



## FRENCH ORIENTALISM

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir), *Odalisque*, detail, 1870, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

- The Orient was a source of **fear, excitement, spirituality and desire**. What do I mean by fear? I am referring to the concern that there will be an invasion by what is sometimes called the Other, that is a foreign culture, will result in the loss of our culture, our history and our very identity. [1]
- The most famous book on this subject is *Orientalism* (1978) is by Edward Said (1935-2003, pronounced 'sigh-eed'). He argues that Orientalism is '**a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient**'.
- It is an **artificial construct** based on the West's **patronising perceptions and fictional creations** and it often involved seeing **Arab culture as exotic, backward, uncivilised, and at times dangerous**.

### NOTES

- Said defined it as the acceptance in the West of "the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny and so on."
- The art historian Linda Nochlin wrote in *The Imaginary Orient* (1983), 'Another important function, then, of the picturesque – Orientalising in this case – is to certify that the people encapsulated by it, defined by its presence, are **irredeemably different** from, **more backward than, and culturally inferior** to those who construct and consume the picturesque product. They are irrevocably "Other."'

### EXAMPLE WORKS

1. Antoine-Jean Gros, *Bonaparte Visiting the Plague Victims of Jaffa*, 1804  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonaparte\\_Visiting\\_the\\_Plague\\_Victims\\_of\\_Jaffa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonaparte_Visiting_the_Plague_Victims_of_Jaffa)
2. 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.
3. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Grande Odalisque*, 1814
4. Delacroix's *Massacre at Chios* (1824) and *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827–28; both Louvre)
5. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867), *The little bather. Interior of Harem Painting*, 1828, 35x27 cm, Louvre  
<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010059112>
6. Léon Cogniet, *The 1798 Egyptian Expedition Under the Command of Bonaparte*, 1835, Louvre Museum  
<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-french-novelist-confronts-orientalism>
7. Eugène Delacroix, *The Women of Algiers*, 1834, Louvre, Paris
8. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque with Slave*, 1839, Harvard Art Museum  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odalisque\\_with\\_Slave](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odalisque_with_Slave)
9. Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *The Turkish Bath*, 1862
10. The annual glut of paintings of idealised nude women in the Paris Salon was satirised by Honoré Daumier in an 1864 lithograph with the caption "This year Venuses again... always Venuses!... as if there really were women built like that!"  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude\\_\(art\)#/media/File:This\\_Year\\_Venuses\\_Again\\_\(Daumier\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude_(art)#/media/File:This_Year_Venuses_Again_(Daumier).jpg)
11. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Slave Market*, 1866, Clark Art Institute,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Léon\\_Gérôme#/media/File:Geromeslavemarket.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Léon_Gérôme#/media/File:Geromeslavemarket.jpg)
12. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Slave Market*, 1871, Cincinnati Art Museum,  
[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-Léon\\_Gérôme\\_-\\_The\\_Slave\\_Market\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Jean-Léon_Gérôme_-_The_Slave_Market_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg)
13. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Snake Charmer*, c. 1879. Clark Art Institute
14. Jean-Léon Cafe House, Cairo (Casting Bullets), 1884. The Met

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436481>

15. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *La Grande Piscine de Brousse*, 1885

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<https://www.mayfairgallery.com/blog/orientalist-paintings-19th-century-fantasies-east/>
- [1] <http://www.parisglobalist.org/beware-the-specter-of-orientalism-in-french-politics/>



Léon Cogniet (1794–1880), *The 1798 Egyptian Expedition Under the Command of Bonaparte*, 1827-35, 376 × 580 cm, Louvre Museum. Ceiling of the current room 651 of the Campana gallery of the Louvre Museum

- It has been said that Napoleon Bonaparte invented Orientalism. In 1798 he set out to conquer Egypt and uncover its eternal mysteries. To this end he took 150 scientists, engineers and artists with him to document everything they found. They carried out topographic surveys, studied the art of ancient Egypt, its society and architecture as well as the flora and fauna they found. The most remarkable discovery was the Rosetta stone that in due course enabled them to decipher ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics.
- In this painting by Léon Cogniet (pronounced 'lee-on con-yea') a makeshift canopy protects Napoleon from the sun. A soldier with his back to us is briefing Napoleon who is surrounded by soldiers and artists.
- In the foreground, under the gaze of the soldier with a drum on his back, two Egyptian workers carry the polychrome sarcophagus of a mummy of the 22nd dynasty.
- On the left a figure is thinking about a document he is reading and below him a group studies some documents. On the left of this group a man holds a stele with a scene showing the worship of Ptah and the figure of Ramses II as a child and the figure in front of him holds a vase Horirâa with a dog-headed lid. These objects are now in the Louvre and were copied accurately by Cogniet.
- On the right is a female water carrier and a man talking to a chained slave.



