



## ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation      THE BLACK EXOTIC: TRADITION AND  
ETHNOGRAPHY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
ORIENTALIST ART

Adrienne L. Childs, Doctor of Philosophy, 2005

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This study of select works by Orientalist artists Jean-Léon Gérôme and Charles Cordier charts the trajectory of the idea of the black exotic and investigates the symbolism of black figures in Orientalist painting and sculpture. Representations of blacks in Orientalist art served a complex and nuanced function as nineteenth-century European artists fashioned the exotic. At the nexus of traditional tropes of blackness and the new science of ethnography, they were a critical tool used to construct an imagined Orient within the context of Orientalism—the phenomenal passion for the exotic in the nineteenth century.

Blacks were multifaceted figures that evoked sexuality, servitude, degradation, and primitive culture while providing decorative beauty and the allure of difference. The trope of the exotic

black is rooted in a tradition of representing Africans dating back to the Italian Renaissance. By the nineteenth century ethnographic approaches to race permeated Orientalist ideologies and affected a qualitative shift in how black figures operated in visual culture.

Through a critical analysis of the relationship between exoticism and blackness, this study addresses the need for a more specialized interpretation of how attitudes towards race were encoded in nineteenth-century visual arts.



THE BLACK EXOTIC: TRADITION AND ETHNOGRAPHY IN  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY ORIENTALIST ART

By

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Dedicated to my loving husband Ron

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## Prologue

This dissertation proposes that images of exotic black figures in nineteenth-century Orientalist art were much more than local color. The first chapter, *The Black Exotic*, is a general introduction to the issues and ideas explored in the dissertation. Setting the stage for the discussion of race and exoticism, chapter one also surveys the existing scholarship that intersects with this multivalent topic, and it reviews the historical shifts and evolutions in the Western idea of race, particularly with regard to blackness. Chapter two, *Blacks in the Exotic Tradition*, is an overview of the important art historical issues and images that established the widely-used tropes of blackness between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries. The material provides a theoretical and formal framework for representing exotic blacks that continued to operate into the nineteenth century and beyond. Chapter three, *Gérôme's Black Women: Slavery, Seduction, and Ethnography in Orientalist Painting*, examines nineteenth-century contexts of the black exotic in Orientalist painting and their resonant expression in Gérôme's 1872 *Moorish Bath*. Although Gérôme's work post-dates Cordier's, it is rooted in a longer, more cohesive tradition and therefore precedes the discussion of Cordier's earlier works. Chapter four, *Orientalism, Sculpture and les*

*Noirs exotiques: Charles Cordier*, applies the framework of the black exotic developed in earlier chapters to the artist's busts of blacks. Like chapter three, it demonstrates the critical shift in the nature of Orientalist imagery in general and the image of the black in particular in response to the emerging science of ethnography.

I have been fascinated by the functioning of blacks as signifiers of exoticism for many years. Early in my graduate career I became interested in the exceptional number of images of black women in nineteenth-century French art. While gender in nineteenth-century visual culture was a field of intense scholarly and critical activity, I was incredulous to find at the time no book or article specifically devoted to images of blacks in this field. I decided to direct my scholarly efforts while in graduate school towards exploring the issue of race in European art. My master's thesis, *Serving Exoticism: The Black Female in French Exotic Imagery, 1733 – 1885*, was an initial survey of images of black females as signifiers of sexuality over the course of more than a century. In seminar papers for individual courses, I continued to investigate issues of race and/or exoticism in Western art.

This dissertation has emerged from the ideas introduced in my master's thesis. Since I began this research, some scholarship in this field has begun to develop, specifically in the work of James Smalls and Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby. However, none specifically targets the

function of black figures in Orientalism. I propose that a more in-depth and nuanced discussion of the nexus of race and exoticism can enrich our understanding of the complexities of European Orientalism.

I have read extensively in the fields of nineteenth-century European art, Orientalism, European colonialism, literature, post-colonial theory, the history of Islam and the Middle East, African slavery, and the history of race as a concept in the West. I have consulted secondary sources at the University of Maryland Libraries, the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, the Bibliothèque National, the Musée de l'Homme, and l'Institut du Monde Arab. I have also conducted archival research at museums and archives, such as the Musée d'Orsay, the Dahesh Musuem, The Frick Collection, The Boston Museum of Fine Arts, The Image of the Black in Western Art Archives, and The National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. Based on readings, research, and analysis, this dissertation is an interpretation of the manner in which art manifests and communicates the complexities of race in Western society.

## Chapter 1 The Black Exotic

Yet there is no such seamless and continuous spectrum of alterity: a black oriental is not simply more oriental. Blackness is not an exponential magnifier but a sign associated with various specific histories. Blackness may have generally signified excess or extremity within a French early nineteenth-century racist optics, but that was never all it signified.<sup>1</sup>

Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, 2002

The European notion of the Orient was largely fictitious, filled with dark, sensuous bodies and lascivious, fanatical rulers.

Permeated with light, vivid colors, and melodious sounds, the Orient was a primary destination for those artists, writers, scholars, and travelers who sought to escape the confines of European civilization and experience the exotic.

Although Orientalism was a European phenomenon, at the beginning of the nineteenth century French artists took the lead in the Orientalist movement and Orientalist exotica flourished in French Salons for the next hundred years. French Orientalists in a variety of fields produced an abundant corpus of works. Recurring subjects such as the harem, the battle, the slave market, hunting and ethnographic portraiture virtually monopolized Orientalist visual

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<sup>1</sup> Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 291-92.

culture. The repetition and longevity of Orientalist themes testify to the importance of this trend. Black figures abound in these representations.

A critical component of the European notion of Oriental culture, black Africans populated Orientalist painting and sculpture throughout the century. Compelling and repulsive, colorful and dark, black figures were the ultimate other in the complex topography of Orientalist art. The polar opposite to the white European male consumers of these images, blacks embodied aspects of the Orient such as sexuality, aggression, servitude, barbarism, and ethnographic degeneration. Dating back to the Renaissance, the black Oriental was a complicated construct devised by Europeans that became a popular mode of representing blacks in the nineteenth century. The Orient was the filter through which Europeans explored blackness in the visual arts.

This topic is implicated in a vast amount of material. Rather than an encyclopedic survey, this analysis concentrates on two artists whose works were emblematic of the confluence of race and exoticism in French Orientalist art, Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904) and Charles Cordier (1827-1905). Of the numerous Orientalist artists at work throughout the century, Gérôme and Cordier were particularly invested in the “blackness” of the Orient. Examining the African woman in Gérôme’s *Moorish Bath* of 1872 (figure 1) in the context of

his series of bathers, will dramatize the relationship between the historical topos of exoticism and trends in Orientalist harem imagery, perhaps the most popular genre. An analysis of Cordier's pendant busts *Saïd Abdallah*, 1848 (figure 2), and *Vénus Africaine*, 1851 (figure 3), as well as his *Nègre du Soudan*, 1857 (figure 4), provide the opportunity to examine race and exoticism in the medium of sculpture and their relationship to the decorative arts. As artists and observers, both were interested in the racialized aspects of the Orient. Their representations of blacks and others were considered authentic, even scientific. Gérôme and Cordier approached and utilized black figures in modes that established influential paradigms for representing exotic blacks in their respective media. Their work remains a barometer of nineteenth-century exoticism. This dissertation will follow the trajectory of the exotic black in European art and examine its impact on the uneasy alliance between artistry and ethnography in nineteenth-century Orientalist art.

Both artists embarked on their careers in Second-Empire France and continued to be active professionally through the end of the century. Firsthand interaction with people, landscapes, and cultures was an essential aspect of the Orientalist experience, and both men drew their inspiration from extensive travel to the Orient. Academic artists, they were celebrated during their own time for their Orientalist works. Gérôme is considered the quintessential Orientalist

painter, and Cordier single-handedly established the genre of Orientalist sculpture. The powerful French art establishment sanctioned both artists. They received state commissions, exhibited at Salons, and represented France in Universal Exhibitions throughout Europe. In an era when many artists attempted to break away from restrictive, elitist arts institutions, Gérôme and Cordier invested their careers in the official art world of nineteenth-century France.

Even before the “scramble for Africa” dramatically increased attention on the region in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, greatly influencing the arts and sciences, the face of Orientalism began to change with evolving relationships with Africa. After the conquest of Algeria in 1830, increasing numbers of French artists traveled to North Africa. To a greater extent than before, the Orientalist project became associated with the colonial project. The interest in anthropology and ethnology, a carryover from Enlightenment study of man, increased with the founding of the Ethnological Society in 1839 and the Paris Anthropological Society in 1859.<sup>2</sup> Closer proximity to North Africa brought into relief certain aspects of Oriental culture that were ignored by earlier mythologies. Cultural and physiological differences among the inhabitants of North

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<sup>2</sup> William H. Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870-1900* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982).

Africa became more visible in art of this period. Artists broke away from the generic Oriental framework and attended to specific characteristics of the varied Oriental types. One of those types that became popular was the black African.

European art, both sacred and secular, has been populated by Oriental figures since the Middle Ages. Often depicted in elaborate robes and turbans, these figures were usually ascribed to a generic Oriental culture without specificity. Orientals were associated with a nebulous Islamic “East” that stood in contrast to the Christian culture of Western Europe. Many of these Oriental figures were black, indexing European ideas about Africa while couched in an Oriental framework. A few black characters, such as the black Magus/King, Prester John, or the Queen of Sheba, became popular subjects in European art.<sup>3</sup> However, the majority of images of blacks were servants, slaves, and other generically exotic peripheral characters. These figures are the genesis of the nineteenth-century black Oriental.

Representations of Africans by Orientalist artists were part of a complex matrix of systems and ideologies operating in mid-century Europe. Black figures not only carried the weight of a centuries-old iconographic tradition, they were indicators of contemporary

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Kaplan has devoted substantial scholarship to the image of the black king in European art. Although the topic of this dissertation builds upon the tradition of the black king, this material is outside of the purview of this analysis. Paul Kaplan, “Ruler, Saint and Servant: Blacks in European Art to 1520” (Dissertation, Boston University, 1983).

European ideas of race and primitive cultures. One of the defining features of Orientalism was its engagement with ethnography as it came into public discourse in the middle of the century. Orientalism provided a forum where fictions, fantasies, and conventional tropes of blackness met the new “sciences” of man in the art of the nineteenth century. Works by Gérôme and Cordier were highly influential in their respective media and established the dominant trends in representing exotic blacks throughout Europe in the nineteenth century.

In spite of the long history of European interest in the Orient, Orientalism as defined here has a distinct historical moment. It was a specifically nineteenth-century phenomenon in the arts and letters in which a widespread interest in the Mediterranean Islamic cultures of the Near East and North Africa coalesced into what theorist Edward Said (1935 – 2003) described as a discourse.<sup>4</sup> Discourse is defined as “a strongly bounded area of social knowledge, a system of statements within which the world can be known.”<sup>5</sup> Said applied this concept to the specific context of European engagement with the Orient. For Said, Orientalist discourse was an academic discipline, an imaginative and interpretive enterprise embodying many forms and media,

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<sup>4</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

<sup>5</sup>Ashcroft states that the notion of discourse in post-colonial studies is derived from Michel Foucault’s definition. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 70.

including literature and art. This discourse—an elaborate network of interrelated texts, objects, and ideas—produced knowledge about the Orient in Europe.

Said's theory of Orientalism was based in part on Michel Foucault's theory of discourse.<sup>6</sup> This pivotal theory proposes that knowledge and truth do not exist in an abstract historical realm, but are created through discursive formations, or discourse.<sup>7</sup> He challenges us to question continuities and unities implied by a discourse and recognize that they possess their own limits, divisions, transformations, and temporality.<sup>8</sup> Said uses Foucault to dismantle the flawed unity of the Orientalist discourse, or the various statements, images, utterances, ideas about the Orient, and reveal its ability to wield power based on the creation of knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

In the context of the colonial presence that Europe was actively establishing in the Orient, the knowledge created through Orientalist ideologies and texts emanated from a position of power. Even though

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<sup>6</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>7</sup>Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 71-72. Foucault defines a discursive formation as a regularity between statements such as a system of dispersion, types of statements or thematic choices. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Said, *Orientalism*..

it was purportedly above the political, Orientalist knowledge presupposed European dominion and authority. Orientalist art and literature were among the primary media that upheld European power over the Orient. This larger matrix was a politicized landscape, permeated with ideologies of power and superiority. I propose that the image of the black was essential to fashioning the Orient as a backwards, archaic, often barbaric culture that, although inferior to Europe, was alluringly exotic.

Blacks became increasingly popular in painting and sculpture over the second half of the nineteenth century. Blacks in the Oriental setting punctuated the gulf between the Orient and Europe in their opposition to the European racial and cultural superiority. Even though degrading stereotypes often framed black figures, blacks were also depicted as objects of beauty and were treated as decorative embellishments. The ambivalent figure of the exotic black, both degenerate and beautiful, helped create the spicy tension of the imagined Oriental world.

As the fields of ethnography and anthropology developed in tandem with colonial expansion and exploration over the century, the Orient became a site of scientific inquiry. Interest in the physical and cultural differences in humans permeated Western culture in the nineteenth century. Consequently, Orientalist art adopted a documentary flavor as artists became more aware of and involved in

popular ethnography. Some Orientalist artists became committed to the task of recording the peoples and cultures of the contemporary Orient. Gérôme and Cordier incorporated ethnographic sensibilities into their finely tuned images of the Orient. In this context, images of blacks shifted from the stereotypical tropes of past traditions to representations of “true” racial types. They served to authenticate imagery that nevertheless remained grounded in the fictions of Orientalism.

### **State of Existing Scholarship**

The literature surrounding this topic is multidisciplinary in nature and broad in scope. Because there are so few secondary sources dealing specifically with the image of the black in European exoticism, I have conducted the research for this project at the intersection of art historical, cultural, and literary studies. However, the nature of exoticism in general and Orientalism in particular has generated significant scholarship over the past quarter century.

### ***Orientalism***

Edward Said’s 1979 text *Orientalism* represents a milestone in scholarship regarding the relationship between East and West.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Interdisciplinary in nature, the book characterizes Orientalism as culture in the service of imperialism, binding together culture and politics through an analysis of nineteenth-century literature and scholarship. Although Said concentrates largely on the written word, his notion that power, authority, and knowledge frame the exchange between East and West and qualitatively affect western cultural production is evident in European art of the nineteenth century.

Said characterizes the notion of the “Orient” as a tradition of thought, vocabulary, and imagery that exists only in European experience. As studies of Orientalism proliferated in various disciplines, scholars and critics began to particularize the larger field, focusing on how more isolated ideological strands function within the general construct. Under the rubric of post-colonial theory, issues of colonialism, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality that are endemic to this type of representation gained critical attention. Although Said’s original construct in *Orientalism* provided a general framework for critical analysis of the relationship between Europe and its “Others,” it did not address the problem of race or the significance of Africa within the context of Orientalism. However, in *Culture and Imperialism*, his follow-up to *Orientalism*, Said utilizes his theoretical stance to examine several key texts. In a discussion of Verdi’s opera

*Aida* and Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* Said considers ideas of Africa.<sup>11</sup>

The gaps left by Said concerning such issues as Africa and feminist theory have engendered criticism by some, while providing opportunities for others to conduct fruitful investigations into new areas. This dialogue has stimulated expansion of Said's premise into more nuanced analyses of western conceptions of the Orient. Even though Said has triumphed due to the staying power of his ideas and their multiple applications, the criticisms are an important part of our understanding of Orientalism as a theory.<sup>12</sup> Condensing the more than twenty years of engagement and controversy surrounding Said's text, A.L. Macfie has published a text also entitled *Orientalism*. This

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<sup>11</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). While Said's work is widely accepted as a major contribution to the intellectual history of colonialism, it has sparked numerous criticisms. Many respondents from disparate fields have found Said's construction dangerously polemical and essentialist. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). See: James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). Dennis Porter, "Orientalism and Its Problems," in *Colonial Discourse and Post Colonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994). Said has responded to his critics, see: Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," *Race and Class* 27, no. 2 (1985), Edward W. Said, "East isn't East: the impending end of the age of orientalism," *The Times Literary Supplement*, February 3 1995.

work provides a useful summary of the concept of Orientalism, pre- and post-Said, and charts the book's impact in the world of scholarship and criticism since its 1979 publication.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Exhibitions and General Texts***

The publication of Said's *Orientalism* marked a turning point in the art historical literature on Orientalism, as was the case in many other disciplines.<sup>14</sup> Prior to Said, Orientalist scholarship focused on the work of the painter/traveler as a medium through which European audiences could capture the beauty and mystery of exotic lands, and as a conduit for understanding the culture of an overseas empire.<sup>15</sup> The scholarship was largely descriptive and devoid of critical analysis of the complexities of imperial or colonial relationships. Jean Alzard's 1930 publication *l'Orient et la Peinture Française* served as a major text early in the twentieth century

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<sup>13</sup> A.L. Macfie, *Orientalism* (London: Longman, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> For example, see the following on poetry, classical drama, and nineteenth-century theatre. See: Emily A. Haddad, *Orientalist Poetics: The Islamic Middle East in nineteenth-century English and French poetry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002). Michèle Longino, *Orientalism in French Classical Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Angela C. Pao, *The Orient of the Boulevards: Exoticism, Empire, and Nineteenth-Century French Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> An early article in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* served as an overview of French Orientalism. Léonce Bénédite, "Les Peintres Orientalistes Français," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1899): 239-74.

surveying Orientalism in nineteenth-century France.<sup>16</sup> Published as a commemoration of the 1830 conquest of Algeria and a prelude to the 1931 colonial exposition in Paris, the book celebrated the accomplishments of many of the painter/travelers who engaged with North Africa.

More recently, there has been an increase in the commercial and scholarly interest in European Orientalist art in the United States. This is partially due to the impact of Said's reexamination of the Orientalist paradigm. To date, a large portion of the scholarship regarding art and Orientalism is in the form of exhibition catalogues. Donald A Rosenthal's 1982 *Orientalism: The Near East in French Painting 1800 – 1880* was the first major treatment of European Orientalism published in English.<sup>17</sup> Rosenthal stated that the exhibition and catalogue were intended to introduce the North American audience to the vast field of French Orientalist painting.<sup>18</sup> Although completed after the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, Rosenthal expressly avoids Saidian politics and instead investigates

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<sup>16</sup> Jean Alzard, *L'Orient et la Peinture Française au XIXe Siècle: d'Eugène Delacroix à Auguste Renoir* (Paris: Plon, 1930).

<sup>17</sup> Donald A. Rosenthal, *Orientalism: The Near East in French Painting 1800-1880* (Rochester: Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

“aesthetic quality and historical interest.”<sup>19</sup> Edited by Mary Anne Stevens, *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse, The Allure of North Africa and The Nears East* accompanied a major 1984 exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. and featured several essays on the European artistic encounter with the Orient.<sup>20</sup>

The Art Gallery of New South Wales mounted the 1997 exhibition *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*, accompanied by a major catalogue edited by Roger Benjamin.<sup>21</sup> Benjamin’s catalogue included essays incorporating some of the more critical issues regarding colonialism, sexuality, and empire. In 2000, *Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870 – 1930* was published in association with an exhibition produced by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. This publication focused on the American incarnation of the Orientalist tradition that had received little consideration.

American institutions were not alone in the Said-influenced revival of interest in European Orientalism. Many French museums revisited the art and literature surrounding their relationship with the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Anne Stevens, ed., *The Orientalists: Delacroix to Matisse: The Allure of North Africa and the Near East* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> Roger Benjamin et al., *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales: 1997).

Orient. In 1975, the Musée Cantini Marseille published *L'Orient en Question 1825 – 1875: De Missolonghi à Suez ou l'Orientalisme de Delacroix à Flaubert*.<sup>22</sup> *Les Peintres Orientalistes (1850 – 1914)*, an exhibition mounted by the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau, was an attempt to extend the examination of the French engagement with the Orient beyond the parameters of the Musée Cantini exhibition, to the outbreak of World War I. One interesting feature of this exhibition catalogue is a list of more than 475 names of artists whom they claim to be the “Peintres Orientalistes Français.”<sup>23</sup> This demonstrates the extent to which French artists invested themselves in Orientalism during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and into the twentieth century.

The 1987 exhibition *Exotische Welten, Europäische Phantasien*, a German response to the growing interest in the history of exoticism, amassed a large body of materials and information on European exoticism from the fifteenth century to the twentieth century.<sup>24</sup> While

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<sup>22</sup> Marielle Latour, Evelyne Lehalle, and Marie-Christine Bouillé, *L'Orient en Question 1825 - 1875: de Missolonghi à Suez ou l'Orientalisme de Delacroix à Flaubert* (Marseille: Musée Cantini Marseille, 1975). See also: Marie-Noël Pinotde Villechenon, *L'Orientalisme dans les collections des Musées de Tours* (Tours: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tours, 1980).

<sup>23</sup> Philippe Comte, *Les Peintres Orientalistes (1850-1914)* (Pau: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1983).

<sup>24</sup> *Exotische Welten: Europäische Phantasien*, (Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen Württembergischer Kunstverein, 1987).

the German exhibition had a wide scope, encompassing art from around Europe that focused on a variety of locales such as Japan, Africa, and Turkey, the 1994 exhibition *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art 1730 – 1930* looked at the Western response to Egypt in particular.<sup>25</sup> Both exhibitions featured a variety of media including jewelry, furniture, popular prints, and photographs, thus widening our conception of the extent of the impact of Orientalism.

These are a few of the many exhibition catalogues published over the past 30 years concentrating on Orientalism and exoticism in art. They have served to document many forgotten artists and images and provide an abundance of materials that stand as a record of the European obsession with the exotic.

Outside of the purview of the museum exhibition, other notable publications provide a broad overview of European Orientalism. Lynne Thornton has published several works, including *The Orientalists: Painter-Travellers* and *Du Maroc Aux Indes: Voyages en Orient au XVIIIe et XIXe siècle*.<sup>26</sup> *Orientalism in Art* by Christine Peltre<sup>27</sup> and *The*

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<sup>25</sup> *Egyptomania: Egypt in Western Art 1730 - 1930*, (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Lynne Thornton, *Du Maroc Aux Indes: Voyages en Orient au XVIIIe et XIXe siècle* (Paris: ACR Edition, 1998), Lynne Thornton, *The Orientalists Painter-Travellers* (Paris: ACR Édition, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Christine Peltre, *Orientalism in Art* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998). Peltre also published a book concentrating on the Orientalist

*Orient in Western Art* by Gérard-Georges Lemaire also supply a generalized panoramic view of the European engagement with the orient.<sup>28</sup> These works offer a host of important images but very little scholarly and or critical interpretation.

In response to what she considered outmoded approaches to Orientalist art history perpetuated in exhibitions such as those by Rosenthal and Stevens, and texts by Gerald Ackerman,<sup>29</sup> Çeylan Tawardos criticized the manner in which art historical scholarship ignored Michel Foucault's notion of discourse as utilized by Said, effectively excusing art from the operations of power and knowledge. In a 1988 article, she claimed that traditional art historical scholarship was content merely to name political interests as a parallel sphere while concentrating on "an analysis of thematic

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artist as traveler. See: Christine Peltre, *L'Atelier du Voyage: Les Peintres en Orient au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Lemaire's analysis spans the 15<sup>th</sup> through the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Gérard-Georges Lemaire, *The Orient in Western Art* (Cologne: Könemann, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> Ackerman's work is primarily associated with Jean-Léon Gérôme. See: Ibid, Gerald M. Ackerman, "Gérôme's Oriental Paintings and the Western Genre Tradition," *Arts Magazine* 60, no. 7 (1986), Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme* (Paris: ACR Édition, 2000), Gerald M. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme: His Life, His Work 1824-1904* (Paris: ACR Edition, 1997).

continuities, artistic principles and biographical anecdotes.”<sup>30</sup> She stated that art historical scholarship

systematically declines to describe the complex system of relations between knowledge and power as enunciated in the discourse of nineteenth-century Orientalist painting (whether consciously or unconsciously), because to do so would challenge seriously the discipline’s status as an independent and autonomous field of ‘pure’ knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

Tawardos’s contentions characterize a crisis in art historical scholarship across the board as it moved from the old to the “new art history.”<sup>32</sup> With the wider use of critical approaches to the history of art, the study of Orientalism came to the forefront of art historical practices in critical theory.

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<sup>30</sup> Çeylan Tawardos, “Foreign Bodies: Art History and the Discourse of 19th-Century Orientalist Art,” *Third Text*, no. 3/4 (1988): 56.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.: 57.

<sup>32</sup> The “new art history” often refers to the developments in the field over the last third of the twentieth century. In the foreword to the 1996 publication *Critical Terms for Art History*, Robert S. Nelson describes the crisis in art history regarding the methods of incorporating critical theory into the discipline. He charts this process as beginning in the 1970s and continuing through the 1990s. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds., *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

## ***Feminist Approaches to Orientalism***

One arena in which more critical approaches to Orientalist art have flourished is in women's studies, particularly the history of women and feminist theory. Linda Nochlin's 1983 article "The Imaginary Orient" was a direct response to the absence of political ideology in Rosenthal's exhibition (as mentioned above) bringing to the forefront concerns of gender and sexuality inherent in Orientalist production.<sup>33</sup> Following Nochlin's feminist approach to Orientalism, Marilyn Brown's article "The Harem Dehistoricized: Ingres's *Turkish Bath*" deconstructed the infamous work of art touching on issues of gender, sexuality, and race.<sup>34</sup> Reina Lewis's *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* takes into account women as producers of Orientalist art and literature, therefore, part of the western power structure as outlined by Said. Yet she problematizes the complicated role of women as agents of Orientalist discourse and illuminates the differences inherent in their views.<sup>35</sup> Western constructions of Oriental femininity as evidenced in colonial Algerian

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<sup>33</sup> Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," in *The Politics of Vision* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>34</sup> Marilyn R. Brown, "The Harem Dehistoricized: Ingres' Turkish Bath," *Arts Magazine* 61 (1987): 58 - 68.

<sup>35</sup> Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (London: New York: Routledge: 1996).

postcards are discussed in Malek Alloula's *The Colonial Harem*.<sup>36</sup> In direct response to Said's *Orientalism*, Meyda Yegenoglu's *Colonial fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism* uses post-colonial theory to examine the figure of the veiled Oriental woman.<sup>37</sup> A significant addition to the art historical literature surrounding the oriental woman is *Multiple Wives, Multiple Pleasures: Representing the Harem, 1800 – 1875* by Joan DelPlato. The work is a history of how the English and French understood the harem in nineteenth-century art and literature. DelPlato provides an examination of the colonial context for the image of the harem and engages issues such as slavery and morality. While DelPlato discusses the various incarnations of black figures that populate harem imagery, the role of the black is not her primary focus.

