

Jean-Léon Gérôme



1824-1904 | FRENCH

Les Baigneuses du Harem

M.S. Rau
FINE ART • ANTIQUES • JEWELS

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Oil on canvas | 1901
Signed "J.L. Gérôme" (lower left)

Canvas: 38 1/2" high x 31" wide | 97.79 cm x 78.74 cm
Frame: 53" high x 45 3/4" wide x 3 1/2" deep
134.62 cm x 116.21 cm x 8.89 cm



“

There is no living painter
whose mind can be
called so interesting as
the mind of Gérôme.

– Edward Strahan, Art historian and critic

”



Jean-Léon Gérôme is widely considered one of the greatest painters in history. His extraordinary canvases brought the human figure to life like no other, and in his day, he was among the world's most famous living artists. Gérôme painted many subjects, with his Orientalist scenes being his most coveted works, prized for their exotic allure and brilliant hues. This monumental masterpiece from 1901, *Les Baigneuses du Harem*, is the largest of Gérôme's intimate bather scenes and is considered the most important harem scene still in private hands.

Gérôme's harem bathers were an instant sensation with his audiences, inviting them into a mystical, faraway world. During his travels to Bursa in 1879, he visited the famed Turkish baths, going to great lengths to make careful studies of the experience—including sketching “in the buff,” as he once told a friend, to completely immerse himself in the relaxed atmosphere and luxurious architecture.

Back in his Paris studio, Gérôme's firsthand observations enabled him to recreate the fantastical magic of these baths. He installed the iconic blue Iznik tiles on his walls, so that his Parisian models could pose in front of them. *Les Baigneuses du Harem* reveals Gérôme's incredible ability to render these enticing interiors with intimacy and authenticity—even though he, of course, was never allowed into the women's bathing quarters himself.

With not one, but four of Gérôme's iconic female figures, this work also epitomizes his singular talent for capturing both the human form and skin tone. The women are rendered with astonishing naturalism, and their pearl-white skin gleams with an ethereal radiance. Every inch of this canvas is an absolute masterclass in painting. Gérôme's skill was so widely admired that he was appointed as one of just three instructors at the École des Beaux-Arts. He would go on to teach over 2,000 students there (including Mary Cassatt and Thomas Eakins) and publish the most important instructional book on drawing that would influence

many artists, including William Bouguereau, Odilon Redon and Pablo Picasso.

Gérôme painted only a handful of these intimate bather scenes with a few figures, and this masterpiece is the largest of all of them. It is bigger and more striking than all of the similar examples in prestigious museums, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and the State Hermitage Collection in St. Petersburg. It is even more substantial than the bath scene that he exhibited at the Salon of 1885 to widespread acclaim. *Les Baigneuses du Harem*'s first owner, the important American art collector Edward Brandus, paid an astonishing 6,600 francs for it—the equivalent of roughly eleven years of wages for the average French laborer in 1901!

When one takes into account that Jean-Léon Gérôme, along with William Bouguereau, was by far the most important Academic painter of his day, and Gerome himself was the most famed Orientalist painter of his time, and that the artist's harem bath scenes are his most iconic works of art—it is clear that this masterwork stands as an extraordinary opportunity to own one of art history's greatest treasures.



PROVENANCE

Boussod, Valadon & Cie, Paris, acquired directly from the artist, 1901

Edward Brandus Inc., New York, acquired from the above in 1901 (6,600 ffr.)

