Orientalism

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Presentation

Orientalism, a term used from 1830 onwards, describes an aesthetic climate rather than a style. It evolved from the 18th century and went on to develop in 18th and 19th century French painting. Orientalism began with the taste for things Turkish, well illustrated by the famous "mamamouchi" in Molière's Bouffon. Gusteau, and continued with the convention of suns and muffins, common in the theater and in honor paintings of the time at Louis XV. However during the 19th century, Orientalism went through a significant development: in 1829, Victor Hugo wrote in his foreword to the Orientals, that the Orient has become a general preoccupation.

Political events and economic transformations bring about a new approach to the Orient

The Egyptian Campaign

Bouasse, inspired by the example of the great conquerors of Antiquity and determined to impose a French presence in a region of the world which the Greeks had been desiring for independence. The Greeks had been making numerous sketches and watercolours, amongst them: cruelty in the form of the desert, the tyrant or the hunt, the sensuality and opulence of harems, picturesque street scenes with colourful and teeming crowds... They also savoured the opportunity of painting more intense light effects, using more vivid and gaudy colours. Decamps stayed only once and for little more than thirty years to come.

Romantic Orientalism: An Imaginary Orient

Romantic artists and writers, in a quest for new models and sources of inspiration, were seduced by the exotism of an Orient from which they constructed new themes, amongst them: cruelty in the Orient has become a general preoccupation. It emerged during the 17th century and went on to develop in 18th and 19th century French painting. Orientalism began with the taste for things Turkish, well illustrated by the famous "mamamouchi" in Molière's Bouffon. Gusteau, and continued with the convention of suns and muffins, common in the theater and in honor paintings of the time at Louis XV. However during the 19th century, Orientalism went through a significant development: in 1829, Victor Hugo wrote in his foreword to the Orientals, that the Orient has become a general preoccupation.

The War of Greek Liberation

Dominated by Ottoman authority, Greek patriots were emboldened by the example of the French Revolution which were awakening the people's desire for independence. The Greeks had been making numerous sketches and watercolours, amongst them: cruelty in the Orient has become a general preoccupation. It emerged during the 17th century and went on to develop in 18th and 19th century French painting. Orientalism began with the taste for things Turkish, well illustrated by the famous "mamamouchi" in Molière's Bouffon. Gusteau, and continued with the convention of suns and muffins, common in the theater and in honor paintings of the time at Louis XV. However during the 19th century, Orientalism went through a significant development: in 1829, Victor Hugo wrote in his foreword to the Orientals, that the Orient has become a general preoccupation.

The various battles taking place throughout the 19th century gave battle painters opportunities to represent exotic settings such as the Capture of the Smala of Abd-el-Kader by Bellangé (Chantilly, Musée Condé). The progressive development of the French stimulated interest and curiosity amongst the "Metropolitan" French for the Algerian landscape and the customs of its people. The interest was such that some artists, like Guillaumet, went to stay in Algeria several times.

Cultural and Economic Development

The Ottoman empire declined and receded throughout the century. Its defeat led part of the elite to call for their country's modernisation which meant the increase of economic investments, secular and religious educational missions, cultural and diplomatic exchanges. As a consequence, Mehmet Ali (1805-1849), who gave France the streaks on the Place de la Concorde, opened his country to the outside world. The inauguration of the Suez canal, engineered by Ferdinand de Lesseps in 1869, the development of roads, railways and maritime routes for steam boats, all encouraged exchanges and visits.

Music

- Le rire oriental aux XIXe siècles, écrits, poèmes, gravures, photographies, CNRS " Delicious, expressif et laconique", 24 édits a hosteler.
- Edmond Lenoir, La vie et l'oeuvre d'Antoine Bourgeois, 1996.
- The Conquest of Algeria

- After the capture of Algiers by Charles X in 1840, the French began to carry out the simultaneous conquest and colonisation of Algeria.

The vantage points taken throughout the 19th century gave battle painters opportunities to represent exotic settings such as the Capture of the Smala of Abd-el-Kader by Bellangé (Chantilly, Musée Condé). The progressive development of the French stimulated interest and curiosity amongst the "Metropolitan" French for the Algerian landscape and the customs of its people. The interest was such that some artists, like Guillaumet, went to stay in Algeria several times.

Inspired by the Orient years later, he subjected it to a rather few interpretation, his female males are of Persian models who evoke an imaginary and sensual Orient.

Orientalist paintings often collected genuine weapons, carpets and other rare and unusual artefacts, using these accessories according to their imaginative fantasies.

Naturalist Orientalism: Ethnographic Curiosity

The confrontation with the Orient having been made more possible in real terms by the acceleration of travel conditions, inspired some artists to look beyond Romantic fantasy and be more readily interested in its reality. Guillaumet's realistic tendencies earned him the nickname "Milliard of the desert". Some artists even accompanied scientific missions, attempting to record the memory of the Orient as it underwent transformations caused by its contact with Europeans. The sculptor Coutard, for example, made a series of books intended to be part of a presentation on the history of the races in the anthropological gallery of the Paris Museum of Natural History. This is reminiscent of the Naturalist approach.