### ***Art and Colonialism***

Since the advent of Said's politically charged theory of Orientalist production and the ensuing developments in post-colonial theory, art historians have explored various aspects of Orientalist art

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<sup>36</sup> Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>37</sup> Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

in terms of its role in colonial and imperial structures of power.<sup>38</sup> Beth Fowkes Tobin takes on the issue of English imperial/colonial culture and visual arts in *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting*.<sup>39</sup> Tobin approaches the wide scope of British imperial pursuits in areas ranging from the West Indies and North America to India. Of particular relevance to this study, she devotes an entire chapter to the image of the black servant in domestic portraiture.<sup>40</sup> James R. Ryan analyzes the photographic image during the Victorian era in *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*.<sup>41</sup> Regarding French art, Todd Porterfield's *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism* approaches art and empire through investigating specific objects and events such as the paintings of the Egyptian Campaign and the establishment of the Musée de l'Égypte.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> It is widely accepted that Said's Orientalism was one of the key texts that has led to the development of post – colonial theory. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*.

<sup>39</sup> Beth Fowkes Tobin, *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. See chapter 1, "Bringing the Empire Home: The Black Servant in Domestic Portraiture," pp. 27 – 55.

<sup>41</sup> James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> Todd Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

In her recent book, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France*, Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby performs an in-depth analysis of six canonical French paintings that embody issues of French imperial history and identity. In each case, she situates the painting within a specific imperial moment. For example, the relationship between revolutionary France and French colonial Saint Domingue contextualizes the case of Girodet's *Portrait of Citizen Belley, Ex-Representative of the Colonies*, 1797.<sup>43</sup> She not only provides a sense of the historical figure of Belley and his complicated role as a black revolutionary in Paris, she extends her analysis to concepts of slavery, race, and sexuality that inform this image and the era in which it was produced. Although I do not uniformly agree with her conclusions, Grigsby's rigorous attempts to re-examine the implications of colonial policies and theories, notions of race and nationality constitute a significant milestone in the scholarship surrounding art in the service of empire.

French scholars have more recently followed the lead of the Americans and the British through an expanding body of scholarship regarding the role of French art and literature of the colonial project. The 1988 conference proceedings, *L'Exotisme*, compiled scholarly

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<sup>43</sup> Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France*.

papers attempting to define exoticism in French history, literature and art over a range of periods. The majority of the scholarship by the French regarding the relationship between colonialism and the image addresses the latter part of the nineteenth century into the twentieth century, the era of concerted colonialist incursions into Africa. The literature examines public ethnography and propaganda, more so than the “fine arts.” *Images et Colonies: Iconographie et propagande coloniale sur l’Afrique française de 1880 à 1962*, assembles articles on a wide variety of colonial imagery, from illustrated journals and photography to advertising. The well-illustrated volume *Le Paris Noir* charts images and experiences of blacks in Paris from 1878 through the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup>

### **Literature**

The discipline that has perhaps experienced the richest engagement with the cultural manifestation of Orientalism is literary studies. In this arena we find substantial use of critical theory. Since the appearance of Said’s *Orientalism*, there have been countless publications characterizing the nature of European and American

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<sup>44</sup> Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Laurent Gervereau, eds., *Images et Colonies: Iconographie et propagande coloniale sur l’Afrique française de 1880 à 1962* (l’Unesco, 1993), Pascal Blanchard, Eric Deroo, and Gilles Manceron, eds., *Le Paris Noir* (Paris: Éditions Hazan, 2002), Alain Buisine, Norbert Dodille, and Claude Duchet, eds., *L’Exotisme* (Paris: Diffusion Didier-Erudition, 1988).

Orientalist literary traditions as systems of knowledge and instruments of power.

The Orientalist discourse is a vast textual body that includes non-fiction, fiction, science, poetry, travel writing, and translation. Following Said's lead many scholars such as Rana Kabbani, Chris Bongie, Malani Johar Schueller, Irvin Cemil Schick, Madeleine Dobie, and others, have investigated a broad spectrum of Orientalist texts. Their scholarship explores the manner in which textual discourses can construct ideas of gender, sexuality, race, religion, and history while both reflecting and affecting the colonial encounter.<sup>45</sup>

As is often the case between the fields of art history and literature, the scholarship on Orientalist literature has provided a wealth of conceptual models utilized in art historical arenas. This is particularly significant with regard to the nineteenth century because

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<sup>45</sup> The books and articles on Orientalism and literature are too numerous to list here. While they take a variety of positions regarding Edward Said's theories of Orientalism, they uniformly acknowledge his seminal work even if they claim to offer a more nuanced, particularized reading of the material. I offer some of the texts that have been influential in my scholarship. Chris Bongie, *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism and the Fin-de-Siècle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), Madeleine Dobie, *Foreign Bodies: Gender, Language, and Culture in French Orientalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), Irvin Cemil Schick, *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alterist Discourse* (London: Verso, 1999), Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

the literature was often the source for themes in visual art. Because of the symbiotic relationship between Orientalist literature and art, much of the scholarship interrogates both the literary and the visual worlds. Works by Rana Kabbani, Joanna de Groot, and Ruth Bernard Yeazell navigate between image and text based on thematic similarities.<sup>46</sup> Joan Del Plato fully integrates her discussion of harem imagery with its literary counterpart.<sup>47</sup> This investigation of European ideas about exoticism as embodied in text is a fruitful method of broadening our understanding of Orientalist visual production. However, heavy reliance on literary precedents and influences can sometimes overshadow the significance of art historical models and traditions. Literary scholars who use art to illustrate a theme or issue at times disregard the importance of artistic training, traditions, and developments in the field that invariably influence the artistic process.

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<sup>46</sup> Joanna de Groot, "Sex' and 'Race': The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century," in *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary studies of gender in the nineteenth century*, ed. Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall (London: Routledge, 1989), Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature*.

<sup>47</sup> Joan DelPlato, *Multiple Wives, Multiple Pleasures: Representing the Harem, 1800-1875* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 2002)..

## ***Representing Blacks***

While some of the literature on Orientalism cites its complicated racial constructs, to date there has been no attempt to isolate and interrogate the manner in which blackness functions within the Orientalist paradigm. However, there are numerous publications addressing the image of the black in a variety of contexts.

The first attempt at a comprehensive investigation of the iconography of blacks in the Western world did not appear until 1960 when the Menil Foundation initiated a 15-year research project focusing on the subject. The research culminated in the landmark series of publications *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, the first of which was published in 1976.<sup>48</sup> This work was part of an explosion of scholarship during the 1960s and 1970s on the history of African Americans, Africa, and the worldwide black Diaspora.<sup>49</sup> The two

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<sup>48</sup> To date only two of the four planned volumes have been published. See Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, ed. Ladislav Bugner, IV vols., vol. IV, *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (Houston: Menil Foundation, Inc., 1989), Jean Vercoutter et al., *The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1 (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1976).

<sup>49</sup> A few influential texts from this era are as follows: Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), David C. Driskell, *Two Centuries of Black American Art* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976), Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

volumes in the series are large repositories of images of blacks spanning centuries and representing a variety of subjects. The intent was not to produce a comprehensive study of how the West regarded blacks, but "...the Foundation and the scholars entrusted with the work have tried first and foremost to outline the most promising themes for future studies."<sup>50</sup>

The scholarly world responded, and is still responding, to the challenge of interpreting the wealth of material uncovered by this study. Two 1990 publications made significant contributions to this field of inquiry, particularly regarding black images in American art. *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710 – 1940* by Guy McElroy was published in association with an exhibition of the same name at the Corcoran Gallery of Art. The text brought to life the function of painting and sculpture in the processes of oppression, both subtle and overt, in American culture. Albert Boime's 1990 text *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* combined a breadth of imagery with a socio-political point of view positioning the image of the black as operative in structures of racism, slavery, and colonialism. The strength of Boime's work is his impressive compilation of contextual history. However, his tendency to jump to conclusions based on assumptions and suppositions

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<sup>50</sup> Vercoutter et al., *The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire*, VII.

compromises his work. His work exemplifies the dangers of reconstructing historical attitudes toward race while operating in a contemporary culture in which race is an explosive political and cultural issue.

Others have walked this tightrope more successfully. William H. Schneider's *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870 – 1900* was an in-depth study of images of Africans in the French penny press.<sup>51</sup> Schneider reconstructed the context of their publication, relating each image to the historical events surrounding its creation. Jan Nederveen Pieterse also took on the issue of blacks in popular imagery. His book *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, like *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, attempted a study of the topic from the sixteenth century through the twentieth century. His sources were primarily prints, book illustrations, and advertisements. The populist nature of the imagery, from cartoons to postcards, reveals the ubiquitous character of distorted, prejudicial racial imagery and serves to underscore similar constructs in more traditional art forms.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), Schneider, *An Empire for the Masses: The French Popular Image of Africa, 1870-1900*.

<sup>52</sup> Marcus Wood applied a similar method to the representation of slavery in his recent publication. See: Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory:*

The most progressive as well as comprehensive scholarship regarding the representation of blacks in Western culture is in the literary field. In particular, an enormous body of Africanist literature in French exists that has been the subject of a well-established scholarly tradition. Roger Mercier and Léon François Hoffman conducted major studies of the black in French literature in the mid-twentieth century.<sup>53</sup> Hoffman's 1973 survey of Africans in French literature and poetry, *Le Nègre Romantique*, acknowledged the presence of racism and political ideology inherent in the representation of blacks by the French. William B. Cohen's 1980 *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530 – 1880* attempts a comprehensive overview of the French involvement with Africans regarding scientific and philosophical ideologies as well as historical encounters with slavery and colonialism. Cohen's scholarship, broad based and well documented, brings to light the extraordinary breadth of the French interest in and involvement with Africa since the sixteenth century.

As in other areas, Edward Said's exemplification of discourse in *Orientalism* influenced a new wave of scholarship regarding Africanist

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*Visual representations of slavery in England and America 1780 - 1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>53</sup> Léon-François Hoffmann, *Le Nègre Romantique* (Paris: Payot, 1973). Roger Mercier, *L'Afrique Noire dans la Littérature Française; Les Premières Images (XVIIe - XVIIIe Siècles)* (Dakar: Publications de la Section de Langues et Littératures, 1962).

literature in French. Christopher L. Miller's *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* is indebted to Said, Hoffman, Mercier, and Cohen.<sup>54</sup> Like Said's concept that the Orient has no actual correlate, Miller contends that Africanist discourse is not the study of Africa, "but of the conditions within certain French and other European utterances that give rise to that peculiar empty profile called 'Africa.'" <sup>55</sup> Miller recognizes the similarities between Orientalism and Africanist discourses, as well as their differences.<sup>56</sup>

An increased interest in feminist theory and postcolonialism in the 1980s and 1990s spawned a generation of scholars who investigated European culture and ideologies of blackness. Jennifer DeVere Brody's 1998 *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* tackles such issues as sexuality, miscegenation, and minstrelsy in Victorian England.<sup>57</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting examines the sexualized black female in French culture from the Hottentot Venus to Josephine Baker in *Black Venus: Sexualized*

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<sup>54</sup> Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), xi.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 - 23.

<sup>57</sup> Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

*Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*, 1999.<sup>58</sup>

Brett A. Berliner's *Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France*, 2002, deals with blacks in the French social imagination from the end of World War I to 1930, the Jazz Age.<sup>59</sup> This new wave of scholarship is a testament to the relevance and fertility of this scholarly arena.<sup>60</sup>

Within the scope of the expanding field of European representations of blacks in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the image of the black in French art of the period has received relatively little scholarly attention. The term art is used here to denote painting and sculpture as opposed to popular imagery such as illustration or advertisement.<sup>61</sup> This distinction would have been relevant to nineteenth-century viewers who understood painting and

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<sup>58</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Brett A. Berliner, *Ambivalent Desire: The Exotic Black Other in Jazz-Age France* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

<sup>60</sup>Two recent dissertations at the intersection of race, critical theory and French culture are Dana S. Hale, "Races on Display: Representations of the French Colonial Native, 1886 - 1931" (Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1998), Katherin Anne Holderbaum, "This Other Darkness: Exotic Bodies and the Gaze of Romanticism" (Dissertation, University of Southern California, 1995).

<sup>61</sup> For images of blacks in popular French imagery see: Raymond Bachollet et al., *NéгриPub: l'image des Noirs dans la publicité* (Paris: Somogy, 1987), Abedlaziz Ghozzi, *The Orientalist Poster* (Casablanca: Malika Editions, 1997).

sculpture to be at the zenith of a hierarchy of media. Interestingly, the scholarship echoes this split. Scholars have been more reluctant to examine nineteenth-century art, a field known for its conservative and elitist scholarly tradition, in terms of its part in perpetuating racist and colonialist agendas. However, the tide is changing as exemplified in the work of Albert Boime and Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby as discussed above.

An influential article by Sander L. Gilman in 1985 had a significant impact on the development of ideas regarding the nexus of race and art in the nineteenth century. “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature” linked the nineteenth-century discourse surrounding the black body, and other “anomalous” physiognomies, with the art of the period.<sup>62</sup> Although Gilman’s primary field is the history of medical discourse, his discussion of the “Hottentot Venus” in relation to Manet, Picasso, and other “modernists” extracted their work from the realm of the purely aesthetic into the battleground of social issues of the period.

Similarly, Griselda Pollock grounded her discussion of modernity in Manet’s *Baudelaire’s Mistress Reclining*, 1862, and *Olympia*, 1863, at

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<sup>62</sup> Sander L. Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature,” in “Race,” *Writing and Difference*, ed. H.L. Gates (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). See also Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1985).

the intersection of race, science, sexuality, and Orientalism in her 1999 book *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*.<sup>63</sup>

James Smalls's 1991 dissertation *Esclave, Nègre, Noir: The Representation of Blacks in Late- Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century French Art* offers an overview of blacks in French art of the nineteenth century. His intent was to force a re-evaluation of the belief that the French always maintained benevolent attitudes toward blacks through a survey of the art within the context of slavery and abolition, colonialism and science.<sup>64</sup> Smalls's 2004 article "Slavery is a Woman: "Race," Gender, and Visuality in Marie Benoist's *Portrait d'une négresse* (1800)" is an interpretation of a portrait of a black slave by a woman artist and the absence of agency for both the slave and the female artist.<sup>65</sup> My own master's thesis, *Serving Exoticism: The Black Female in French Exotic Imagery, 1733 – 1885*, examined the representation of black women in French art of the eighteenth and

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<sup>63</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London: Routledge, 1999). see chapter 9.

<sup>64</sup> James Smalls, "Esclave, Nègre, Noir: The Representation of Blacks in Late-Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century French Art" (Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1991), 1.

<sup>65</sup> James Smalls, "Slavery is a Woman: "Race," Gender, and Visuality in Marie Benoist's *Portrait d'une négresse* (1800)," in *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* (2003).

nineteenth centuries.<sup>66</sup> This dissertation refines my previous scholarship through a closer, more nuanced examination of trends, methods, and modes of representing blacks in French art.

### **Historicizing Race**

Characterized by an apparently endless plasticity, Africa was rendered the subject of Europe's positive and negative projections. Either monstrous or noble, Africans were reduced to a monolithic substance that mirrored whatever qualities Europe was assumed to possess, fear, or secretly desire.<sup>67</sup>

T. Carlos Jacques, 1997

Images of exotic blacks that abound in nineteenth-century Orientalist art are a continuation of a tradition in European art that dates back centuries, yet they reflect notions of race that simply did not exist in earlier eras. Throughout the centuries, images of blacks represented specific art historical issues and contexts as well as shifting understandings of race that permeated religious, philosophical, literary, and scientific discourses.<sup>68</sup> In spite of distinct

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<sup>66</sup> Adrienne L. Childs, "Serving Exoticism: The Black Female in French Exotic Imagery, 1733-1885" (MA Thesis, University of Maryland, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> T. Carlos Jacques, "From Savages and Barbarians to Primitives: Africa, Social Typologies, and History in Eighteenth-Century French Philosophy," *History and Theory* 36, no. 2 (1997): 201.

<sup>68</sup> Ivan Hannaford has convincingly argued that race, as a biological concept did not exist until the eighteenth century. I use this term regarding blacks from antiquity to the present for the sake of

differences in the way that race, specifically blackness, was understood and fashioned over the course of Western history, representations of exotic Africans survived epistemological shifts and consistently symbolized extreme difference in European arts and letters. While not an attempt to describe the history of race in Western consciousness, this review will survey some of the key concepts that framed the image of the exotic black.

An extensive body of scholarship exists exploring the development of the idea of race in the West.<sup>69</sup> Grounding our understanding of representations of blacks in the intellectual climate from which they emerge helps to avoid “presentism” in the discussion of historical problems of race. According to Michael Banton, presentism “is the tendency to interpret other historical periods in the terms of the concepts, values, and understanding of the present time.”<sup>70</sup> Banton warns that some scholars overlook differences in the meaning of the word race and interpret the racial attitudes of earlier centuries in terms of their own generation’s understanding of biological variation and condemn anything that “smacks of racial

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consistency. Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>69</sup> For an overview of the concept of race as it developed in Western ideology see *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8.

intolerance” to a modern reader.<sup>71</sup> Clearly, racial intolerance, stereotyping, fear, hatred, and gross misunderstanding characterized Western knowledge of Africans, but these ideas flourished in various frameworks that are essential to our understanding of the different qualities of historical images.

Texts and images have recounted European encounters with Africans since antiquity. From the earliest sources, differences were perceived and schematized into tropes that shaped the way Europeans understood Africans. Ancient writers described monstrous races that inhabited Ethiopia (the term often used for Africa in antiquity) and other remote locales. Writers such as Herotodus in the fourth century B.C.E. and Pliny the Elder in the first century C.E. wrote about strange creatures that were often deformed, lustful, and cannibalistic. Those living in the mysterious lands such as Africans among others, were barbarians, outside of what ancient Greeks considered civilization.<sup>72</sup> However, a monolithic view of blacks by Europeans has never existed as ancient authors also idealized

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<sup>71</sup> Michael Banton, “The Idiom of Race: A critique of presentism,” in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*, ed. Les Back and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 2000), 62.

<sup>72</sup> A. Buluda Itandala, “European Images of Africa from Early Times to the Eighteenth Century,” in *Images of Africa: Stereotypes and Realities*, ed. Daniel M. Mengara (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2001), 63.

blacks.<sup>73</sup> The Greek historian Herodotus referred to Ethiopians as the “tallest and finest of all humans.”<sup>74</sup> Both idealized and demonized, blacks were part of what Gay L. Byron calls “ethno-political rhetoric” that was deeply ambiguous.

In the early Christian era, ideas about blacks and blackness shifted from a pagan to Christian context. Byron contends that references to Egyptians/Egypt, Ethiopians/Ethiopia, and Blacks/blackness in ancient Christian literature came to symbolize the extremes within early Christianity, the most remote manifestations of Christian identity.<sup>75</sup> On one hand, blacks symbolized immoral behavior, sin, sexuality, and demonic behavior. On the other hand, Biblical figures of the Ethiopian eunuch and Ethiopian Moses were revered as models of virtue.<sup>76</sup> The Christian worldview would be the framework for western ideas about blacks until the eighteenth century.

The Christian European relationship with Africans began to evolve when Muslim Arabs conquered North Africa and the Iberian

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<sup>73</sup> Frank M. Snowden, Jr. found that modern commentators have misread images of black from antiquity and that color prejudice did not exist in the ancient world. Jr. Frank M. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

<sup>74</sup> Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002), 32.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

Peninsula between the seventh and twelfth centuries. The rise of the trans-Saharan slave trade brought many black Africans to Muslim North Africa. In turn, many black Africans participated in the conquest of the Iberian Peninsula. The links between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe were established through Islamic trade and conquest. David Brion Davis pinpoints the Muslim conquest of Central Europe as the event that bonds Islam and Africa in the mind of the European: "Since the Berber dynasties (Almoravids and Almohades) had deployed armies that included thousands of black slaves, *all* of Africa became equated in many Christian minds with the Islamic enemy."<sup>77</sup> Christian Europeans referred to Muslim Arabs as "Moors" or "Saracens" and blacks as "Blackamoors." The black African and the Islamic invader were eventually conflated in the term "Moor." Although used liberally to describe Arabs and others from North Africa, this term would come to define the image of the black Oriental.<sup>78</sup> Christian fear of and rivalry with the growing threat of Islam would be grafted on to the figure of the Moor, who often represented the most savage example of the Muslim infidel. European

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<sup>77</sup> David Brion Davis, "Constructing Race: A Reflection," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, no. 54 (1997): 16.

<sup>78</sup>The term Moor was ambiguous and became associated with Arabs, blacks and sometimes whites. Gustav Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 27. See also: Itandala, "European Images of Africa from Early Times to the Eighteenth Century," 65-67.

ideas of the Muslim Mediterranean Orient overwhelmingly shaped the idea of blackness and Africa in the Christian era and had a critical impact on how blacks were characterized in Europe through the nineteenth century.

The early modern/Renaissance era, beginning about 1500, saw the expansion of European overseas empires, the rise of the slave trade, colonial economies based on slavery, and the increased presence of Africans in Europe.<sup>79</sup> These factors directly influenced the European view of blacks as well as the manner in which blackness was represented. The African presence in Europe was no longer mediated by Oriental trade or Muslim conquest. Beginning with the Portuguese and later the British and French, Europeans went directly to coastal Africa to obtain slaves, then shipped them to

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<sup>79</sup> The periodization of the “early modern” and “Renaissance” eras are not clearly defined and distinguished in contemporary scholarship. There is a movement towards replacing the term “Renaissance” with “early modern,” although it meets with some controversy. Currently Renaissance is defined as designating roughly the years 1400 to 1600 in the Grove Dictionary of art. The Oxford English Dictionary defines Renaissance as the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries. The aforementioned dictionaries do not list the term “early modern.” Clark Hulse and Peter Erickson define the early modern era as roughly the period of 1500 to 1700. This dissertation will not attempt to clarify the problems associated with this terminology, but will use “early modern” and “Renaissance” interchangeably to designate the period between 1500 and 1700. *Grove Art Online* (Oxford University Press, 2005 [cited May 25, 2005]; available from <http://www.groveart.com/>, Oxford English Dictionary, (Oxford University Press, [cited May 25, 2005]; available from <http://www.oed.com/>. See also Heather Dubrow and Frances E. Dolan, “The Term Early Modern,” *PMLA* 109, no. 5 (1994). Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse, eds., *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

colonies in the West Indies and North and South America. This triangular trade established relationships between Africans and Europeans whereby the direct subjugation of Africans was fundamental to the success of the system. Africa and Africans became a critical part of the European economy.

In recent years, scholars have begun to question the role of race in early modern or Renaissance arts and letters, attempting to understand the role that race played in Europe's shifting epistemology. Valerie Traub has suggested that race seems not to have existed in the sixteenth century as a stable category of biological difference, but as a "concept among parallel and overlapping concerns of lineage, civility, religion, and nation."<sup>80</sup> She maintains that the scholarship that declares the category of race as we know it does not apply to Renaissance epistemology. Traub explains:

Rather than idealizing the Renaissance as a period untouched by race, or condemning it as a mirror of our own culture, we need to analyze the multiple processes and strategies by which race was constructed in this period, even as we acknowledge the numerous ways in which its incipience precluded certain forms of racism. For it is certainly true that the concepts that would be consolidated by the nineteenth century are inchoate, unstable and malleable in the early seventeenth century.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Valerie Traub, "Mapping the Global Body," in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race and Empire in Renaissance England*, ed. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 44.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

Similarly, Ivan Hannaford has stated, “It is unhistorical to perceive the concept of race before the appearance of physical anthropology proper, because the human body, as portrayed up to the time of the Renaissance and Reformation, could not be detached from the ideas of *polis* and *ecclesia*.”<sup>82</sup> He maintains that the identity of a person was related to his membership in political and ecclesiastical bodies, ideas that were rooted in the scholasticism of the Middle Ages. People were bound together through faith and law, not through biology.<sup>83</sup> Traub’s and Hannaford’s contentions seem to be underscored by prior eras in which discourse about blackness was embedded in geo-political or religious rhetoric as discussed above.

To some scholars investigating race in Renaissance culture the notion that “race” is not a distinct scientific category, but a social/political construct, is problematic. Diffusing the validity of race as a scientific category weakens the case for investigating the historical presence of race-based ideologies. Kim Hall states, “Unfortunately, this semiotic point seems to have the effect of silencing racial politics in Renaissance criticism...”<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Peter Erickson states the absence of the modern understanding of the word

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<sup>82</sup> Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, 147.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>84</sup> Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1995), 255.

“race” in the Renaissance does not discount a racially inflected discourse about color.<sup>85</sup> He goes on to claim that there was a substantial increase in the numbers and types of blacks represented in European art beginning in the sixteenth century. This abundance of visual images of blacks in Renaissance painting “confirms the existence of blackness as a potent visual signifier of ethnic difference.”<sup>86</sup>

In spite of the complexities surrounding the issue of race and blackness in Renaissance representation, the body of work generated in this era demonstrates a marked increase in the numbers and types of black figures found in the visual arts and literature.<sup>87</sup> This is linked to the increased contact with blacks through exploration, conquest, and exploitation. Even though there was no monolithic understanding of the nature of blackness, the tropes that were formed during this era gained great currency in early modern Europe and remain potent to the present day.

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<sup>85</sup> Peter Erickson, “Representations of Blacks and Blackness in the Renaissance,” *Criticism* 35, no. 4 (1993): 503.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*: 499.

<sup>87</sup> There is an increasing body of literature regarding the notion of difference in the Renaissance. See: Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism*, *Oxford Shakespeare Topics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Even though the contemporary concept of race itself is unstable,<sup>88</sup> most scholars agree that during the Enlightenment era the notion of race as a scientific category was introduced.<sup>89</sup> Due to the increased contacts and relationships with a growing variety of peoples and cultures overseas, eighteenth-century Europeans began to question and investigate the nature of human variances. “Trying to identify what was distinctive about these other peoples, Europeans were forced into a new self-consciousness. They had to ask what was distinctive about themselves and why their own way of life was to be preferred.”<sup>90</sup>

Theories abounded regarding the nature of human variety. An increasingly scientific approach to humanity was a significant break with prior discourses that were largely based in religious beliefs. The questioning of Christianity by some scholars and *philosophes* led some to reject the Biblical explanation of human origins which argued

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<sup>88</sup> Henry Louis Gates has notably unmasked the notion of race in the twentieth century as a fiction and has questioned it as a meaningful category in critical theory. See Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Writing “Race” and the Difference it Makes,” in *“Race,” Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985).

<sup>89</sup> Ivan Hannaford asserted that the first stage in the development of an idea of race was from 1684 to 1815, encompassing the entire eighteenth century. Hannaford See also: Banton, *Racial Theories*.; David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>90</sup> Banton, *Racial Theories*, 23.

that all groups had a common origin in God's creation.<sup>91</sup> Two schools of thought developed around this issue. The monogenists believed in the common origin of all humans that could be linked back to Adam and Eve, and the polygenists contended that various groups could be tracked to separate origins. Michael Banton claims that ideas of race developed within this opposition.<sup>92</sup>

Scientists and scholars on both sides of the issue of origins attempted to classify animals and humans and to account systematically for similarities and differences. Swedish naturalist Carl von Linné (1701 – 1778), is known for his groundbreaking work on taxonomic classification, *Systema naturae* of 1735, that incorporated humans into the system of nature and classified them along with flora and fauna.<sup>93</sup> A contemporary of Linné, George-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707 – 1788), examined the variety of the human species, ascribing differences to climate and geography. He linked black skin to the extreme heat in Africa.<sup>94</sup> Buffon first made

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<sup>91</sup> Itandala, "European Images of Africa from Early Times to the Eighteenth Century,"76.

