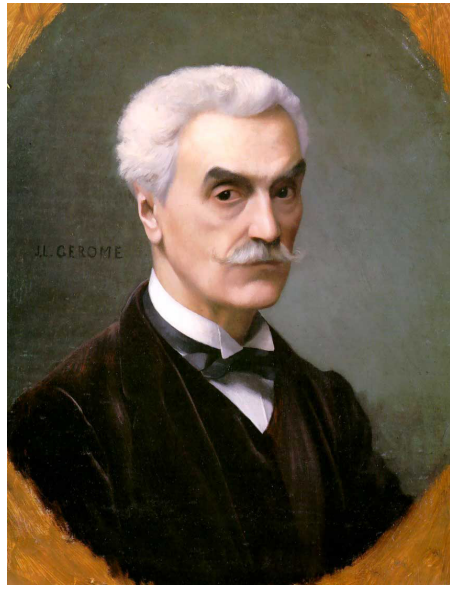


Jean-Léon Gérôme

a biography



Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Self-Portrait*, 1886, oil on canvas, Aberdeen Art Gallery, Aberdeen Scotland.

Jean-Léon Gérôme was born in Vesoul (Haute-Saône) on May 11, 1824. The son of a provincial goldsmith, Gérôme was accepted into the Paris studio of the painter Paul Delaroche in 1840 at the age of 16. He studied with Delaroche until 1843. Gérôme followed his mentor to Rome in 1844 and returned to Paris entering briefly the studio of the Swiss artist Charles Gleyre. During his years of study, Gérôme was able to generate a sufficient income by painting religious cards and selling them at churches.

Gérôme competed unsuccessfully for the Prix de Rome, a multiyear stipend for study at the French Academy in Rome, but he scored a sudden unforeseen event at the Salon of 1847. The influential critic Théophile Gautier singled out his painting *The Cockfight* for notice. At the age of twenty-three, Gérôme was famous.

Highly regarded in its day, Gérôme's approach to painting combined a meticulous eye for detail with a painstakingly intricate technique, which left absolutely no record of the paintbrush, creating an almost enameled surface. Each of his paintings is a testimony to his mastery of authentic detail, whether of geography, mythology or history.

Depicting scenes distant in either time or place, Gérôme's aim was photographic realism for these times and places beyond the reach of modern photography. At times convincing and real, his images are also the ultimate in fantasy.

Over his long career, Gérôme was preoccupied with a number of themes: classical myths and history, ethnographic reportage of the Middle East, the nude, exotic animals (particularly the lion, which had an iconic symbolism for Gérôme because of his given and surname), and a category that might be de-

scribed as literal idealism, standing on its head Gustave Courbet's assertion, "Show me an angel, and I will paint it." Like Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Gérôme reworked the same themes, time after time, over several decades.

In the 1850s, Gérôme did portraits, some state commissions, and depictions of the world of the Islamic east (Egypt, Turkey, and the Balkans), a theme that occupied him for the rest of his life.

Gérôme was appointed to one of the three professorships of painting at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, a position he held for 40 years, when the teaching structure of the school was changed in 1864 to provide more structured curriculum for the students. The following year, he was elected to one of the fourteen positions allocated to painters in the Académie des Beaux-Arts, a division of the Institut de France.

