

Émile-Jean-Horace Vernet, *The Duke of Chartres and Pierre-Paul Édouard Save the Engineer Siret from Drowning on August 3, 1791, in Vendôme*

Born in Paris on June 30, 1789, just days before the storming of the Bastille, Émile Jean-Horace Vernet (French, 1789–1863) began his life at a critical moment in French history, one that was to profoundly shape his identity, art, and reputation. Critics' later claims that he was France's national painter were enlivened by the detail of this auspicious timing.

Vernet painted *The Duke of Chartres and Pierre-Paul Édouard Save the Engineer Siret from Drowning on August 3, 1791, in Vendôme* in 1847. That year would be the last of the July Monarchy, as King Louis-Philippe abdicated on February 24, 1848. The present scene, however, commemorates an incident that took place in 1791, when Louis-Philippe (1773–1850), then known as the duc de Chartres, demonstrated his heroism by diving into the River Loire to save the engineer Monsieur Siret from drowning. As the painting indicates, Louis-Philippe was assisted in the rescue by Pierre-Paul Édouard (died 1796), a free Black man who attended the House of Orléans



Émile-Jean-Horace Vernet (French, 1789–1863), *The Duke of Chartres and Pierre-Paul Édouard Save the Engineer Siret from Drowning on August 3, 1791, in Vendôme*, 1847, oil on canvas, 20 1/4 x 24 1/4 in., Museum purchase with funds from the Jack Drew Acquisition Fund for 18th- and 19th-Century Art, 2022.10.

and later, played a key role in the Haitian Revolution. The commission marked the start of Vernet's role as the principal painter of Louis-Philippe's personal propaganda, including decorative campaigns for the Palace of Versailles.

The first work by Vernet to enter Joslyn's collection, the painting may be contextualized within a notable current in nineteenth-century European art that is well-represented at the Museum: anecdotal and inventive history paintings, including examples by Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier (French, 1815–1891), Jean-Léon Gérôme (French, 1824–1904), and Jehan-Georges Vibert (French, 1840–1902). In addition to engaging the function of history and history painting in the nineteenth century, Vernet's painting attests to a neglected biography of a person of color, offering an opportunity for further research into a key figure in French Black history.