<sup>92</sup> Banton, *Racial Theories*,18.

<sup>93</sup> Nicolas Hudson, "From "Nation" to "Race": The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 3 (1996): 253.

<sup>94</sup> Comte de Buffon George-Louis Leclerc, "A Natural History, General and Particular," in *Race and the Enlightenment*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Malden: Blackwell, 1748-1804), 21.

systematic use of the term “race” to identify groups of human types, thus giving this word a new status in scientific nomenclature.<sup>95</sup> Both Linné and Buffon were monogenists who saw this classificatory system as part of God’s natural scheme.

Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711 – 1776) ascribed value judgments to human differences claiming that they were due to moral rather than physical causes. His influential 1748 essay “Of National Characters” contained the following statement in a footnote:

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There was never a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences... Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen in so many countries and ages if nature had not made an original distinction between these breeds of men.<sup>96</sup>

The widespread attempt to understand human variety during the eighteenth century was also empowered by the need to establish the European at the height of a hierarchical continuum of peoples and cultures. Africans usually populated the lowest strata of these kinds of schemes. Polygenist French *philosophe* Voltaire (1694 – 1778) claimed that the black race was a different species of man, echoing

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<sup>95</sup> Hudson, “From “Nation” to “Race”: The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought,” 253.

<sup>96</sup> David Hume, “Of National Characters,” in *Race and the Enlightenment*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Malden: Blackwell, 1754), 33.

Hume's notion that evidence of an original distinction between breeds of men exists.<sup>97</sup>

Although these theories continued to evolve, the inclusion of human races in scientific discourse that developed in the eighteenth century set the stage for the explosion of racial sciences in the nineteenth century. A pivotal figure in this transition was German scientist Johann Freiderich Blumenbach (1752 – 1840) who is considered the father of modern anthropology. Blumenbach dismissed the polygenists and emphasized the unity of the species and claimed that mankind's differences were mutable. He also conducted a methodological study of human skulls. While he maintained that his studies did not suggest a hierarchical relationship between races, he did contend that the Caucasian was the more beautiful because of the shape of the skull and the extreme Ethiopian and Mongolian were of lesser rank through degeneration from an ideal.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, the work of Pieter Camper (1722 – 1798) described the measurement of human skull angles from the European through the African to the Ape.<sup>99</sup> Although both of these theorists claimed no definitive differences among whites, blacks and others, their ideas paved the way for much of the virulently racist scientific doctrines of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>97</sup> Itandala, "European Images of Africa from Early Times to the Eighteenth Century," 76.

<sup>98</sup> Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*, 208.

<sup>99</sup> See Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*.

This brief sketch of ideas of race as they evolved in the West outlines a context for representations of blacks as they were produced and received in their own time. Through the lens of post-modern critical theory, the wider political and social implications of these constructs of race are apparent. Africa was a social, ideological, and physical foil to the European for centuries, used to understand and construct European identity, culturally and physically. Ideas of Africa and Africans over time formed a discourse that helped to establish and confirm European superiority in an ever-diversified world. As we will see in this examination of nineteenth-century art, vestiges of outmoded or invalid ideas about Africans tend to survive epistemological shifts as they are associated with art historical traditions that remain of critical value in academic art practices well into the nineteenth century. Therefore, even though the new nineteenth-century discourse of anthropology and ethnography frame the black oriental at issue in this dissertation, many of these works are emblematic of the entire history of racial thought in the West.

## **Chapter 2 Blacks in the Exotic Tradition to 1800**

### **Early Modern Roots of the Exotic African Servant**

The African servant is the first visual trope of exotic blackness in the modern era.<sup>100</sup> Although this figure will take on many forms and media from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, many of the ideas and conventions associated with the image of the African were formulated in this tradition. This material serves as background to the discussion of blacks in the work of G r me and Cordier.

The pairing of the sexualized white female and black attendant/slave has a significant history in European art. Orientalist images of blacks and others of the genre emerge from this tradition. An exploration of this history brings to the forefront the extent to which European notions of Africa and Africans have been embedded in art of the past five centuries. Although this analysis covers many years, various artists, and contexts, I suggest that there has been a systematic development in the way European artists have used the image of the African to shape their own identity in spite of shifting understandings of race and ethnicity. These allied trends solidified in

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<sup>100</sup> Here, my use of “modern era” refers to the fifteenth-century Renaissance through the twentieth century.

Orientalist art of the nineteenth century and are a fundamental part of the tradition in which nineteenth-century artists were invested.

As early as the sixteenth century, artists such as Titian, Rubens, and Rembrandt included black servants in Biblical and mythological tableaux and portraits. Sensuous goddesses Venus and Diana and Biblical heroines Judith and Bathsheba were often accompanied by black servants, both male and female. These precedents established an early pattern whereby the black servant was paired with a white female whose story was replete with sexuality and exoticism.

The nature of the image of the black in European art seems to have taken on a new direction beginning in the sixteenth century. Jan Nederveen Pieterse has described the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a period of transition when both “positive” and condescending images of Africans coexist. He claims that this transitional era was framed by the “extremely positive images predominating from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries” and the “extremely negative image of blacks and of Africa which predominated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.”<sup>101</sup> While oversimplified, the tradition of the black servant in European art is thought to have originated in sixteenth-century Venice during this period of

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<sup>101</sup>Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*.

“transition.”<sup>102</sup> The predominantly religious context in which we find “positive” images such as the black Magus, the Queen of Sheba or St. Maurice shifts into an era of secular exoticism in which blacks became anonymous markers of rhetorical darkness, sexual innuendo, luxury, and servitude.

Images of black attendants were woven into European constructions of religious events, mythologies, and self-stylings in a consistent pattern from the sixteenth century forward. The presence of African slaves in art, although essentialized, reference the existence and circumstances surrounding their historical presence in Europe at this time. The history of servitude in Europe, as opposed to the practice of slavery in overseas colonies, was therefore the basis for the early development of this typology in art. The presence of the black servant in painting did not necessarily reference his or her own identity or historical place in the narrative portrayed, but reflected some aspect of the identity of those being served. European artists often used the presence of a black figure, representing extreme alterity, in order to construct various aspects of their own cultural identity through religion, mythology, or portraiture.

The historical experience of blacks in early modern Europe largely occurred within a commercially and culturally integrated Mediterranean community that included Italy, the Middle East, and

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<sup>102</sup> Paul H.D. Kaplan, “Titian's “Laura Dianti” and the Origins of the Motif of the Black Page in Portraiture,” *Antichità viva* 4 (1982).

North Africa. The widespread use of black servants in Islamic culture spread into Europe through interactions in the political, economic, and cultural crossroad that was the Mediterranean. The Moorish conquest of Spain brought Africans into Europe from the seventh to the twelfth centuries as discussed in Chapter 1. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, distinct North African slave populations existed in Mediterranean Europe.<sup>103</sup> Europeans encountered Africans through interactions with Arab slavers who sold black slaves to southern Europeans. Blacks became associated with Arab culture. In fact, recent scholarship has suggested that most blacks in Europe before the fifteenth century were not born below the Sahara, but were from North African slave populations whose sub-Saharan ancestors were sold into slavery through the Arab trade.<sup>104</sup> The East, or the Orient, was the frame through which early modern Europeans encountered and understood black Africans.

The concept that Africans were Eastern frames their representation in art of this period. Paul Kaplan points out that artists used black figures in their work to help evoke an eastern setting.<sup>105</sup> According to Kaplan, the first black servant to appear in

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<sup>103</sup> David Northrup, *Africa's Discovery of Europe: 1450-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Kaplan, "Ruler, Saint and Servant: Blacks in European Art to 1520" (Dissertation, Boston University, 1976), 590.

European art was in the *Portrait of Laura Dianti* by Titian (c. 1485 – 1576) in 1523 (figure 5).<sup>106</sup> The birth of the iconography of the exotic black servant is grounded in the relationship of the servant to a white female. This relationship will echo in a plethora of nineteenth-century *tableaux*.

Laura Dianti was the mistress of Alfonso I d'Este, Duke of Ferrara. Due to the recorded presence of black servants at the court of Ferrara prior to Dianti's era, Kaplan surmises that a black child could have been in her retinue at the time of this portrait.<sup>107</sup> The uncertainty of the existence of this servant does not diminish the significance of the use of this type of figure in the portrait of an important woman. Moreover, it underscores the use of the servant as a symbol.

Notwithstanding questions regarding the historical accuracy of the presence of black servants in the household of the sitter, the image of the young African served particular aesthetic and ideological functions in this portrait. The depiction of this pair lent an aura of wealth, luxury, and courtliness that was associated with owning a

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<sup>106</sup> Kaplan, "Titian's "Laura Dianti" and the Origins of the Motif of the Black Page in Portraiture," 12.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

black servant.<sup>108</sup> There has been a proliferation of recent scholarship investigating the importance of the Islamic trade in luxury goods in Renaissance Italy and other parts of Europe.<sup>109</sup> Items such as fabrics, ceramics, glass, and brassware that entered Europe through the Islamic trade were associated with exotic luxury and status. Artists often included objects such as Oriental carpets in both secular and sacred subjects from the fourteenth through the sixteenth century. These carpets were high-priced items that when portrayed were a conspicuous display of wealth.<sup>110</sup> Like a richly patterned silk fabric or an Oriental carpet, the African servant who had entered Europe through the same channels also signaled the luxuries of distant lands.<sup>111</sup> Black African servants were not rare, but they were

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<sup>108</sup> Even though Northrup states that black servants in Europe were fairly common in the fifteenth century, he also points out that exotic blacks were a way of displaying their owner's wealth. Northrup, 149.

<sup>109</sup> For a discussion of Renaissance Italy and the Islamic trade see Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance Bazaar: From the Silk Road to Michelangelo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Rosamund E. Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). For a discussion of England and the Islamic decorative arts see John Sweetman, *The Oriental Obsession: Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture 1500-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>110</sup> Mack, *Bazaar to Piazza: Islamic Trade and Italian Art*, 73-93.

<sup>111</sup> Here I am using the term "Oriental carpet" to describe the carpets imported into Europe from various eastern sources. This is the term used by Rosamund E. Mack in *Bazaar to Piazza*.

expensive and in great demand in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe.<sup>112</sup> The black as a luxury accoutrement becomes a symbol of wealth and worldly tastes that would have been understood by elite Venetians in the sixteenth century.

The page gazing up at the beautiful woman operates as a conduit for our admiration of the subject. This device is used in representations of black servants for centuries and becomes a rhetorical posture that not only glorifies the sitter, but also naturalizes black subservience in an aristocratic setting.

The formal contrast of the servant's black skin and Dianti's white skin serves to enhance her whiteness. The deep color of Dianti's page nearly blends into the background of the painting. Dark skin was a quality sought after by Italians looking to retain African servants. Dark skin further enhanced the status of the elite subject.<sup>113</sup> Complementing Dianti on multiple levels, the page therefore functions formally as a pictorial tool and socially as a servant and luxury item.

Notably, the servant is in courtly garb of the era, not the generic robe and turban that was ubiquitously used to signal the East.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Kaplan, "Titian's "Laura Dianti" and the Origins of the Motif of the Black Page in Portraiture."

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Many turbaned figures representing Eastern types can be found in Renaissance art. Because of Venice's place as a crossroads between

Kaplan's considerable work on the image of the black in medieval and Renaissance art reveals the complexities of these early blacks in European imagery. Prevalent African figures such as the black Magus as well as black attendants to the Magi would have been depicted in eastern garb due to their identification as biblical figures emanating from the East. He points out that in Venetian Renaissance painting African children are usually dressed in Venetian clothing, embodying Venetian dominance and control of other peoples.<sup>115</sup> Even when the image depicts a biblical story, such as Paolo Veronese's (1528 – 1588) *Marriage at Cana, 1563*, (figure 6), the young African servant is dressed as a Venetian. He notes that black adults, on the other hand, are most often depicted in the garb of the Islamic Levant.<sup>116</sup> Dressed in European garb, the young servant is part of the context of European domestic life while pointing to the worldliness of the scene. The blackness of the attendant's skin marks extreme racial/cultural differences and evokes distant lands, but ultimately serves to enhance the racial/cultural identity of the European figure in his or her own context.

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Europe and the East, there are many examples in Venetian painting. See Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

<sup>115</sup> Paul Kaplan, "Veronese's Images of Foreigners," in *Nuovi studi su Paolo Veronese* (Venice: Arsenale Editrice, 1990).

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

Dianti's portrait was presented by Cesare d'Este to Holy Roman Emperor Rudolph II. By 1599, the identity of the sitter had been lost and was listed in the inventory of the royal collections in Prague as a "Turkish Woman."<sup>117</sup> Titian's portrait was misread as a woman from Turkey. The presence of the black servant was seen as a symbol of the East thereby prompting the sitter's misidentification as a Turkish woman. Evidently, as early as 1599 blackness signaled "Orientality."

By the seventeenth century, the black female servant becomes an even more complex symbol as reflected in Peter Paul Rubens' (1577-1640) *Venus at a Mirror*, c. 1615, (figure 7). The black servant is located at the edge of the composition, her body completely cropped. Her dark skin and partially wrapped short hair contrast with the white skin and long blond hair of Venus. The disembodied head of the servant balances the disembodied reflection of Venus in the mirror. In *Venus at a Mirror*, Rubens uses the presence of the black woman to both complement and supplement the white female. The African woman is a foil to the main character, Venus.

The image of a nude Venus was by this time a common and popular theme in European art. *Venus at a Mirror* represents the

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<sup>117</sup> Filippo Pedrocchi, *Titian: The Complete Paintings* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), 6. Rudolph II was a major collector and patron of the arts who reportedly acquired works from Alfonso d'Este. See: Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The School of Prague: Painting at the Court of Rudolph II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 23.

nude goddess at her toilet, a theme that developed in Venetian Renaissance painting and grew into one of her most prevalent incarnations.<sup>118</sup> Common elements found in toilet scenes are the nude woman with long flowing hair, a maidservant, a mirror, ointment jars, jewelry, flowers, and small animals. The notion that the nude woman at the toilet is preparing for a sexual encounter is a fundamental framework for this theme. All of the accoutrements and attributes, including the presence of the black servant, are shrouded in sexual innuendo and evoke the notion of vanity.

Rubens' black woman is more than a token of luxury. The coral jewelry she wears is a specific reference to Ripa's allegorical construction of Africa.<sup>119</sup> First published in 1593, Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia or Moral Emblems* was a fundamental source in the field of European iconography that exerted influence on artists in the

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<sup>118</sup> Lucia Impelluso, *Gods and Heroes in Art* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2002), 242.

<sup>119</sup> Kim Hall notes that the coral is linked with Africa, but does not mention how. "Venus becomes associated with the gold, red, and white of European poetic beauty. Her attendant's dark arm is entwined in the gold hair and they are further linked through the red in the coral necklace (associated with Africa) and the ruby arm band." Kim F. Hall, "Object in Object? Some Thoughts on the Presence of black Women in Early Modern Culture," in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race and Empire in Renaissance England*, ed. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 355.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>120</sup> The personification of Africa in Ripa's *Iconologia* (figure 8) wears a coral necklace and earrings and has other attributes such as a lion, scorpion and snakes.<sup>121</sup> This is in keeping with a 1709 version of *Iconologia* which described Africa as follows:

A Blackmoor Woman, almost naked; frizl'd Hair; and Elephant's Head for her Crest; a Necklace of Coral, and Pendants of the same, at her Ears; a Scorpion in her right Hand, and a Cornucopia, with Ears of Corn, in her left; a fierce Lion by her on one Side and a Viper and Serpent on the other. Naked, because it does not abound with *Riches*. The Elephant is only in *Africa*...<sup>122</sup>

Ripa's description is a blueprint for the symbolism of Africa in the seventeenth century. Ripa describes the personification of Africa as a "Blackmoor." This is a term used widely to describe Africans in Europe at this time, and as stated in Chapter 1, is related to the history of the Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula. He again

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<sup>120</sup> Yassu Okayama, *The Ripa Index: Personifications and their Attributed in Five Editions of the Iconologia* (Davaco Publishers, 1992).

<sup>121</sup> Okayama's index lists the following attributes for Africa 1: black woman, almost naked, coral ear-drops, coral necklace, head of an elephant as crest of the helmet, horn of plenty with ears of corn, lion, scorpion, snakes, and vipers. These attributes were illustrated in the Italian, Dutch, and French versions from between 1600 and 1644. *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>122</sup> This English version from the early eighteenth century has the same description that was produced in five versions in Italian, French, and Dutch produced during the seventeenth century. For an index of the versions, see *Ibid.* Caesar Ripa, *Iconologia or Moral Emblems* (London: P. Tempest, 1709).

casts the African in terms of the East, effectively “Orientalizing” Africa. The term “Blackmoor” may also allude to Africa as a religious enemy. While the cornucopia she holds is a sign of abundance, the scorpion, according to Ripa, is an emblem of lust. Additionally, Africa is almost naked, like her counterpart America, and indeed many allegorical figures. However, Ripa states that her nakedness is because of poverty, a seeming contradiction to the inclusion of the cornucopia. The naked Africa is the antithesis of Ripa’s Europe who is “A Lady in a very rich Habit...”<sup>123</sup> Europe is described as a “principal Part of the World, for *Religion, Arts and Arms.*”<sup>124</sup> Ripa’s Africa is abundant with animals, but not religion, arts, nor arms, the salient aspects of civilized society in Renaissance Europe.

Ripa’s seventeenth-century descriptions exemplify twentieth-century theoretical assessments of the Renaissance idea of difference. As stated in Chapter 1, difference during the Renaissance was measured in terms of civility and religion. Ripa’s constructions of the four parts of the world uphold the primacy of Europe through the opposition of European religion and civilization, and the lack of these qualities in Africa, Asia, and America.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ripa, *Iconologia or Moral Emblems*, 47.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Nicholas Thomas states that pre-modern European discourse on non-Europeans seems to be characterized as a lack or poorer form of the values of the center. Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture:*

Rubens' *Venus at a Mirror* also engages the ancient rhetorical opposition between whiteness as beauty and blackness as non-beauty. This tradition dates back to ancient writings in the Greco-Roman tradition. "Within Greco-Roman writings," writes Gay L. Byron, "beauty or attractiveness is generally symbolized by whiteness, while ugliness or undesirability is symbolized by blackness."<sup>126</sup> Anthony Colantuono has explored how the rhetoric of dark and light, and black and white functioned in the seventeenth century regarding the juxtaposition of the white female and black servant. He contends that the issue of blackness was translated into the rhetoric of beauty in response to Guido Reni's (1575 – 1642) 1631 painting *Abduction of Helen* (figure 9) in which Helen is attended by an African servant. An observer contrasted the "day" of Helen's "rare beauty" with the "tenebrous night" of the African's "dark shadows." The contrast of white and black skin was seen as a deliberate rhetorical construct through which the blackness enhanced the apparent whiteness of Helen's skin.<sup>127</sup>

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*Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 71.

<sup>126</sup> Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature*, 41.

<sup>127</sup> Anthony Colantuono, *Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen: The Politics and Rhetoric of Painting in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 146-47.

With Rubens in the sixteenth century we find that the black servant is an allegory of Africa, a symbol of the farthest reaches of the known world where blackness is linked with rhetorical notions of darkness and light. These ideas are presented in contrast with the white female who represents European, therefore ideal, beauty. As in Titian's *Portrait of Laura Dianti*, the inclusion of the black servant is a vehicle through which the artist can further characterize or describe the main character by utilizing oppositions. The oppositions between Europe and the East, Europe and Africa, beauty and non-beauty, civilization and barbarity are embedded in the pairing of exotic black slave and white mistress from its initial appearance, characterizing their relationship through the nineteenth century.

Rubens' *Venus at a Mirror*, although a mythological subject, is in dialogue with the style of secular portraiture utilizing the African servant that flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. A prime example of the issues that develop when slaves become an element in portraiture are found in French painter Pierre Mignard's (1612 – 1695) *Portrait of the Duchess of Portsmouth* of 1682 (figure 10). This painting demonstrates how the pairing of black slave and white mistress carried undertones of empire and mercantile wealth as Europeans became increasingly involved with commercial slavery during the era of colonial expansion.

Mignard's portrait features Louise de K roualle, Duchess of Portsmouth. The sitter was the mistress of King Charles II and was thought to have been a spy for the French government. Here she is pictured seated in front of an open window with a young African female servant by her side. The servant is wearing European dress as well as a strand of pearls. Gazing upward at her mistress, the servant's function has become a convention in representation. Her admiration directs the viewer's gaze and establishes the social and cultural hierarchy. Her black skin is antithetical to the beauty of the mistress, as seen in Rubens and Titian. The servant's gift of a piece of coral and a pearl-filled sea shell introduces another layer of meaning to this portrait. These objects may suggest that the Duchess is being portrayed as Thetis, a sea nymph and mother of Achilles.<sup>128</sup> However, the use of the black slave in conjunction with luxury import objects suggests parallel interpretations.

Certainly, the coral offered by the slave evokes Ripa's emblematic symbol of Africa. With the inclusion of African servants in European portraits, the role of the servant symbolized Africa as diminished and subservient. Symbolically, Africa is at the service of Europe as well as a source for riches, such as coral, seashells, and

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<sup>128</sup>In fact, Mignard used the same combination of coral, pearls and seashell in his later *Portrait of the Marquise de Seignelay with Two of Her Children* (1691) that **is** an allegorical representation of Thetis. However, her children offer her the objects, not an exotic servant.

pearls. The pearls point to the wealth of both the East and the new world.<sup>129</sup> David Bindman interprets the gifts given to the Duchess from the black child as a “tribute” to her beauty. He also points out that the servant would later become a sign of female extravagance, vanity, and lax sexual morality for satirists such as William Hogarth.<sup>130</sup>

With time, as the relationship between Europeans and Africans becomes more complex, the images of exotic Africans begin to

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<sup>129</sup> Pearls were traded with Europeans from both Eastern and Western, or new world, sources. They represented luxuries of distant lands and were used as a medium of exchange. They were also part of the drive for colonization of South America and were therefore a symbol of European overseas economic expansion/exploitation. See Nicholas J. Saunders, “Biographies of Brilliance: Pearls, Transformations of Matter and Being, c. AD 1492,” *World Archaeology* 31, no. 2 (1999).

<sup>130</sup> Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*, 39. Mignard’s utilization of the trope of the African servant also speaks to a political commentary that specifically references the duchess’ place in the Court of Charles II as a royal mistress. According to Kim Hall, the fact that Louise Renée de Kéroüalle was portrayed several times with a black servant may be linked to her close association with Charles II, who was called “The Black Boy” throughout his reign due to his dark complexion. Illustrated in Hall’s book is *Louise Renée de Kéroüalle, duchess of Portsmouth and Aubigny* by Jacques D’Agar. In D’Agar’s portrait there are two black servants. Hall maintains that the servant presenting a crown to the duchess suggests that the black boy/king is submitting to her erotic power by offering her a crown. Hall also points out that Barbara Villiers Palmer, another Charles II mistress, was also portrayed several times with a black servant. According to Hall “The proliferation of such portraits of his mistresses may have been some sort of inside joke at court – a way of signifying their erotic power over Charles as well as identifying themselves as aristocratic beauties. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, 289.

accumulate new levels of meaning. While the black servant in Rubens' *Venus at a Mirror* performs an allegorical and symbolic function evoking excess, luxury, and rhetorical opposition to white beauty, Mignard's portrait of the black servant is an explicit reference to the economics of slavery in Europe and the dependence of the European elite culture on this institution. In an era in both England and France when the economy was increasingly involved in the trade of slaves and overseas enterprises were dependent on slave labor, the image of the black in a subordinate role evokes slavery and trade in commodities as well as luxury goods. Black servants came to symbolize the accumulation of foreign objects that filled European collections and adorned the spaces of wealth and privilege. "The presence of the black servant," writes David Bindman "suggests a consciousness of new horizons opening up through trade in distant and recently discovered lands, hinting at riches and new knowledge to be acquired by Britain under the aegis of gallant sailors."<sup>131</sup>

The contextualization of the image of the African attendant shifted in the Early Modern era as European relationships to Africa and Africans evolved. The reference to slavery in the seventeenth century is a markedly different context from the Islamic trade that brought blacks into Italy during the fifteenth century. Islamic culture had framed the importation as well as the image of the Oriental black

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<sup>131</sup> Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*, 39.

as seen in Venetian sixteenth century representations. By the end of the seventeenth century, France and England were conducting their own trade in black slaves. West African trade systems run by Europeans did not rely on the North African Islamic traders of past eras. Even though blacks were considered exotic and were often portrayed in Oriental garb, the image of the black attendant signaled the domestic economy. Hence, Mignard's black servant became a marker of *European* wealth and dominance, not necessarily mediated by Islam.<sup>132</sup> In spite of this significant shift in how blacks were received in Europe and by Europeans, their association with the East or the Orient remained a fundamental aspect of their representation well into the nineteenth century. By suspending black Africans in an Oriental fantasy, European representations circumvented the economic, political, and moral issues of the slave system that was escalating in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The eighteenth century produced major developments in the history of the figure of the exotic black. The definitive association of the black with the Orient solidifies within *turquerie*, the popular taste for all things Turkish in eighteenth-century France.

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<sup>132</sup> Allison Blakely argues that in the case of Dutch art the exotic black represented the domestic economy. According to Blakely, the Dutch Lowlands produced more portraits with black servants than any other area in the world during the seventeenth century. Although they were often in turbans, they symbolized **Dutch** commercial success and political sovereignty. Allison Blakely, *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 78-170.

## **Turquerie: Ornamental Blackness in Eighteenth-Century France**

*Turquerie* is the term the French used to describe works of art, literature, and music with Turkish themes that had been popular in literature and theater since the seventeenth century.<sup>133</sup> A domestication of Turkish-flavored exotica in *Ancien Régime* France, *turquerie* conventionalized western mythologies of the East and provided an arena where themes of sexuality, dominance, race, and ethnicity were explored under the guise of fashionable frivolity. The imagined violence and debauchery of Arab men, the mystery, docility, and sexual subservience of Arab women, and the naturalization of slavery were among the major ideas that were played out in French *turquerie*. The vogue for *turquerie* solidified the explicit conflation of Africa, slavery, and the Orient in the visual arts of the eighteenth century. Not a simple descriptive term, *turquerie* connotes a more cohesive genre of representation than prior forms of exoticism. Based on the eastern framework of earlier forms of European exoticism, *turquerie* became the landscape in which the African flourished in eighteenth-century French imagery.

Not only did representations of blacks in *turquerie* evoke how the French conceptualized the historical practice of black slavery in Islamic lands, they hinted at French involvement in slavery as well.

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<sup>133</sup>See Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, Longino, *Orientalism in French Classical Drama*.

By the eighteenth century, European powers had been engaged in the trade of Africans and the utilization of black slaves in the colonial economy for three centuries. Propelled by its overseas colonial possessions, the economy of the *Ancien Régime* was dependent upon the trade in African slaves and African slave labor for much of its wealth.

