a young man of tangible presence looks resolutely out at the viewer and has been painted by Oerder with rapid, impasto brushstrokes. The subject of the portrait is exceedingly rare not only within the artist's oeuvre but also within the wider context of the time and constitutes one of the very earliest, if not the earliest, oil portrait from life of a Zulu man. A second, smaller, portrait of a Zulu man from the same trip (fig.4) appeared on the US market in the early 1990s and similarly depicts the sitter at half-length with a feathered headdress. Perhaps Oerder could be criticised for presenting these two Zulu men as a European audience would want to see them, dressed up in all their finery, from the ostrich-plumes to the cow-hide straps, beads and arm bangles. That said, a real sense of the sitter's individuality and personality comes through in Oerder's remarkable portrait.



FIG. 4. FRANS DAVID OERDER, *PORTRAIT OF A ZULU*, OIL ON CANVAS, 23 X 16 CM, PRIVATE COLLECTION



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