

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Jean-Léon Gérôme
(Vesoul 1824 – 1904 Paris)

A merchant carrying a rifle, helmet and fabrics, study for Marchand ambulant au Caire

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 carefully squared drawing is a preparatory study for Gérôme's *Marchand ambulant au Caire* (fig. 1), painted in 1869. The painting, exhibited at the Paris Salon that year, depicts an itinerant trader carrying a lance, helmet and an assortment of goods through the streets of Cairo.



Fig. 1, Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Marchand ambulant au Caire*, 1869, oil on canvas, 79 x 54 cm, Private Collection

The drawing concentrates on the figure of the merchant himself. Gérôme delineates the turbaned head and beard with particular clarity, while the rest of the body is articulated in simple outlines, leaving much of the drapery schematic. The squared grid indicates its use as a transfer drawing, ensuring precise enlargement onto the canvas. The juxtaposition of weapons and fabrics - the lance carried upright, the helmet hanging from the arm - points to the dual nature of the merchant's trade, offering both military and decorative objects.

In the finished painting, Gérôme framed the solitary figure against a sunlit wall of polychrome stonework, transforming him into a symbol of dignity and endurance. Critics of the time admired the work for its archaeological precision and photographic detail. The contrast between the brisk economy of line in the study and the finished canvas's jewel-like finish illustrates Gérôme's working process: a foundation of academic draughtsmanship refined into an Orientalist tableau of dazzling realism.