The French first used black labor in the West Indies in the early seventeenth century, and by its end had settled on black labor as the principal means of cultivating their overseas empire.<sup>134</sup> The main French possession in the Antilles was Saint-Domingue (present day Haiti), where the most extensive interaction between the French and Africans took place. The colony generated two-fifths of the world's sugar production and over half of the world's coffee, making it the major contributor to French wealth in the eighteenth century.<sup>135</sup>

Black servitude was part of the fabric of a European culture deeply involved in the perpetuation of black slavery well into the nineteenth century. Any reference to black slavery in France, even if routed through a distant culture or a historical context, necessarily reflects this very long and complex history. In other words, African

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<sup>134</sup> William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

<sup>135</sup> Frederick Quinn, *The French Overseas Empire* (Westport: Praeger, 2000), 83.

slavery was an institution that was an integral part of French history as well as that of the Orient. Issues regarding French and Islamic use of black slavery converge in the French obsession with depicting black servitude and perhaps reveal how they used the Orient to explore their “underground self.”<sup>136</sup>

The French, who often pictured themselves through the lens of the exotic, used *turquerie* as a form of self-representation. In the eighteenth century, the portrait *deguisé* in which French royals and nobles were portrayed in various guises, such as mythological figures, became popular.<sup>137</sup> In keeping with the interest in the East, French notables took on the fashionable persona of a Turkish Sultan or Sultana. Interior décor inspired by the Near and Far East, including furniture, fabrics, tapestries and porcelains, were in vogue in the upper echelons of French society bringing exoticism into the domestic sphere.<sup>138</sup> Black characters’ prior association with the East, as well as their preexisting status as a symbol of luxury and excess, fit with the French notion of the debauched but compelling Ottoman culture

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<sup>136</sup> Said uses this term to describe a collective subconsciousness regarding European ideas of the Orient. Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

<sup>137</sup> Marianne Roland Michel, “Exoticism and Genre Painting in Eighteenth-Century France,” in *The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting*, ed. Colin B. Bailey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>138</sup> Peter Hughes, *Eighteenth-Century France and the East* (London: The Wallace Collection, 1981), 12-14.

that inspired *turquerie*. In this broader context, black figures were once again integral to the process of defining luxury, status, sexuality, and power.

European notions about blacks in the Orient were based on a number of influences including travel accounts and fictional literature. The most influential text fueling the craze for exoticism was the 1704 publication of Antoine Galland's *Les Mille et Une Nuits* (Thousand and One Nights). Galland's translation of the compendium of Arabian folklore whetted the French appetite for themes of the Orient.<sup>139</sup> *Les Mille et Une Nuits* prompted interest in sumptuous exoticism, violence, and the decadence of the Turkish harem. What are important to this study are the roles that black slaves play throughout the stories. In the frame story the initial fury of the Sultan ignites upon discovering his wife in bed with a black slave. Enraged, he murders both and travels to visit his brother, another Sultan, for solace. There he happens upon his brother's wife and several concubines in a late-night tryst.

How great was his astonishment, when he saw, in this party which he supposed to consist of only women, ten blacks, who each selected a mistress. Nor did the sultana, on her part, remain long without her lover. Clapping her hands, she called

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<sup>139</sup> Eva Sallis, *Sheherazade Through the Looking Glass: The Metamorphosis of The Thousand and One Nights* (1999).

out, “Masoud, Masoud!” and another black instantly descended from a tree, and ran towards her.<sup>140</sup>

The tales are replete with sexual interactions between slaves and masters, blacks and other “Orientals,” and among characters of different social ranks. The presence of blacks in the Oriental harem, either as primary characters or as ornamental features, was solidified in *Les Mille et Une Nuits*. The tales of race, sexuality, and the Oriental harem provided rich sources for literary and pictorial exoticism for the next two hundred years.<sup>141</sup>

A large web of relationships among the fantasy of *turquerie* in the arts and letters, the economic and political realities of colonialism

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<sup>140</sup> Antoine Galland, *The Arabian Nights: In Four Volumes*, trans. Edward Forster (Philadelphia: J.& A.Y Humphreys, 1812), 38.

<sup>141</sup> *Les Mille et Une Nuits* was translated numerous times over the nineteenth century. Sir Richard Burton, in his 1885 translation, describes the same passage in a decidedly more salacious manner. “...and then sprang with a drop-leap from one of the trees a big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight. He walked boldly up to her and threw his arms round her neck while she embraced him as warmly; then he bussed her and winding his legs round hers, as a button-loop clasps a button, he threw her and enjoyed her.” In a note to this passage, Burton states, “debauched women prefer negroes on account of the size of their parts.” He goes on to maintain that this is a characteristic of “the negro race and of African animals.” Burton’s writings reflect the influence of racist science on exoticism over the course of the nineteenth century. Richard F. Burton, *The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night: A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments*, 6 vols., vol. 1 &2 (New York: The Heritage Press, 1934), 6 & 26. See also Dane Kennedy, ““Captain Burton's Oriental Muck Heap”: The Book of the Thousand Nights and the Uses of Orientalism,” *The Journal of British Studies* 39, no. 3 (2000).

and the French engagement with Africans contextualizes the image of the black in eighteenth-century art. An important example of the complexities posed by blacks in *turquerie* is the 1733 portrait *Mademoiselle de Clermont en Sultane* (figure 11) by Jean-Marc Nattier (1685 – 1766). Nattier, court painter to Louis XV, is noted for his allegorical portraits of Versailles courtiers and Parisian socialites.<sup>142</sup> The sitter is Anne Marie de Bourbon, a member of the royal family, portrayed as a Turkish sultana at her bath, surrounded by exotic servants.

Kathleen Nicholson referred to this portrait as the “first odalisque.”<sup>143</sup> Heretofore the concept of the odalisque, or sexualized Oriental concubine, was not an established convention in art as it would be in the nineteenth century. Although Nattier clearly relied on the tradition of the black servant in portraiture, the Turkish theme, the bath setting, and sexual innuendo combined with the exotic slaves constituted a new development in this type of imagery.<sup>144</sup> By

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<sup>142</sup> Michael Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France 1700-1789* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 188.

<sup>143</sup> Kathleen Nicholson has produced the most comprehensive study to date of *Mademoiselle de Clermont* and the Nattier portraits. Kathleen Nicholson, “Practicing Portraiture: *Mademoiselle de Clermont* and J.-M. Nattier,” in *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Melissa Hyde and Jennifer Milam (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 79.

<sup>144</sup> Nicholson points out that this portrait was strikingly original in its time and “exceeds its literary and pictorial precedents.” *Ibid.*, 81.

placing the black servant, a convention in European art, into the harem bath, a relatively new site of interest for European painters, Nattier established a modern approach to a traditional theme.<sup>145</sup> This particular combination of race and sexuality in the Oriental harem was the pictorial genesis of Gérôme's Moorish bathers and would prove to be successful for more than one hundred years.

Nattier's conception of the harem bath was presumably based on various secondary sources such as travel literature and fiction. His depiction of *Mademoiselle de Clermont* utilized a variety of standard tropes that forefront both the exotic and the sexual. The bathing woman was popular in Western art and frequently charged with sexual undertones.<sup>146</sup> The bath scene evokes the *toilette* of Venus, importing themes of vanity and seduction from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mythology. While English artist William Hogarth (1697 – 1764) used the association between the black servant and vanity to satirize the pretensions of the wealthy,<sup>147</sup> Nattier used

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<sup>145</sup> Nicholson contends that the portrait as *Sultana* was initiated by *Mademoiselle de Clermont* who was confident enough to present herself in a modern and alluring format. *Ibid.*, 84-85.

<sup>146</sup> Beatrice Farwell, "Courbet's 'Baigneuses' and the Rhetorical Feminine Image," in *Woman as Sex Object: Studies in Erotic Art 1730-1970*, ed. Thomas B. Hess and Linda Nochlin (New York: Newsweek, 1972).

<sup>147</sup> David Bindman, "A Voluptuous Alliance between Africa and Europe: Hogarth's Africans," in *The Other Hogarth: Aesthetics of*

servants to establish social status, not question it. The luxury objects such as pearls, costumes, and the carpet adorn the space with appointments lending an exotic opulence to the classicized interior that was most likely her home, Chantilly.<sup>148</sup>

The fashion for portraits in the Turkish mode had a precedent in English painting, particularly in the numerous images of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu dating back to the 1720s.<sup>149</sup> However, Nattier's unusual portrait initiated the trend in French court painting.<sup>150</sup> Carl Van Loo (1705 – 1765), court painter to Louis XV, portrayed the famous royal mistress Madame de Pompadour in a series of paintings for her bedroom at the Chateau Bellevue. The room was known as the *chambre à la turque* (Turkish room) and was embellished with several *turqueries*.<sup>151</sup> Van Loo's *A Sultana Taking*

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*Difference*, ed. Bernadette Fort and Angela Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 265.

<sup>148</sup> Nicholson, "Practicing Portraiture: Mademoiselle de Clermont and J.-M. Nattier," 84.

<sup>149</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 141-57.

<sup>150</sup> Nattier returned to the theme once more, although without servants, in the 1742 painting *The Marchioness of Broglie as Sultana*. This is a costume portrait with no attendants at all. There are no other black attendants in Nattier's oeuvre.

<sup>151</sup> For more on the harem imagery, see: Perrin Stein, "Madame de Pompadour and the Harem Imagery at Bellevue," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 122 (1994).

*Coffee*, 1755, (figure 12) depicts Madame de Pompadour dressed in Turkish costume, holding a Turkish pipe and being served by a black female servant. Assuming the persona of a Sultana, Madame de Pompadour affirms her status as a powerful mistress and confidant to the King/Sultan.<sup>152</sup> More whimsical than physiologically accurate, these black figures signal the idea of the dark races that punctuate and adorn the East.

Engraving books, such as *Recueil de cent estampes représentant différentes nations du Levant* (*Anthology of one hundred prints representing different nations of the Levant*) by Jean-Baptiste Vanmour (1671 – 1737) that depicted “ethnic” types were influential in *turquerie*. From the Sultan to the chief eunuch, Vanmour’s images not only helped to document Turkish costume, but offered information on Ottoman class structure and social activities, fueling western fantasies about the inner workings of the harem.<sup>153</sup> While the idea of ethnicity or ethnography would not be developed until the nineteenth century, these references provided artists with source materials for depicting more authentic images of Oriental culture.

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<sup>152</sup> Stein contends that Madame de Pompadour deliberately employed harem iconography to underscore her authority in the court. Perrin Stein, “Exoticism as Metaphor: *Turquerie* in Eighteenth-Century French Art” (Dissertation, New York University, 1997), 188-9.

<sup>153</sup> Stein, “Madame de Pompadour and the Harem Imagery at Bellevue,” 33.

This heightened level of consciousness about the “Other” represents a slow drift away from the generic, rhetorical exoticism of the Renaissance and Baroque periods, toward an approach that embraces difference, even if it remained decorative or largely superficial. Edward Said noted:

...those [artists] of the eighteenth century confronted the Orient’s peculiarities with some detachment and with some attempt at dealing directly with Oriental source material, perhaps because such a technique helped a European to know himself better.<sup>154</sup>

Although mediated by a western artist and engraver, the images of Orientals were used as source material that provided the sense of historical detachment that would later characterize nineteenth-century Orientalism.

Léon-François Hoffman, in his masterful treatment of the black in French Literature, *Le Nègre Romantique*, observed:

Esclave des Européens dans le Nouveau Monde, le Nègre est l’esclave ou à la rigueur le serviteur des émirs, pachas et autres mamamouchis littéraires. Sa négritude est décorative :...Assimilé à une bête de somme aux colonies, le Noir faisait simplement partie du décor dans l’Orient que l’imagination collective s’était créé.<sup>155</sup>

Slave of Europeans in the New World, the Black is the slave or in a pinch the servant of emirs, pashas and other literary *mamamouchis*. His blackness is decorative:... Similar to a beast of burden in the colonies, the black was simply part of the décor in the Orient that the collective imagination created.

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<sup>154</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 118.

<sup>155</sup> Author’s translation. Hoffmann, *Le Nègre Romantique*, 63.

Although Hoffman referred to fictional tropes, exotic blackness literally became part of the décor in *Ancien Régime* France. The figure of the black in decorative art was an outgrowth of the popularity of black servitude in painting. Black servants appeared on a multitude of objects that adorned the spaces of wealth and refinement from porcelain figurines to large-scale tapestries. *Turkish Emperor* (figure 13), a typical porcelain figure group by the Höchst factory in Germany, is a luxury ornament in which ideas of race and exoticism are naturalized in a diminutive vignette. Fabricated by Meissen in porcelain, 1748, *Blackamoor with Covered Bowl* (figure 14) features a semi-nude black female figure holding a pearl, a sign of sensuality and exotic locales. A pair of turbaned Nubian slaves supports a small French console table from c. 1780 (figure 15). Nubian men carry candles in an eighteenth-century pair of bronze and gold candlesticks (figure 16). The horrors of black slavery were recast in sumptuous materials and adorned with gold and precious stones. The artifice of exoticism had become a means by which Europeans could celebrate, domesticate and naturalize racial domination.

*Turquerie's* naturalization of slavery through the arts was complicit in the colonial project. The prevalence of Africans in *turquerie* deflects the importance of the pertinent relationships between the French and blacks, rerouting them through a fantastic "East," distant in space and time. Coffee drinking and slave service, as

seen in the works by Van Loo and Nattier, were relegated to the artificial domain of the Turkish harem rather than the colonial plantation. The slave candelabra and table support literally perform African servitude in domestic décor. According to Lisa Lowe, "...the allegories about otherness in French Orientalism tend to be literary figurations that detour or displace the problems of colonial encounter; in effect, colonialism is often not named or addressed."<sup>156</sup> What *is* named and addressed is a European fantasy of the Orient in which the black is a marker of exotic servitude. The Oriental fantasy inhabited by black characters served to divert the issue of African labor from more immediate relationships that included domestic and colonial slavery and the slave trade, to a largely ornamental, fictitious Eastern setting.

*Turquerie* was linked to the French aristocracy and began to fade towards the end of the century as this kind of frivolous exoticism became more closely associated with a dying monarchy.<sup>157</sup>

Orientalism emerged in the early Napoleonic era with the increasing political and cultural interest in North Africa that accompanied Napoleon's Egyptian campaign. By the nineteenth century, the

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<sup>156</sup> Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: British and French Orientalisms* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991), 107.

<sup>157</sup> Perrin Stein has observed that the values represented by the harem in *turquerie* would have been antithetical to Republican sentiment because of its close alliance with the monarchy. Stein, "Exoticism as Metaphor: Turquerie in Eighteenth-Century French Art", 266-67.

different forms of exoticism evoking the Middle East and North Africa came together under the rubric of what we now consider Orientalism.

### **Chapter 3 G r me’s Black Women: Slavery, Seduction and Ethnography in Orientalist Painting**

They were Negresses from Senaar, and indeed no species could be so far removed from our standard conceptions of beauty. The prominence of their jaws, their flattened foreheads, and their thick lips are characteristics which class these poor creatures in an almost bestial category; nevertheless, apart from this strange physiognomy which nature had endowed them with, their bodies were of a rare and exceptional beauty; pure and virginal forms were clearly visible under their tunics; their voices were sweet and vibrant like the shrill but subdued sounds of fresh mountain springs.<sup>158</sup>

G rard de Nerval, 1851

Nerval’s description of black women in a Cairo slave market embodies the confluence of ethnography and exoticism that characterizes nineteenth-century Orientalist arts and letters. Using terms such as “species” and “bestial,” Nerval evokes the language of ethnographers and anthropologists who considered Africans the lowest human species in the hierarchy of types, closer to animals than Europeans. In the same passage, however, Nerval abandons the pseudo-scientific rhetoric, and paints a romantic portrait of “rare and exceptional” beauties, with voices like “fresh mountain springs.” Nerval’s scientific and poetic reaction to these women is a jarring example of the approach taken by European men who attempted to represent blacks in the nineteenth century. With the tools of the new

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<sup>158</sup> G rard de Nerval, *Journey to the Orient*, trans. Norman Glass (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 63, Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, 29.

and developing sciences of race at their disposal, artists and writers felt free to incorporate their limited understanding of human difference into their artistry, resulting in a strange mix of exoticism and science. While at the time this approach lent credence and documentary authenticity to representations of unusual peoples and places, today it reveals the flawed and insidious system through which Europeans constructed their own racial and cultural superiority through the phenomenal nineteenth-century passion for the exotic.

In the twentieth century, Jean-Léon Gérôme has been indelibly linked with Edward Said's theory of Orientalism. His controversial 1889 painting *The Snake Charmer* (figure 17) graces the paperback cover of *Orientalism*.<sup>159</sup> Just as Said's analysis of European conceptions of the Orient shaped the way a generation of scholars has approached colonial and post-colonial studies, Gérôme's art has come to embody the core values and conflicts of Orientalist imagery. Gérôme's images of Africans exemplify the uneasy alliances between artistry and ethnographic sensibilities and reflect the tensions embodied in the Orientalist approach to the exotic.

Gérôme's works are possibly the most seductive examples of the tensions of art and ethnography in Orientalist art. Gérôme's

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<sup>159</sup> Said, *Orientalism*.

compelling combination of academic classicism and exoticism fueled the popularity of the genre. His exacting documentary approach to both human and inanimate subjects garnered him a reputation as an ethnographer. Since the resurrection of interest in Orientalist art after the 1982 exhibition *Orientalism: the Near East in French Painting 1800 – 1880*, Gérôme's *Moorish Bath* has become one of the most notorious images of the nineteenth century. This chapter will investigate the intersection of exoticism and ethnography through an exploration of the African women featured in Gérôme's painting *Moorish Bath* (figure 1) and his bather series. Gérôme's black servant in *Moorish Bath* is emblematic of the complexity of the trope of the black female in Orientalist art. The role of the black in Orientalist art is an often noted but rarely examined aspect of this important and popular trend in nineteenth-century art.

Jean-Léon Gérôme invested his work in the blackness of the Orient. An elite French academician, his works were both lucrative and popular during his lifetime. One of the hallmarks of his style was the interest in different ethnic and racial types. Because of his detailed and specific treatment of these exotic figures, contemporary commentators labeled his work ethnographic, lending a sense of documentary accuracy to paintings now largely considered pastiches or fantasies. Gérôme's career spanned the second half of the nineteenth century, a period that witnessed the development of

human sciences, such as ethnography and anthropology, an increasing European engagement with Africa, and the international success of Orientalism in art. While these developments emanated from different sectors of society, Gérôme's work is a prime example of how they collided in art of the period, particularly in the representations of black Africans. His many black figures have been identified as Egyptian, Moorish, Sudanese, and Nubian. Perhaps his most notorious is the black slave woman in his 1872 painting *Moorish Bath*.<sup>160</sup>

*Moorish Bath* (figure 1) was the first in a series of works by Gérôme featuring black African women depicted with an ethnographic exactitude heretofore absent from French Salon painting. Gérôme's black women serve white female nudes in sumptuous interiors and perpetuate the long tradition of the black attendant in Western art. However, Gérôme's approach to this centuries-old theme combines his training as an academic artist, his experiences as an Orientalist traveler, and his impulse toward ethnographic documentation, resulting in a new type of Orientalist tableau. These black women were a critical index of a shift in Orientalist representation. They were

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<sup>160</sup> *Moorish Bath*, traditionally dated 1871, has been re-dated 1872 in the recent catalogue *Gérôme and Goupil*. The chronology of events surrounding Gérôme's search for an adequate black model and the sales records support the new date. *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise*, (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000), 135.

markers of sexuality, servitude, and difference, aspects that grew out of the tradition of the black servant. Additionally, with the rise of interest in ethnography and the scientific classification of human races, they came to represent a specific racial and cultural type that characterized the nature of the Orient and provided a racially degraded counterpoint to the superior European. As exemplified by Gérôme, Orientalism provided a forum for the artistry, fantasy, and fictions of the Orient to interact with the burgeoning scientific discourse on race and ethnicity.

Fictions of slavery in Orientalist art mediated social and political ideologies regarding race and colonialism in the nineteenth century. Exploring the tropes typified by *Moorish Bath* exemplifies the manner in which Orientalist and Africanist discourses of sexuality and race informed academic art in the Salons of nineteenth-century Paris.

### *Gérôme as Academic*

Born in 1824 in Vesoul, France, Gérôme was the son of a prosperous jeweler. In his youth he studied drawing and painting and had the tentative support of his family in the pursuit of art as a career.<sup>161</sup> In 1840, at sixteen years old, he entered the Paris atelier of academic artist Paul Delaroche (1797 –1856). Delaroche's work

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<sup>161</sup> Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme: His Life, His Work 1824-1904*, 13.

combined the draftsmanship of neo-classicism with the popularity of genre, a combination that would also come to characterize Gérôme's work.<sup>162</sup> In 1843, Gérôme accompanied Delaroche and other students to Rome for further study.

Upon his return to Paris, he entered the studio of Charles Gleyre (1806 – 1874). Although Gerald Ackerman maintains that Gérôme's time with Gleyre was influential in the development of his work, his tenure there was short-lived.

His interest in correct and accurate settings was probably reinforced by Gleyre's archaeological attention to his settings...And if Gleyre's enthusiasm for antiquity paralleled Gérôme's interests, Gleyre's enthusiasm for the Near East opened a new area for the young painter, probably instilling a curiosity that would later take him to the Near East and – so to speak – to his destiny.<sup>163</sup>

Gleyre had traveled to Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Sudan during 1834 and 1835. He returned with numerous studies of ethnic types.

Although his many watercolors and drawings of Nubians, such as *Study of a Young Nubian Woman* (figure 18), demonstrate his interest in the individual qualities of Sudanese blacks, Gleyre did not make the connection between his ethnographic sketches and his finished products as Gérôme later would. Gleyre's painting *La Nubienne* of 1838 (figure 19) exhibits none of the ethnographic flavor he recorded in his studies. Instead it is a romanticized interpretation of a Nubian

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 24.

woman in an artificial landscape.<sup>164</sup> In spite of his firsthand experiences, the Nubian woman remains vested in the artifice of academic studio painting. The degree of influence that Gleyre's experiences with African ethnography had on Gérôme is difficult to determine. At the very least Gérôme profited from a scholarly milieu in which the problems of translating extreme difference into academic art were being negotiated.

While in Gleyre's studio, Gérôme and other students formed a small group of painters known as the *Néo-Grecs*. From 1847 until they drifted apart in 1863, they were known for their depictions of ancient Roman and Greek genre. Critic Théophile Gautier (1811 – 1872) championed their work as an antidote to the vulgarity of realism.<sup>165</sup> The *Néo-Grecs*'s interest in historical genre reflects the triumph of bourgeois tastes for *juste-milieu* art during the Second Empire (1852 – 1870).<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Michel Thévoz, *L'Académisme et ses Fantasmies: Le Réalisme Imaginaire de Charles Gleyre* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980), 89-90.

<sup>165</sup> Gerald M. Ackerman, "The Néo-Grecs: A Chink in the Wall of Neoclassicism," in *The French Academy: Classicism and its Antagonists*, ed. June Hargrove (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 143.

<sup>166</sup> *Juste-milieu* can be defined as a taste in art that developed in the 1840s out of the gulf between classicism and its importance of the linear in art, and romanticism and the primacy of color. The group of artists who preferred to take the middle road between these two warring factions was called *juste-milieu*, a term that was also used to

Gérôme's work was not limited to the lighthearted classicism of the *juste-milieu*. He became increasingly successful with his official commissions, portraits, and entries in the Salon. He was praised for *Age of Augustus*, his large history painting exhibited at the 1855 Universal Exposition in Paris. Some critics believed that Gérôme's serious historical work was a hopeful sign in an era of eclecticism in art that was eroding the centrality of classicism.<sup>167</sup> In spite of the attempts by Gérôme and other artists to carry classicism's torch into the second half of the nineteenth century, the 1855 Universal Exposition made clear to the critics and viewers that a major shift in the arts had taken place. Regarding the 1855 Paris Exposition, Patricia Mainardi claims "In its pursuit of eclecticism, it had dealt a fatal blow to the traditional hierarchy of categories, and created the pre-conditions for a Modernist view of art."<sup>168</sup> In the wake of this "fatal blow" to tradition, Orientalism, among other trends, gained

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describe the policy of the July Monarchy government. The taste for the relatively safe *juste-milieu* art continued into the Second Empire. Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art* (New York: Abrams, 2003), 218-19.

<sup>167</sup> Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 80.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 120. Expounding on Mainardi's statement that the preconditions for Modernism are emerging at this time, it could be claimed that Orientalism is a precursor to modernist primitivism.

momentum and through it, Gérôme eventually found his most powerful voice.

The directions that Gérôme's artistry took during the Second Empire in his *Néo-Grec* work, his historical genre, and a growing interest in Orientalist themes, reflected the more widespread movement away from the rigidity of academic subjects, even among academic artists. Gérôme's *After the Masked Ball* (figure 20) was critical favorite at the 1857 Paris Salon. A contemporary Parisian scene set in the *Bois de Boulogne*, the painting depicts the dramatic moments after a duel has taken the life of a masquerader. Although this work won widespread praise, some conservative critics deemed him a traitor for seemingly abandoning the lofty realms of history for a lesser theme.<sup>169</sup>

The various critical issues with Gérôme's work reveal a central problem in the French visual arts in the Second Empire and the early Third Republic: the growing rift between academic values and the more moderate eclecticism of the visual arts. Critics publicly lamented a lack of order and structure in the visual arts and its institutions in mid-nineteenth-century Paris. Artists moved away from the classicism

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 119.

of the Davidian school to a popular taste that some felt lowered the moral tone of French art.<sup>170</sup> Robert Jensen observed:

By mid-century it was widely felt that the Salon had become commercially debased, appealing to the tastes of the public rather than remaining true to the noble calling of art. With the decline of history painting, the appearance of the mass spectacle of the Salon, and the bitter disappointments of the *refusés*, it became increasingly clear that the academic system no longer worked, either from the perspective of producing major works of art or as a professional organization that could ensure the economic livelihood of all of its membership.<sup>171</sup>

Rather than getting lost in the quagmire of conflicts, Gérôme skillfully navigated his career, and managed to gain official honors, popular renown, and wealth in an era of turmoil in the visual arts. His application of traditional draftsmanship in the neo-classical style to a body of work largely devoted to popular genre was an effective way to straddle some of the dividing lines, keeping one foot in both camps. However, I contend that it was his status as an ethnographic/Orientalist painter that became an important key to his success and longevity during this tumultuous period in French art.

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<sup>170</sup> Katherine B. Heisinger and Joseph Rishel, "Art and Its Critics: A Crisis of Principle," in *The Second Empire: Art in France under Napoleon III* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978).

<sup>171</sup> Robert Jensen, *Marketing Modernism in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 19.