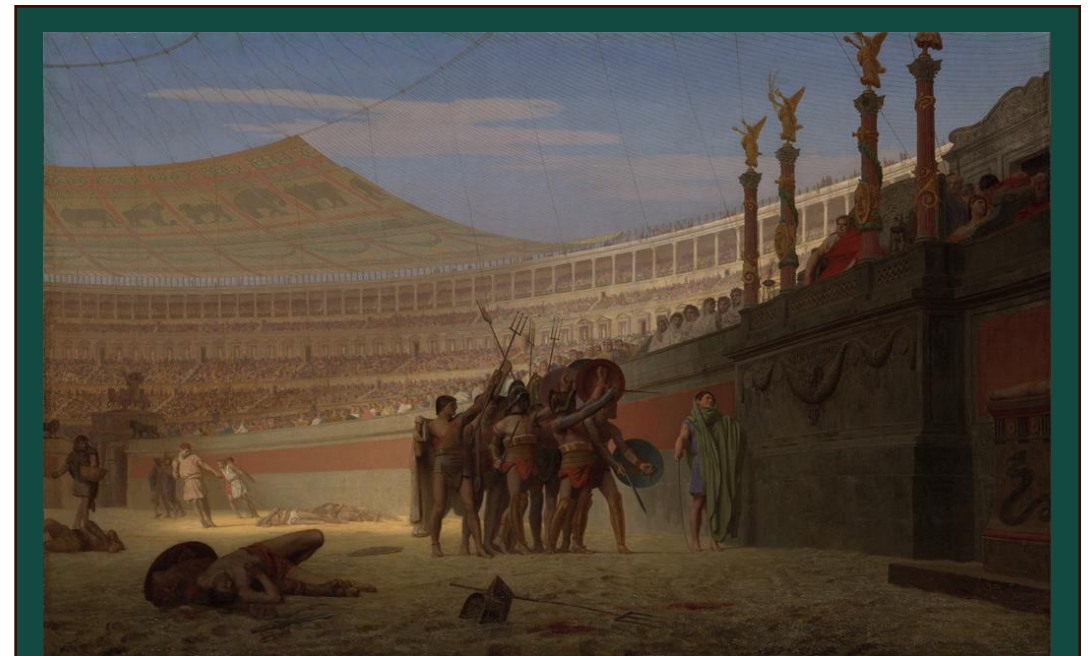
An extremely popular teacher, Gérôme was conscientious about his teaching responsibilities and his atelier drew large numbers of foreign students, particularly Americans. His influence on technique and composition can perhaps be seen most clearly in the work of Philadelphia artist Thomas Eakins, who maintained a lifelong relationship with his teacher after spending the years 1866-70 in Paris.

A staunch defender of the academic tradition, Gérôme actively campaigned against the rising tide of Impressionism and tried in 1893 to block the government's acceptance of the Impressionist works bequeathed by Gustave Caillebotte. As a result, his popularity, along with the price of his art, dropped dramatically.

Gérôme's later years were dedicated to producing sculptures and teaching students. He died on January 10, 1904, and is buried in Paris's Montmartre Cemetery in front of the statue of Sorrow he had cast in memory of his son Jean.



Portrait of Jean-Léon Gérôme in his studio by Domac (fl. 1890-1910), Archives Larousse, Paris, France. Giraudon. Bridgeman Art Library



Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Ave Caesar! Morituri te salutant (Hail Caesar! We Who Are About To Die Salute You)*, 1859, oil on canvas, 36 5/8 x 57 1/4 in., Yale University Art Gallery. According to Gerald M. Ackerman, author of *Jean-Léon Gérôme: His Life, His Work*, the success of this painting at the Salon of 1859 established him and made him well renowned.

Academic Art

Academic art refers to the tradition of drawing, painting, and sculpture taught at the academies, or art schools, of Europe. First established in Renaissance Italy, academies flourished in the 19th century and prescribed strict guidelines for the production of works of art. This training system ensured that artists possessed a high level of technical ability and familiarity with the lofty themes of Western tradition. Nearly every city in Europe, and, later, the United States, developed an art academy that set similarly high standards. The most important academy of the modern period, and the one upon which many others modeled their own systems of promotion, patronage, display, and teaching, was the French Academy, founded in 1648. During most of the nineteenth century, this powerful institution oversaw the premier art school in Paris, the École des Beaux-Arts, and controlled the official exhibitions known as Salons. It established a strict hierarchy for valuing subject matter, with history paintings at the pinnacle, and also awarded the most prestigious honor a French art student could receive, the prix de Rome. Artists such as Jean-Léon Gérôme and Bouguereau epitomize this style.