Anon. Sale; Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc., New York, 20 Nov. 1947, lot 85

Renaissance, Inc., acquired at the above sale

Anon. Sale; Parke-Bernet Galleries, Inc., New York, 24 March 1954, lot 70

Cianis, acquired at the above sale

Private Collection, USA

Private Collection, Europe

M.S. Rau, New Orleans

LITERATURE

Paris Photographs: Gérôme, Oeuvres, Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, vol. V

G. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme, with a catalogue raisonné*, London and New York, 1986 (republished 1992, 2000), p. 329, no. 380 (illus. p. 148)

L. de Cars, D. de Font-Reaulx and E. Papet, *Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824 – 1904): L'Histoire en Spectacle*, exh. cat., the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; and Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 2010, p. 288 (illus. fig. 137)

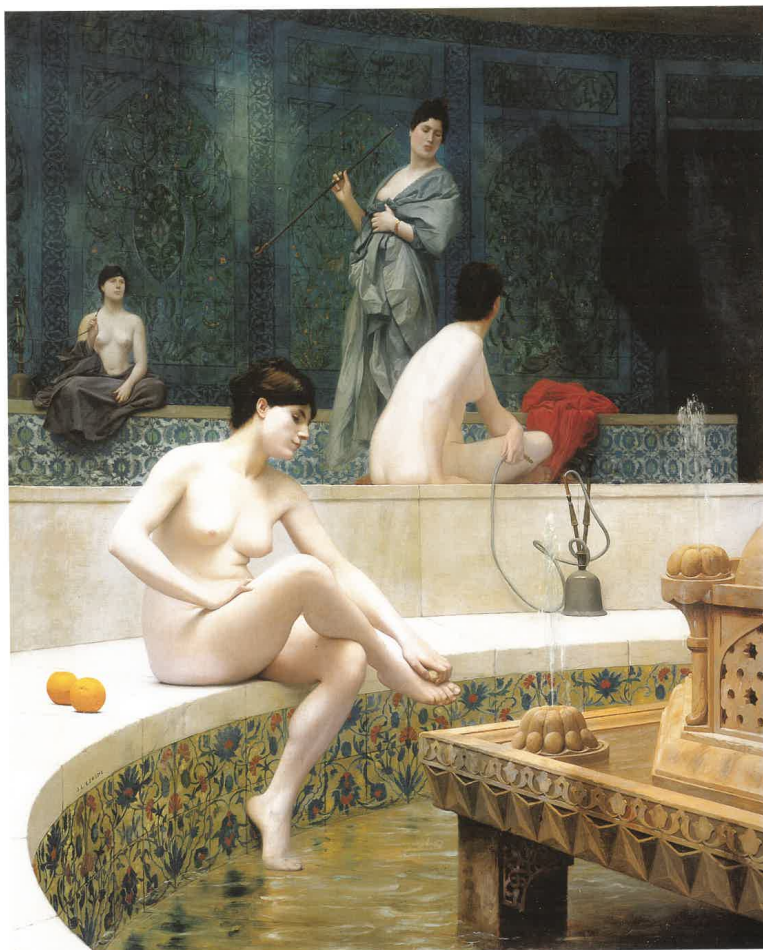




G. M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme, with a catalogue raisonné*, London and New York, 1986 (republished 1992, 2000), p. 329, no. 380 (illus. p. 148)



Jean-Léon Gérôme



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G. M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme, with a catalogue raisonné*, London and New York, 1986 (republished 1992, 2000), p. 329, no. 380 (illus. p. 148)



Jean-Léon Gérôme

378 Nu au bain, ébauche

Vers 1889. Localisation inconnue.
41 x 32 cm. Signé.**Historique** : SPBNY, 30 octobre 1980, vente 4452, lot 83, illustré.

379 Vapeur sèche - Le Hammam

1889. Perdu.

Commentaire : Hering note qu'il fut exposé à Copenhague où il reçut une distinction royale, et le décrit ainsi (p. 264) : « Le corps est tout rose à cause du bain et du massage ». Ce tableau représentait, sans doute, le personnage de femme étendue que l'on massait qui figure dans le dessin préparatoire.

380 Les Baigneuses du harem

1901. Collection particulière.

Toile, 99,7 x 80,6 cm. Signé en bas à gauche.

