

FRENCH SCHOOL, MID-19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY*Two head studies of an African man*

Oil on canvas

19 x 24 cm

7 1/2 x 9 7/16 in.

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This picture is a beautiful study of a black man's head from two angles, most likely connected to an as yet undiscovered larger work. Such a study shows the prevailing romantic influences of Gericault, whose studies, such as the *Head of a Boy*, (Getty Museum), were to be a lasting legacy for many artists and their ateliers in France. It is possible that the model for this picture was found on the streets of Paris, or in North Africa, where many artists travelled in the nineteenth century. The particular hairstyle and physiognomy of the sitter indicates that he was a native of the Darfur region of Western Sudan. Kristian Davies, author of *The Orientalists: Western Artists In Arabia, The Sahara, Persia & India*, has pointed out that no European artists were active in the Sudan interior in the mid nineteenth century, suggesting that the sitter must have at least moved up to the Mediterranean coast, perhaps to Cairo. Davies suggested an attribution to Georges Clairin.

Adrienne Childs of the University of Maryland, who has been working on African iconography in European nineteenth century art, was struck by how much this sitter resembles the African model for Cordier's bust of Said Abdallah (below).



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