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 six. He studied with Delaroche until he was fifteen, when he moved to Rome in 1844 and returned to Paris in 1848 to found the studio of the Swiss artist Charles Gleyre. During his years of study, Gérôme was able to gain a sufficient income by selling pastel copies of paintings.

Gérôme competed unsuccessfully for the Prix de Rome, a scholarship-sponsored study at the French academy in Rome, but was awarded a sudden unannounced prize in the Salon of 1857. The Muses, a study of Flora, was purchased by the British Queen Victoria, and his work was highly regarded by the British aristocracy, which was predominantly American. His influence on technique and composition is perhaps its most valuable contribution to the work of American Thomas Eakins, who was inspired by Gérôme’s style of romanticized realism.

Highly regarded in his day, Gérôme’s approach to painting resulted in a style so particular that it was difficult for others to imitate or reproduce. A meticulous eye for detail combined with a keen sense of humor is the hallmark of Gérôme’s artistic style.

The Story of... Pygmalion & Galatea

Like many Greek myths, the story of Pygmalion and Galatea takes place on the island of Crete. Pygmalion, a sculptor, was so enamored of his creation that he vowed to marry her even though she was not a real person. This vow of love is a beautiful expression of the human capacity for devotion and self-sacrifice.

Pygmalion is a popular subject among artists, who often depict him and his creation in various artistic styles. This work by Gérôme shows the sculptor and his statue together, creating a sense of intimacy and emotional connection. The statue, though created by the artist, is imbued with life through the power of Pygmalion’s love.

Academic Art

Academic art refers to the tradition of drawing, painting, and sculpture taught at the academies, or art schools, of Europe, established in the early 19th century. It is characterized by the use of mathematical proportions and descriptive accuracy so real that the sculpture itself might look alive. Academic sculptures were often based on classical and historical models.

Orientalism

Orientalism describes a tendency to portray the Near and Middle East and North Africa in ways that appealed to the assumptions, emotions, public opinion of Western audiences. British and French imperial expansion of the 19th century, for example, led to increased interest in the region. The works of art which resulted from Orientalism are generally classified into two categories: objects of study and objects of desire.

Orientalist works of art generally presented the Orient as backward and primitive, thereby justifying Imperialism as “civilizing.” They often depicted wealthy, exotic scenes, exotic costumes, and local customs.

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

This special exhibition traveled to three venues from June 17, 2010, to May 22, 2011. Joseph listed two Gérôme artworks: The Grief of the Pasha and The Musée. The latter traveled to all three venues. The painting refers to a Victor Hugo poem, La Musée du dehors, which always made her wish for gunners and the French.

The Grief of the Pasha

Victor Hugo’s poem, La Musée du dehors, inspired Gérôme to create his painting of the same name. The poem is a reflection on the military and political events that took place in the Middle East during the 19th century. The painting refers to a particular event, the death of a Pasha, and the general feeling of sadness and loss that followed.

Jean-Léon Gérôme, The Grief of the Pasha, 1887, oil on canvas, 36 3/8 x 29 in. (92.6 x 73.7 cm). Gift of Louis C. Raegner, 1927. The Minneapolis Institute of Art.
THE GRIEF OF THE PASHA

1882, OIL ON CANVAS ON MASONITE PANEL

JEAN-LÉON GÉRÔME
FRENCH, 1824 – 1904

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