Historique : Gérôme à Bousod, Valadon & Cie, 1901. B.V. & Cie à Edward Brandus, New York, 1901 : 6 600 francs ; vente Rockefeller, PBNY, 20 novembre 1947, lot 85. Renaissance, Inc., acheté à la vente précédente ; vente Mrs. Beverly Bogert, PBNY, 24 mars 1954, vente 1504, n° 70, illustré ; acheté par Clanis. Sotheby's, New York, 1^{er} novembre 1995, vente 6760, n° 75 : 189 500 dollars.**Commentaire** : Peu des scènes orientales de bains exécutées par Gérôme furent vendues par Goupil ou ses successeurs ; peut-être furent-elles vendues directement à partir de l'atelier de Gérôme ou par d'autres marchands. Bien que tardif, ce magnifique exemple, avec deux de ses plus beaux nus, est une exception que l'on peut admettre.**Bibliographie** : *Œuvres de J.-L. Gérôme* (Bibliothèque nationale, Paris), V, 5.

381 Vapeur humide

1901.

Toile, 73 x 100 cm. Repeint. Signé en bas à gauche.

Historique : Hering le cite en mentionnant qu'il fut exposé à Moscou (p. 264).**Commentaire** : Cette peinture, connue seulement par une photo d'atelier, ne fut à l'évidence pas terminée. Les nus, que l'on aperçoit à peine à travers la vapeur, semblent quelque peu bizarres ; peut-être étaient-ils d'une autre main, ce qui a pu inciter à repeindre le tableau pour en faire ce que l'on voit au n° 382. Voir ci-dessous l'état actuel du tableau.**Bibliographie** : *Œuvres de J.-L. Gérôme* (Bibliothèque nationale, Paris), V, 6.

382 Gérôme et imitateur : Vapeur humide

Collection particulière.

Toile, 73 x 101 cm. Signé en bas à gauche.

Historique : Collection MM. Wilder, Ewen & Patterson, Avoués, AAA, New York, 1917. Holland Galleries, New York, à Glemby. Vente Harry Glemby, AAA, New York, 1929, n° 579, illustré, déjà repeint. S.A. Glarius, Suisse, 1960. Hammer Gallery, New York. Dr. Bernard.**Commentaire** : Œuvre non finie, en partie repeinte. Voir au numéro précédent l'état de la toile d'après une photo d'atelier de Gérôme. Elle a été très modifiée.**Bibliographie** : *Œuvres de J.-L. Gérôme* (Bibliothèque nationale, Paris), V, 6.

382.5 Bain

Vapeur humide

1886. Perdu.

31 x 40 cm.

Historique : Gérôme à Bousod, Valadon & Cie, 1886 : 3 562 francs. B.V. & Cie à Mactean, Haymarket, Londres, 1886 : 3 560 francs.**Commentaire** : Le titre de cette œuvre l'associe aux n°s 381 et 382, mais ses dimensions, plus petites, interdisent de la considérer comme une répétition ou une variante de l'un ou de l'autre. Si elle leur est toutefois apparentée, alors ma datation pour les deux bains précédents doit être remise en question.

382.6 Atelier de Gérôme : Baigneuse

Collection particulière, Brésil.

Toile, 64 x 53,5 cm. Signature apocryphe en bas à gauche.

