

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Jean-Léon Gérôme
(Vesoul 1824 – 1904 Paris)

Standing figure seen from behind, study for The Carpet Merchant

Pencil on paper
32.3 x 20.3 cm (12 ¾ x 8 in.)

Provenance:

Suzanne and Aimé Morot, the daughter and son-in-law of the artist;

By descent to their son, Aimé-Léon Morot;

By whom sold, Sotheby's, Paris, 27 June 2002, lot 187;

From where acquired by the present owner.



This drawing is a preparatory study for *The Carpet Merchant* (fig. 1), Gérôme's celebrated Orientalist composition in the collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art. The finished painting depicts a richly patterned carpet unfurled before a group of potential buyers, set within a courtyard framed by arches and windows. This is the Court of the Rug Market in Cairo, which Gérôme visited in 1885. The present sheet relates directly to one of the standing figures, who is positioned with his back turned as he gazes toward the central action.



Fig. 1, Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The Carpet Merchant*, 1887, oil on panel, 86 x 68 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Art

As in Gérôme's other studies, the emphasis falls on pose and drapery rather than facial detail. The turban and long, flowing robes are carefully articulated, with particular attention to the fall of fabric across the shoulders and back. The slight backward tilt of the head and the hand resting at the hip lend the figure a sense of poised authority, contributing to the painting's theatrical balance.

The Carpet Merchant was painted in 1887, at the height of Gérôme's fame, and is a prime example of his ability to fuse observed detail with staged spectacle. While the painting presents a theatrically orchestrated vision of commerce, drawings such as this remind us of the academic precision underlying Gérôme's compositions. His mastery of line and his concern for clarity are evident even in such studies, where the economy of means results in striking presence.