## **Gérôme as Ethnographer**

Post-modern critic James Clifford deconstructed the history of ethnography and anthropology in his 1988 collection of essays *The Predicament of Culture*. In the essay “On Ethnographic Authority,” Clifford poses the following questions:

If ethnography produces cultural interpretations through intense research experience, how is unruly experience transformed into an authoritative written account? How precisely, is a garrulous, overdetermined cross-cultural encounter shot through with power relations and personal cross-purposes circumscribed as an adequate version of a more or less discrete “other world” composed by an individual author?<sup>172</sup>

Even though Clifford’s subject matter is twentieth-century social anthropology, his questions reveal the problematic nature of western authoritarian engagement with the ethnographic subject throughout the history of the field. The experiences of artists as ethnographers, travelers, and European interpreters of Oriental culture were unruly and overdetermined. Their presence in the Orient was necessarily undergirded by Western colonial, imperial, and economic domination, regardless of the intent of the individual artist. Clifford then wonders how a western observer could produce an adequate version of this other world. Under these circumstances, no adequate version exists. However, in the mid-nineteenth century interpretive methods of

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<sup>172</sup> James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority,” in *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 25.

western observers were not questioned as they are now. Power relations were taken for granted. Gérôme's photo-realistic style was accepted at face value, a documentary source that was readily consumed by the public.

Mid-nineteenth-century critics and patrons assumed that painters of the Orient were also painters of ethnography. The notion that art could be linked to this new science seemed to breath life into a floundering art establishment suffering from a lack of direction. Théophile Gautier, in his response to the 1859 Salon, contended that ethnography and Orientalism would rejuvenate a beleaguered art world.<sup>173</sup> Gautier remarked that the historic tableau on canvas was disappearing from the Salon and being replaced by large murals that adorned public buildings, modern spaces being too small. He claimed that even those who continued to produce history paintings seem to understand that they cultivated a fallen genre. Gautier asserted that ethnographic painting, as a scientific movement, was more in tandem with current ideas.

*En revanche, une tendance nouvelle plus conforme à nos mœurs et au mouvement de la science se développe aujourd'hui dans l'art, recrutant des adeptes à chaque Salon. Nous voulons dire "la peinture ethnographique."*<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Wolfgang Drost, "Gautier Critique d'Art en 1859," in *Exposition de 1859*, ed. Wolfgang Drost and Ulrike Henniges (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992), 482-86.

<sup>174</sup> Théophile Gautier, "M. Eugène Fromentin," in *Exposition de 1858*, ed. Wolfgang Drost and Ulrike Henniges (Heidelberg: Carl Winter

(On the other hand, a new tendency, more in accordance with our customs and with the movement of science is developing today in art, recruiting followers at each Salon. We want to call it “ethnographic painting.”)

Later in the article, he explained further.

*Toute la terre est inconnue sous le rapport plastique, excepté quelques coins de l'Europe qui, le plus souvent, n'ont fait que copier l'idéal de la Grèce et de l'Italie, négligeant ou dédaignant de reproduire leurs propres types. L'art, prenant l'homme pour point de départ, n'a guère, jusqu'à présent, rendu que la beauté général, sans spécifier les différentes races, sans les habiller de leurs costumes vrais, sans les poser dans les milieux d'elles habitent...Aujourd'hui la nature a remplacé le paysage historique, et les peintres se sont aperçus qu'il y avait d'autres hommes que les modèles d'académie ;...et le Sahara voit maintenant se déployer autant de parasols de paysagistes qu'autrefois la forêt de Fontainebleau.<sup>175</sup>*

(The arts of the entire world are unknown, except some corners of Europe which, more often, are only copies of the ideal of Greece and Italy neglecting or disdaining to reproduce their own types. Art, taking man as the point of departure hardly has, until now, rendered but general beauty, without specifying different races, without dressing them in their true costumes, without placing them in the milieu in which they live...Today nature has replaced the historical landscape and painters realize that there are men other than the academic model...and the Sahara now sees as many parasols of landscape artists unfolding as formerly in the forest of Fontainebleau.)

Gautier, clearly fatigued with the classical ideal, applauded artists such as Gérôme and Eugène Fromentin (1820 – 1876) for painting

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Universitätsverlag, 1992), 38. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 39.

figures outside of the academic models.<sup>176</sup> He compared the number of artists traveling to the Sahara to the forest of Fontainebleau, where nature was the source of artistic and spiritual inspiration for the Barbizon painters.

In his commentary on Gérôme, Gautier indicated that a sense of ethnographic accuracy and the understanding of different races were necessary for the modern painter.

*M. Gérôme possède aussi le sens ethnographique nécessaire au peintre moderne, aujourd'hui que tant de races, hier inconnues, surgissent à la lumière et entrent dans la sphère de plus en plus agrandie des types humains à formuler.*<sup>177</sup>

(Mr. Gérôme also has the ethnographic sense necessary to the modern painter, today when so many races, yesterday unknown, emerge into the light and enter into the widening sphere of human types to formulate.)

His statement that many previously unknown races had come to light, increasing the sphere of human types, is a direct reference to the science of racial classification as well as the proliferation of popular ethnography. Gautier implied that artists should incorporate these

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<sup>176</sup> Gautier's criticism is sometimes inconsistent and contradictory. His ideas shifted with the times. Robert Snell found his ideas on the nude and ideal beauty more in line with traditionalist approaches to art, rather than the more romantic tendencies seen in other commentaries. See Robert Snell, *Théophile Gautier* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

<sup>177</sup> Théophile Gautier, "M. Gérôme," in *Exposition de 1859*, ed. Wolfgang Drost and Ulrike Hennings (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992), 10.

different types into their schemes of representations. Interestingly, his assessment of Gérôme not only characterized the attention that academic artists were beginning to pay to different human types, but also foreshadowed the relationship between modernism and the European fascination with the “primitive” races at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>178</sup>

Gautier’s 1859 statement reflects the rise of popular anthropology and ethnography that was taking place in Paris at that time. In fact, Gautier wrote this commentary in the same year that the *Société d’Anthropologie de Paris* was founded by Paul Broca (1824 – 1880).<sup>179</sup> The forum for the advancement of anthropology and ethnography in the nineteenth century was the *société savante*.<sup>180</sup> Anthropology, a term associated almost exclusively with Broca, was defined as a natural science devoted to positive investigations into human anatomy, the variety of human physical types, and man’s place in nature.<sup>181</sup> The science of ethnography had developed independent of Brocan anthropology. *Société Ethnologique de Paris*,

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<sup>178</sup> Marianna Torgovnic, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>179</sup> Banton, *Racial Theories*, 88.

<sup>180</sup> Elizabeth A. Williams, “Anthropological Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France,” *Isis* 76, no. 3 (1985): 332.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

founded in 1839 by physiologist W.F. Edwards, was comprised of “gentlemen scholars” and a few trained academics. Less successful than the *Société d’Anthropologie*, this group intended to probe the physical organization, intellectual and moral character, languages, and historical traditions of the human races and to establish the degree of their intelligence and culture.<sup>182</sup> This organization was later replaced by the *Société d’Ethnographie* established in 1859 by Léon de Rosny for the purpose of promoting a more comprehensive science of anthropology that incorporated man’s moral and intellectual capacities.

Although the terms *anthropologie* and *ethnographie* were ambiguous even in the nineteenth century,<sup>183</sup> *ethnographie* extended the sciences of anthropology to assess the morality and intelligence of its subjects. Interestingly, critics adopted the term “*ethnographique*” to describe the Orientalist artist’s interest in documenting Eastern peoples and cultures. The quantification of morality inherent in the ethnographic approach to the human sciences parallels the position of moral, racial, and cultural superiority that Edward Said claims is implicit in Orientalism. The Saidian theory of Orientalism proposes

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<sup>182</sup> Martin S. Staum, “Paris Ethnology and the Perfectibility of “Races,”” *Canadian Journal of History* 35, no. 3 (2000).

<sup>183</sup> Williams, “Anthropological Institutions in Nineteenth-Century France,” 331.

that Orientalist texts and images in their repetition of stereotypes serve to affirm European power over societies of degraded morality. He contends that knowledge created by authorities, such as ethnographers and anthropologists, is characteristically political, not pure.<sup>184</sup> From our postmodern vantage point, the term Orientalist ethnography is laced with notions of European political and moral authority that ultimately compromised any claim to authenticity. At the time, however, the idea that Orientalist art was truthful and authentic was in keeping with practice of ethnography in public discourse.

For the next twenty years, Paris was the center of the disciplines of anthropology and ethnography in both its academic and popular form. Beginning in 1860, the journal *Le Tour du Monde* published popular anthropology/ethnography for general consumption until 1914. Illustrated accounts of overseas exploration were in great demand after 1850. Journals such as *Bulletins de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris* (1860 – 1899) were associated with the academicism of the learned society. Whereas a publication such as *L'Exploration: Journal des conquêtes de la civilisation sur tous les points du globe* (1876 – 1884) popularized the adventure of overseas

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<sup>184</sup> These ideas are presented in chapter one and two of Said's text. Said, *Orientalism*.

exploration and European conquest.<sup>185</sup> Less than scientific in their approach to images, the illustrations in *Le Tour du Monde* were executed by contemporary artists using sketches, drawings, or photographs brought back by the explorers. Frequently removed from their subjects, artists used conventional imagery to construct their interpretations of exotic peoples. *Femmes du harem* (figure 21), in an 1863 issue, is an example of the strong ties that popular ethnographic representation had to contemporary art. The interior scene of lounging Arab women smoking, drinking coffee, and being served by a black attendant, is attributed to Swiss painter-engraver Karl Girardet (1813 – 1871).<sup>186</sup> Standard Orientalist fare, it evokes the moody harem interiors of English painter John Frederick Lewis (1805 – 1876).

The same 1863 issue of *Le Tour du Monde* features an image of the harem of a Dahomean king (figure 22). The artist, working after sketches, depicts a classic scene of lounging nudes being fanned by a servant. The illustration is unusual because all of the women of the harem are black. The black women, referred to as “les amazones” in

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<sup>185</sup> “Les grands revues,” Bibliothèque National de France, Gallica. *Voyages en Afrique*, 2002, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/VoyagesEnAfrique/> (9 February 2005).

<sup>186</sup> This illustration appeared in an 1863 issue of *Le Tour du Monde*. It illustrates an article entitled “Une Visite Au Sérail en 1860” by Madame X, an anonymous female contributor. Madame X, “Une Visite Au Sérail en 1860,” *Le Tour du Monde* 7, no. 1 (1863).

the article, are represented with typical generic nude body types and nondescript facial features, exhibiting no attempt at ethnographic accuracy.<sup>187</sup> As a result of explorations into sub-Saharan or Black Africa, blacks outside of the geographic Orient had become the subject of great interest. Even though the black women in the Dahomean harem were not technically “Oriental,” they were cast as the primary performers in an Orientalist sexual fantasy. The Orientalist paradigm as it developed in fine art became the language for representing non-white exotic women across disciplines. The relationship between popular ethnographic illustration and art is interwoven and becomes indistinguishable in some instances. Early in the development of ethnography as a public discourse, the boundaries between ethnographic illustration and artistry blurred.

Despite the increase of learned societies and journals in mid-nineteenth century Paris, anthropology and ethnography remained a discipline of relative amateurs. Gérôme, Gautier, and a host of Orientalist artists and writers who traveled to the Orient were like other tourists who returned with personal accounts of their experiences and observations. Raconteurs of Orientalist lore fulfilled the main criteria for authority by being European and male. Visual and literary accounts brought back to Europe by these observers were

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<sup>187</sup> *Interieur du harem du roi* was engraved by V. Foulquier after sketches from the author M. Repin and M. Boulangé. Dr. Répin, “Voyage Au Dahomey,” *Le Tour du Monde* 7, no. 1 (1863): 100.

published widely in ethnographic journals, exhibited in Salons, and deemed authoritative. Although it now seems unsettling to ascribe scientific status to the works of an artist or writer, at the time they were among the legitimate purveyors of ethnographic knowledge.<sup>188</sup>

Gérôme's remarkable ability to capture the likenesses of different types of people that he encountered in his travels to Egypt, Turkey, and the Middle East solidified his reputation as an ethnographer in this loosely defined field. Gérôme typically sketched on his travels and later produced his paintings in his Paris studio using photographs, props, and costumes.<sup>189</sup> His *Bachi-Bouzouk nègre* of 1869 (figure 23) is the close study of a black figure in the costume of a mercenary soldier. Gérôme produced numerous ethnographic portraits such as his *Bisharin Warrior* of 1872 (figure 24) and *The*

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<sup>188</sup> Ellen Strain contends that the lines between science and popular knowledge were difficult to draw in the mid-nineteenth century. In the decades before the establishment of fieldwork as proper ethnographic method, anthropologists were hobbyists and naturalists. Most mid-century anthropologists could be likened to armchair travelers. In this instance, Gérôme and Gautier both could be considered hobbyists who traveled and observed. Ellen Strain, "Exotic Bodies, Distant Landscapes: Touristic Viewing and Popularized Anthropology in the Nineteenth Century," *Wide Angle* 18, no. 2 (1996).

<sup>189</sup> Hélèn Lafont-Couturier states definitively, "Les portraits n'ont pas été réalisés sur place, mais dans l'atelier parisien. Gérôme a recours à un modèle professionnel, habillé de vêtements orientaux empruntés à son immense collection..." (The portraits definitely are not completed on site, but in the Parisian studio. Gérôme resorts to a professional model dressed in Oriental clothing borrowed from his immense collection...) Hélène Lafont-Couturier, *Gérôme* (Paris: Herscher, 1998), 69.

*Black Servant Girl* of 1872 (figure 25). Without the context of elaborate settings and exotic landscapes, these images focus on the figure. The ethnicity of the individuals, their physical attributes, and their personal adornment are the subject of the painting.

Gérôme's sensibilities as an Orientalist "ethnographer" flourished when he set his subjects in lavish Oriental surroundings. *Arab et ses chiens* of 1875 (figure 26) and *La Prière au Caire* (figure 27) of 1865 allowed Gérôme to incorporate Islamic architecture, costume studies, and decorative detail into his studies of ethnic types. These seemingly documentary genre scenes of modern Oriental life impressed the critics and established a niche for Gérôme.

Whereas realist artists such as Gustave Courbet (1819 – 1877) and Edouard Manet (1832 – 1883) and impressionist Claude Monet (1840 – 1926) challenged the traditional academic models and spurred public controversy over the second half of the century, Gérôme was seen as the bedrock of tradition, the antithesis of emerging modernity in the visual arts. Gérôme's academic Orientalism was an acceptable alternative to traditional classicism and did not appear as transgressive as realism or impressionism. Because Orientalist genre intersected with the science of ethnography, it seemed less frivolous than the typical low-ranking category of

genre.<sup>190</sup> Orientalist subjects lent seriousness to genre and landscape because of their authenticity, and infused history painting with popular exoticism. Gérôme's hyperrealist, documentary approach to the Orient became a dominant mode in Orientalist art in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>191</sup>

### **Venus Noire**

Gérôme's interpretations of black females were part of a wave of interest in black women that escalated during the nineteenth century. Recent scholarship reveals the great extent to which the black female captured the imagination of European scientists, writers, and artists. Although historical accounts of their experiences in Europe are scant, their images abound in art, literature, and theater. The French seemed to be particularly intrigued by the image of the black woman in the nineteenth century, and they set the tone for her representation across Europe.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Peltre, *L'Atelier du Voyage: Les Peintres en Orient au XIXe siècle*, 59.

<sup>191</sup> Roger Benjamin, "The Oriental Mirage," in *Orientalism: Delacroix to Klee*, ed. Roger Benjamin (New South Wales: The Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997), 16.

<sup>192</sup> In America, the development of the image of the black female took a decidedly different tone. See Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*.

The evidence of this fascination remains behind in novels, paintings, popular publications, and “scientific” documentation. The boundaries between disciplines were often blurred with the arts taking cues from the sciences and vice versa. The overarching theme of European narratives of the black woman in the nineteenth century was primitive sexuality. The black woman was in fact an icon of sexuality.<sup>193</sup> T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting has theorized that black women embodied the dynamics of racial/sexual alterity, invoking primal fears and desire in European, particularly French, men. The qualities of difference in the black female gave rise to the trope of the *Venus Noire* (Black Venus) that inspired repulsion, attraction, and anxiety in the collective French male imagination.<sup>194</sup>

Many scholars have traced the paradigm of sexuality and degradation that surrounded the black woman in the nineteenth century to the notorious case of the Hottentot Venus. Early in the century a group of French scientists, led by Georges Cuvier (1769 – 1832), asserted that the black woman was the incarnation of primitive sexuality. Cuvier based his conclusions on the study of a Hottentot

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<sup>193</sup> Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature.”

<sup>194</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*, 6.

female in 1817.<sup>195</sup> The now infamous “Hottentot Venus,” Sarah Baartman, was of the Khoikhoi peoples from South Africa. Her exploitation by Europeans in London and Paris as a sideshow attraction (figure 28) had become notorious.<sup>196</sup> Bartman was known for her physical anomalies such as her large protruding buttocks, or steatopygia, and her hypertrophy, or overdevelopment of the labia minora. Her unexplained, extreme difference from the European body prompted the scientific community to assert that black women were biologically predisposed to pathological sexuality. The Hottentot Venus was positivist proof that the black female was the incarnation of sexual degeneracy.

The strangeness of the Hottentot body was not new to the nineteenth century. The misshapen physiognomy and “bizarre” customs of the Hottentots had been reported by European travelers

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<sup>195</sup> Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature.”

<sup>196</sup> *La Sculpture Ethnographique: de la Vénus hottentote à la Tehura de Gauguin*, (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994), Gérard Badou, *L'énigme de la Vénus Hottentote* (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot/Voyageurs, 2002), Stephen Jay Gould, “The Hottentot Venus,” *Natural History* 91, no. 10 (1982), Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, ed., *La sculpture ethnographique: De la Vénus hottentote à la Tehura de Gauguin* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994), Z.S. Strother, “Display of the Hottentot Body,” in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, ed. Bernth Lindfors (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

for centuries.<sup>197</sup> However, Sarah Baartman became more than an oddity in a freak show. She was a scientific document of the nature of the black female. After her death, her body was dissected by Cuvier and her genitalia were preserved and presented as specimens of black female degeneracy.<sup>198</sup> She was the first major ethnological exhibition of the century.<sup>199</sup> The public spectacle of the Hottentot Venus, along with the notions of sexuality and lasciviousness associated with her type, underscored representations of black women in Europe, particularly France, throughout the century.<sup>200</sup>

While black women remained supporting characters in the visual arts through most of the century, employed mainly to punctuate their environment with sexuality and exoticism, a narrative

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<sup>197</sup> Four hundred years before the case of the Hottentot Venus, European travelers wrote accounts and commentary on the South African “Hottentot” people. Strother claims that the Hottentots were reported to be a separate species from the black race and were considered undersexed. Reports of their lasciviousness were rare until the nineteenth century. These ideas radically changed in the nineteenth century. Strother, “Display of the Hottentot Body.”

<sup>198</sup> Baartman’s genitalia, skeleton, and brain were preserved and studied by scientists such as Paul Broca. Her remains were in the collection of the *Musée de L’homme* in Paris until 2003 when they were repatriated to South Africa. See Gould, “The Hottentot Venus.”, Hankey, “S. Africa Buries Remains of 'Sarah',” *NYTimes.com*, August 9, 2002.

<sup>199</sup> Strother, “Display of the Hottentot Body,” 35.

<sup>200</sup> For a survey of the black female in nineteenth-century ethnographic photography, see Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 8-81.

surrounding the *Venus Noire* as a central character developed in the literary arts.<sup>201</sup> Mme. Claire de Dura's (1777 – 1828) *Ourika*, published in 1823, is a novella about a tragic African slave orphan taken in by an aristocratic French woman who dresses her in Oriental attire and attempts to teach her the charms of French civilization.<sup>202</sup> Modernist poet Charles Baudelaire's (1821 – 1867) *La Venus noire* cycle from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1857, is known to have been inspired by his mulatto mistress Jeanne Duval.<sup>203</sup> Baudelaire's sensuous description of a black prostitute in *La Belle Dorothée* of 1869 exploits the idea of the Black Venus as dark seductress.<sup>204</sup> Emile Zola's (1840 – 1902) *Thérèse Raquin*, 1867, is the story of a mulatto woman who becomes a prostitute because she cannot escape the primitive sexuality in her blood. Pierre Loti's 1881 *Le Roman d'un saphi* is a

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<sup>201</sup> Sharpley-Whiting refers to the trope of the sexualized black female in literature as the "Black Venus narrative." See Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*, 6.

<sup>202</sup> The idea that a black woman should be dressed in Oriental garb permeated French culture. For more on *Ourika*, see Doris Y. Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney, eds., *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1783-1823* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1994), 185-228.

<sup>203</sup> Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French*, 69-138, Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, 261-76.

<sup>204</sup> See Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French*, Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*.

novel set in Senegal about a French man who is seduced by both an African and a mulatto woman leading to his eventual death. The supposed inherent sexuality of the black female runs through the heart of these novels and poems.

The *Venus Noire* narrative that flourished throughout the century was the unquestioned frame of reference for the image or the idea of the black female. Seemingly disparate discourses in science, literature, and the arts converged in this figure. When Gérôme, Cordier, and other mid-century artists began to include the black female in their artistry, they did not manufacture new ideas about black women; they entered a discourse that had generated its own history, logic, and internal structure.

### **Gérôme's Nineteenth-Century Predecessors**

Sources for Gérôme's 1872 *Moorish Bath* and bather series abounded in early Salons. The tradition of the Oriental harem in nineteenth-century painting has its cornerstone in two of the most prominent artists of the first half of the century: neo-classicist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780 – 1867) and the romantic icon Eugène Delacroix (1798 – 1863). They produced different, but equally influential harem images that set the tone for the development of this genre throughout the century. Ingres introduced the combination of

the academic nude and an Orientalized setting in *Grande Odalisque* of 1814 (figure 29). The objects that adorned and appointed her boudoir signified the Orient, not the European body.

Delacroix's "authentic" treatment of the harem challenged Ingres' brand of academic Orientalism. Delacroix conceived *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* of 1834 (figure 30) while on a French diplomatic mission to North Africa. His approach to the Oriental female was a departure from the rococo fantasy of the harem as seen in Nattier's *Mademoiselle de Clermont* (figure 11) or the stylized "eastern" nude of Ingres' *Grande Odalisque*, both executed by artists who had never been to the Orient. Not only did Delacroix travel to the Orient, but he was purportedly allowed to observe the female quarters of an Algerian household, or what would have been known in the West as a harem.<sup>205</sup> Since westerners were generally not permitted inside the cloistered female quarters of the Oriental household, Delacroix's image was considered true to nature, a fragment of his journey, even scientific.<sup>206</sup> In an era when travel to

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<sup>205</sup> Mary J. Harper contends that Delacroix avoided the sexually charged terms "harem" and "odalisque" for the more ethnographically accurate *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*. Mary J. Harper, "The Poetics and Politics of Delacroix's Representation of the Harem in *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*" (paper presented at the Picturing the Middle East: A Hundred Years of European Orientalism, Dahesh Museum, 1995), 58.

<sup>206</sup> Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism*, 121-22.

North Africa had expanded for artists, the issue of the firsthand experience of the artist and its contribution to the perceived accuracy of the image became important aspects of representations of the Orient.<sup>207</sup>

Edward Said and his followers have demonstrated that the Western traveler to North Africa and the Middle East came armed with preconceptions, making it impossible to record their surroundings accurately.<sup>208</sup> Delacroix was no exception. In spite of his clear will to document what he experienced in the Moroccan household, Delacroix felt the need to embellish the scene by adding a black servant, a figure that was by this time the definitive sign of Oriental sensuality. While the three main figures were drawn from life and recorded in his Moroccan sketchbook, the black servant was based on a later sketch of a studio model.<sup>209</sup> Delacroix's need to enhance the scene could be rooted in any number of issues. Hugh Honour suggests that the standing black woman serves as a compositional balance to the seated figures, providing movement, texture and contrast, but "no

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<sup>207</sup> Peltre, *L'Atelier du Voyage: Les Peintres en Orient au XIXe siècle*.

<sup>208</sup> Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>209</sup> Jobert points out that the three seated women derive from his sketchbook as well as a model in Paris wearing clothing he brought back from North Africa. The black woman, according to Jobert, is a complete invention of the artist. Barthélémy Jobert, *Delacroix* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 150.

burden of symbolism.”<sup>210</sup> Barthélémy Jobert, in his recent monograph on Delacroix, also comments on the addition of the black female servant in *The Women of Algiers*:

This figure simply adds to the exoticism of the painting, the verisimilitude of which she increases in the eyes of a spectator familiar with descriptions of Turkish harems. She is thus part of the tradition of European painting since the Renaissance, tying the work to the great Venetian masters, in particular Veronese.<sup>211</sup>

Jobert acknowledges the important lineage of black servants dating back to the Renaissance and their links to nineteenth-century art. He also confirms my contention that the black servant was a critical aspect of the Oriental setting, and actually increases the verisimilitude, or truthfulness, of the painting in the eyes of the spectator. In Delacroix we find an early example of a painter/traveler who combined his will to document the Orient with the highly artificial traditions of European art to form a hybrid approach to exoticism. The addition of the servant was a device that expanded the limits of his experience, enabling him to create a schematized Orient easily consumed by the European audience.<sup>212</sup>

The sensuous Oriental woman and black slave transcended depictions of the modern Orient, exporting their combustive

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<sup>210</sup> Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 148.

<sup>211</sup> Jobert, *Delacroix*, 150.

<sup>212</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 66-68.

combination to historical and biblical subjects. Theodore Chassériau (1819 – 1856), a follower of Delacroix, brought elements of the Oriental harem to his treatment of the biblical heroine Esther in *The Toilette of Esther* (figure 31) of 1841. Two dark servants in colorful costumes and jewelry flank the sensuous Esther. A striking feature of this work is the black servant to the left of Esther. Presumably the eunuch Hegi, his muscular arms and large hands combined with his jewelry and generic costume lend him an air of androgyny. He is the inverse of the pale, sinuously elongated Esther.<sup>213</sup> Both masculine and feminine, the gender of the servant is indeterminate, adding another dimension to the conventional oppositions of dark and light, beauty and non-beauty. Later, Gérôme will exploit the sexual tension between masculine and feminine in the tradition of Chassériau in the muscular figure of the black slave in *Moorish Bath*.

Perhaps the most important image in the genealogy of Gérôme's *Moorish Bath* is Ingres' 1863 *Turkish Bath* (figure 32). Now an icon of academic Orientalist fantasy, *Turkish Bath* is a pastiche of decades of Ingres' bathers. Devout neo-classicist and armchair Orientalist, Ingres combined Orientalized settings and details with his signature

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<sup>213</sup> Chassériau transcribed a passage from the Book of Esther in the Salon handbook that inspired this painting. The text mentions "Hegi, the keeper of the women." This text is quoted in Stéphanie Guégan, Vincent Pomarède, and Louis-Antoine Prat, *Théodore Chassériau (1819-1856) The Unknown Romantic* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002), 142-45.

classical nudes. Black servants were important Orientalizing attributes in *Turkish Bath*. The juxtaposition of dark and light bodies, by this time a conventional symbol of eastern exotica, punctuates the crowded bath. The black women, one a musician, one serving coffee, another dressing hair, add an anecdotal exoticism to a scene invested in the sensuous white flesh of the bathers.<sup>214</sup> In a work that is clearly a tribute to the European body, these black figures are a counterpoint to the ideal of beauty. The forward-facing black servant in the hairdressing vignette is juxtaposed with the profile of a white servant (figure 33). The round, broad nose, full lips, and dark skin of the servant is a marked contrast to the white skin and aquiline nose of her neighbor. These figures recall the spectrum of types described by eighteenth-century scientists and reinforce the understanding of racial hierarchies that remained alive in the discourse of human physiognomy contemporary to the painting.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> There is a figure entering the door in the background of this painting. The source of the figure is an African attendant with a bowl on her head from a sixteenth-century print by Nicolas de Nicolay. This figure could potentially be the fourth black servant, but she is impossible to identify in the shadows of the door. For more on the print by Nicolay, see Leslie Luebbers, "Documenting the Invisible: European Images of Ottoman Women, 1576-1867," *The Print Collectors Newsletter* 24 (1993).