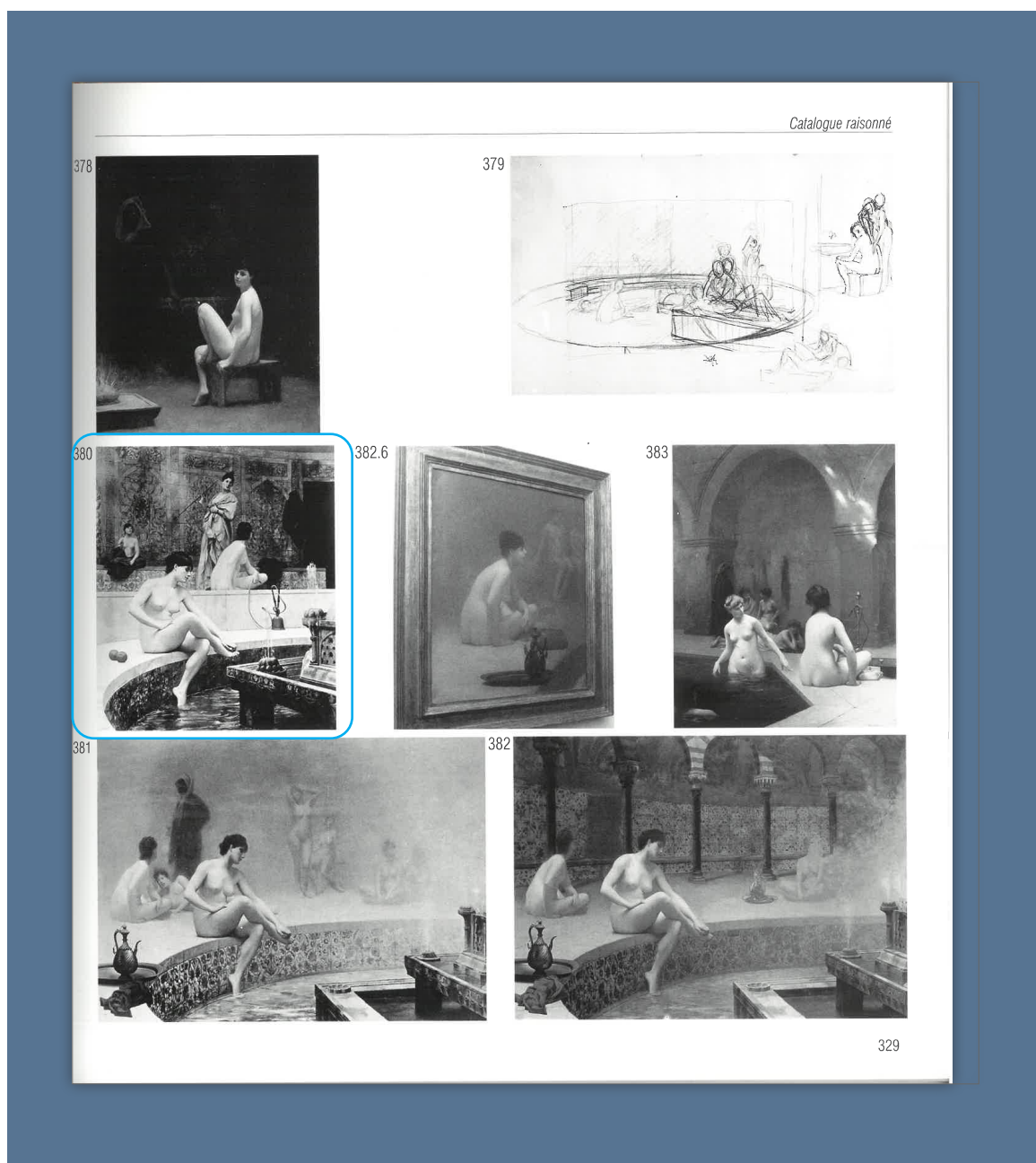
Historique : Sur le marché new yorkais en 1999.