Landscapes were just as interesting to painters as human types. Struck by the immensity of the desert, artists like Fromentin, Guillaumet and Tourneur endeavoured to capture its feeling of infinity. The spirit of observation, the desire to relate and testify to things as they saw them, as well as to qualities of atmosphere and light led these artists to emphasize reportage rather than emotion.

Bibliography

- "Le rire oriental aux XIXe siècles, écrits, poèmes, gravures, photographies, CNRS " Delicious, expressif et laconique", 24 édits a hosteler.
- "Edmond Lenoir, La vie et l'oeuvre d'Antoine Bourgeois, 1996."
Objectives
Various educational objectives may be linked to an unit on Orientalism. They are listed here in order of ascending complexity.

Primary school level
The infant school curricula includes an initiation into the discovery of the world, the environment and culture. It is possible to use the artworks outlined in this visit to give a simple idea of the artists analysing the iconographic and pictorial elements outlined in this visit to give a simple idea of the artists' work which may be represented in its collections. Major pieces by Delacroix are housed in the Musée du Louvre, and a rich and diverse collection of his work can be seen at the Musée Delacroix, Place Turpin (Paris VI).

Another interesting follow-up would be to pursue the confrontation between Orientalism and Primitivism, the latter's best known representative being Gauguin. One may show pupils that the Orient mostly provided "Orientalist" artists with two kinds of resources: new subject matter and a renewal of pictorial expression in terms of light and colour. Primitivist artists were to go further; they would actually include elements derived from ethnic art in their artistic vocabulary. This approach was to influence a profound change in Oriental-inspired literature and the arts in the 20th century.

Secondary school level
1. The visit may be used as part of a reflection on travel, displacement and otherness. By listing and analysing the iconographic and pictorial elements which tell of the artists' search for fresh subjects and new atmospheres, pupils will be able grasp which half of the 19th century Orientalism began in southern Spain. It is also important to use maps to define the zones explored by the different artists and of the great visual arts movements of the second half of 19th century held in the Musée d'Orsay collections. This is a refreshing way of approaching the art of period rather than in the usual "movements", i.e. through the juxtaposition of movements (romanticism, realism, academism, impressionism etc.). Furthermore, Orientalist works are found in all the different disciplines represented in the Museum collections: painting, sculpture, photography, and occasionally, objet d'art. Finally, representatives of Orientalism can be found in all the genres codified by the traditional "hierarchy": history painting, portrait, animal painting, and landscape.

2. More specifically, the ethnographical approach of some of the Orientalist artists may be included in the study of social sciences during the second half of the 19th century. It is also possible to include in it a more general study of the relationship between arts and sciences.

Before The Visit
Several suggestions are made to help teachers prepare for the visit at the Musée d'Orsay, which can be followed according to the level and the subject taught.

• Study the historical background of Orientalism. Specify the different areas of influence in the Middle-East and in Northern Africa of the European countries and of France. Distinguish between the processes of conquest and colonization. One may examine the role of political authorities and the bias of the commissions they authorised to artists and also the material and topographical conditions of the "trip to the Orient" which artists made increasingly under their own steam.

• Study a certain number of texts pertaining to 19th century Orientalist literature, preferably chosen to illustrate the two sides of the visit: the first on "the Orient as a Romantic dream", and the second "the real Orient of the naturalists" (see bibliographical suggestions below and the fourth "objective" above).

• Prepare the pupils with materials such as excerpts from texts, pictures, historical events which enable them to understand in what forms the Orient inspired literature and the arts in the 17th and 18th centuries. This would be nicely introduced by a visit to the Musée du Louvre centred around the 18th century. It will then be possible to guide the pupils through the theme's evolution during the 19th century.

After The Visit
A further and more detailed study of Eugène Delacroix is recommended as the chronological limits assigned to the Musée d'Orsay restrict the amount of his work which can be represented in its collections. Major pieces by Delacroix are housed in the Musée du Louvre, and a rich and diverse collection of his work can be seen at the Musée Delacroix, Place Turpin (Paris VI).

The visit: list of artworks
N.B. For guided visits, this list of artworks is indicative only. The guide leading the group is free to choose the works which support their demonstration.