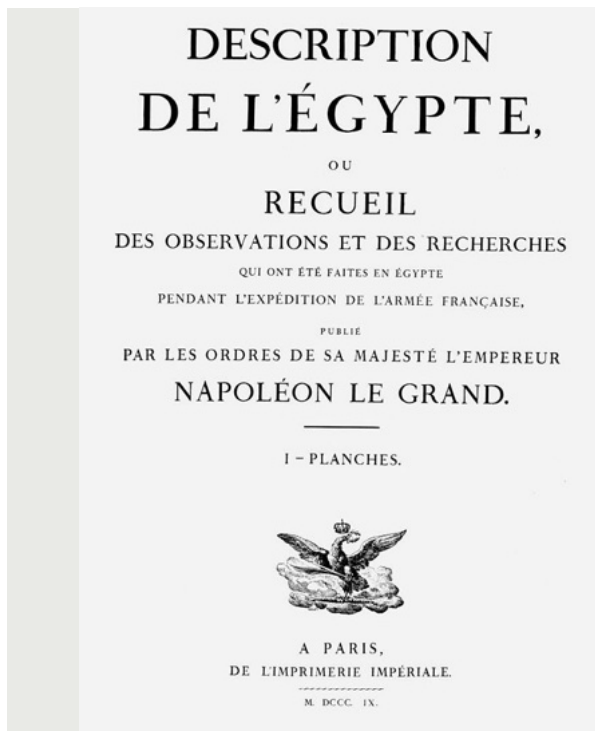
Under the canopy on the right an artist is sketching the statues of Memnon in the distance.

- The painting celebrates French genius and energy as the brightest minds uncover and document the ancient secrets of the ancient Egyptian civilization.

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In 1809, the French government published the first instalment of the twenty-three volume **Description de l'Égypte** (1809–22), illustrating the topography, architecture, monuments, natural life, and population of Egypt.

Frontispiece, vol. 1

- How did this heightened interest in the Orient begin in France?
- In 1798, Napoléon I launched his **Egyptian Campaign** and this resulted in a twenty-three volume *Description of Egypt*— the largest published work in the world at that time. The volumes were enormous, a metre high and it was the work of 160 scholars plus some 2,000 artists, including 400 engravers.
- Why did Napoleon invest in such a monumental and expensive work? Politically he saw the **strategic importance of Egypt**, which at the time was part of the Ottoman Empire. The enormous scientific achievement and cultural record was a **massive propaganda exercise** that established him and France as **European intellectual leaders** of the Enlightenment. It also **linked the French Empire** he was building with the greatest and longest lasting civilization known in Europe at the time.
- After Napoleon's fleet was defeated at Trafalgar in 1805 he returned to France and the scientists and artists documented everything they had found in these twenty-three volumes published between 1809 and 1829.
- **The book created the enormous public interest in the Orient that inspired artists through the remainder of the nineteenth century.**
- There were many Orientalist artists in France, **Wikipedia lists 187** but from

these I have selected, in order of their birth year, **Antoine-Jean Gros** (1771–1835), **Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres** (1780–1867), **Eugène Delacroix** (1798–1863) and **Jean-Léon Gérôme** (1824–1904), **Pierre-Auguste Renoir** (1841–1919), and **Henri Matisse** (1869–1954).