383 Baigneuses

1881. Collection particulière.

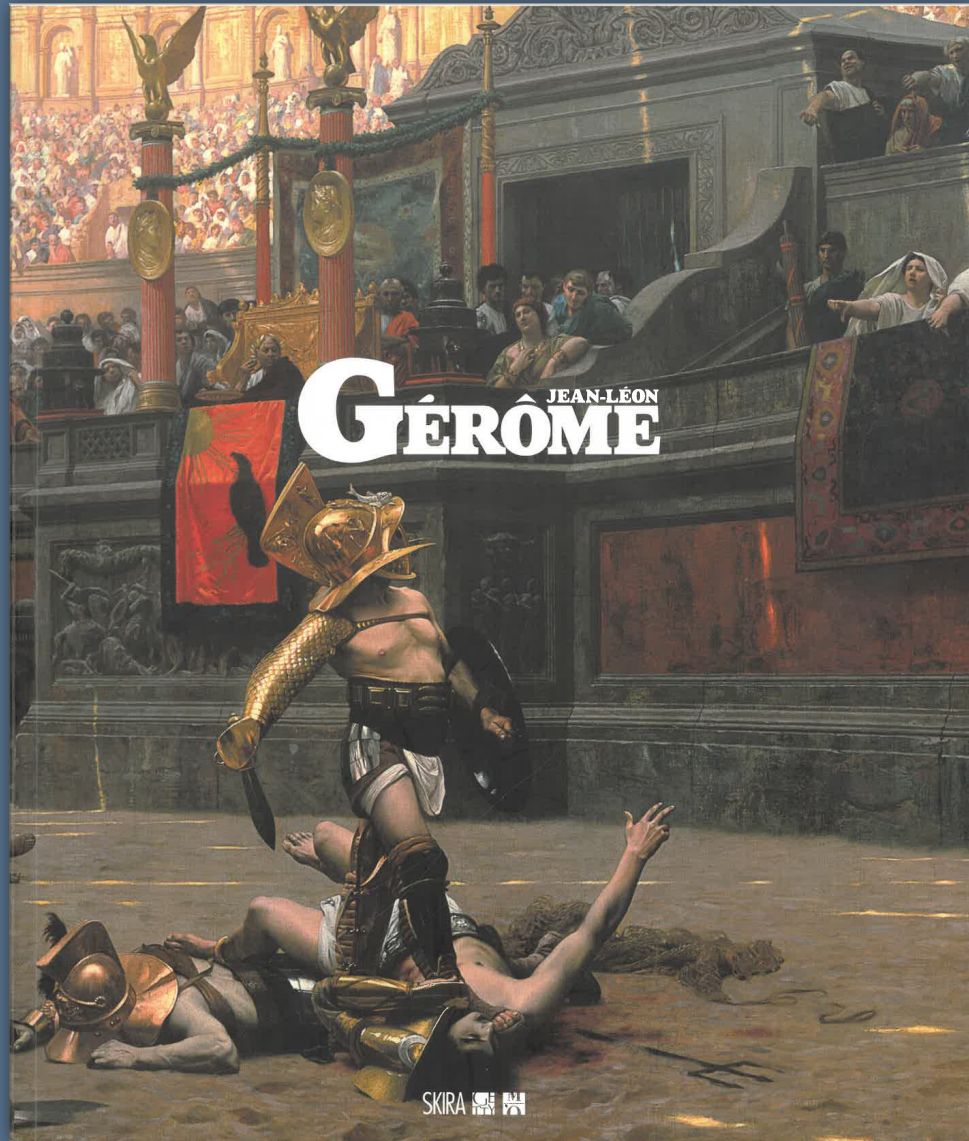
Toile, 61,5 x 46 cm. Signé en bas à droite.

Historique : Probablement Gérôme à Bousod, Valadon & Cie, 1881 : 3 562 francs ; inventaire B.V. & Cie n° 17024, « Deux baigneuses, 45 x 60,5 ». Vendu à Knoedler, New York, 1884. Louise Whitford Ltd., *Dreamers and Academics*, Londres, 1981, enregistré comme « venant d'Amérique du Sud ». Christie's, Londres, 21 mars 1997, lot 66.**Commentaire** : Le décor architectural est une version simplifiée de l'intérieur du grand bain Sinan à Brousse, voir le cat. n° 334. Gérôme était à Brousse en 1875.



G. M. Ackerman, *The Life and Work of Jean-Léon Gérôme, with a catalogue raisonné*, London and New York, 1986 (republished 1992, 2000), p. 329, no. 380 (illus. p. 148)





L. de Cars, D. de Font-Reaulx and E. Papet, *Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824 – 1904): L'Histoire en Spectacle*, exh. cat., the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; and Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 2010, p. 288 (illus. fig. 137)



288 | THE PARADOX OF REALISM: GÉRÔME IN THE ORIENT

ILL. 137. A Bath, Woman Bathing her Feet (also known as Harem Pool), 1901, oil on canvas, 39 1/4 x 31 1/4 in., private collection.