Paintings
Gustave Guillaumet: Le Sahara (The Sahara), also known as Le Desert (The Desert), 1867
Berne Regnault: Excursion sans jugement aux rois maures de Grenade (Excursion without Trial Under the Rule of the Moorish Kings in Granada), 1870
Charles de Tournemine: Elephants d'Afrique (African Elephants), 1867 Salon
Charles de Tournemine: café à Adèle (Café in Adalí), 1883
Eugène Delacroix: Chasse aux Lions (Lion Hunt), 1854
Eugène Delacroix: Chasse au Tigre (Tiger Hunt), 1854
Eugène Delacroix: Paysage d'un pays au Maroc (Fording a River in Morocco), 1858
Eugène Delacroix: Cranes arabes se hollant dans une estrade (Arab Horse Fighting in a Stable), 1869
Auguste Renoir: La mosquée (The Mosque) at Plé arabe (Arab Celebration), 1881
Auguste Renoir: Paysege d'Algérie (Algerian Landscape) ou Le ravin de la femme sauvage (The Wild Woman's Gully), 1867
Auguste Renoir: Femmes arabes (Bou Chafouane) (At the Well), 1888
Théodore Chassériau: Tripartitum (Tripartitum), 1853 Salon
Théodore Chassériau: Cheval de tribus arabes et deux soldats (At the Walls of a City), 1852 Salon
Louis Rémy: Pêcheurs allant à la mer (Fishermen on Their Way to Sea), 1861
Alexandre Devamps: Marchand de fruits dans sa boutique (Turkish Merchant Smoking in His Shop), 1884
Alexandre Devamps: Pêcheur. Sali pourvauteur (Fisher. Sali Prowler), 1884
Alexandre Devamps: Le pays de la neige (The Land of Ice), circa 1860
Alexandre Devamps: Chasse au faucon en Algérie, la carre (Falcon Hunting in Algeria, the Square), 1885
Gustave Guillaumet: Toreadors a Bou-Saâdia (Fencers in Bou-Saâdia), formerly known as Fencers a Bou-Saâdia (Swordsmen in Bou-Saâdia)
Gustave Guillaumet: Le Desert (The Desert), 1867
Gustave Guillaumet: L'Auberge, Sahara arabian (Inns and Hotels in the Sahara), 1873

Sculptures
Louis-Émile Barrias: Jeune fille du Moyen âge et Blain (Girl from the Middle Ages and Shield), 1868
Jules Dalou: Ante la fama, souvenier de Tangier (Before the Fame, Souvenir of Tangier), 1885
Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier: Néger du Soudan (Sudanese Man), 1875
Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier: Capucres des colonnes (Women of the Columns), 1881
Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier: Egle d'Alsace et hameau (Arab From El-Aghosh Showing a Hamlet), 1887 Salon

Objets d'Art
Théophile Dour: Coupe monumentale (Monumental Cup), circa 1790
Philippe-Joseph Rocard: Fais, 1867

Gustave Guillaumet: Prêtre de vœux dans le Sahara (Evens' Prayer in the Sahara), 1865
Oran. Pongaud. L'Harid. Les berger, conduits par l’âge, se rendant à Bethléem (The Shepherds, Led by the Star, on Their Way to Bethlehem), 1885
Jean-Étienne Gérôme: Arabes à Grenade (King Boudhail's Farrow to Granada), 1868

N. B. For guided visits, this list of artworks is indicative only. The guide leading the group is free to choose the works which support their demonstration.

This list includes paintings, sculptures and objects of art exhibited in the galleries of the Musée d'Orsay.
Objectives

Various educational objectives may be linked to an visit based on Orientalism. They are listed here in order of ascending complexity.

Primary school level

The infat school curricula includes an initiation into the discovery of the world, the environment and culture. It is possible to use the artworks outlined in this guide to give a simple idea of Orientalism (near, far, for distant spaces...) and of landscapes, houses, costumes, exotic animals...

Primary school introduces the study of the diversity of landscapes, the discovery of maps and the terrestrial globe, as well as an initiation into artistic approaches. One may encourage the children to compare the world around them with other environments, landscapes and human activities, which are interesting for the children to compare with those they are familiar with. It is also possible to tackle notions of distance and time based on the study of maps of communication and transport.

Secondary school level

1. The visit may be used as part of a reflection on travel, displacement and otherness. By listing and analysing the iconographic and pictorial elements which tell of the artists’ evolution during the 19th century.

2. The visit may be used as part of a reflection on the subject taught.

3. The visit: list of artworks

4. Another significant feature of this particular visit is that, owing to the nebulous nature of Orientalism, it may be used to cut across the entire range of the great visual arts movements of the second half of 19th century held in the Musée d’Orsay collections. This is a refreshing way of approaching the art of period rather than in the usual “movements”, i.e. through the juxtaposition of movements (romanticism, realism, academicism, impressionism etc.).

5. The visit: list of artworks

Published: 1867

5. A further and more detailed study of Eugène Delacroix is recommended as the chronological limits assigned to the Musée d’Orsay restrict the amount of his work which can be represented in its collections. Major pieces by Delacroix are housed in the Musée du Louvre, and a rich and diverse collection of his work can be seen at the Musée Delacroix, Place Furstenberg (Paris VI).