<sup>215</sup> Banton, *Racial Theories*, Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880*, Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*.

An illustration in J. Jules Virey's 1824 *Histoire naturelle du genre humain* (figure 34) exemplifies this point.<sup>216</sup> This illustration juxtaposes the upright profile of Apollo with the extremely angular profile of a "negro." Apollo represents the highest standard of both physical beauty and morality while the black is the lowest, one level above the primate.<sup>217</sup> The negroid features found in the figure of the black servant demonstrate an understanding of racial typology that was not present in Ingres's earlier works such as his *La Petite Baigneuse, Intérieur de Harem* of 1828 (figure 35) or *Odalisque with Slave* of 1839 (figure 36). Nor was it present in other important pieces of this genre such as *Delacroix's Women of Algiers* (figure 30). The physiological "African-ness" of the black figure, a relatively minor aspect of *Turkish Bath*, anticipates a new wave in representation that will be fully articulated by Gérôme.

Academic painting was not the only milieu from which Gérôme's ethnographic/Orientalist sensibilities gained momentum. Concurrent with the rise of Orientalist painting in France was the development of the science and art of photography. This medium would play a large role in the Orientalist project in France, both as its own

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<sup>216</sup> This widely reproduced image was published in Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western culture*, 71.

<sup>217</sup>For a discussion of the ideas of Lavater, Wincklemann and others regarding physiognomy and beauty see Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*.

representational vehicle and as an *aide de mémoire* for European artists.<sup>218</sup> Mid-century photographers traveled to Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey to photograph and document the landscape, peoples, and cultures of North Africa and the Middle East. They took their cues from Orientalist artists in constructing their images of the East. Orientalist schemes also influenced photographers who recreated exotic scenes in their local studios.<sup>219</sup> They used the juxtaposition of dark and light bodies to exploit the formal qualities of the new medium of black and white photography. They also drew upon the trope of the pairing of black and white females to create erotic images in the tradition of Orientalist Salon painting.

French photographer Jacques Antoine Félix Moulin (ca. 1802 – 1869) was clearly in dialogue with contemporary Orientalist painting in his 1853 photograph from *Etudes Photographiques* (figure 37). Gen Doy claimed that this erotically charged “artistic” nude was not considered pornographic, but would have been sold under the table and probably suggests a brothel.<sup>220</sup> The odalisque and her black

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<sup>218</sup> Sylvie Aubenas and Jacques Lacarrière, *Voyage en Orient* (Paris: Editions Hazan, 1999).

<sup>219</sup> Nissan N. Perez, *Focus East: Early Photography in the Near East (1839-1885)* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1988), 40.

<sup>220</sup> Gen Doy, “More than Meets the Eye. Representations of Black Women in Mid-19th-Century French Photography,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 21, no. 3 (1998): 307.

female attendant, both nude, lounge with legs intertwined on a chaise covered with leopard skin. The black model wears a turban, earrings, and light-colored beads, similar to the pearls seen worn by this figure throughout the centuries. The animal skin, used by Chassériau in *Toilette of Esther* (figure 31), signals the primitive nature of the odalisque, her African attendant, and the Oriental context. The persistence of the paradigms of race and exoticism in photography is a testament to the strength of the ideas as well as the compelling visual nature of the image of the black in mid-nineteenth-century Paris.

The relationship between photography and Orientalist art was multi-dimensional. Photographers not only borrowed heavily from Orientalist imagery, but Orientalist painters and sculptors relied on photographs to document images and sources for their work. Gérôme used photographs as documentation for his canvases. On his first trip to Egypt in 1856, he traveled with sculptor/photographer Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi (1834 – 1904) who recorded their journey.<sup>221</sup> In an undated photograph by Bartholdi, he portrays himself and Gérôme in North African garb (figure 38).<sup>222</sup> This type of self-portrayal reveals the manner in which artists often assumed the identity of the exotic

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<sup>221</sup> Perez, *Focus East: Early Photography in the Near East (1839-1885)*, 66.

<sup>222</sup> Peltre, *Orientalism in Art*, 172.

characters they wanted to capture. Gérôme's brother-in-law, Albert Goupil (1840 – 1884), was the official photographer of the 1868 expedition. Gérôme used photographs taken on these journeys to reproduce architecture and landscape.<sup>223</sup> In fact, Nissan N. Perez contends that the primacy of the photo-realist style in Orientalist art is linked to its close relationship to photography.<sup>224</sup>

In addition, photography was a critical part of the widespread reproduction and dissemination of Gérôme's work by art publisher Adolphe Goupil (1806-1893). Goupil's firm published and marketed photographs and photogravures of Gérôme's works in Europe and America, making him one of the wealthiest artists of the century.<sup>225</sup> Emile Zola (1840 – 1902) criticized Gérôme's links to photography and through it the commercialization of his artistry. He stated that Gérôme was an artist who "paints a picture so that this picture can be reproduced through photography or engraving and sell thousands of copies. Here the subject is everything, the painting is nothing: the

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<sup>223</sup> *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise*, 17.

<sup>224</sup> Perez, *Focus East: Early Photography in the Near East (1839-1885)*, 66.

<sup>225</sup> Photogravure was a technique developed by Goupil. The process combined printing photographs by copper-plate engraving, resulting in prints comparable to photographs. *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise*, 31-43.

reproduction is worth more than the work itself.”<sup>226</sup> The middlebrow bourgeois consumers of Gérôme’s prints lowered his status as an elite academician, yet built his international reputation and his fortune.

Gérôme’s Orientalist imagery was squarely situated in the artistic *milieu* of mid-nineteenth-century Paris. As he embarked on his series of bathers in 1871, he had an established reputation as a painter, Orientalist, and ethnographer. He followed the footsteps of Delacroix in his search for fidelity to his experiences of North Africa and the Middle East. Stylistically he maintained the exacting linear quality of Ingres, David, and the traditional academic school, but his exotic, anecdotal subjects had more in common with the *juste-milieu* than grand history painting.

### **A Vendre: Esclaves au Caire: Prelude to Moorish Bath**

Prior to *Moorish Bath*, Gérôme’s representations of women consisted of portraits, allegories, religious themes, and a few nudes. The nudes were primarily mythological subjects and slave markets, both Oriental and Roman. Works such as *Phryné devant l’Aréopage* (Phryné before the Areopagus) (figure 39), 1861, and *Marché*

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<sup>226</sup> As quoted by Peter Gay, *Pleasure Wars*, vol. V, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 72.

*d'esclaves* (Slave Market) (figure 40), 1866, are part of a pattern of passive nudes by Gérôme. From the ancient world to the contemporary Mediterranean, women subject to the exploitation, domination, and voyeurism of powerful men recur in his oeuvre. One work in particular, *A Vendre: Esclaves au Caire* (For Sale: Cairo Slaves) (figure 41), of 1871, stands out as a precursor to *Moorish Bath* and the bather series.

Before he embarked on his series of exotic bathers, Gérôme was actively exploring the pictorial and ideological relationships between the black and the white body in an Oriental setting. In 1871, he executed two related works that depict a public Cairo slave market, *The Slave Market*, (figure 42), and *A Vendre: Esclaves au Caire* (figure 41). Although slave markets are not new to his repertoire, in *A Vendre: Esclaves au Caire*, Gérôme distills the relationship between the black and the white to its essential tensions.

Replacing the pampered, languorous Salon odalisque, the white nude in *A Vendre* is a degraded, albeit sensuous, white slave. Served up for sale by the slave dealer lurking in the shadows of the open kiosk, she is seductively distraught and disheveled. A black woman, also for sale, accompanies her. They complement each other in form and content, true to the convention they represent. The white slave displays full frontal nudity for potential buyers and spectators. Her

explicit sexuality is a departure from Gérôme's more reserved slave market nudes who often turn their backs to the viewer.

The pairing of black and white slaves represents the variety of women that were sold in the Cairo marketplaces, from Circassian to Abyssinian. In this respect, Gérôme reported what he no doubt witnessed in the streets of Cairo. While technically both for sale, the white slave was destined for an elevated form of concubinage, whereas the black slave would perform the lowest levels of servitude.

Once again, the black female was the symbol of racial degeneracy. By seating the black slave next to a monkey, Gérôme constructed an explicit reference to the hierarchy of human races. E.B. Shuldham, who reviewed the piece in the 1871 Royal Academy exhibition, immediately recognized this reference:

There is an honesty, as it were, about the slave girl's nakedness, as she stands there in the market, a dark, strong-limbed Eve, but - and here is the pathos of this picture - an Eve who is irrevocably doomed to dishonour. The jet black Abyssinian semi-nude sits careless of her fate, whilst a marvelous monkey, worthy of Landseer, squats huddling by her side, from the terms of the sale almost an acknowledged equal, the monkey and the negress evidently going together as one lot.<sup>227</sup>

Shuldham, likened the white slave to Eve and ascribed to her feelings of dishonor and shame, imbuing her with a humanity not extended to the black woman. Shuldham asserts that in contrast the black shows

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<sup>227</sup> M.D. E.B. Shuldham, "The Royal Academy," *Dark Blue* (1871): 472.

no emotion and accepts her fate not only as a slave, but also as an equal to the monkey. The critic for *The Athanæum* responded in kind, describing the black figure as “a Nubian, in a white cotton robe, with red flowers in her black hair, and occupied by a monkey, whose profile is oddly like her own...”<sup>228</sup>

Gérôme painted *A Vendre: Esclaves au Caire* during the same period he began his bather series with *Moorish Bath*. Although *A Vendre* drew critical attention with its political theme and provocative display of sexuality, Gérôme abandoned the sexual underworld of the Orient for a more romantic approach to the nude. Within the sumptuous, decorative interiors of *Moorish Bath* Gérôme continued to develop the theme of race and sexuality in the imagined Orient.

### **Moorish Bath and the Bather Series**

In *Moorish Bath*, Gérôme continues his tradition of seductive, but powerless women. He established a new vocabulary of Orientalist nudes, an interest that he would sustain throughout his career as a painter. He was not the first to invest in the seductive imagery of the Oriental bath, but his provocative interpretations would come to

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<sup>228</sup> “The Royal Academy,” *The Athenæum* 2270 (1871): 532. See also Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, morality and art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 171-72.

represent some of the most potent forms of French exoticism of the nineteenth century.

Gérôme began *Moorish Bath* (figure 1) in London in 1870. After the Franco-Prussian War broke out in Paris, Gérôme moved his family away from the hostilities to London.<sup>229</sup> As an established French academician and commercially successful artist, he was immediately accepted into and embraced by the London art establishment. Elected to the Royal Academy as an honorary member in 1869, he exhibited there in 1870 and 1871, as well as at the popular French Picture Gallery.<sup>230</sup>

The first owner of *Moorish Bath* was H. J. Turner, a London collector. Varying accounts exist of the manner in which Turner acquired the piece. According to the curatorial file of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where the painting now resides, the painting was a gift from Gérôme to Turner.<sup>231</sup> Alternatively, the recent catalogue for the exhibition *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise* indicates that the piece was sold to the art dealer and publisher Adolphe Goupil in 1872 for 12,000 francs by the artist and in turn

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<sup>229</sup> Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme*, 90.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>231</sup> Provenance records for *Moorish Bath*. Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

sold to Turner by Goupil for 22,000 francs.<sup>232</sup> In his memoirs, Gérôme stated that he could not complete the painting in London because he did not have the proper model for the African slave.<sup>233</sup> He returned to Paris in June of 1871 to find an appropriate model.<sup>234</sup> Therefore the piece was probably not completed until 1871 or later and could have logically gone through Goupil in Paris back to Turner in London. Gérôme and his father-in-law Goupil had a long-standing agreement for the purchase and reproduction rights to his paintings.<sup>235</sup> Goupil later reproduced *Moorish Bath* in an etching by Charles-Jean-Louis Courty in 1873.<sup>236</sup>

Turner, who also owned at least one other Gérôme, *L'Arab et son Coursier*, lent *Moorish Bath* to several major exhibitions including the Universal Exhibitions of 1873 in Vienna and 1878 in Paris.<sup>237</sup> The painting was also featured in two important exhibitions at the London

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<sup>232</sup> Hélène Lafont-Couturier, ed., *Gérôme and Goupil, Art and Enterprise* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000), 135.

<sup>233</sup> Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme*, 92,272.

<sup>234</sup> See time line of Gérôme's life and work in Lafont-Couturier, *Gérôme*, 117-26.

<sup>235</sup> Lafont-Couturier, ed., *Gérôme and Goupil, Art and Enterprise*.

<sup>236</sup> *Gérôme and Goupil: Art and Enterprise*, 135.

<sup>237</sup> *L'Arab et son coursier* and *Moorish Bath* are listed as lent by Turner in the 1878 catalogue for the Universal Exposition in Paris. "Exposition Universelle Internationale de 1878, à Paris," in *Catalogue Officiel* (Paris: Commissariat Général, 1878), 30.

Guildhall in 1895 and 1898. In 1903, art dealer Arthur Tooth purchased *Moorish Bath* through a sale at Christies, London. Tooth sold the piece and it eventually ended up in the collection of Robert Jordan of Boston, Massachusetts, who donated it to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1924. Since the 1970s when the interest in European Orientalist art exploded in the United States, *Moorish Bath* has been included in numerous publications and exhibitions.

*Moorish Bath* was the first in a series of bathers that eventually resulted in approximately 27 works, three of which share the title *Moorish Bath*.<sup>238</sup> Most of the bath scenes include at least one black servant. Dating from 1871 through the 1890s, they range from intimate groups of two such as the 1872 *Moorish Bath* and the 1880 – 85 version of the same theme (figure 43), to multi-figured compositions such as his *Grand Bath at Bursa* of 1885 (figure 44). Most of the scenes take place in an interior, as in *Pool in a Harem*, ca. 1876 (figure 45), or in an enclosed courtyard, as seen in *La Terrasse du sérail* of 1886 (figure46).

### ***Black and White Slavery***

For more than a century, European artists had seized upon the allure of the Oriental female captive to transform European bodies

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid. This number is a result of a survey of the images in Ackerman's monograph, the most complete assemblage of Gérôme's work to date. Many of these paintings were published as prints or photogravures.

into Eastern seductresses.<sup>239</sup> Gérôme's Oriental bath scenes embraced the fantasy of the white odalisque and used the traditional iconography of the black slave to provide the necessary oppositions and underscore the sense of exoticism in the scenes. The Orientalist framework allowed artists the freedom to use white bodies to explore racial and sexual taboos and perverse desires by contextualizing them within a debauched culture, far from the "buttoned-up decorum of Second Empire Paris."<sup>240</sup>

Gérôme's pairing of black and white bodies are at the core of a series of oppositions and tensions that structure the work. The tension between Africa and Europe is the overriding framework within which the various polarities operate in *Moorish Bath*. Africa, once filtered through the veil of the Orient, was by the mid-nineteenth century understood as a separate entity. Africans came to represent a set of ideas and issues that were developed within the realm of ethnography. Because the human sciences determined that the black African was the lowest race in a hierarchical system in which the European was the apex, the role of race in Orientalist art had a

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<sup>239</sup> See Joan DelPlato's discussion of Circassian and Georgian women. DelPlato, *Multiple Wives, Multiple Pleasures: Representing the Harem, 1800-1875*, 39-42.

<sup>240</sup> Robert Rosenblum used this phrase in a description of Théodore Chassériau's *The Tepidarium*. Robert Rosenblum, *Paintings in the Musée D'Orsay* (New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1989).

biological rationale, however erroneous, that did not exist in earlier forms of exoticism. This notion of biological comparison represents a qualitative shift in the understanding of human difference since the Enlightenment.

Although the odalisque in Orientalist works such as Gérôme's *Moorish Bath* inhabits a white European body, she too is a slave or concubine held captive by the wealthy Turk or Ottoman Sultan. The titillating notion of sexual servitude was more than a pure fantasy. The Eastern harem was a well-known aspect of Oriental culture dating back centuries. The presence of white concubines in the Oriental harem had long been "documented" through literary sources and was a fundamental aspect of the mythology and the ethnography of the eastern harem.<sup>241</sup> Edward Lane's (1801 – 1876) *Manners and Customs of Modern Egyptians* was a popular account of contemporary Egyptian culture that was widely used as a documentary source throughout Europe. In it Lane describes white slaves in the harem as Greek, Circassian, and Georgian, and black slaves as Abyssinian, Nubian, or simply black.<sup>242</sup> Lane's 1860 text describes the status of the white slave:

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<sup>241</sup> Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature*.

<sup>242</sup> Lane's book has never gone out of print. First published in 1836, the definitive edition was published in 1860. It was used as a source for historians, writers, artists, and others as an authoritative account

The white slaves, being often the only female companions, and sometimes the wives, of the Turkish grandees, and being generally preferred by them before the free ladies of Egypt, hold a higher rank than the latter in common opinion. They are richly dressed, presented with valuable ornaments, indulged, frequently, with almost every luxury that can be procured...<sup>243</sup>

Black women in harems were almost exclusively slaves. By 1871, Europe and America had abolished slavery, but it was only nominally prohibited in North Africa and the Middle East. In spite of attempts to eradicate the ancient tradition, the trans-Saharan trade in Nubian or Sudanese blacks continued to supply Egypt and other Islamic countries slave labor throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>244</sup> In fact, Ronald Segal maintains that “In all the many centuries of the Islamic trade, it was in the nineteenth century that the largest

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of contemporary Egyptian society and culture. At times problematic, his general descriptions of the ethnicity of Egyptian slaves have been confirmed by twentieth-century historians. Gabriel Baer, “Slavery in Nineteenth Century Egypt,” *Journal of African History* 8, no. 3 (1967), Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2003), 184.

<sup>243</sup> Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 184-5.

<sup>244</sup> The practice of keeping black slaves continued in Egypt throughout the nineteenth century. *Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824-1904)*, (Dayton: The Dayton Art Institute, 1972), Baer, “Slavery in Nineteenth Century Egypt.”, Robert O. Collins, “The Nilotic Slave Trade: Past and Present,” *Slavery and Abolition* 13, no. 1 (1992), Alice Morre-Harell, “Slave Trade in the Sudan in the Nineteenth Century and its Suppression in the years 1877-80,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 2 (1998).

numbers of black men, women and children were enslaved and the largest numbers of other blacks killed in the process.”<sup>245</sup>

In the Islamic system, black female slaves held the lowest rank, performing most of the coarse household duties.<sup>246</sup> Lane wrote that “Most of the Abyssinian and black slave-girls are abominably corrupted by the Gellábs, or slave-traders, of Upper Egypt and Nubia, by whom they are brought from their native countries; there are very few of the age of eight or nine years who have not suffered brutal violence... .”<sup>247</sup> Their primary duties were to serve the higher-ranking concubines of the harem. Although domestic servants, they were not exempt from the role of sexual servant.<sup>248</sup> Gérôme would no doubt have encountered this aspect of Islamic society through his travel experiences. The black slave evoked both a timeless, antiquated Orient with a barbaric and uncivilized culture, as well as a contemporary society that failed to embrace the modern social structures of the Western powers.

The desirable women in an Orientalist painting conformed to European standards of beauty. Rana Kabbani declared that they

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<sup>245</sup> Ronald Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 146.

<sup>246</sup> Baer, “Slavery in Nineteenth Century Egypt,” 419.

<sup>247</sup> Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 185-6.

<sup>248</sup> Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora*, 109.

were “exotic without being unappetizingly dark.”<sup>249</sup> Kabbani infers that the darker skin of a Turkish or Arabic woman would be unappealing to the European viewer. The preeminence of the white odalisque in Orientalist art attests to Kabbani’s interpretation. However, historical accounts of slavery in nineteenth-century Islamic societies maintain that white female slaves were scarce. The lack of supply actually served to increase the demand for black slaves.<sup>250</sup> That black slaves played a larger role in Orientalist art perhaps reflects this demographic. However, the white female nude remained the nucleus of Orientalist Salon painting. The black servant then played a crucial role in symbolizing race in the harem and therefore transforming the white nude from a contemporary European society to the exotic local.<sup>251</sup> The spectrum of dark Oriental races was

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<sup>249</sup> Kabbani is among the scholars whose critical view of Orientalist painters, particularly Gérôme, stands in opposition to that of Ackerman. Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 81.

<sup>250</sup> Segal, *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora*, 149.

<sup>251</sup> The female nude in nineteenth century art became a popular subject in Salon painting and at times the site of contentious debate. The controversy of contemporary sexuality was avoided by the exotic context. The public outcry surrounding Manet’s *Olympia*, 1863, is a well-known example. For more on the controversial nude in nineteenth-century art see T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Heather Dawkins, *The Nude in French Art and Culture, 1870-1910* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

concentrated in the black servant without the threat of tarnishing the body of the white odalisque.

### ***Binaries***

In the case of the black servant plus the white nude, the sum is greater than its parts. Carefully crafted binaries create a reaction that evokes exoticism in a manner that neither figure could achieve alone. Ackerman, who rarely discusses race in Gérôme's work in a politicized manner, notes the combustive nature of this combination by describing the series as "often juxtaposing a black woman and a white woman in a spicy contrast."<sup>252</sup> During the nineteenth century "the exotic, the foreign, increasingly gained, throughout the empire, the connotations of a stimulating or exciting difference, something with which the domestic could be (safely) spiced."<sup>253</sup>

*Moorish Bath* is an example of masterful use of an array of "exciting" differences and binaries that produce a "spicy" tension. In the tradition of contrasts that began in the Renaissance with Titian and carried through Rubens and Nattier, Gérôme's African servant is the rhetorical opposition to the bather. Her darkness is the absence of beauty that enhances the beauty of whiteness. The gesture of

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<sup>252</sup> "...juxtaposant souvent une femme noire et une femme blanche dans un contraste piquant." Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme*, 92.

<sup>253</sup> Bill Ascroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 94.

service was also a rhetorical tool that bolstered the status of the served, directing attention to the main figure. The elements of race and sex, integral to the fantasy of the Orient, are grafted onto the body of the African servant and through her permeate the scene.

The differences between the figures are not limited to race and ethnicity. The body of the servant is muscular. She is actively involved with bathing her mistress. Her muscles bulge as she holds a large basin of water. She is the foil for the passive, fleshy nude bather seated on the tile bench. By juxtaposing the action of the slave with the stillness of the bather, Gérôme exploits the notion that the Oriental woman perpetually languished in sensual abandon while being waited on by an elaborate staff of attendants.

Gérôme's composition reinforces the ideological binaries. The black figure stands facing front, and the "white" bather sits facing back.<sup>254</sup> An enclosed seating area on the right is juxtaposed with an empty space on the left. The black servant wears a turban, a typical headdress of the exotic slave, while the nude wears no headgear. The servant's drapery is a dark, rough-hewn cloth while the bather's discarded robe is a finely woven, vibrant silk in bright shades of green and red. A litany of contrasts define the subject as well as the composition.

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<sup>254</sup> Linda Nochlin points out that Gérôme's bather signifies tradition by referencing the "original Oriental backview" of Ingres's *Valpinçon Bather*. Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," 47.

## Critical commentary on *Moorish Bath* in the 1878 Universal

Exposition in Paris reveals that Gérôme's use of oppositions appealed to the contemporary viewer:

The ebony body of one and the ivory form of the other, first with a yellow Madras kerchief on her head, the second with her wealth of golden tresses, are bathed in the ambient air, the highlights being adjusted with remarkable flexibility; there is nothing to criticize in this little gem, no fault of style or orthography; one could write perfect from one end of the canvas to the other.<sup>255</sup>

These oppositions are present in overarching issues of race and ethnicity as well as the minor details of the composition. In fact, Gérôme's attention to detail is one of his most distinguishing attributes as a painter. His detailed eye contributed to his reputation as an ethnographer in his own time, and it has revealed his extreme artifice to later observers.

### ***Costume and Décor***

Much of Gérôme's appeal stemmed from his ability to re-create costumes, architecture, and decorative accoutrements. An 1868 article in the *Gazette des Beaux-Art* praised Gérôme's "scholarly ornamentation" in an era when many artists neglected execution and

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<sup>255</sup> Fanny Field Herring, American Gérôme biographer, quotes "Art of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" by DePesquidoux. Fanny Field Herring, *Gérôme: The Life and Works of Jean-Léon Gérôme* (New York: Cassell Publishing, 1892).

masked their ignorance under a “false appearance of liberty.”<sup>256</sup>

Gérôme’s ornamentation of both bodies and décor was a spectacle of exotic material culture.

As stated above, because Gérôme was unable to find an appropriate model for the servant in London, he returned to Paris to complete the painting.<sup>257</sup> This anecdote puzzled Gerald Ackerman who wrote in his latest monograph that the artist seemed to paint his white bathers from memory, prompting him to question “so why not the slave?”<sup>258</sup> Indeed, Gérôme had included several black females in his Orientalist works to date. However, they were background figures such as the slave standing behind the buyer in the 1857 *Achat d'une*

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<sup>256</sup> Émile Galichon, “M. Gérôme: Peintre Ethnographe,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1868): 150.

<sup>257</sup> While we do not know who Gérôme used as his model for the slave, it is well known that there were several black models working during the 1860s and 1870s. Artists such as Paul Cézanne, Edouard Manet, Frederick Bazille, Charles Cordier, and Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux used black models in mid-century Paris. It is probable that some of the models worked for more than one artist. Perhaps the most well known today was Laure who posed for Manet’s *Olympia*. Recently, Phylis A. Floyd uncovered a photograph of a black woman she contends is Laure. The name on the photograph is Lucie. Although it is impossible to determine from the painting, I believe there is a resemblance between Gérôme’s black model in *Moorish Bath* and the photograph of Lucie (Laure). While identifying the model is potentially interesting, more important to this analysis is that Gérôme apparently sought out ethnographic accuracy in representing the black body. Phylis A. Floyd, “The Puzzle of Olympia,” *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*, no. Spring (2004).

<sup>258</sup> “...alors, pourquoi pas l’esclave?” Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme*, 272.

*esclave* (figure 47), and the seated black woman behind the slave dealer in *Marché d'esclaves* (figure 40). Gérôme brought the black slave out of the shadows in *Moorish Bath*, making her part of the primary action of the painting. Hence, the issue of authenticity became more critical to the image of the black woman as a central figure. In light of the reputation that Gérôme had garnered as a painter of ethnography, coupled with the rising interest in Africa, the convincing rendition of the African slave was clearly of paramount importance to Gérôme. The authenticity of the scene hinged on it.