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[1] *French Orientalism: Culture, Politics, and the Imagined Other*,  
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Antoine-Jean Gros  
(1771–1835), *Bonaparte  
Visiting the Pesthouse in  
Jaffa*, 1804, 715 × 523  
cm, Louvre Museum



Antoine-Jean Gros (1771–1835), *Bonaparte Visiting the Pesthouse in Jaffa*, 1804, 715 × 523 cm, Louvre Museum

- Returning briefly to Napoleon this is **one of the most famous painting of Napoleon's visit**, painted in 1804. It shows Napoleon **visiting a plague hospital** in Jaffa in 1799. It was **commissioned by Napoleon** perhaps partly to quell rumours that he had ordered fifty plague victims to be given fatal doses of opium so they would not hold up his retreat as well as rumours of French atrocities during their capture of Jaffa, in other words as **propaganda**.
- **It is set in a monastery** and Jaffa can be seen in the background with the **French flag flying** over one of the towers. On the left a man in oriental dress **hands out bread** while behind him two men carry out a body on a stretcher. On the right Napoleon touches swelling under the armpit of a plague victim. In front of him an Arab doctor tends to another patient who would be of enormous height if he stood up. On the right a blind man is struggling to approach Napoleon.
- It was exhibited in 1804 between his proclamation as emperor and his coronation so it was clearly an important propaganda tool. Napoleon is shown clearly unafraid and tending to the plague victims with the implication that his touch can cure them.

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Antoine-Jean Gros (1771–1835), *Battle of the Pyramids, July 21, 1798*, 1810, 389 x 311 cm, Palace of Versailles



Antoine-Jean Gros (1771–1835), *Battle of the Pyramids, July 21, 1798*, 1810, 389 x 311 cm, Palace of Versailles

- A large painting showing the **1798 Battle of the Pyramids**, a rare French triumph in the campaign to conquer Egypt. **Prints were produced of Napoleon in the centre** excluding his many of the French officers. [1]
- Gros studied under the French Neoclassical artist **Jacques-Louis David** (1748–1825). He **failed to win the Prix de Rome** but funded himself travelling to Italy by selling portraits. In 1796 he **met Joséphine Bonaparte** on her way to Milan and he became portraitist and history painter to Napoleon.
- **After Napoleon's fall** he went on to achieve many things. He was made a Baron in 1824 but suffered from depression and committed suicide in 1835.

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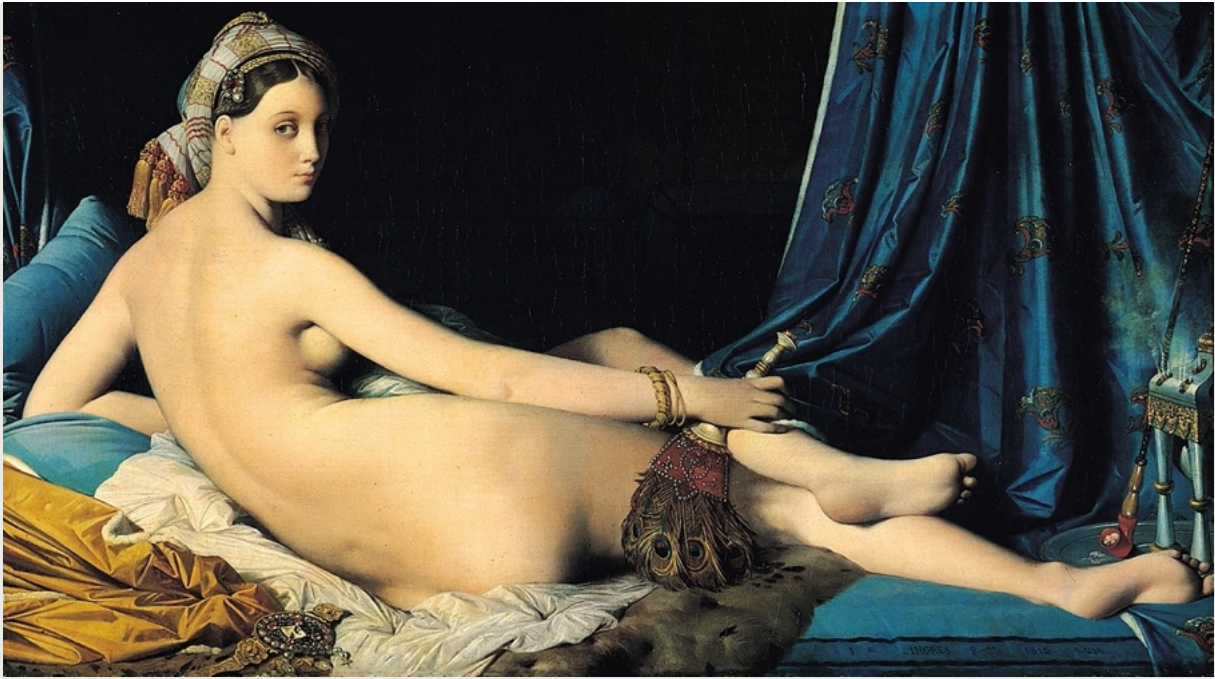
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[1] <https://www.loc.gov/item/2014645167/>



Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *Grande Odalisque*, 1814, 91 × 162 cm, Louvre Museum

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *Grande Odalisque*, 1814, 91 × 162 cm, Louvre Museum

- Ironically, Ingres became the guardian of academic art and fought against the rise of Romanticism but his expressive distortions are now seen as a precursor to modern art and his work influenced Picasso and Matisse.
- Here the distorted body of the concubine with her small head and elongated back reminds us of the Mannerist school and when it was first exhibited in 1814 Ingres was regarded as a young rebel. One critic wrote, the woman had **"neither bones nor muscle, neither blood, nor life, nor relief, indeed nothing that constitutes imitation"**. His work continued to be criticised until the mid-1820s.
- The refined and meticulous paintwork disguises the fact that we are dealing with the slave trade. Many of the orientalist paintings I will show glorify the slave trade by appealing to the sexual fantasies of the viewer with in many cases, as here, only the slightest reference to the culture portrayed.
- The history of slavery spans many cultures and nationalities back to ancient times.

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Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *The Bather of Valpinçon* (also known as *The Large Bather*), 1.46 m x 97.5 cm, 1808, Louvre Museum



Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *The Little Bather; Harem interior*, 1828, 35 x 27 cm, Louvre Museum

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *The Little Bather; Harem interior*, 1828, 35 x 27 cm, Louvre Museum

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *The Bather of Valpinçon* (also known as *The Large Bather*), 1.46 m x 97.5 cm, 1808, Louvre Museum

- Ingres experimented with the nude and selected three prototypes, a nude seen from behind, a reclining figure and a helpless figure in distress. In *The Large Bather* also known as the *The Bather of Valpinçon* (the name of one of its original owners) the figure is shown from behind in an anonymous setting. In 1828 he painted *The Little Bather; Harem interior* an Orientalist painting with a harem in the background.
- Ingres was a master of drawing, not colour and despised the work of the Romantic Eugene Delacroix and was despondent when his own work was poorly received. His paintings tend to be static rather than capturing a critical moment of action and he was inspired by Orientalism and painted a series of female slaves or odalisques.

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Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867),  
*Odalisque with Slave*,  
1839, 72 × 100.3 cm,  
Harvard Art Museums,  
Fogg Museum,  
Cambridge MA



Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *Odalisque with Slave*, 1839, 72 × 100.3 cm, Harvard Art Museums, Fogg Museum, Cambridge MA

- Ingres never visited the Middle East and so these harems are painted entirely from his imagination. This was painted in Rome where he lived for six years (1835–41). The odalisque was painted from a sketch he had made years earlier and the musician from a model who posed in the studio.
- He always took great care over the details of his paintings and started with detailed drawings. He worked with assistants one of whom described the extreme detail he put into every element of the painting, the architecture, mosaics, rugs, furniture and instruments and would often reposition them until he was satisfied.
- The painting was delivered to the owner in Paris and was much admired by all the critics and three years later he painted a second version now in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore in which the back wall has been replaced by view out into a garden.

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Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres  
(1780–1867), *The Turkish Bath*, 1862,  
108 × 110 cm, Louvre Museum

Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *The Turkish Bath*, 1862, 108 × 110 cm, Louvre Museum

- *The Turkish Bath* by **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres** (1780–1867).
- You may associate Orientalism with such paintings **but** nude female figures were unusual in English art. When Gérôme exhibited a similar painting, *For Sale; Slaves at Cairo* at the Royal Academy in London in 1871, it was "**widely found offensive**".
- The female nude was a common theme in French art but in England most of the paintings concern costumes, customs and the ancient Biblical and historic landscape and buildings. But there was one exception...