6. Various educational objectives may be linked to a visit based on Orientalism. They are listed here in order of ascending complexity.

Before The Visit

Several suggestions are made to help teachers prepare for the visit at the Musée d’Orsay, which can be tailored according to the level and the subject taught.

• Study the historical background of Orientalism. Specify the different areas of influence in the Middle-East and in Northern Africa of the European countries and of France. Distinguish between the processes of conquest and colonisation. One may examine the role of political authorities and the bias of the commissioners they assigned to artists and also the material and topographical conditions of the “trip to the Orient” which artists made increasingly under their own steam.

• Provide the pupils with materials such as excerpts from texts, pictures, historical events which enable them to understand in what forms and according to which approach was in influence a profound change in the order of values: would the “scientific” art of the Western world lose its supremacy?

The visit: list of artworks

N.B. For guided visits, this list of artworks is indicative only. The guide leading the group is free to choose the works which support their demonstration. This list includes paintings, sculptures and objects of art exhibited in the galleries of the Musée d’Orsay.

Paintings

• Gustave Guillaumet: Le Sahara (The Sahara), also known as Le Désert (The Desert), 1867

• Henri Regnault: Exécution sans jugement sur les rois maures de Grenade (Execution without Trial Under the Rule of the Moorish Kings in Granada), 1870

• Charles de Tournemine: Éléphants d’Afrique (African Elephants), 1867, Salam

• Charles de Tournemine: Café d’Adula (Café in Adul), 1883

• Eugène Delacroix: Chasse aux Lions (Lion Hunt), 1854

• Eugène Delacroix: Chasse au Tigre (Tiger Hunt), 1854

• Eugène Delacroix: Paysage d’un pays au Maroc (Fording a River in Morocco), 1858

• Eugène Delacroix: Chromes arabes se battant dans une estrade (Arab Horse Fighting in a Stable), 1860

• Auguste Renoir: La mosqûta (The Mosquita) or Pile arabe (Arab Celebration), 1871

• Eugène Delacroix: Paysage d’Algérie (Algerian Landscape) or Le ravin de la forêt sauvage (The Wild Woman’s Gully), 1863

• Auguste Renoir: Champs de bananes (Banana Fields), 1883

• Théodore Chassériau: Tépidarium (Tépidarium), 1855, Salam

• Théodore Chassériau: Cheve de tribus arabes et défilé au combat singulier sous les remparts d’une ville (Arab Tribes Chief Challenging Each Other to Single Combat Under the Walls of a City), 1852, Salam

• Louis-René Rémond: Adieu du roi Boabdil (Adieu to Boabdil), 1875

• Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier: Caperse des colonnes (Woman of the Columns), 1863

• Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier: Caprere des colonnes (Woman of the Columns), 1863

Sculptures

• Louis-Ernest Barrias: Jeune fille du Moyen âge et Blante Girl (from the Mephisto Setting), 1868

• Abd El Kébir Maro, duchesse de Calabre (Chafypharoûn (Abytain Chat)), 1875

• Jean Damp; Journ e de fantasia, saufleur desd (Before the Fantasia, saufleur of Tanger (Before the Fantasia, saufleur of Tanger)), 1881

• Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier: Nager du Susulain (Gandertian Man), 1875

• Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier: Cireuse des côtes (Cohere des côtes), 1865

• Charles-Henri-Joseph Cordier: Juge d’El-Aghouat au Maroc (Arab from El-Aghouat wearing a burnous), 1887 Salam

Objets d’Art

• Théodore Deck: Coupe monumantal (Monumental Cup), circa 1870

• Philippe-Joseph Ricard: Fais, 1867
Orientalism

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Presentation

Orientalism, a term used from 1830 onwards, describes an aesthetic climate rather than a style. It developed thereafter, at the beginning of the 19th century French painting, and went on to develop in 13th and 19th century French painting.

At the time of Louis XV, there was a great deal of interest in the Orient, which was a source of documentation which served him for thirty years to come. Itineraries for steam boats, all encouraged exchanges and voyages in the form of the desert, the tyrant or the hunt, the picturesque street scenes with colourful and teeming crowds. They also savoured the opportunity of painting more intense light effects, using more vivid and gaudy colours. Decamps stayed only once and for little more than a year in the Middle East (1828-1829) before his trip he was painting imaginary cities and buildings, and Turkish bathhouses. From 1842 onwards, Delacroix, crossed the Maghreb, staying especially in Mekeke, Oran, Algeria, where he made numerous sketches and watercolours as a source of documentation which served him for thirty years to come – and developed some of his most renowned paintings, including *The Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1854, Musée du Louvre). He saw in the mobility of the Classical qualities which he had felt French Neoclassicism lacked: *Vue* is no longer in *Rome*, he wrote, *Antiquity has nothing more beautiful*. This is similar to the approach of Horace Vernet, the battle painter, who during his trips to Algiers, painted biblical scenes using contemporary models. In 1848, he published an article in which he illustrated entitled: "The similarities between ancient and modern Hebrews". Chassériau on the other hand spent only a short while in Algeria, in 1846, and although he continued to be inspired by the Orient years later, he subjected it to a rather few interpretations, his female nudes are of Parisian models who evoke an imaginary and sensual Orient. Orientalist painters often collected folklore, weapons, carpets and other rare and unusual artefacts, using these accessories according to their imaginative fantasies.