Gérôme abandoned the practice of dressing the black servant in generic Oriental garb in favor of a specifically North African costume. Ethnic costume and jewelry was an important aspect of representing the Oriental body. Gérôme used the black servant to display the adornment that gave the scene much of its ethnographic flavor. The most striking feature is her Moroccan-style necklace (figure 48). Gérôme collected jewelry and costumes during his trips abroad. Even though he never traveled to Morocco, he had access to jewelry from across the Mahgreb in the Cairo marketplaces he visited. The necklace has a series of circular coins and square pendants interspersed with red coral, typical of Moroccan metalwork (figure

49).<sup>259</sup> Later, in his 1880 – 85 iteration of *Moorish Bath* (figure 43), he adorns the black servant with a Bedouin-style headdress that consists of fabric draped around the head and large rings on the sides of the face. A photograph by Gamianoset Sarolides, active in Egypt in the 1870s, depicts a Bedouin woman with a similar headdress (figure 50).

In the tradition of Rubens, Nattier, and VanLoo, jewelry and headdress were important elements in the adornment of the exotic slave. However, before the primacy of ethnography in exoticism, the jewelry was limited to pearls or coral beads, items that symbolized luxuries to Europeans. The servants who wore them were exotic luxuries as well. Gérôme and other ethnographic Orientalists used jewelry from the Orient to adorn their figures.

The servant's drapery is another "authentic" garment that is identifiably ethnic. Although impossible to determine where the cloth originated, it resembles fabric found in nineteenth-century photographs of North Africans. *Negresse à la fontaine* (figure 51) is an anonymous, undated photograph of a black woman taken in Algeria.<sup>260</sup> Her dark, woven drapery is comparable to the drapery worn by the servant in both the 1871 and 1880 – 1885 versions of *Moorish*

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<sup>259</sup> Jacques Rabaté and Marie-Rose Rabaté, *Bijoux du Maroc: Du Haut Atlas à la vallée du Draa* (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud/Le Fennec, 1996), 40-42.

<sup>260</sup> Mounira Khemir, *L'Orientalisme: L'Orient des Photographes au XIXe Siècle* (Paris: Nathan, 2001).

*Bath*. Ethnographic artist Alfred Dehodencq (1822 – 1882) depicted a black man draped in a comparable weave in *Moroccan Storyteller* of 1877 (figure 52).<sup>261</sup> This type of cloth is clearly ascribed to the lower registers of North African cultures. In the form of adornment, Gérôme pits the primitive African against the alluring odalisque. The drapery is one more detail that solidifies the African difference in Gérôme’s bathers.

Critics consistently noted Gérôme’s ability to capture ethnic types in their native costumes, but his skill at reproducing architectural detail, both interior, and exterior was widely praised as well. From the interior of a mosque to a Cairo cityscape, Gérôme’s architectural settings were central characters in his ethnographic genre. His series of Oriental baths portray the intimate interiors of a world of eastern wealth and luxury.<sup>262</sup>

In the Renaissance, the notion of a luxurious East was manifest in exotic objects and servants. In the nineteenth century, Gérôme added to this mix the Oriental interior. Both versions of *Moorish Bath* of 1872 (figure 1) and 1880 – 85 (figure 43), *Pool in a Harem* (figure

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<sup>261</sup> *Moroccan Storyteller* was exhibited at the 1878 Universal Exposition along with Gérôme’s *Moorish Bath* of 1871.

<sup>262</sup> Because they were so rich in décor, Steven R. Eddidin proposed that Gérôme’s series of Turkish bath scenes were an answer to the decline in France’s decorative arts industry of the 1870s. Stephen R. Eddidin, “Gérôme’s Orientalisms,” in *Gérôme & Goupil: Art and Enterprise* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000), 136.

45) and *La Terrasse du sérail* (figure 46) as well as others in the series, feature rich decorative schemes. Two versions of *Moorish Bath*, 1872 and 1880 – 85, represent a private Cairo bath, possibly the domain of a wealthy Turk.<sup>263</sup> *La Terrasse du sérail*, a multi-figured composition, is a setting in the style of a typical Turkish palace courtyard, and has been identified as the terrace of the Topkapi palace in Istanbul.<sup>264</sup> In spite of its many bathers, the setting is private, the province of the on-looking sultan seated at the rear of the pool. These harem baths offer the viewer access to a world of private luxury and sensuality that had been the center of European fantasies of the east for more than a century.<sup>265</sup>

The women languish in an interior space defined by fountains, pools, domes, and arcades. Gérôme's baths are often

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<sup>263</sup> Gérôme's characterization operates with Edward Lane's contention in *Manners and Customs* that white slave women were very expensive and strictly the property of wealthy Turks in nineteenth-century Cairo. Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 183.

<sup>264</sup> Ackerman states that this is the terrace of the Topkapi palace, probably painted from photographs taken by Abdulla Frères. Ackerman, *Jean-Léon Gérôme*, 316. Ettinghausen states that this setting is modeled after a Turkish palace kiosk, but does not identify it as Topkapi. Richard Ettinghausen, "Jean-Léon Gérôme as a painter of Near Eastern life," in *Jean-Léon Gérôme (1824 - 1904)* (Dayton: The Dayton Art Institute, 1972).

<sup>265</sup> Schick, *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alterist Discourse*, Yeazell, *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature..*

rendered with lavish tiled walls and mosaic floors decorated with meticulously rendered, authentic motifs.<sup>266</sup> He also includes decorative objects such as rugs, coffee pots, hookas (pipes), and metal bowls. These items have been associated with the harem environment since the eighteenth century. Rana Kabani discusses the function of interior décor in creating the atmosphere of the Orient.

In the Orientalist interior (and the erotic scenes in this genre almost always depict an interior), the setting is vital to the body it cushions. It is a catalogue of goods, a showpiece of commodities that the viewer might covet... The nude or semi-clothed woman in the Orientalist painting is made more erotic by her surroundings of material objects, by the cushions, hangings, sofas, vessels, fans, bottles, garments and musical instruments which the viewer's eye is made to take in. <sup>267</sup>

Kabbani's interpretation aptly describes Gérôme's bather series in which the objects of desire range from the sensuous nudes to the colorful tiles.

Linda Nochlin has sharply criticized Gérôme's use of detail as giving undue credibility to his work. In her landmark article "The Imaginary Orient," she stated:

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<sup>266</sup> Many scholars have commented on Gérôme's attention to architectural detail. His detailed renderings of settings and decorative objects have prompted some to claim that his work is an accurate depiction of another culture, and others to maintain that it falsely authenticates a fantasy world. For a balanced view to this issue see Walter B. Denny, "Quotations In and Out of Context: Ottoman Turkish Art and European Orientalist Painting.," *Muqarnas* 10 (1993).

<sup>267</sup> Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient*, 70.

A “naturalist” or “authenticist” artist like Gérôme tries to make us forget that his art is really art, both by concealing the evidence of his touch, and at the same time, by insisting on a plethora of authenticating details, especially on what might be called unnecessary ones...They are signifiers of the category of the real, there to give credibility to the “realness” of the work as a whole, to authenticate the total visual field as a simple, artless reflection – in this case, of a supposed Oriental reality.<sup>268</sup>

Nochlin points out that in fact Gérôme’s work does not reflect a “ready-made reality but, like all artists, is producing meanings.”<sup>269</sup>

Like the exotic objects, the black woman is an authenticating detail, part of the coveted “catalogue of goods.”

Now considered the emblem of French exoticism, Gérôme’s *Moorish Bath* of 1872 is a prime example of the duality of intense repulsion and attraction inspired by the image of the black female body in nineteenth-century art. With smooth surfaces, hypnotic colors, and entrancing details, Gérôme’s painting conveys the sensual and seductive pleasures of the Orient while mediating European ideas of slavery, racial degeneracy, and sexual domination. Within the ongoing narrative of sexuality that permeated the visual arts for two hundred years, the black woman generally played the role of the slave

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<sup>268</sup> Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989).

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

or servant to a sexualized “white” female. Out of the many compelling aspects of what Europeans considered Oriental culture, French artists seemed to be obsessed with the explosive combination of black slavery and white sexuality through the veil of the exotic.

Through elaborate scenarios, costumes, and characters, Gérôme investigated the rich strata of Oriental society. While Gérôme and other painters produced tableaux populated by exotic characters, sculptor Charles Cordier extracted these types, and established a new expression of Orientalism in the form of ethnographic sculpture. His particular passion for black African figures gave new form to the black exotic.

## **Chapter 4 Orientalism, Sculpture, and *les Noirs exotique*: Charles Cordier**

*Médaillé et décoré; voyageur, savant et portraitiste. M. Cordier a rassemblé la plus complète et la plus savante collection de portraits anthropologiques que l'on ait vue. Quelques-uns son des merveilles de luxe et de décoration où es marbres rare, l'or, les pierres précieuse sont agencés avec un goût tout oriental.*<sup>270</sup>

(Medal-holding and decorated, traveler, scholar and portraitist, Mr. Cordier has assembled the most complete and scholarly collection of anthropological portraits seen. Some are marvels of luxury and decoration where rare marbles, gold, precious stones are put together with a totally Oriental taste.)

Treated with “ethnographic” flair, Charles Cordier’s exotic black African men and women were unusual in the landscape of mid-nineteenth-century sculpture. Even though his expressed efforts to dignify and celebrate the beauty of the black race were a departure from the caricature that typified this brand of imagery, his Africans remained bound to complex historical tropes of blackness.

While painting was, by far, the most prevalent medium for Orientalist representation, the phenomenon had a powerful voice in the sculptor Charles Cordier. Cordier advanced the genre of Orientalist sculpture by investing his work on North African types,

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<sup>270</sup> Emile Cantrel, “Salon de 1863,” *L'Artiste* 1 (1863): 192.

infused with Orientalist tropes.<sup>271</sup> He was closely linked to ethnographic circles and, like Gérôme, his work operated in the margins between ethnography and art. His combination of idealism, exoticism, and use of sumptuous materials influenced other sculptors and artisans to adopt his format for representing “Others.” Cordier’s Africans became paradigmatic models of race in nineteenth-century sculpture.

This chapter explores the confluence of exoticism and blackness in three of Cordier’s most important ethnographic busts. *Saïd Abdallah*, 1848 (figure 2), and *Vénus Africaine (African Venus)*, 1851 (figure 3), are pendant bronze busts of an African man and woman. These works were Cordier’s first and perhaps greatest successes in his career. *Nègre du Soudan (Negro of the Sudan)*, 1856 (figure 4), was a triumph of Orientalist polychrome sculpture and a resonant embodiment of art and empire.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Before Cordier, Orientalist themes in sculpture were generally small-scale animals, hunt and battle scenes. One example is Anotine-Louis Bayre’s bronze *Python Crushing an African Horseman* of c. 1835 – 40. See Peter Fusco and H.W. Janson, eds., *The Romantics to Rodin: French Nineteenth-Century Sculpture from North American Collections* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1980), 134.

<sup>272</sup> English language publications have variously translated the titles of these works. Here I am using titles as translated in the recent exhibition catalogue and most comprehensive study of Cordier to date. Laure de Margerie and Édouard Papet, *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905) Ethnographic Sculptor* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004).

In the larger matrix of Orientalist representation, sculpture and painting were related discursive practices that shaped European understanding of the Orient. However, when considering its relationship to blackness, Orientalist sculpture experienced a trajectory distinct from painting. Rooted in the decorative arts, it traveled through ethnographic practice into academic sculpture, and returned to the decorative arts. Cordier's work is a prime example of this circular journey of the sculptural embodiment of the black exotic.

Whereas Gérôme adopted the role of ethnographer as he gravitated toward ethnic subjects, Cordier consciously embarked on a career as an artist/ethnographer and intended his work to be part of the scientific discourse on human variation. He believed his sculpture represented both accurate and ideal examples of racial physiognomy, reflecting current ethnographic methods that often drew conclusions regarding the intellectual and moral qualities of racial types based on physiological features.<sup>273</sup>

Cordier's polychrome Orientalist works stood in opposition to the primacy of neoclassicism in both subject matter and medium. The revival of interest in antique sculpture was fueled by Johan Joachim Winckelmann (1717 – 1768), a German scholar whose notion that bodies represented in classical sculpture were ideal forms, reoriented

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<sup>273</sup> William B. Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1890), 218-62.

the world of sculpture.<sup>274</sup> This ideal flourished in the young, athletic, primarily male bodies solidified in white marble. The paradigm of ideal beauty that was considered inherent in classical Greek and Roman sculpture was the standard followed by neoclassical sculptors of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century. Historical and mythological themes from antiquity abounded. Contemporary themes were also depicted in the style of the antique. White marble was the material used by the ancients as evidenced by the antiquities that flooded European museums and private collections. It was therefore the principle medium in this new wave of classicism. Even though it was known that many ancient works were originally polychrome, most European artists and critics resisted this as a corruption of the ideal.<sup>275</sup>

Cordier is often credited with resurrecting the ancient art of polychromy in the nineteenth century. The use of polychrome materials was an ancient Roman imperial practice that experienced a revival in baroque sculpture, and resurfaced in Cordier's works. He boldly conceived his series of ethnographic sculptures in a variety of materials and patinas. Although he is not solely responsible for the resurgence of this practice, his work was in the forefront of its revival

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<sup>274</sup> Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 23-33.

<sup>275</sup> Andreas Blühm, "In living colour: A short history of colour in sculpture in the 19th century," in *The Colour of Sculpture 1840-1910*, ed. Andreas Blühm (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 1996).

in the Second Empire, blurring boundaries between the fine and decorative arts.<sup>276</sup>

Cordier's blacks are potent examples of the influence of ethnography on the decorative as well as the "fine" arts. Many of his large-scale busts such as *Saïd Abdallah*, *Vénus Africaine*, and *Nègre du Soudan* were reduced, produced in multiples, and sold as decorative statuettes.<sup>277</sup> Cordier, like other sculptors of his era, also produced large-scale decorative sculpture commissioned for public and private spaces. While Gérôme's paintings demonstrated the artist's interest in recording decorative arts and interiors, Cordier's work with exotic ethnographic imagery actually *functioned* as decorative art and brought Orientalism to the domestic interiors of Second-Empire Paris and beyond.

### **Sculpture and Eclecticism in Second-Empire France**

Beginning in 1852 with the reign of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte (1801 – 1873), Napoleon III, and ending with the devastation of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, the Second Empire was an era of

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<sup>276</sup>Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> The reduction and serialization of sculpture was a common practice in the nineteenth century. Jacques de Caso, "Serial Sculpture in Nineteenth-Century France," in *Metamorphoses in Nineteenth-Century Sculpture*, ed. Jeanne L. Wasserman (Cambridge: Fogg Art Museum, 1975).

exuberance, splendor, and controversy in the world of French art. Cordier's combination of sculpture, ethnography, and the decorative arts is characteristic of this tumultuous period in French art. Just as Gérôme's historical and Oriental genre paintings appealed to bourgeois tastes, Cordier's rejection of strict classicism for decorative exoticism attracted collectors interested in the new eclecticism of contemporary art.

A dictatorial ruler, Napoleon III presided over a period of development and prosperity for France that brought about the growth of foreign trade, the spread of industry and railways, as well as an explosion of public works projects.<sup>278</sup> Attempting to build his empire, he employed the most aggressive policy of expansionism to date in nineteenth-century France. Although his policies were often ill fated, he fashioned himself as an Emperor in the tradition of his uncle, Napoleon I, and attempted to construct an imperial culture centered in Paris.<sup>279</sup> Part of the Emperor's plan was an elaborate public project aimed at modernizing Paris. To update the medieval city, the state commissioned grand architectural projects that "affirmed the might of

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<sup>278</sup> Quinn, *The French Overseas Empire*, 108.

<sup>279</sup> Louis Napoleon's "successes" included the building of the Suez Canal, and the incursion into Senegal, Vietnam, and Cambodia. His resounding defeat occurred in a disastrous attempt to exercise power in Mexico. His foreign policy stirred controversy during his own time. See Ibid, Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present*, Fifth ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1995).

imperial power.”<sup>280</sup> Cordier’s ethnographic busts were one aspect of a large arts movement in which sculpture and architecture were used to affirm the legitimacy of the Empire.<sup>281</sup>

Described as an era of bourgeois materialism, Second-Empire modes in art, literature, fashion, and more, were aimed at satisfying middle class tastes.<sup>282</sup> A growing bourgeois class with more disposable income drove the market for an increasing and diverse array of goods.<sup>283</sup> The diversity of genres and lack of a coherent style in art and material culture characterized the times, and caused some to criticize the period as insignificant, wedged between the major stylistic movements of Romanticism and Impressionism.<sup>284</sup> In the official world of French sculpture, the move away from predominant neo-classical modes and themes was seen as a lamentable erosion of the grand style.<sup>285</sup> Rather than mourning the slow death of classicism

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<sup>280</sup> *The Second Empire 1852-1870: Art in France under Napoleon III*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978), 204.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>282</sup> Jean-Marie Moulin, “The Second Empire: Art and Society,” in *The Second Empire: Art in France under Napoleon III* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1978), 12.

<sup>283</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).

<sup>284</sup> Moulin, “The Second Empire: Art and Society,” 11.

<sup>285</sup> *The Second Empire 1852-1870: Art in France under Napoleon III*, 204.

that seemed to last the entire century, Cordier, like Gêrôme in the world of painting, took advantage of the possibilities that eclectic tastes afforded and developed a niche for his brand of exotic sculpture.

### **Manhood and the exotic black**

Until Cordier initiated the genre of ethnographic sculpture in the mid-nineteenth-century, no cohesive tradition of representing black men in modern sculpture existed.<sup>286</sup> Unusual types such as Nicolas Cordier's<sup>287</sup> (1567 – 1612) *Maure or Il Moro*, (Moor), c. 1600 (figure 53) appeared sporadically. Napoleon I acquired *Maure* in 1801 and it was on display in the Louvre around 1850.<sup>288</sup> Scholars agree that Charles Cordier would have seen *Maure* and other polychrome pieces at the Louvre.<sup>289</sup> The title *Maure* binds the sculpture to the

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<sup>286</sup> There are numerous examples of blacks in ancient Greek and Roman sculpture. Vercoutter et al., *The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire*.

<sup>287</sup> No relationship exists between Nicolas Cordier and Charles Cordier.

<sup>288</sup> Édouard Papet, ““To have the courage of his polychromy” Charles Cordier and the Sculpture of the Second Empire,” in *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905) Ethnographic Sculptor* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004).

<sup>289</sup> Andreas Blühm et al., *The Colour of Sculpture 1840-1910* (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 1996), 170, Papet, ““To have the courage of his polychromy” Charles Cordier and the Sculpture of the Second Empire,” 54.

trope of the “Blackamoor” that appears to encompass most representations of black men in European art and literature of the modern era. Cordier used black marble to depict the black skin of the Moor, a technique dating back to antiquity.

The Moor had various incarnations since the Renaissance vogue for exotic blacks in painting and literature.<sup>290</sup> After the illustration of Shakespeare’s plays became popular in the late eighteenth century, the figure of the Moor was often conflated with the character Othello.<sup>291</sup> Other than a few specialized characters such as the Black Magus, the Moor, or Othello, adult black men were relatively rare in European art until the nineteenth century.

A few examples of black men in eighteenth-century sculpture can be considered background material for Cordier’s innovations. The distinguished French rococo portrait artist Jean-Baptiste Pigalle (1714 – 1785) produced a terra-cotta bust of *Le Nègre Paul*, ca. 1760, (figure 54), the servant of a friend of the artist. Pigalle sculpted Paul’s

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<sup>290</sup> Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*. Israel Burshatin, “The Moor in the Text: Metaphor, Emblem, and Silence,” in *“Race,” Writing, and Difference*, ed. Jr. Henry Louis Gates (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

<sup>291</sup> Paul H. D. Kaplan, “The Earliest Images of Othello,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1988).

portrait along with that of his master.<sup>292</sup> Fashioned with a feathered turban, typical of black figures in *turquerie*, *Le Nègre Paul* was the sculptural counterpart to the black servant in painting.

*Head of an African*, 1758 (figure 55), a marble bust by British artist Francis Harwood, active 1748 – 1783, presages Cordier's ethnographic work with its use of colored marble and individualized treatment of the subject. Sculpted without the ubiquitous turban, *Head of an African* represents black Africa unmediated by the veil of the Orient. David Bindman claims that the scar on the forehead of the figure “makes it clear that it represents a ‘savage’ warrior,” asserting that the bust evokes the trope of the noble savage.<sup>293</sup> The idea of the noble savage developed in Enlightenment theories of primitive peoples. A contradiction in terms, the savage was by definition inferior to the civilized observer, but “nobility” resided in his simplicity and innocence, his ability to commune harmoniously with nature, and his lack of the pretensions and falsehoods associated with aristocratic European society.<sup>294</sup> The stately portrayal of *Head of*

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<sup>292</sup> Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, “Sculpture et ethnographie,” in *La sculpture ethnographique: De la Vénus hottentote à la Tehura de Gauguin* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994), 35.

<sup>293</sup> Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*, 32.

<sup>294</sup> Todorov points out that the myth of the noble savage played an important role in literature between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe. The ideas were first developed in response to European observation of American indigenous people. Tzvetan

*an African* in the manner of ancient Roman portraiture recalled the portrayal of notable men in antiquity. In Harwood's piece, the African savage in the form of antique nobility was an articulate instance of the paradox of the noble savage. Cordier later resurrected this paradox of representing a degenerate race in the style of the revered ancients in both *Saïd Abdallah* and *Nègre du Soudan*.

Because of the lack of a cohesive tradition of blacks in sculpture, black men in Orientalist paintings are the salient referents for the Africans in Cordier's sculpture. Orientalist works were never isolated; they built on one another. As Edward Said demonstrated, Orientalism was an interrelated discourse encompassing a variety of media that shaped Western understanding of the East. Cordier's images of blacks, stand-alone pieces of sculpture, were in dialogue with narratives of exoticism that were repeatedly recounted and recast in Orientalist painting and literature. They were a body of discreet but related works that collectively communicated the mythologies of the Orient.

While as we have seen, black females were plentiful in harem imagery, black men populated earlier Orientalist battle scenes fashionable in the Napoleonic era. In the context of war and colonial pursuits, the notion of the noble savage that circulated in eighteenth-century idealist concepts of race slipped into the merely savage. In

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Todorov, *On Human Diversity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 264-308.

numerous tableaux, black soldier/slaves were part of Oriental armies defending themselves against French and British invasion. An important example of this typology is the turbaned, knife wielding black nude at the center of Anne-Louis Girodet's (1767 – 1824) *Revolt of Cairo*, 1810 (figure 56). The embodiment of Oriental savagery, the black man holds the decapitated head of a French soldier among the mêlée (figure 57). His nude body radiates sexual energy.<sup>295</sup> In this case, art in the service of imperialist propaganda demonized the Oriental foe whose darkest incarnation was the black African male.<sup>296</sup>

The black eunuch was the inverse of the stereotype of the aggressive African male in French Salon painting. The most important early example was portrayed in Ingres's *Odalisque with Slave*, 1830 (figure 36). The richly adorned black eunuch in the background became a ubiquitous symbol for the Oriental harem in European painting throughout the century. In Orientalist mythology, the eunuch was far from the aggressive, potent soldier. He was a passive, impotent accessory, similar to the adoring page. This

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<sup>295</sup> For a reading of the complex erotic relationships between the male soldiers in this painting see Grigsby, *Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France*, 105 - 63.

<sup>296</sup> After Napoleon's unsuccessful campaign in Egypt, he returned to France and rose to power. Girodet and other artists were employed to produce propagandistic images to glorify the emperor's past military exploits in North Africa. Ibid, Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism*.

guardian and gatekeeper for the harem women became a popular subject of Orientalist painting throughout the century.

Thus the unbridled savage and the passive eunuch bracketed the spectrum of black manhood in Orientalist art. By the time Cordier submitted *Saïd Abdallah* to the Salon, the exotic black man was a familiar figure in Orientalist painting. Cordier's involvement in this tradition would indeed bring new dimension to this trope and import Orientalism into the world of Second-Empire sculpture.

### **Saïd Abdallah**

Cordier's early years followed the conventional path in France, where a thriving arts establishment provided both training opportunities and patronage.<sup>297</sup> As an apprentice in Paris, sixteen-year-old Cordier worked in a studio of ornamental sculpture for architectural decoration and, for extra money, he sold small statues

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<sup>297</sup> Cordier was born in 1827 in Cambrai, France, the youngest child of a pharmacist. In his early years, he studied drawing at a local art school and briefly apprenticed with a jeweler. He studied modeling with a sculptor in Lille before leaving for Paris in 1844. Laure de Margerie, "Chronology," in *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905) Ethnographic Sculptor* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004). For more on arts institutions and patronage in the nineteenth century see Harrison C. White and Cynthia A. White, *Canvases and Careers: Institution Change in the French Painting World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

along the river Seine.<sup>298</sup> After spending time at the *École royale spécial de dessin*, Cordier entered the *École des beaux-arts* for a short period in 1846.<sup>299</sup> Instead of the institutional instruction of the Parisian art schools, Cordier opted to work in the studio of François Rude (1784-1855), one of France's premiere sculptors. While Cordier was in Rude's atelier, he encountered an African man, a serendipitous event that changed the course of his career.

Cordier's memoirs recount the day in 1847 when a "superb Sudanese" appeared in the studio.<sup>300</sup> The man was Seïd Enkess, a freed black slave from the Sudanese Kingdom of Darfour who worked in Paris as a professional artist's model.<sup>301</sup> His identity was confirmed through a recent discovery of a life cast that had been presented to the *Société Ethnologique* in 1847 as an example of "Negroid beauty"

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<sup>298</sup> Cordier's biography was documented by Jeanne Durand-Revillon and Laure de Margerie. Margerie, "Chronology."

<sup>299</sup> Facing the Other, Larue de Margerie, 129.

<sup>300</sup> "Un superbe Soudanais paraît à l'atelier. En 15 jours je fis ce buste et l'envoyait au Salon ne doutant pas d'être reçu." (A superb Sudanese appeared in the studio. In 15 days, I made this bust and sent it to the Salon, having no doubts it would be received.) Mémoires et notes écrites par Charles Cordier, statuaire, chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, né à Cambrai le 1<sup>er</sup> novembre 1827, décédé à Alger le 19 Avril 1905. Manuscript retained by the family. Documentation, Musée d'Orsay.

<sup>301</sup> Margerie, "Chronology," 129. Enkess' life story was recounted by the *Société ethnologique* de Paris in their 1847 journal. "Notice sur Seïd Enkess, nègre d'une remarquable beauté qui habite Paris," *Bulletin de la société ethnologique de Paris*, no. 1 (1847).