William Adolphe Bouguereau, *The Knitting Girl (La Tricoteuse)*, 1869, oil on canvas, 57 x 39 in., Gift of Jessie Barton Christiancy, Joslyn Art Museum



Jean-Léon Gérôme French, 1824–1904 *The Grief of the Pasha* 1882

oil on canvas on masonite panel, 36 3/8 x 29 in.
Gift of Francis T. B. Martin

The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904)

This special exhibition traveled to three venues from June 15, 2010 to May 22, 2011. Joslyn loaned its two Gérôme artworks, *The Grief of the Pasha* and *The Muezzin (Le Muezzin) (The Call to Prayer)*. The latter traveled to all three venues: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; and Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. The former was featured at the Musée d'Orsay.

The Grief of the Pasha

Victor Hugo's poem, *La Douleur du pacha (The Grief of the Pasha)*, is faithfully illustrated by Gérôme's painting, inspired by several highly different sources that thereby construct an imaginary, composite Orient (just as Hugo had done half a century earlier). Gérôme invented a singular, highly personal iconography without sacrificing his concern for exactitude or undermining the impression of accuracy that he so often invoked, despite the great liberties he took with reality.

Numerous liberties can be seen here, starting with the magnificent tiger lying dead like a beloved courtesan on a bed of roses, whereas this great beast was known for its ferocity and never allowed itself to be tamed. Here the tiger is mourned...by a man dressed in oriental garb.

The Grief of the Pasha allowed Gérôme to combine his penchant for wild beasts - an earlier interest...before he had traveled outside Europe. Thanks to his ability to "make it lifelike" by focusing on an *image* of reality rather than its exactness, he made it seem accurate. The subtly colored and skillfully composed painting - a blend of power and emotion, ferocity and fondness - is one of the finest canvases produced by Gérôme during this period. (Dominique de Font-Réaulx, 204)

(from *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme* catalogue, 2010).

In her 1915 novel, *The Song of the Lark*, Willa Cather's protagonist visits the Art Institute of Chicago where she sees *The Grief of the Pasha*:

There was a painting by Gérôme... which always made her wish for Gunner and Axel. The Pasha was seated on a rug, beside a green candle almost as big as a telegraph pole, and before him was stretched his dead tiger, splendid beast, and there were pink roses scattered about him.

The painting refers to a Victor Hugo poem, *La Douleur du pacha (The Grief of the Pasha)*, written in 1827. The poem ends with the lines: No, no, 'tis not those dismal figures who /inspire his wretched soul's remorse /though shadowy visions that gleam with blood. /What, then, ails this Pasha, beckoned by war /yet weeping like a woman, vacant and sad? /-his Nubian tiger is dead.

(from *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme* catalogue, 2010).

The Muezzin (The Call to Prayer)

The muezzin's call to prayer from the minarets of Cairo was an evocative element of nineteenth-century travelers' accounts, and the view to be obtained from those structures was likewise appealing to tourists. This painting, raising the viewer to the height of a minaret's upper platform, combines both attractions: a memorable image of Islamic piety and a picturesque cityscape of Cairo. Facing east towards Mecca on a hot afternoon, the muezzin directs his song heavenward, Gérôme giving visual dimension to his voice through a distant flight of birds rising above the dusty horizon. Enlivening the scene below are several picturesque details: a woman hanging laundry and two dogs, one lying asleep in the hot sun and the other sitting at attention, ears perked. (Scott C. Allan, 244).

(from *The Spectacular Art of Jean-Léon Gérôme* catalogue, 2010).



