

# COLNAGHI



Carl Freidrich Heinrich Werner  
*The Rug Merchant, 1879*

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CARL FRIEDRICH HEINRICH WERNER  
(Weimar 1808 – 1894 Leipzig)

*THE RUG MERCHANT, 1879*

Oil on canvas  
96.5 x 151 cm; (38 x 59 1/2 in.)

Signed and dated lower right: '*Werner 1879*'

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Provenance

Private collection.

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Born in Weimar in 1808, Carl Friedrich Heinrich Werner (1808-1894) studied under the artist Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld in Leipzig and later trained in architecture in Munich (1829-31) before returning definitively to painting. After earning a travel scholarship (encouraged in part by Goethe), he spent two decades in Italy - based in Venice, Rome, Bologna and Florence - honing his draughtsmanship and exhibiting widely. Like many 19th-century Orientalist painters, Werner eventually turned his focus to the Near East. He undertook extensive journeys through the Levant and North Africa, traveling to Palestine and Egypt in the mid-19th century (notably a full Nile voyage in 1864). During these expeditions he filled sketchbooks with detailed on-site studies, recording everyday life and architectural vistas as raw material for later compositions.

Throughout his career he predominantly worked in watercolour, while his training in architecture provided him with precise draughtsmanship and exact topographical depiction. His works in oil are particularly rare - he produced only a small number of paintings compared to his prolific output on paper. *The Rug Merchant* (1879) is therefore a noteworthy exception in Werner's catalogue, executed on canvas at a time when he was an established master of Orientalist watercolour scenes. Works by Carl Werner are today held in several major public collections. Notably, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London houses examples of his watercolours, and paintings by Werner can also be found in the Nationalgalerie, Berlin, and in museum collections in Venice.

Painted in 1879, *The Rug Merchant* is set in Cairo (then a part of Ottoman Egypt), a city Werner visited during his journeys and where he gathered impressions of local bazaars and architecture. Although completed in his studio years after his Middle Eastern tour, the painting is directly informed by the artist's memories of Cairo's vibrant street life. By the 1870s Werner was in fact a professor in Leipzig and an acclaimed Orientalist painter. In the present painting, he deployed his accumulated knowledge of Islamic architecture and urban customs to recreate a characteristic marketplace scene.

With this depiction of commercial exchange - a carpet seller displaying his wares to a customer - Werner managed to capture the vitality and excitement of an everyday moment. The setting is an enclosed courtyard or *khan*, characteristic of Ottoman-era Cairo: from the pointed horseshoe arches and carved arabesque panels to the wooden screen above a doorway, the building's fabric is portrayed in exacting detail. Within this richly textured setting, Werner arranges a trio of figures in the foreground, animating the surrounding space. With the help of a youthful assistant, a turbaned rug merchant at left unfurls an ornate carpet before a robed customer.

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Werner's handling of light in the painting is especially noteworthy. A soft, diffused daylight enters the courtyard from above, gently illuminating the back of the courtyard. Equally impressive is the textile rendering: the piles of Oriental carpets on the right are painted with vivid reds and earth tones, their intricate geometric and floral patterns discernible yet harmonised into the overall scene.



A steel engraving print of carpetmakers at the Khan el-Khalili bazar in Cairo by Carl Werner from *Aegypten in Bild und Wort Volume One* by Georg Ebers, published in 1879 by Eduard Hallberger, Stuttgart, Germany; depicts the same precise location as the painting.

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## COLNAGHI *London*

26 BURY STREET, LONDON SW1Y 6AL  
UNITED KINGDOM

MONDAY TO FRIDAY  
10AM-6PM

+44 (0)20 7491 7408

[contact@colnaghi.com](mailto:contact@colnaghi.com)

## COLNAGHI *Madrid*

CALLE GENERAL CASTAÑOS 9  
PLANTA BAJA, DCHA.  
28004 MADRID

MONDAY TO FRIDAY  
BY APPOINTMENT

[spain@colnaghi.com](mailto:spain@colnaghi.com)

## COLNAGHI *New York*

23 EAST 67TH STREET, FOURTH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10065  
USA

MONDAY TO FRIDAY  
10AM-6PM

+1 (917) 388-3825

[newyork@colnaghi.com](mailto:newyork@colnaghi.com)

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RUE JACQUES JORDAENS 30  
1000 BRUXELLES  
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BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

[brussels@colnaghi.com](mailto:brussels@colnaghi.com)