Natural Orientalism: Ethnicographic Curiosity

The confrontation with the Orient having become more made more possible in real terms by the acceleration of travel conditions, inspired some artists to look beyond Romantic fantasy and to be more readily interested in its reality. Guillaumet's realism tendencies earned him the nickname "Millet of the desert". Some artists even accompanied scientific missions, attempting to record the memory of the Orient as it underwent transformations caused by its contact with Europeans. The sculptor Cordier, for example, made a series of busts intended to be part of a presentation on the history of the races in the anthropological gallery of the Paris Museum of Natural History, This is reminiscent of the Naturalist approach. Landscapes were just as interesting to painters as human types. Struck by the immensity of the desert, artists like Fragonard, Guillaumet and Tourneux endeavoured to capture its feeling of infinity. The spirit of observation, the desire to relate and testify to things as they saw them, as well as to qualities of atmosphere and light led these artists to emphasize reporting rather than emotion.

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Audiovisual

• Le voyage oriental au XIXe siècle, émissions, peintres, graveyaires, photographes, CNP ("Dialotique, expressions et langages", 26 vidéos à l’ordre)
III. An Impressionist

Orientalism?

1. Auguste Renoir (1841–1919):

La Mosquée (The Mosque) or File arabe (Arab Celebration), 1881

Location: upper level, gallery 52

Either a landscape scene with figures or a genre scene viewed from a distance, this painting shows a joyful crowd gathering around an Oriental dance. The background is divided into predominantly white architecture on one side, a rocky landscape on the other, the far background being occupied by the sea and palm trees. In the foreground, one can pick out figures sitting on the top of a rock to get a better view. The impact brush stroke is characteristic of Impressionism. In places, the figures, their faces indistinguishable, are made up of no more than a quick suggestion of coloured spots. The picturesque details of the costumes (turbans), the white architecture and vegetation evoke the exotic atmosphere of the Orient. Renoir presents a predominantly white architecture on one side, a landscape, hanging next to Arab Celebration, 1881

2. Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863):

Chasse aux lions (Lion Hunt), 1854

Location: ground floor, gallery 2

This artwork is a sketch for a painting that has been destroyed by fire. Although it is difficult to pick out individual elements, one can identify the figure of the horse rearing up in the centre of the composition. The beast is inspired by Bataille, whose influence can also be found in the composition which is structured by colour rather than drawing. The quick, nervous touch, in which the artist’s hand can be felt, expresses the ferocity of the scene and the vitality of the painter. The mobile, intertwined lines of the hounds, the bodies of the animals are presented in a spiral constructed from the three primary colours blue, red and yellow. The colour harmony in the finished painting prompted Baudelaire to write: “Never before have more beautiful, more intense colours, penetrated one’s very soul by way of one’s eyes.”

3. Théodore Chassériau (1819–1856):

Le Tepidarium, 1855 Salon

Location: ground floor, gallery 2

A tepidarium, was part of the Roman bathing system, a place where bathers, according to the custom in common throughout the Orient, came to rest and dry after bathing. The painter very consciously set his scene in Roman Antiquity, the ceiling vault being decorated with a bar-rel inspired by the baths of Venus Genitrix, a recent archaeological discovery at Pompeii. But Chassériau’s nudes curry all the poetry of the Orient. The melancholy of the poses and look, the sensuality born from the proximity of bodies and of their languid curves all conform to the standard harem atmosphere as assumed by Western art. A painting like this contributes to the occidental fantasy of the odaloupe, the myth of the idle, dreaming, sensual oriental woman. This combination of warm colours – note in particular the yellow and blue pieces of cloth – and the smooth and perfectly proportioned bodies of the female nudes remind us that Chassériau, having been a pupil of Ingres, was an admirer of Delacroix.