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Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863),  
*The Massacre at Chios*, 1824,  
419 × 354 cm, Louvre Museum



Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), *The Massacre at Chios*, 1824, 419 × 354 cm, Louvre Museum

- Turning now to his arch rival, the Romantic painter Eugene Delacroix. Just a reminder that I am not giving a balanced summary of these artists but focusing entirely on their Orientalist paintings.
- This is Delacroix second major painting. It is over four metres high and shows the horrors of war. Unusually, there are no heroic figures and no suggestion of hope. It was completed and exhibited in 1824 in the Paris Salon and drew some criticism for its depiction of total ruin and despair.
- The reality was worse than Delacroix's depiction of events. Two years previously Ottoman forces killed 20,000 Greek civilians at Chios (pronounced 'KAI-os') and deported another 70,000 into slavery.
- Delacroix has arranged the thirteen civilians rounded up for slaughter or slavery into two pyramidal structures. On the left a man looks down at three children and a couple lean on each other. On the right a taller pyramid is dominated by an Ottoman soldier on a horse, the only person whose head crosses the horizon. He is about to draw his sword to kill two woman pleading for their lives while below an older woman looks into the distance and a mother lies dead while her child struggles for life.
- When this picture was exhibited Delacroix was virtually unknown and it made his name. It was criticised by the establishment, Ingres for example said it showed the 'fever and epilepsy' of modern art. It was, however, purchased by the state

for 6,000 francs.

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Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863),  
*Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827, 392 ×  
496 cm, Louvre Museum



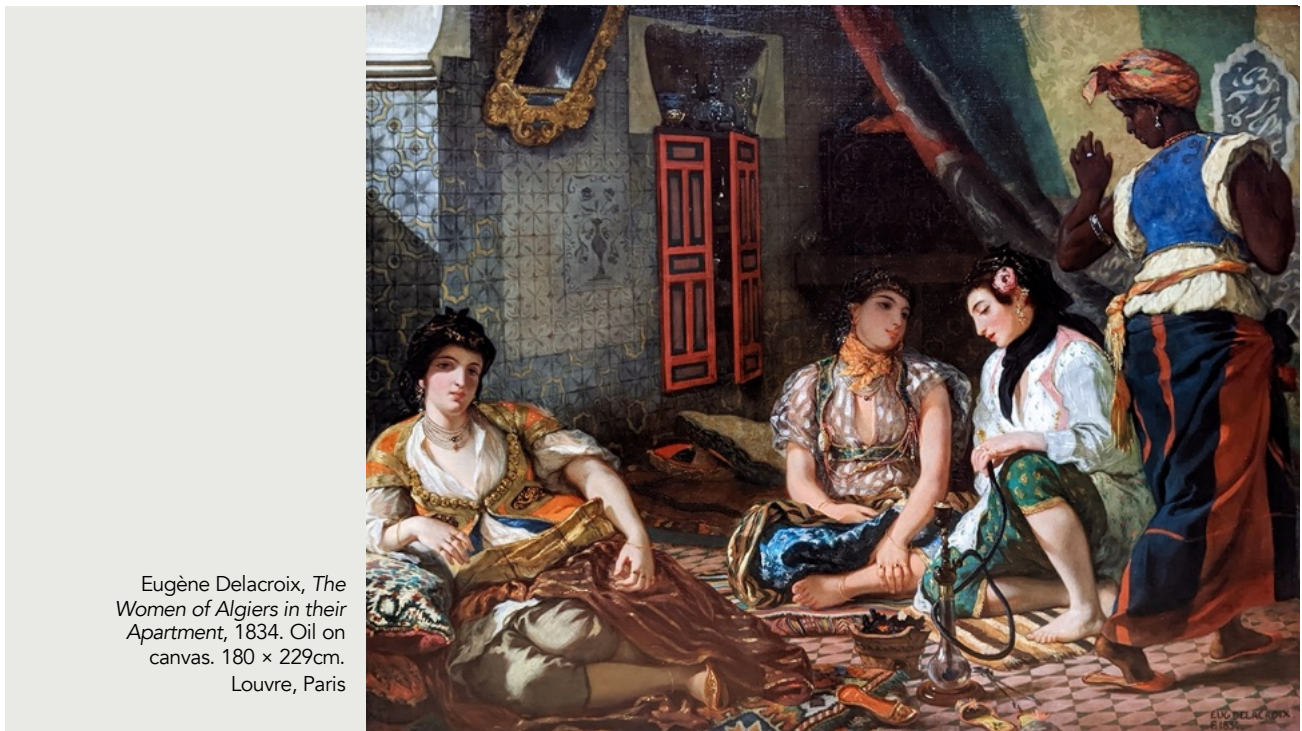
Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), *Death of Sardanapalus*, 1827, 392 × 496 cm,  
Louvre Museum