ILL. 138. Pascal Sebah (1823–1886), The baths of Yénir-Kaplıca, Bursa, 1894, albumen print, 11 x 10 1/4 in., École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, inv. Ph. 6656.



ILL. 139. James Pradier (1790–1852), Odalisque, 1841, marble, 2 x 37 x 24 in., Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, inv. R.793.



very similar to the one held firmly by the haughty black slave here.² The hookah in the background, meanwhile, resembles one seen in a photograph of Gérôme's studio (Musée d'Orsay, Paris).

Gérôme very certainly based his *Grand Bath at Bursa* on a photograph (ill. 138). As was often the case, it was not exact details that he borrowed from the photographic picture, because we can see the liberties he took with the shape of the arches, transforming the pointed Islamic arch into a rounder one, and placing non-existent medallions on the spandrels. Such modifications and additions allowed him to subtly turn an oriental hammam into Roman baths, and to play on the confusion between an oriental scene and an ancient one, thereby underscoring the extent to which his two favorite sources of inspiration were, to his mind, similar. The breadth of composition of the Pascal Sebah photograph also offered a framework for Gérôme's painting, and he was able to draw on the play of light and shade in the picture. Once again Gérôme was sensitive to photography's theatrical ambitions and stagey quality.

The bodies of the young bathers are as white and sleek as marble—their poses seem to constitute a catalogue of models after the antique, as though anthologizing the photographic studies of academic nudes by Louis Igout. Here again the objects come from the artist's familiar surroundings—the wood-slatted cage on which a young odalisque is seated on the right of the canvas is the very one that Gérôme used when he painted (ill. 150, p. 304).

These two works reveal the talent with which Gérôme produced *lifelike* pictures of his contemporaries' imaginary Orient. The rise of ethnography as a science was also grounded in the exotic charms of a fantasy Orient—indeed, the entry for "harem" in the Larousse dictionary of the French language encouraged readers to turn to *The Arabian Nights* to discover the truth about oriental customs: "[I]f one wishes to have an accurate picture of oriental existence, one need merely open [*The Arabian Nights*]."³

Transcending the accuracy of observation that his contemporaries ascribed to him—reducing him to the rank of a faithful but uninventive copier—Gérôme was able to construct a pictorial truth by combining models of Western painting with images drawn from his oriental travels, images still imbued with the voluptuous feelings that he, like Flaubert, experienced there. **D. F.-R.**

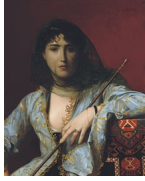
1. Gustave Flaubert, letter from Cairo to Louis Bouilhet dated Jan. 15, 1850; *Correspondance* (Paris: Gallimard Pléiade, 1973), vol. 1, p. 572.
2. *Catalogue des objets d'art de l'Orient et de l'Occident, tableaux et dessins composant la collection de feu M. Albert Goupil*, Hôtel Drouot, Paris, Apr. 23–27, 1888, lot 67. 3. Volume IX, letter R, p. 14.



L. de Cars, D. de Font-Reaulx and E. Papet, *Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824 – 1904): L'Histoire en Spectacle*, exh. cat., the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA; Musée d'Orsay, Paris; and Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 2010, p. 288 (illus. fig. 137)



— AUCTION COMPARABLES —



Jean-Léon Gérôme
Femme circassienne voilée,
veiled circassian beauty
 oil on canvas
 Height 40.7 x Width 32.6 cm.
 Height 16.024 x Width 12.835 in.
 1876

02 July 2008 *over 17 years ago*

Christie's London
Orientalist Art – [Lot 00042]

est. 400,000 - 600,000 GBP **2,057,250** GBP (P)
 est. 797,607 - 1,196,410 USD **4,102,193** USD (P)

↑ 243% est



Jean-Léon Gérôme
La grande piscine à Brusa (The
great bath at Bursa)
 oil on canvas
 Height 70 x Width 100.5 cm.
 Height 27.559 x Width 39.567 in.
 1885

