

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



**JOHANN GEORG DE HAMILTON**

(Brussels 1672-1737 Vienna)

***A REARING ARAB STALLION  
HELD BY A GROOM IN ORIENTAL COSTUME***

oil on canvas

48.5 x 60.5 cm; 19 x 23 3/4 in.

Signed and dated lower right: J.G. De. / Ham 1.6.9.8.

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## Provenance

Anonymous sale, Aguttes, 12 December 2006, lot 27 (as dated 1695);

Anonymous sale, Christie's New York, 19 April 2007, lot 118;

Anonymous sale, Sotheby's London, 8 July 2021, lot 170;

Private collection, Geneva.

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Johann Georg de Hamilton (later known as 'von' Hamilton), was one of three sons of the artist James Hamilton (c.1640-1720), all of whom became painters. By 1688 James, a Scotsman, had established himself as a distinguished still life painter in Brussels. Johann Georg and his brothers all carved out distinguished careers as court painters across Central Europe, specialising in animal and still life subjects. Philipp Ferdinand (c.1664-1750) served as the court painter for the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph I (1678-1711), and Karl Wilhelm, also known as 'Thistle-Hamilton' (c.1668-1754), served as court painter to Bishop Alexander Sigismund von der Pfalz-Neuburg (1663-1737).

Johann Georg's career flourished first in Vienna between 1690 and 1698, and after a period in Germany working for Prince Adam Franz Karl of Schwarzenburg (1680-1732), he returned to Vienna in 1718 to become Court Painter for Charles VI (1685-1740) and continued his career there until his death in 1737. This second period in Vienna marked Johann Georg's recognition as 'the Viennese Wootton,' a testament to his unparalleled skill in painting horses. He focused particularly on the emperor's Lipizzaners, a famed breed that was developed from Spanish and Arabian horses, and for which Charles VI commissioned the Viennese Winter Riding School in 1729. The milk-white colour that distinguishes Lipizzaner horses today was bred more formally in the nineteenth century, following a change in fashion. This contrasts with earlier periods, as highlighted in Johann Georg's painting from 1702, commissioned by Prince Anton Florian I von Liechtenstein, depicting *The Imperial Riding School* (fig. 1) – the painting illustrates horses of various colours, including piebalds, 'tigers' and 'isabelles', which were clearly prized just as highly. At the centre of the composition is Charles of Habsburg (future Charles VI) proudly riding a horse which is very similar in colouring to that of the horse in the present picture. However, rather than the 'Roman nose' recognisable in Lipizzaners, the horse featured here exhibits characteristic of an Arab breed – a broad forehead with large eyes, and a more dished profile.

This painting, signed and dated 1698, was produced during Johann Georg's first stint in Vienna. It is of outstanding quality and clearly shows the artist's exceptional skills in representing horses. It also stands out due to the groom's striking attire, the bright and ornate tack, and of course the tiger skin draped on the horse's back. These orientalist motifs allude to the tradition of presenting Arab stallions as prestigious diplomatic gifts, a practice common among the elite circles of Europe and the East, reflecting the rich tapestry of culture and commercial interactions between these regions. Through this work, Johann Georg engages with the legacy of orientalist themes previously explored by renowned artists like Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Antoine Coypel (1661-1722), thereby continuing a tradition that celebrates the intricate exchanges between Eastern and Western courts.

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**Fig. 1.** Johann Georg de Hamilton, *The Imperial Riding School*, 1702, Vaduz Castle, Prince of Liechtenstein collections.