- This painting by Delacroix tells the story of a king of Assyria as described by an ancient Greek historian (Diodorus Siculus). We see a large bed draped in red fabric on which the decadent King Sardanapalus watches impartially as all his possessions including buildings, luxurious goods, horses, slaves and concubines are destroyed. He ordered the total destruction in the face of military defeat and his final act was to burn himself to death on a pyre of all his palace treasures.
- There are six concubines in the scene in various states of undress. One lies across his bed dead.

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Eugène Delacroix, *The Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, 1834. Oil on canvas. 180 × 229cm. Louvre, Paris.

- Delacroix painted two versions of *Women of Algiers* some 15 years apart and this is the first and best known version which is in the Louvre.
- The painting inspired many other artists including Vincent van Gogh and Paul Gauguin. Paul Cézanne described Delacroix's intoxicating colour plays as "All this luminous colour... It seems to me that it enters the eye like a glass of wine running into your gullet and it makes you drunk straight away".
- Picasso used to visit the Louvre once a month to look at *The Women of Algiers* and when his partner Françoise Gilot asked him how he felt about Delacroix he said, "That bastard. He's really good."
- It has been praised for not eroticising the harem and the Oriental woman compared with artists, such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) with his *La Grand Odalisque* (1814) and *The Turkish Bath* (1862-3) and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Parisiennes in Algerian Costume*, 1872, which show Oriental woman as sexual objects...

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Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *The Draught Players*, 1859, 40.3 x 28.6 cm, The Wallace Collection



Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *The Draught Players*, 1859, 40.3 x 28.6 cm, The Wallace Collection

- The Wallace Collection's painting is a fine demonstration of Gérôme's meticulous, high-keyed manner which was an important constituent of his popular success. He made many visits to the Middle East between 1854 and 1875.
- The players were identified from several other paintings by Gérôme as Arnauts, Albanian soldiers in the service of Mohammed Ali in Egypt, when a photogravure of the painting was issued by the publishers Goupil. The type of bench on which they sit appears in several other paintings by Gérôme.

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Jean-Léon Gérôme  
(1824–1904), *The Slave Market*, 1866, 84.8 × 63.5  
cm, Clark Art Institute, MA



Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *The Slave Market*, 1866, 84.8 × 63.5 cm, Clark Art Institute, MA

Honoré Daumier (1808-1879), 'Still more Venuses this year... always Venuses!... as if there were any women built like that!', from 'Sketches from the Salon,' published in *Le Charivari*, May 10, 1865, The Met

- This painting has become iconic of all nineteenth-century orientalist art.
- A man is inspecting the mouth of a slave woman as if he were dealing with a horse. He painted a very similar scene ten years earlier, set in an ancient roman slave market.
- (CLICK) The annual glut of paintings of idealised nude women in the Paris Salon was satirised by Honoré Daumier in an 1864 lithograph with the caption "**Still more Venuses this year... always Venuses!... as if there really were any women built like that!**" (CLICK)

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Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Slave Market*, 1871, 74.9 × 59.7 cm, Cincinnati Art Museum

- Gérôme continued the theme of the slave market. Here one imagines this is a group of slaves waiting to be sold. Such paintings are not intended to be realistic renditions of actual street scenes but are romantic dreams designed to evoke passions through their eroticism but at a comfortable remove.
- Gérôme was the most important and influential Orientalist artist in France in the nineteenth-century. He painted with precision with highly realistic faces, bodies and buildings and his exotic, erotic subjects were often of slave girls and harems as he imagined them.
- Slavery and slave markets were still present in Egypt in the 1870s and Gérôme may have witnessed them but his portrayal of the wretchedness of the waiting slaves waiting to be sold is shown alongside sensualised poses, and the nude body of one of the women. This allowed the artist and the viewer to condemn the savage trade but also fantasise about the sexual possibilities.