4. Théodore Chassériau (1819–1856):

Chefs de tribus arabes se désaltérant au combat singulier sous les remparts d’une ville (Arab Tribal Chiefs Challenging Each Other in Single Combat Under the Walls of a City), 1870

Location: ground floor, gallery 2

Whereas the stock-image of the oriental woman was that of the monotonous harem odaloupe, the oriental man was seen as the haughty warrior, courageous but cruel. In this respect, this painting may be seen as the companion to Topolarum. The fight plunges us into a cruel, merciless world in which the violence and hatred of the challenge can be read in the glances exchanged by the warriors. The two horses and the bloody corpse in the foreground are composed in a V-shape. In the background, between the horses’ heads, one can see the fight taking place. Horses accumulate; a soldier, with a sabre in his hand, is attacking a horseman, who is himself stabbing an enemy. Warm and cold colours confront one another in the chief’s tunics. The contrast is reinforced by the fact that one of them is on dry ground whilst the other is in water. Cruelty is also expressed by the fight’s disproportionate odds in terms of weaponry: one chief is only armed with a small arrow whilst the other brandishes a heavy javelin.
II. Realist and Naturalist Orientalism

9. Alexandre Decamps (1805-1880): Marchand turc fumant dans sa boutique (Turkish Merchant Smoking in His Shop), 1844 Location: ground floor, gallery 5

This picturesque subject from Algerian daily life is presented like a familiar traveller’s anecdote but is also used as a pretext for studying colour and light. The scene represents a man, curled up, exhausted by the heat and tinged with the calm of oriental meditation. The shop interior, full of objects, makes up part of a larger exploration of the customs of this country which, through street scenes, were easily accessible to travelling painters. Baudelaire described Decamps’s style: “No one studied the effects of atmosphere with such care. He valued above all the most bizare and incredible intersections of shadow and light. (...) The only thing one could reproach him with is in giving too much consideration to the material execution of the objects.” Rembrandt’s influence was often mentioned when describing the artist’s technique which was characterised by heavy impasto and the rendring of light on small format canvases. Decamps exercised a profound influence on Degas and Picasso.

10. Léon Belly (1827-1877): Pilgrims on their Way to Mecca, 1861 Location: ground floor, gallery 25

For this work, considered in its time to be a masterpiece of Orientalist painting, Belly chose an imposing subject and format: it represents the movement of a caravan through the desert on a journey to the Holy City of Mecca. The artist was keen to render the poor, rough, and monotonous life of the desert peoples. He also suffered from malaria. This painting is exceptional in its subject and it is almost as a visionary that he evokes the desert’s desolate and deadly world.

11. Gustave Guillaumet (1840-1887): Tisseraies d’Afrique (Spinning in Africa), 1884 Location: ground floor, gallery 25

This picturesque subject from Algerian daily life is presented like a familiar traveller’s anecdote but is also used as a pretext for studying colour and light. The scene represents a man, curled up, exhausted by the heat and tinged with the calm of oriental meditation. The shop interior, full of objects, makes up part of a larger exploration of the customs of this country which, through street scenes, were easily accessible to travelling painters. Baudelaire described Decamps’s style: “No one studied the effects of atmosphere with such care. He valued above all the most bizare and incredible intersections of shadow and light. (...) The only thing one could reproach him with is in giving too much consideration to the material execution of the objects.” Rembrandt’s influence was often mentioned when describing the artist’s technique which was characterised by heavy impasto and the rendring of light on small format canvases. Decamps exercised a profound influence on Degas and Picasso.

12. Eugène Fromentin (1820-1878): Le Pays de la vie (The Land of Thirst), circa 1860 Location: ground floor, gallery 27

This landscape holds nothing but hostile rocks where drought has destroyed everything: men and vegetation. It contrasts dramatically with the idyllic image of the Orient presented by Tournemine in his Études africaines. Here, the land is dominated by suffering and death. The composition is Géricault’s Best of the Middle- a work renowned throughout the 19th century, now exhibited at the Louvre – transposed into “drought-ridden earth.” In both paintings, the only remaining touch of hope is embodied by an armExtended figure in the sky, calling for help. The other men do not even have the strength to call out to the woman. Is there hope of deliverance or only disillusion?

For Fromentin, the Romantic period “informed entirely by imagination” is succeeded by a period “informed entirely by observation”: the “oriental spirit” became the “inquest on the Orient.”


Cordier made a series of studies upon a commission from the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle, to illustrate the “History of Races” exhibit in the gallery of anthropology. The sculptor went on assignment in Algeria and Greece to study these human types which, he feared, were “about to melt into a single people.” This sculpture is therefore very much in the ethnographical mould. The use of bronze and Smyth takes up the Algerian tradition of using Algerian smx (the quarries having been re-opened following colonization). Like the sculpture, the base is multi-coloured.

5. Henri Regnault (1843-1871): Exécution sans jugement sous les rois maures de Grenade (Execution Without Trial Under the Rule of the Moorish Kings in Grenada), 1870 Location: ground floor, gallery 5

Regnault sent this painting to the Académie des Beaux-Arts during the fourth year of his Prix de Rome residency at the Villa Médicis in accordance with the rules governing the residence. Rather than choosing a Classical subject, he took his inspiration from the Orient, where he had been given permission to travel. The Ippolito-Mauritshuis architectural setting indicates how much the young painter had been impressed by the Alhambra in Granada. Here, once again, the Orient is characterised by a violent scene. The final framing - originally Regnault had conceived of a larger painting: is emotionally theatrical: the two diagonals formed by the Dialogue and the victim’s corpse, the Joning angle from below and the staring eyes of the severed head, all work to stirring dramatic effect. The evocative power of painting is further enhanced by the astonishing device of the “drablings” of red paint which lend the flowing blood a disturbing realism.