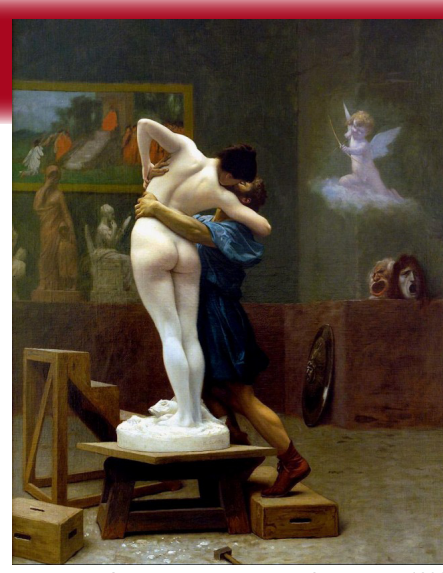
The Muezzin (Le Muezzin) (The Call to Prayer), 1866, oil on canvas on masonite panel, 32 x 25 1/2 in., Gift of Francis T. B. Martin



Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (1827–1875), French *Jean-Léon Gérôme*, 1875, cast terra cotta, 22 3/4 x 10 1/2 in., Museum Purchase with funds from Robert H. and Mildred T. Storz Endowment Fund, Joslyn Art Museum

Carpeaux was perhaps the most sought-after sculptor of his day. This portrait of the Academic artist Gérôme exemplifies his style of romantic realism. It combines great naturalism in representing flesh, hair, and facial features, with a pleasing romantic informality of pose and physical beauty. In the early 1870s, Carpeaux developed a technique for casting terra cotta, which he used to produce affordable copies of his most popular works. Made upon commission, one by one, they are individually signed and dated. This Gérôme was cast in 1875, three years after its bronze "parent" was admired at the Paris Salon exhibition.

The Story of . . .



Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, ca. 1890, oil on canvas, 35 x 27 in., Gift of Louis C. Raegner, 1927
Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

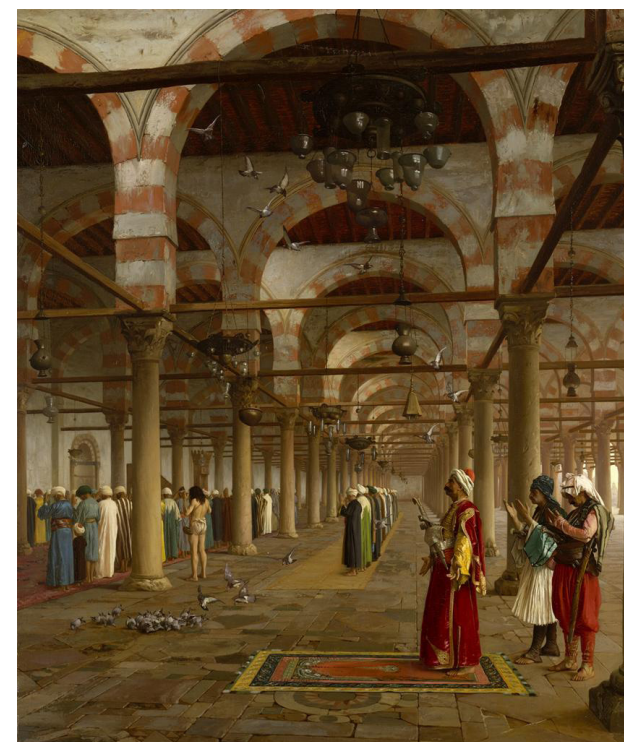
Like many Greek myths, the story of Pygmalion and Galatea has slightly different versions. Pygmalion, King of Cyprus, in the most familiar of these versions, created a lifelike statue of his idea of womanhood. The statue, which he called Galatea, was so beautiful that he fell in love with his own creation. Aphrodite, the Goddess of Beauty and Love, took pity on the lovesick Pygmalion. She turned Galatea into a living woman and presided over the marriage of the two. The story is the subject of this nineteenth century painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme. The story also inspired George Bernard Shaw to create Professor Higgins and Eliza Doolittle, the Pygmalion and Galatea of his play "Pygmalion." That play in turn, was the basis of the popular musical, "My Fair Lady."