15 June 2004 *over 21 years ago*

Sotheby's London
19th Century European Paintings – [Lot 00112]

est. 900,000 - 1,200,000 GBP **1,909,600** GBP (P)
 est. 1,645,348 - 2,193,797 USD **3,491,063** USD (P)

↑ 59% est

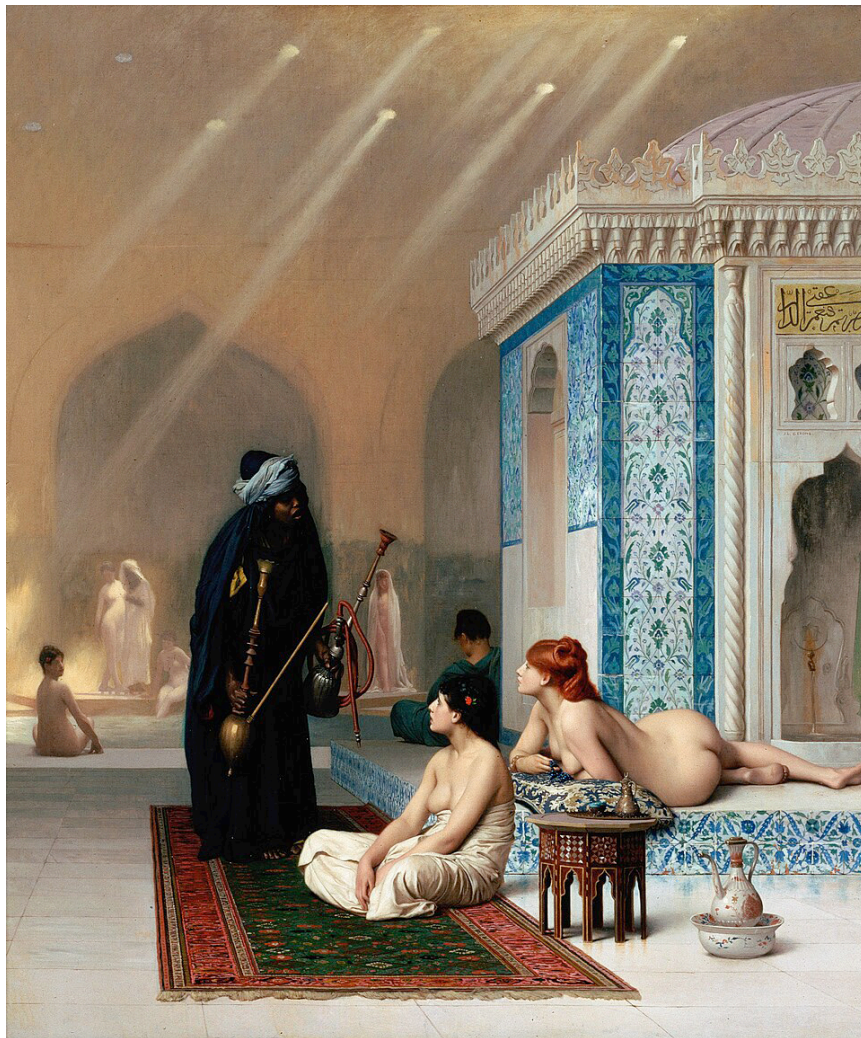


Jean-Léon Gérôme | *Pool in a Harem*

1876

Medium: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 29 x 24 inches | 73.5 x 62 cm



ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ
ЭРМИТАЖ
The State Hermitage Museum



The State Hermitage Museum
St. Petersburg, Russia



Jean-Léon Gérôme | *Moorish Bath*

1870

Medium: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 20 x 16 inches | 50.8 x 40.6 cm



MFABoston

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
Boston, MA, United States



Jean-Léon Gérôme | *The Bath*

1880-85

Medium: Oil on canvas

Dimensions: 29 x 23^{1/2} inches | 73.7 x 59.7 cm



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