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Eugenio Lucas Velázquez,
Ruins with Arab Figures

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EUGENIO LUCAS VELÁZQUEZ
(Madrid 1817 -1870)

RUINS WITH ARAB FIGURES, 1848

A pair, signed and dated lower right.

Oil on canvas
129 x 100 cm; 50 3/4 x 39 3/8 in.

Provenance

Sala Parés, Barcelona, December 1943, acquired through the dealer Maragall;
The Riviere Collection, Barcelona (acquired from the above);
thence by descent to the present owners.

Literature

J. A. Gaya Nuño, *Eugenio Lucas*, Barcelona 1948, pp. 10 and 43, figs. 3–4.
J. M. Arnaiz, *Eugenio Lucas. Su vida y su obra*, Madrid 1981, nos. 19–20, pp. 296–297.

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Populated by a multitude of figures colorfully dressed in Arab drapes and turbans, crumbling Moorish ruins majestically frame this pair of 1848 orientalist landscapes by Eugenio Lucas Velázquez (1817-1870). The long caravans, the typical clothing and the exotic water-facing setting place these works squarely in the European Romantic fascination with North Africa. The dilapidated arches and fortifications hint at a long-gone prosperity, recalling Spain's own Hispano-Muslim past. Although no specific historical site is depicted, the iconography signals a Mediterranean or Maghrebine landscape at twilight, immersed a dream-like atmosphere. By the late forties such "imaginary Oriental" scenes became indeed a signature theme for the Spanish artist, melding the Romantic taste for dramatic ruins with exoticism.

The pair, conceived to be hung side by side as companion pieces, is executed in free, impastoed oil paint, with a predominance of warm earth-tones offset by bright accents of emerald green and deep crimson. The brushwork is broad and slashing in the architecture and landscape, and minute and *staccato* in the human figures and vegetation. Clouds dominate the sky, and the colouring suggests dusk with a fiery, vibrant hue. Lucas arranges the composition with the ruin's crumbling wall and arches dominating one side of the picture, their broken openings sharply silhouetted by light, while distant hills and sea recede into the background. Small groups of figures and animals - often men on foot or mule conveying cargo - gather at the base of the ruins. These figures are not rendered in detail but by quick, gestural dabs of paint that suggest human presence without modelling individual likeness.

The influence of contemporary landscape painters is evident: Lucas explicitly drew on the example of his friend Genaro Pérez Villaamil when tackling such vistas (Fig. 1). He echoes Villaamil in the steep lighting contrasts and atmospheric clouds, emulating Goya's palette and inventiveness, but his own hand is apparent in the vivacious brushwork. The energetic, gestural execution is genuinely Lucas's own, reflecting the artist's signature bravura. In 1853 he signed *La Plaza partida* (Fig. 2), a picture at once nervous, sketch-like and chromatically opulent - qualities that would become characteristic of his later, copious, and vigorously animated output.¹ The present pair exemplifies the Romantic strand of his work: grand, exotic, and tinged with melancholic grandeur. In fact, later critics have identified these "Puerto Oriental" scenes as Lucas's first fully mature Orientalist landscapes.

Born in Madrid in 1817, Lucas Velázquez trained initially as a cabinetmaker but soon devoted himself to painting. He studied at the Academia de San Fernando and copied works by Velázquez and Goya in the Prado. His patron in Madrid, Don Leandro Álvarez de Torrijos, whose portrait he painted in 1848, supported his studies.² By the

¹ J. A. Gaya Nuño, *Eugenio Lucas*, Barcelona 1948, p. 10.

² See J. M. Arnaiz, *Eugenio Lucas. Su vida y su obra*, Madrid 1981

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1840s Lucas was well integrated into Romantic circles. In 1844 he married Martina Hernández Muñoz, and by the late 1840s exhibited at the National Academy. These *Ruins with Arab Figures* were painted in Lucas's early maturity, after he had established his reputation as an imaginative Romantic. He would later travel to Paris in 1852 and to Morocco in 1859, absorbing Delacroixian and Orientalist influences (Fig. 3).

Note on provenance

The present pair formed part of the celebrated Rivière Collection, whose holdings by 1947 already included works by the Madrid Romantic alongside Sorolla, Fortuny and Nonell, attesting to Fernando Rivière de Caralt's discerning interest in nineteenth-century Spanish painting. Rivière began collecting in 1929 at Sala Parés and, after the Civil War, pursued a rigorously documented acquisition programme under the guidance of the historian Luis Monreal, sourcing pictures from leading Barcelona and Madrid galleries as well as directly from artists' studios. Around 1947 he consolidated the ensemble in a dedicated first-floor apartment at Carrer de Sant Gabriel 15, Barcelona; its nine rooms transformed the collection into a quasi-private museum and a meeting-place for the Amics dels Museus de Catalunya, of which Rivière served as a board member between 1950 and 1964. More than one hundred loans, from the 1951 *Arte en España en tiempo de los Reyes Católicos* to the 1968 *100 Años de Pintura en las Colecciones Barcelonesas*, disseminated its contents nationally and internationally.³

³ S. Vila Gomà, 'Fernando Rivière de Caralt (1904–1992), passió pel col·leccionisme', 2021, pp. 171–195.

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Fig. 1. Genaro Pérez Villaamil, *Village Bullfight*, 1838, oil on canvas, 64 x 81.5 cm.
Málaga, Museo Carmen Thyssen.

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Fig. 2. Eugenio Lucas Velázquez, *La plaza Partida*, 1853, oil on canvas.
La Habana, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes.

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Fig. 3. Eugenio Lucas Velázquez, *Arab Caravans Arriving at the Coast*, c. 1860, oil on canvas, 62.9 x 88.9 cm. Málaga, Museo Carmen Thyssen.

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