6. Gustave Guillaumet (1840-1887): Le Sahara (Sahara), also known as Le Désert (The Desert), 1867 Location: ground floor, gallery 25

The painting’s originality lies in its emptiness. The landscape is completely reduced to horizontal layers of colour interspersed with grey. The only identifiable being, the skeleton of the camel in the foreground, carries a forceful symbolic power: death and loneliness rule in this immensity where Western art.

The refinement of her gestures as she is spinning the thread evokes the poise of a dancer. The girl is peacefully with a group of birds. Tournemine, who cordier made a series of busts upon a commission from the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle, to illustrate the “History of Races” exhibit in the gallery of anthropology. The sculptor went on assignment in Algeria and Greece to study these human types which, he feared, were “about to melt into a single people.” This sculpture is therefore very much in the ethnographical mould. The use of bronze and Smyth takes up the Algerian tradition of using Algerian smx (the quarries having been re-opened following colonization). Like the sculpture, the base is multi-coloured.

7. Charles-Emile Tournemine (1812-1872): Jeune fille de Mekarcis allant à la Mosquée (Girl going to the Mosque on their Way to Mecca), 1861 Location: ground floor, gallery 25

This painting is exceptional in his oeuvre and it is his style: the Orientalist canon for the representation of the adolescent in

8. Louis-Ernest Barrias (1841-1900): Jeune fille de Mekarcis assise et dormant (Mekarcis Girl Sitting and Sleeping), 1868 Location: ground floor, gallery 24

All the grace of this figure is expressed in the delicacy of the proportions chosen by the artist and in the care he took in details. The Orientalist flavor remains discreet: the girl is wearing a costume typical of Orientalist art. Also, the artist uses light on small format canvases. Decamps exercised a profound influence on Degas and Picasso.

10. Léon Belly (1827-1877): Pilgrims en route to Mecca, 1861 Location: ground floor, gallery 25

For this work, considered in its time to be a masterpiece of Orientalist painting, Belly chose an imposing subject and format: it represents the movement of a caravan through the desert on a journey to the Holy City of Mecca. The artist was keen to render the poor, rough, and monotonous life of the desert peoples. He also suffered from malaria. This painting is exceptional in its subject and it is almost as a visionary that he evokes the desert’s desolate and deadly world.

11. Gustave Guillaumet (1840-1887): Tisseraies d’Afrique (Spinning in Africa), 1884 Location: ground floor, gallery 25

This picturesque subject from Algerian daily life is presented like a familiar traveller’s anecdote but is also used as a pretext for studying colour and light. The scene represents a man, curled up, exhausted by the heat and tinged with the calm of oriental meditation. The shop interior, full of objects, makes up part of a larger exploration of the customs of this country which, through street scenes, were easily accessible to travelling painters. Baudelaire described Decamps’s style: “No one studied the effects of atmosphere with such care. He valued above all the most bizare and incredible intersections of shadow and light. (...) The only thing one could reproach him with is in giving too much consideration to the material execution of the objects.” Rembrandt’s influence was often mentioned when describing the artist’s technique which was characterised by heavy impasto and the rendring of light on small format canvases. Decamps exercised a profound influence on Degas and Picasso.

12. Eugène Fromentin (1820-1878): Le Pays de la vie (The Land of Thirst), circa 1860 Location: ground floor, gallery 27

This landscape holds nothing but hostile rocks where drought has destroyed everything: men and vegetation. It contrasts dramatically with the idyllic image of the Orient presented by Tournemine in his Études africaines. Here, the land is dominated by suffering and death. The composition is Géricault’s Best of the Middle- a work renowned throughout the 19th century, now exhibited at the Louvre – transposed into “drought-ridden earth.” In both paintings, the only remaining touch of hope is embodied by an arm Extended figure in the sky, calling for help. The other men do not even have the strength to call out to the woman. Is there hope of deliverance or only disillusion?

For Fromentin, the Romantic period “informed entirely by imagination” is succeeded by a period “informed entirely by observation”: the “oriental spirit” became the “inquest on the Orient.”