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Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *Pool in a Harem*, c. 1876, 73.5 × 62 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg



Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *Pool in a Harem*, c. 1876, 73.5 × 62 cm, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

- "Throughout his artistic career Gérôme made numerous visits to the Orient - to Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Palestine and Sinai. His unfailing interest in the depiction of scenes from the life of the Muslim world gave him a reputation as an "ethnographic" artist, of which he was very proud. His orientalisng compositions are often of great documentary value. Gérôme produced very precise representations not only of exotic costume, architecture and interiors, but also of different ethnic types. In the Hermitage painting we see a Turkish bath in a harem. In the centre, lit through a window in the ceiling, we see two white women and a dark-skinned slave; in the depth, by the pool, are the smaller figures of naked odalisques. With pedantic care Gérôme painted the figures and the details of the setting: the smooth surface of the marble floor, the coloured tiles, the furniture and the clothing. The style of Gérôme's oriental works, realistic in content and classicising in technique, is often described as 'academic realism'."

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Jean-Léon Gérôme  
(1824–1904), *The  
Snake Charmer*, c.  
1879, 83.8 x 122.1  
cmClark Art Institute,  
Williamstown MA

Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *The Snake Charmer*, c. 1879, 83.8 x 122.1 cmClark Art Institute, Williamstown MA

- This painting was used as the cover of Edward W. Said's influential 1978 book "Orientalism".

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Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *Cafe House, Cairo (Casting Bullets)*, 1884, 54.6 x 62.9 cm, The Met



Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *Cafe House, Cairo (Casting Bullets)*, 1884, 54.6 x 62.9 cm, The Met

- "While two mercenaries cast bullets and a third, seated behind them, seems to be inspecting one, others engage in revelry and a man and woman converse. Despite these apparent incongruities, the meticulous painting technique renders the scene convincing. Gérôme traveled to Egypt many times from 1855 onward. His recollections of these journeys, together with objects that he brought back to Paris, became ingredients for scenes which today might be regarded as historical fictions. The title of this work derives from the stock book of Gérôme's dealer, who bought the painting from the artist in 1884, presumably soon after he finished it."

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Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *Bonaparte Before the Sphinx*, 1886, 61.6 × 101.9 cm, Hearst Castle, California

Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *Bonaparte Before the Sphinx*, 1886, 61.6 × 101.9 cm, Hearst Castle, California

- This was painted in 1886, over eighty years after Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. It shows Napoleon on his own contemplating the enigmatic Sphinx with his army in the far distance.
- When exhibited the title was Oedipus referring to the legend that all travellers on the road to Thebes must solve a riddle posed by the Sphinx or die. The classic riddle is "**What is it that has a voice and walks on four legs in the morning, on two at noon, and on three in the evening?**" Oedipus answered that it was man, who as a child crawls on all fours, as an adult walks on two legs, and in old age uses a stick as a third leg. Before his birth Oedipus he was prophesied to marry his mother and kill his father. The baby Oedipus is cast into the desert to avoid this fate but survives and goes on to conquer Thebes and marries the recently widowed queen Jocasta who, unknown to him, is his mother. Discovering she has married her own son she hangs herself and Oedipus takes two pins from her dress and blinds himself.
- The painting therefore is about fate and destiny symbolised by the Sphinx and by the story of Oedipus.
- The painting was well reviewed by *The New York Times* describing it as one of his finest works. It was purchased by the billionaire William Randolph Hearst in 1898 and is still on display in his Californian mansion.



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Jean-Léon Gérôme  
(1824–1904), *The Great  
Pool of Bursa*, 1885, 70  
× 100.5, private  
collection



Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824–1904), *The Great Pool of Bursa*, 1885, 70 × 100.5, private collection

- La Grande Piscine de Brousse is a painting by the French painter Jean-Léon Gérôme in 1885. This oil on orientalist canvas represents naked women inside public baths in Bursa, now in Turkey. Exhibited at the 1885 Salon, it is now preserved in a private collection.
- By the end of his life, Gérôme felt very much a man out of his time. In 1903, recalling his first meeting with Charles Jalabert in 1840, he wrote:

*At that time, Paris had nothing to do with the Paris of today: no railways, no bicycles, no cars; we were less agitated, and certain districts, among others the one we lived in and which we called the Latin Quarter, had a provincial aspect in their calm and tranquility. Now everything is changed; we no longer walk, we run like crazy; if we are not crushed during the day, we have a good chance of being murdered at night. It is charming. We have witnessed the end of a world, we are witnessing the dawn of a new one, which lacks the picturesque and above all serenity. The day is not far off when, through our customs, our ways of being, our love of the dollar (auri sacra fames), we will no longer be French, neither in spirit nor in heart. Horrible to think of! We will be Americans!*

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919),  
*Parisiennes in Algerian Costume or  
Harem*, 1872, 156 × 128.8 cm,  
National Museum of Western Art,  
Tokyo



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *Parisiennes in Algerian Costume or Harem*, 1872, 156 × 128.8 cm, National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo

- Although this purports to show a harem it is a room in Paris. Renoir had not yet visited North Africa and so his knowledge of the culture, carpets and furnishings is based on Delacroix *Women of Algiers*.
- It is an early Renoir and is showing his use of a warmer palette and the beginnings of his Impressionist style leanings towards fresh colours, dramatic expression and loose brushwork.
- The red-headed woman in the centre is looking in the mirror held by the woman on the right after having her makeup applied by the woman on the left who is distracted by the woman in the background.
- It is a good example of how artists used the public's imagination of the Orient to create a sensual image of Parisian woman with little if any basis in life in the Middle East.

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *Odalisque*, 1870, 69.2 × 122.6 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919), *Odalisque*, 1870, 69.2 × 122.6 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

- It was remarked at the time that this painting referred back to Delacroix's *Women of Algiers* which was renowned in its time for its quality of painting. In fact when exhibited by Renoir this painting was called *Woman of Algiers*. It has also been compared with Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres (1780–1867), *Odalisque with Slave*, the painting of a lounging naked woman with a slave playing a musical instrument that we saw earlier.
- Renoir's painting was praised by some when it was first exhibited and disliked by others.

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Henri Matisse (1869-1954), *Odalisque with Arms Raised, Green Striped Chair*, 1923, 65.1 x 50.2 cm, National Museum of Art, Washington DC

Henri Matisse (1869-1954), *Odalisque with Arms Raised, Green Striped Chair*, 1923, 65.1 x 50.2 cm, National Museum of Art, Washington DC

- As we have seen the odalisque was a popular subject for artists in the nineteenth century and here Matisse modernises the subjects. He visited Morocco in 1912 and the trip inspired this painting. The model is French, Henriette Darricarrère (pronounced 'en-ree-et derri-carry-air') who sat for him between 1920 and 1927.
- He argued, "***I do Odaliques in order to do nudes. But, how does one do a nude without being artificial? And then I do them because I know they exist. I was in Morocco, I have seen them***". The word odalisque is from the Turkish word 'Odalik' which can mean a chambermaid or a female harem slave. Matisse would not have been allowed in a harem but perhaps he is referring to the chambermaids he saw.
- He had a collection of semi-oriental furnishings, fabrics mirrors and screens that he used to furnish his studio to create the 'oriental' atmosphere.

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Henri Matisse (1869–1954), *Yellow Odalisque*, 1937, 55.2 × 46 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Henri Matisse (1869–1954), *Yellow Odalisque*, 1937, 55.2 × 46 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art

- Finally, ***Yellow Odalisque*** continues Matisse's modernising of the odalisque. It is no longer a Turkish odalisque but a modern European woman (Hélène Galtzine).
- The small Algerian painted table from the 1800s or early 1900s came from Matisse's personal collection, as did the French pewter jug from the late 1700s.
- Matisse had come to fame in 1905 because of a public scandal over the challenging appearance of his works—particularly the starkness of their colour.
- His work evolved over his long life but his essential method was to distill his emotional response to a given person, landscape or still-life into bright colours and flowing decorative lines. The flatness of the picture and the dominance of the decorative patterns is in danger of overwhelming the subject but his draughtsmanship, compositional skill and hue and tonal balance combine to create unique, modern view of a very old subject.

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## FRENCH ORIENTALISM

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir), *Odalisque*, detail, 1870, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC

- I have focused on French artists but other artists across Europe produced orientalist scenes. The themes continued in the twentieth century with artists such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), Paul Klee (1879-1940), Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980) and August Macke (1887-1914).
- Thank you for your attention and I hope to have another talk prepared soon.

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