Pygmalion & Galatea

Gérôme's choice of referencing "Pygmalion" is an appropriate one for an artist of the academy. These artists were striving for accuracy so real that the sculpture itself might look alive. Academic art did not leave room for individual interpretation of the figure like modern sculpture does. Academic sculptures judged to be the most successful were those that also appeared to be the most real. With the juxtaposition of both the model and the sculpture, only the material of the sculpture indicates which one is real and which one has been created. Their forms are identical. But in this self-portrait, Gérôme is not only highlighting his work as a sculptor, but his skills as a painter as well. He makes it clear using paint that one figure is a real model while the other is plaster.

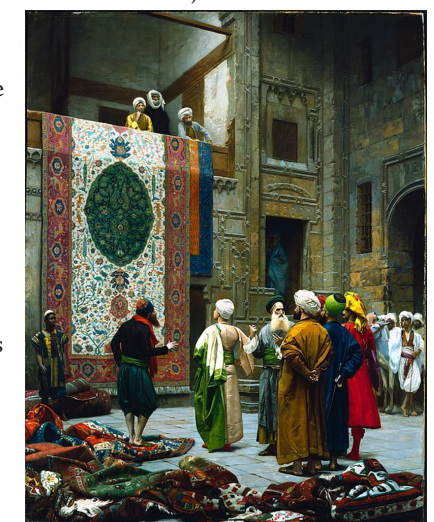


Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pygmalion or Working in Marble*, 1890, oil on canvas, 18 3/4 x 25 3/4 in., Dahesh Museum, New York



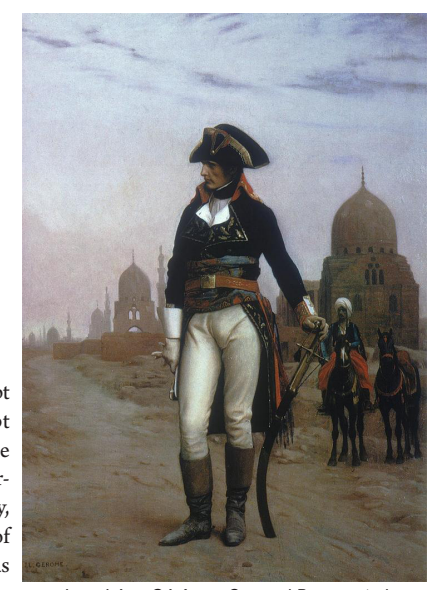
Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Prayer in the Mosque*, 1871, oil on canvas, 35 x 29 1/2 in., The Metropolitan Institute of Art, Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Collection, Bequest of Catharine Lorillard Wolf, 1887
Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

In 1798, a French army led by General Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt and occupied the country until 1801. The European presence in Egypt attracted Western travelers to the Near and Middle East. In 1809, the French government published the first installment of the twenty-four-volume *Description de l'Égypte* (1809–22), illustrating the topography, architecture, monuments, natural life, and population of Egypt. Some of the first nineteenth-century Orientalist paintings were intended as propaganda in support of French imperialism, depicting the East as a place of backwardness, lawlessness or barbarism enlightened by French Rule.