Cordier made a series of studies upon a commission from the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle, to illustrate the “History of Races” exhibit in the gallery of anthropology. The sculptor went on assignment in Algeria and Greece to study these human types which, he feared, were “about to melt into a single people.” This sculpture is therefore very much in the ethnographical mould. The use of bronze and Smyth takes up the Algerian tradition of using Algerian smx (the quarries having been re-opened following colonization). Like the sculpture, the base is multi-coloured.
II. Realist and Naturalist Orientalism

9. Alexandre Decamps (1805-1880): 
Méchant tueur fumant dans sa boutique (Tarahk Shisha Smoking in an Inn), 1844
Location: ground floor, gallery 25

This picturesque subject from Algerian daily life is presented like a familiar traveller’s anecdote but is also used as a pretext for studying colour and light. The scene represents a lone man, curled up, exhausted by the heat and tinged with the calm of oriental meditation. The shop interior, full of objects, makes up part of a larger exploration of the customs of this country which, through street scenes, were easily accessible to travelling painters. Raudnitz described Decamps’ style: “No one studied the effects of atmosphere with such care. He valued above all the most bizarre and incredible interactions of shadow and light. (...) The only thing (...) one could reproach him with is giving too much consideration to the material execution of the objects.” Raudnitz’s influence was often mentioned when describing the artist’s technique which was characterised by heavy impasto and the rendering of light on small format canvases. Decamps exercised a profound influence on Édouard de la Pytha, Monnerville, Céanne and even Van Gogh.

10. Léon Belly (1827-1877): 
Pêtrines allant à la Mosquée (Petrunes on their Way to Mecca), 1861
Location: ground floor, gallery 25

For this work, considered in its time to be a masterpiece of Orientalist painting, Belly chose an imposing subject and format: it represents the movement of a caravan through the desert on Muslim pilgrimages to Mecca. A critic tried to judge the work using the criteria of history painting and reproached it for grouping the human subjects too tightly and “exaggerating the space apportioned to the camels compared to that of the human figure”, but the public was captivated by the image. “On the way back from the Sahs, it seemed as if every vaster was part of the caravan.” (Timbali). The scrupulous accuracy of the painting gives a quasi-photographic aspect. In accordance with the rules of atmospheric perspective, in the background the crowd of pilgrims fade into the horizon.

Observe the group of three characters on the left of the caravan: a man on foot accompanying a woman with her child on a donkey: it is a striking reference to the subject, so frequent in painting, of the “flight to Egypt” of Mary, Joseph and the Christ child. The painting is knowingly playing with syncretism, merging two religious traditions.

11. Gustave Guillaumet (1840-1887): 
Touristes en Baja-Saâda (Wearers in Baja-Saâda) (Spinners in Baja-Saâda)
Location: ground floor, gallery 25

Girls are weaving in the gloom of an underground room. Beams of light coming from the open trap door break the half-light in which the painting is bathed. The artist employs a technique where small isolated touches of bravely painted white and red catch the eye, illuminating the whole canvas.

Although no expression can be distinguished on the faces of the protagonist, the atmosphere conjures up the harsh working conditions of the weavers. Guillaumet lived amongst the Algerian people and so was familiar with their daily life. The painting shows that there was something of a Social Realist movement amongst the Orientalist painters.

12. Eugène Fromentin (1820-1878): 
Le Pays de la soif (The Land of Thirst), circa 1860
Location: ground floor, gallery 21

This landscape holds nothing but hostile rocks where drought has destroyed everything: men and vegetation. It contrasts dramatically with the idyllic image of the Oriental presented by Tissot. In his African Elephants, Böckl shows, the land is dominated by suffering and death. The composition is Géricault’s Reflet de la Merâse – a work renowned throughout the 19th century, now exhibited at the Louvre – transposed into “drought-ridden earth”. In both paintings, the only remaining touch of hope is embodied by an arm stretched outwards, the sky, calling for help. The other men do not even have the strength to call out for help. Are they victims, martyrs, a mirage? Is there hope of deliverance or only despair? Is there hope of deliverance or only illusion?

For Fromentin, the Romantic period “informed entirely by imagination” is succeeded by a period “informed entirely by observation” – the “oriental space” became the “inquest upon the Orient”.
III. An Impressionist
Orientalism?

La Mosquée (The Mosque) or FILI arabes  
(Leath Celebration), 1881  
Location: upper level, gallery 52

Either a landscape scene with figures or a genre scene viewed from a distance, this painting shows  
the joyous crowd gathering around an oriental dance. The background is divided into  
predominantly white architecture on one side, a rocky landscape on the other, the far background  
being occupied by the sea and palm trees. In the foreground, one can pick out figures sitting on the  
top of a rock to get a better view. The impasto brush stroke is characteristic of Impressionism. In  
places, the figures, their faces indistinguishable,  
are made up of no more than a quick suggestion of coloured spots.

The perceptible details of the costumes (turbans),  
the white architecture and vegetation evoke the  
exotic atmosphere of the Orient. Renoir presents a  
pleasant and joyful Orient contrasting with the  
sluggish and bloody fights. This is an innovative kind of Orientalism,  
employing the pictorial characteristics of  
impressionism.

One should also look at Renoir’s Orientalist  
landscape, hanging next to La Mosquée: its exotic  
vegetation, whose luxuriance is suggested by the  
interweaving of coloured brush strokes, plunges us  
once again in to a dream-like Orient.