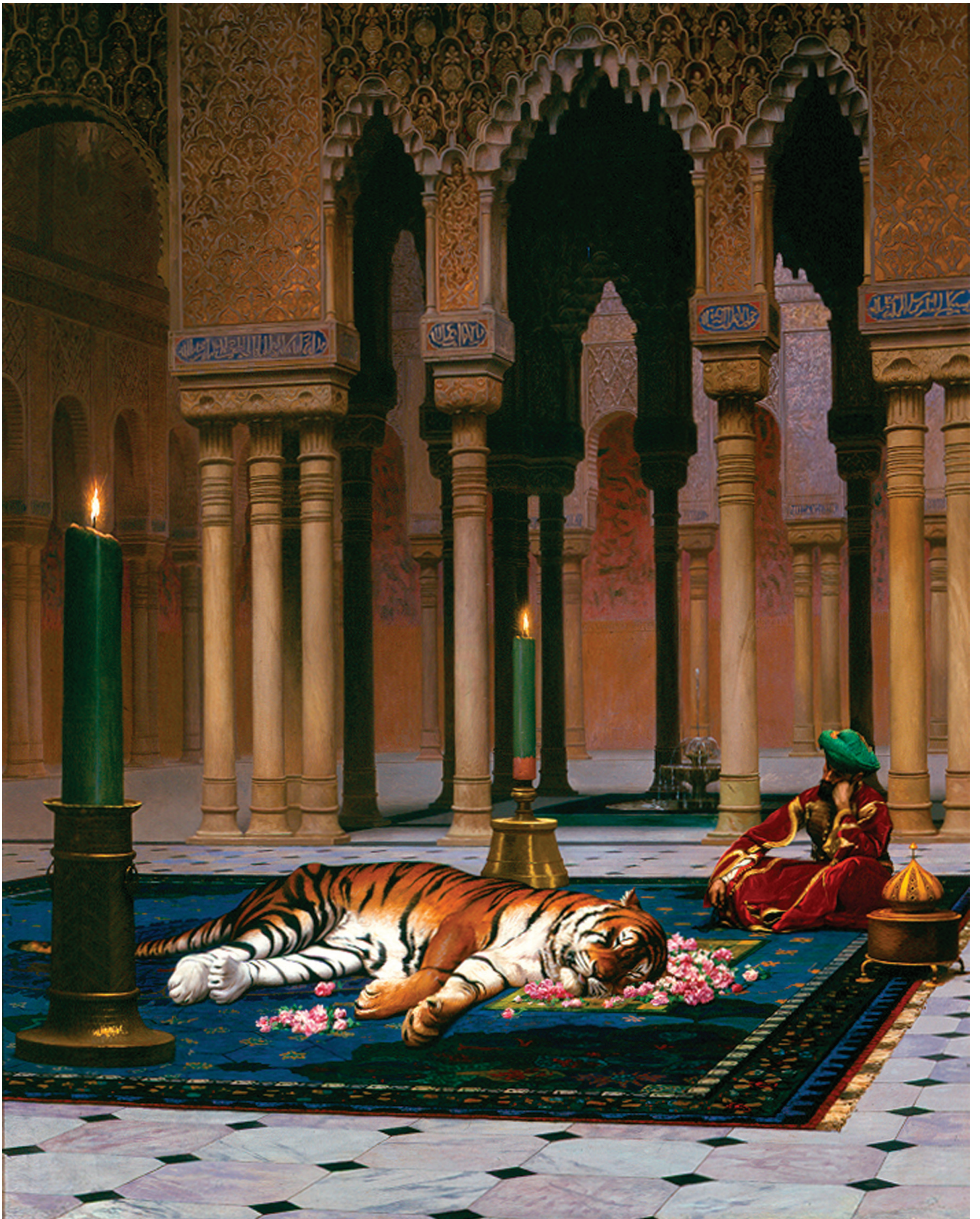


Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Carpet Merchant*, ca. 1887, oil on canvas, 32 7/8 x 25 1/2 in., The Minneapolis Institute of Art

The taste for Orientalism manifested itself in architectural motifs, furniture, decorative arts, and textiles, which were sought after by European elite. The Aesthetic movement in Great Britain (1860s–80s), advocated an aesthetic of beauty for its own sake and took particular inspiration from Oriental interiors.



Jean-Léon Gérôme, *General Bonaparte in Cairo*, 1863, oil on panel, 14 x 9 3/4 in., Princeton University Art Museum



JEAN-LÉON GÉRÔME
FRENCH, 1824 – 1904

THE GRIEF OF THE PASHA
1882, OIL ON CANVAS ON MASONITE PANEL

JOSLYN ART MUSEUM® OMAHA, NEBRASKA
Gift of Francis T. B. Martin