(figure 57).<sup>302</sup> The *Société* was debating issues of race and physical characteristics of beauty in a program entitled “The Distinctive Characteristics of the White Race and the Black Race.”<sup>303</sup> This debate centered on the notion that physical beauty and advanced civilization were linked, and ugliness was indicative of primitive society. Life casts of two Africans, Ochi-Fekoué and Seïd Enkess, were presented as a refutation of this theory. Fekoué was an example of ugliness and degradation. Yet instead of a barbarian, he was a free man, from one of the best families of the Yebou nation.<sup>304</sup> Enkess, on the other hand, was an example of beauty, yet a former slave and a member of a “reputedly barbarian” tribe of Upper Sennar.<sup>305</sup> Without access to the life cast of Ochi-Fekoué, the criteria for beauty versus ugliness are impossible to conjecture. What is certain is that Enkess’s combination of features signaled African beauty to the French scientific observers.

A notice in the 1847 *Bulletin de la société ethnologique de Paris* provides some clues as to why the participants considered Enkess a specimen of beauty:

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<sup>302</sup> Christine Barthe, “Models and Norms: The Relationship Between Ethnographic Photographs and Sculptures,” in *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827 - 1905) Ethnographic Sculptor* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 99.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*

*Ses cheveux sont complètement laineux, sa peau très noire ; cependant la tête se rapproche par sa conformation de la tête européenne,... la jambe, extrêmement fine et sèche, n'est cependant pas en désharmonie avec l'ensemble du corps.*<sup>306</sup>

( His hair is completely wooly, his skin very black; however, the shape of his head is close to the European...the arm, extremely thin and dry, is not, however, inharmonious with the total body.)

Enkess's head was close to the European standard. Certainly more so than the degenerate African type that was lowly ranked because of a sharp skull angle as asserted Camper and others. Additionally, the comment on his arms is an oblique reference to the studies of the simian nature of blacks.<sup>307</sup>

In an effort to be generous to the visiting African of such extraordinary beauty, the *Société* also praised his character.

*Comme la plupart des homes de sa race, Seïd est bon, honnête, fidèle, dévoué ; il est aussi très-intelligent ; son plus grand défaut est de ne pas savoir suffisamment modérer son amour pour le plaisir.*<sup>308</sup>

(Like most of the men of his race, Seïd is good, honest, true, devoted; he is also very intelligent; his biggest fault is not knowing how to sufficiently moderate his love for pleasure.)

In spite of the attempt to imbue the African subject with humanity, they nevertheless revived the ambivalent trope of the noble savage

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<sup>306</sup> "Notice sur Seïd Enkess, nègre d'une remarquable beauté qui habite Paris," 52.

<sup>307</sup> For more on the animality of blacks, see: Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western culture*.

<sup>308</sup> "Notice sur Seïd Enkess, nègre d'une remarquable beauté qui habite Paris," 53.

and reaffirmed the stereotype of the sensuous nature of blacks. The comments on Enkess' love for pleasure are reminiscent of J. J. Virey's contention that "...the negro brutally abandons himself to the most villainous excesses; his soul is, so to say, more steeped in the material, more encrusted in animality, more driven by purely physical appetites."<sup>309</sup> The European concept of blackness, no matter how benevolent, was inexorably intertwined with the unquestioned knowledge that blacks suffered from some form of innate degradation. Even the *Société's* attempts to refute as unscientific the links between beauty and social status adhered to other pseudo-scientific, racist ideologies.

The commentary of the *Société ethnologique* as well as the existence of the life cast of Seïd Enkess bring to the forefront the extent to which Cordier's bust *Saïd Abdallah* was in dialogue with contemporary practices of racial science, particularly physiognomy and phrenology. The Swiss pastor, theologian, and mystic, Johann Caspar Lavater (1741 – 1801), revived and popularized the ancient art of physiognomy in late-eighteenth-century France.<sup>310</sup> Central to this system was the notion that physical features, particularly the angle of

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<sup>309</sup> As quoted and translated by Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western culture*, 69.

<sup>310</sup> Martin S. Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race, and Empire, 1815 - 1848* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 30.

the face, revealed intelligence, character, beauty, and moral worth. This classification led to a ranking of humans, not races, by their facial angle.<sup>311</sup> Although Lavater's ideas were later discredited, his work was the foundation for important developments in the nineteenth century that led to phrenology and the positivist sciences of race.<sup>312</sup>

The practice of phrenology, a way to determine personality traits through studying the topography of the skull, was similar to physiognomy in that it held that a person's mental character was a result of their physical state. In order to obtain exact replicas of the human skull, phrenologists developed the practice of collecting and examining skulls and plaster casts taken from live subjects.<sup>313</sup> Even after the decline of phrenology in the mid-nineteenth century, ethnographers and anthropologists continued to use life casts to document racial types.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Bindman points out that Lavater does not deal with questions of racial or national hierarchy. Bindman, *Ape to Apollo*, 210.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>313</sup> Marc Rochette, "Dumont d'Urville's Phrenologist," *The Journal of Pacific History* 38, no. 2 (2003), Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race, and Empire, 1815 - 1848*.

<sup>314</sup> Barthe, "Models and Norms: The Relationship Between Ethnographic Photographs and Sculptures.", Édouard Papet, "Ethnographic Life Casts in the Nineteenth Century," in *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905) Ethnographic Sculptor* (New York:

When Enkess met Cordier, the African model had already entered the world of ethnographic documentation and inquiry. Like other artists, Cordier disapproved of the use of life casts for his artistry.<sup>315</sup> He maintained that he modeled *Saïd Abdallah* from life over the course of 15 days in the studio.<sup>316</sup> Cordier's sculptural interpretation of Enkess would bring aspects of ethnographic methodology into the world of academic art.

The resulting bust, fully titled *Saïd Abdallah, de la Tribu de Mayac, royaume de Darfour* (Saïd Abdallah of the Mayac tribe, Kingdom of Darfour) (figure 2), was Cordier's his first entry into the Salon, where it received honorable mention. More importantly, it launched Cordier's passion for ethnographic sculpture, and was a pivotal moment in his career.

Later Cordier would recall that *Saïd Abdallah* had the topicality of a new subject, the revolt against slavery, and anthropology at its birth.<sup>317</sup> In fact, he created the bust in 1848, the same year that France abolished slavery throughout its colonial empire. However, his

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Harry N. Abrams, 2004). Staum, *Labeling People: French Scholars on Society, Race, and Empire, 1815 - 1848*.

<sup>315</sup> Papet, "Ethnographic Life Casts in the Nineteenth Century," 127.

<sup>316</sup> From a transcription of Cordier's memoirs. Documentation, Musée d'Orsay.

<sup>317</sup> From Cordier's memoirs as transcribed in the archives at Musée d'Orsay. Documentation, Musée d'Orsay.

initial intentions for rendering Enkess in sculpture are unclear. According to Cordier, Enkess “appeared” in the studio. This unplanned meeting resulted in a bust that received positive critical attention stimulating Cordier to take his work into a new direction. Perhaps Cordier was able to link his image of *Saïd Abdallah* to the abolition of slavery and the birth of anthropology upon reflection rather than intention. Nevertheless, he gained a consciousness about race, science, beauty, and art that would henceforth impact his treatment of black subjects.

The 1848 Salon entry of *Saïd Abdallah* was in the form of a plaster bust, now lost. By 1850, Cordier had the bust cast in bronze. In this second entry, the title *Saïd Abdallah de la tribu de Mayac, royaume de Darfour* was dropped and the piece was listed simply as *Nègre de Tamboctou* (Negro of Timbuktu).<sup>318</sup> Titling the piece *Saïd Abdallah*, even though it was not the name of the sitter, lent a portrait-like individuality to the bust. The title *Nègre de Tamboctou* alternatively signaled an association with an ethnographic type rather than a singular identity, reverting to the more traditional designation

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<sup>318</sup> The recent catalogue raisonné of Cordier’s work lists their exhibition history. The list retains the spellings as originally published. Laure de Margerie, “Works by Charles Cordier Exhibited Between 1848 and 1906,” in *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905) Ethnographic Sculptor* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2004).

for representing black identity.<sup>319</sup> The bust would be exhibited under the titles *Un nègre nubien*, *Nubian Negro*, and *Le nègre Saïd* until 1906. It is difficult to determine if the artist or the exhibitor initiated the change, but the amended title reflects an artistic and intellectual climate that rarely accepted representations of blacks as individuals, particularly in the context of ethnographic Orientalism.

*Saïd Abdallah*<sup>320</sup> is an elegant portrayal of an African man in a fez and tunic. Crowning him in a fez rather than a turban was a departure from the standard images of Orientals. The fez was a headdress that originated in Fez, Morocco, but by the nineteenth century was worn across North Africa. In 1826, Turkish Sultan Mahmud II (1801 – 1839) decreed that his army, administration and all government employees should adopt the fez in place of the turban as a headdress. The symbol of a modernized Muslim society, it was eventually adopted across social and religious lines throughout the region.<sup>321</sup> *Saïd Abdallah* also wears a tasseled, hooded tunic with

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<sup>319</sup> Hugh Honour noted this shift from individual to type. Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 105.

<sup>320</sup> I will use the first title, *Saïd Abdallah*, to refer to this work even though it went through many title changes.

<sup>321</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 5, Philip Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire 1453-1924* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998), 246-47.

fabric draped over his left shoulder reminiscent of the drapery swag of an antique bust.

Cordier's use of North African clothing served to define *Saïd Abdallah* in a specifically Orientalist context. Like Harwood (figure 55), Cordier used the time-honored, antique format of the portrait bust to depict the black male. However, Harwood's black subject was nude, presenting him in a state of nature. Cordier's use of the costume refined the subject's blackness from a generalized African type into a specifically modern Oriental African.

Cordier's transcription of the personal features of Seïd Enkess demonstrated remarkable fidelity. Because the life cast is available for comparison (figure 59) we can confirm that Cordier retained the structure and general features of the model.<sup>322</sup> He even maintained the facial hair pattern of the moustache and split goatee recorded in the plaster cast. Comparison with the life cast also confirms some subtle amendments imposed by Cordier.<sup>323</sup> Cordier reshaped Enkess's nose, as well as the curvature of his forehead.<sup>324</sup>

Additionally, the somewhat gruff beard was stylized into symmetrical

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<sup>322</sup> The life cast of Seïd Enkess was used for purposes of scientific documentation only. Cordier opposed the use of life casting in sculpture. It is not clear if he ever saw or used the cast of Enkess. Papet, "Ethnographic Life Casts in the Nineteenth Century," 127.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>324</sup> These alterations were noted by Papet. *Ibid.*

peaks jutting out from his chin. Cordier extended the facial hair around the jaw, creating sideburns that connected with his hairline and defined the eyebrows.

The idealization of flaws or inconsistencies was a typical practice in portraiture, but not in ethnographic documentation. On the contrary, in order to facilitate “scientific” assessment of the subject according to current trends in physiognomy and phrenology, the ethnographic life cast was designed to capture every physical detail of the subject. Cordier’s idealization of Seïd Enkess technically altered the integrity of his image as a scientific document. However, as an artist, with the aim of exhibition at the Salon, he had to refine the piece, smoothing surfaces and balancing the composition. He modified the subject into a work of art using the techniques and traditions of art rather than science. *Saïd Abdallah* was never an ethnographic document in the strict sense. However, because the individualized portrait of a black African was antithetical to the standards of fine sculpture, the piece was more readily accepted within an anthropological or ethnographic milieu.

At the Salon of 1850, Cordier exhibited nine portrait busts in addition to *Saïd Abdallah*.<sup>325</sup> Listed under the title *Nègre du Tambouctou*, the piece was awarded a third place medal. Apparently,

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<sup>325</sup> Margerie and Papet, *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905) Ethnographic Sculptor*, 229.

the shift from the individualized portrait, *Saïd Aballah*, that was exhibited in 1848 to the “negro” presented in 1850 made the piece more palatable to the judges. Cordier would henceforth designate his ethnographic portraits as racial types.

Cordier sent *Saïd Abdallah* to London to represent France in the 1851 *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* at the famous Crystal Palace. The exhibition, generally designed to highlight the industrial advances of modern nations, included the fine arts, but limited to sculpture only. Some French sculptors were unenthusiastic about participating because they did not want their work characterized as industrial.<sup>326</sup> In fact, the exhibition design did not separate the sculpture from the other “industrial” exhibits. Patricia Mainardi asserts: “Two hundred years of effort to elevate the status of the fine arts went for naught, it seemed, for the British had used sculpture to “decorate” the more important displays.”<sup>327</sup> Hovering in the margins between art and science, *Saïd Abdallah* was well suited for the eclectic mix of objects at the exhibition.

Art or science, the exoticized treatment of blacks in sculpture was no doubt a novelty that stood out among the typical exhibition fare, prompting the Royal family to take notice. Queen Victoria and

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<sup>326</sup> Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867*, 26.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*

the Duke of Devonshire both purchased versions of the bust from Cordier. The Queen also commissioned Cordier to produce *Vénus Africaine* (figure 3) as a pendant to *Saïd Abdallah*. She presented the busts to her husband Prince Albert in 1852.<sup>328</sup>

In 1851, Cordier produced the first plaster of *Vénus Africaine*, after which it was exhibited with *Saïd Abdallah* as a pair. Together they typified the ideal of the exotic African couple and became Cordier's most commercially successful works.

### **Vénus Africaine**

*“Elle s’avance, balançant mollement son torse si mince sur ses hanches si larges. Sa robe de soie collante, d’un ton clair et rose, tranche vivement sur les ténèbres de sa peau et moule exactement sa taille longue, son dos creux et sa gorge pointue... Le poids de son énorme chevelure presque bleue tire en arrière sa tête délicate et lui donne un air triomphant et paresseux. De lourdes pendeloques gazouillent secrètement à ses mignonnes oreilles... A l’heure où les chiens eux-mêmes gémissent de douleur sous le soleil qui est le mord, quel puissant motif fait donc aller ainsi la paresseuse Dorothée, belle et froide comme le bronze ?»*<sup>329</sup>

Charles Baudelaire, 1869

(She advances, languidly balancing her slim torso on her large hips. Her clinging silk dress of light pink contrasts vividly with the darkness of her skin and molds precisely to the long body, her hollow back and her pointed breasts...The weight of her enormous head of

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<sup>328</sup> From the information in the catalogue it is unclear if the busts were delivered together or separately. Margerie and Papet, *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905) Ethnographic Sculptor*, 205.

<sup>329</sup> From the full text of *La Belle Dorothée* as published in Miller. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French*, 117.

hair, almost blue, holds her delicate head back and gives her a triumphant and indolent air. Heavy earrings dangle secretly at her ears...At the hour when even the dogs whine with pain under the sun that bites them, what powerful motive makes Dorothy move, beautiful and cold like bronze?)

Baudelaire's prose poem *La Belle Dorothée* is an ode to a beautiful black prostitute of the colonies.<sup>330</sup> With clinging dress and pointed breasts, heavy earrings and indolent affect, Dorothée could be a literal transcription of Cordier's *Vénus Africaine*. Baudelaire's metaphors are rooted in the visual tropes of the black exotic. He evokes painting in the description of her contrasting skin and dress. Touting her as "beautiful and cold, like bronze," he brings to mind sculpture, particularly *Vénus Africaine*.

Cordier's work pre-dates the poem by 18 years. There is no evidence that *Vénus Africaine* inspired *La Belle Dorothée*, although Baudelaire likely encountered the piece in the 1852 Salon, the 1855 Universal Exposition in Paris, or in one of its many reproductions. Baudelaire, like Cordier, celebrated the sensuality of the black woman in spite of the conflicts inherent in her appeal. Baudelaire's complex relationship with his mulatto mistress, often referred to as *his Venus Noire*, both inspired and devastated him. Scholars contend that his black muse was the source of his most controversial modern

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<sup>330</sup> For an analysis of the poem in terms of Baudelaire's Africanist topoi, see *Ibid.*

poetry.<sup>331</sup> Cordier's *Venus Africaine* adopted a more mainstream attitude toward the allure of the *Venus Noire* in the nineteenth century. Both artist and poet romanticized, admired, perhaps even coveted the *Venus Noire*, however their work remains ensconced in the exploitative, colonialist discourse that shrouded European engagement with its "Others."<sup>332</sup>

Even though sensuous black women were plentiful in Orientalist painting, a portrait bust of an African woman as the mythological goddess of love was highly unusual in mid-nineteenth-century European sculpture, but not without precedent. A singular example is the 1550 bronze *Black Venus* by Italian sculptor Danese Cattaneo, (1509 – 1573) (figure 60). The full-length nude Venus gazes at herself in a handheld mirror. Wearing a turban, she is the exoticized incarnation of a typical European Venus. Characteristic of the Renaissance approach to blackness, there is no attempt at capturing a racially marked body. Her blackness is rhetorical in nature, emphasizing the dark, the different, yet not tied to

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid, Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*.

<sup>332</sup> Abdul R. JanMohamed contends that even when an author is reluctant to acknowledge systems of colonial power and may be critical of imperial exploitation, he is nevertheless drawn into the strong currents of its vortex. Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of the Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 82.

physiognomy in the way it would be for Cordier. This figure has been described, on the one hand, as an objectified woman, stripped of her selfhood, and on the other, as evidence of the desirability of African women in the eyes of early modern European men.<sup>333</sup> More typically, black women were included in European sexual mythology as accompaniments, rather than as the sexualized subject. The black attendant in Rubens' *Venus at the Mirror* (figure 7) is conceivably the darker side of Venus reflected in the mirror, but not the goddess herself. Before the nineteenth century, black women were generally not cast as the object of erotic desire, but maintained a more ornamental function. Cattaneo's *Black Venus* may be the exception that proves the rule.

In the eighteenth century, French neo-classical sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741 – 1828) brought the conventional black attendant and white bather into full sculptural form.<sup>334</sup> Houdon translated this trope into garden sculpture in his full-scale grouping of a black female slave in bronze pouring water over the white marble body of a bather. He created the piece, now destroyed, for the garden of the Duke d'Orléans at Monceau, and exhibited it at the Salon of

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<sup>333</sup> Kim Hall described the reactions to this piece in relation to various scholarly approaches to the issue of race and representation. Hall, "Object in Object? Some Thoughts on the Presence of black Women in Early Modern Culture," 346-79.

<sup>334</sup> Houdon's piece may be the only example of a white bather and black attendant in sculpture.

1783.<sup>335</sup> The white bather and a black attendant were fashioned in the vein of *turqueries*, such as Nattier's *Mademoiselle de Clermont at the Bath*, that played on the playful eroticism of the black servant and white bather. This exemplifies the movement of the exotic black beyond the canvas to a multitude of ornamental three-dimensional incarnations in the eighteenth century. Houdon used the plaster study for the black slave as a model for the marble bust *La Nègresse*, 1794 (figure 61), a subsequent work that commemorates the declaration of the abolition of slavery in the colonies.<sup>336</sup> Over the course of a few short but turbulent years in France, the figure of the black woman had shifted from the frivolous enticements of exotic slavery to the symbol of liberty and equality. Yet, as James Smalls asserts in his discussion of Marie Benoist's *Portrait d'une nègresse* of 1800 (figure 62), the black woman as an emblem of ideals of freedom and equality could never be completely divorced from her roots as a signifier of sexuality and exoticism.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Paul Vitry discussed the lost work by Houdon. Paul Vitry, "Un Buste de la Collection M. de Camondo: La Nègresse de Houdon," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 6 (1931).

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*: 309.

<sup>337</sup> James Smalls, "Slavery is a Woman: "Race," Gender, and Visuality in Marie Benoist's *Portrait d'une nègresse* (1800)," in *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* (2004).

Cordier's *Vénus Africaine* is an individualized portrait of a sensuous African woman. A faintly opened mouth and heavy eyelids give the figure an expression of languor. Her body leans slightly to the left, accentuating her curvaceous torso. She wears a striped fabric wrapped around her body that clings to her breasts, revealing erect nipples. Her arms and shoulders are bare. She is adorned with a necklace of cloves and large, dangling earrings with gold patina.<sup>338</sup> From the coral that represented Africa in Ripa's *Iconologia* to pearls that symbolized sensuality, jewelry was an important attribute in the representation of black women. The clove necklace added an aromatic dimension of exotic perfume to this evocative piece. Sharpley-Whiting has described the affinity between black women and spices in the construct of the exotic:

In the exoticist's world, the black female provides rapturous delights, a detour from the ennui of whiteness. Black women serve as savorous spices, seasonings that come in a variety of colors and ethnic flavors to whet the exoticist's palate.<sup>339</sup>

Additionally, spices, like black slaves, were among the most important commodities traditionally offered by Oriental traders.

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<sup>338</sup> Laure de Margerie pointed out that the necklace on *Vénus Africaine* was comprised of cloves in a guided tour of the *Facing the Other* exhibition at the Dahesh Museum, New York, October 2004.

<sup>339</sup> Sharpley-Whiting, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*, 87.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of Cordier's bust is the treatment of her hair. Black women in European art traditionally wore turbans or head wraps that completely covered their hair. Alternatively, as seen in Houdon's *La Nègresse*, coarse or curly hair was suggested with stylized patterns. The artists made no attempt at capturing the volume and density of African hair. Cordier's Venus, on the other hand, has a strikingly naturalistic head of coarse hair twisted in locks. Throughout the centuries, artists depicted Venus with long, flowing hair. Cordier's response to this attribute is a recognizably African coiffure. Cordier's interest in depicting African hair corresponded to ethnographic interests in accurate representation of the physical features of primitive peoples, particularly those in marked opposition to the European standards. Seventeen years later, Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux (1827 – 1975) would follow Cordier's example in his dramatic rendering of a black female slave with thick disheveled hair, *Pourquoi naître esclave* (Why born a slave?), 1868 (figure 63).

Cordier's treatment of *Vénus Africaine* was a decidedly sensuous, textured, tactile representation of a black woman. Before Gérôme foregrounded the black woman's physicality in *Moorish Bath* (figure 1), *Vénus Africaine* manifested a specifically African, female, corporeal individuality that was a palpable shift in the treatment of the black body. Through color, texture, and scent, *Vénus Africaine's*

assertive sensuality, coupled with the title of *Vénus*, bound this work to the discourse on black female sexuality.

As discussed in Chapter 3, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the idea of the black woman as the embodiment of innate sexuality entered the scientific discourse through the case of Sarah Baartman, the so-called Hottentot Venus. A sideshow parody on beauty, the title “Hottentot Venus” satirized the notion of a beautiful black goddess. Venus, the traditional goddess of love and sensuality was alluring and attractive, the ideal of European beauty. However, as an African woman, Venus’ blackness also signified degeneracy and a primitive nature. The incongruity of the Hottentot woman as goddess of love created a humorously absurd spectacle for the enjoyment of European audiences.<sup>340</sup> Z.S. Strother described this paradox as “anti-erotic.”

In fact, Baartman’s success lay in her status as a figure of the anti-erotic, which allowed her to cross from the “freak show” to the pseudo-educational ethnographic show. It was as the figure of the *anti-erotic* that Baartman was reassuring to a European audience. The “Hottentot” represented a fantasy creature without language or culture, without memory or consciousness, who could never actually threaten the viewer with the sexual power of a “Venus.”<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Strother claims that naming Baartman the “Hottentot Venus” was a marketing strategy instituted by Henrick Caeser, her exhibitor in London. Strother, “Display of the Hottentot Body,” 25.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 2..

Again, we find that at the root of racialized exoticism is the tension caused by attraction and repulsion. Although Cordier may not have intended the piece to satirize black female beauty, it nonetheless upheld the ambivalence associated with the tension between Africa, which historically equaled non-beauty, and the essence of mythological beauty, Venus. Both erotic and “anti-erotic,” *Vénus Africaine* necessarily sustained the binaries of the black exotic.

Cordier would have been aware of the implications of casting a black woman as Venus in the revered medium of sculpture. The purity of white marble that had encased the body of Venus for centuries was the ideal medium for sculpture in the mid-nineteenth century. Charmane A. Nelson reads the privileging of white marble in neoclassical sculpture as a decidedly racialized discourse in which black bodies were disavowed, while the white body was the standard of representation. Nelson writes:

The nineteenth century’s stylistic dependence upon classical sculpture, broadly termed neoclassicism, located the privileging of the white body as the aesthetic paradigm of beauty. Quite simply, the term classical was not neutral, but a racialized term which activated the marginalization of blackness at its antithesis.<sup>342</sup>

Nelson’s claim that blackness was the antithesis of neoclassicism is supported by the fact that, other than allegorical representations of

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<sup>342</sup> Charmane A. Nelson, “White Marble, Black Bodies and the Fear of the Invisible Negro: Signifying Blackness in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Neoclassical Sculpture,” *RACAR* 27, no. 1/2 (2000): 88.

Africa, there are very few blacks depicted in white marble during this period.<sup>343</sup>

A black Venus in white marble was a potentially combustible combination. The case of British sculptor John Gibson's (1790 – 1866) *Tinted Venus*, 1851 – 1856 (figure 64), reveals the public intolerance for a Venus “of color.” Gibson was inspired to experiment with polychromy and painted his white marble Venus with a “flesh” tone mixture of paint and wax. Even though Gibson followed the antique tradition of painting sculpture that was experiencing a revival in Europe, the nineteenth-century audience accustomed to white marble found the colored Venus disturbingly sexualized.<sup>344</sup> If Gibson's *Tinted Venus* was considered unchaste, an African Venus in marble would have been an outrage. By casting the *Vénus Africaine* in the dark brown medium of bronze, Cordier averted the issue of depicting a raced body in white marble.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Carpeaux's *Pourquoi naître esclave* was produced in marble.

<sup>344</sup> Nelson, “White Marble, Black Bodies and the Fear of the Invisible Negro: Signifying Blackness in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Neoclassical Sculpture,” 89.; Blühm et al., *The Colour of Sculpture 1840-1910*, 122.

<sup>345</sup> British sculptor John Bell's *Octoroon*, ca. 1868 fashioned the “raced” body in white marble. Nelson argues that it was possible to depict this black woman because as a “white negro,” she possessed the classical white beauty. Nelson, “White Marble, Black Bodies and the Fear of the Invisible Negro: Signifying Blackness in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Neoclassical Sculpture,” 93.

Nearly all of Cordier's works depicting North African types are in polychrome marble, bronze, with or without patina, or a combination of the two materials.<sup>346</sup> Cordier did not use white marble for his darker "types." *Mauresque noire* (Black Moorish Woman), 1856 (figure 65), and *Arabe d'El Aghouat* (Arab of El Aghouat), 1856 (figure 66), are two of many examples of Cordier's polychromatic Oriental types. He used white marble for the heads of the Greek and Italian figures such as *Femme hydriote*, *Baboulina* (Woman of Hydra, Baboulina), 1859 (figure 67), even if the clothing was polychrome. Modern Greeks and Italians were not only racially European, but descended from the great classical civilizations that were immortalized in white marble. If, as Nelson posited, white marble was a raced medium that marginalized blacks, Cordier's exclusive use of bronze or black marble to portray Africans and Arabs suggests that he too could not negotiate the ideological and physical barriers between the classical medium and a raced body.

Straddling the axis of ethnographic and Orientalist art, *Venus Africaine* as constructed by Cordier was an acceptable object. The "scientific" basis for its representations effectively removed the works from the rigid ideological constraints of "high" art, providing him with

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<sup>346</sup> The only exception I could find is the *Mauresque d'Alger chantant* (Moorish Woman of Algiers Singing), 1858, fabricated in white marble with gilt trim. Margerie and Papet, *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905) Ethnographic Sculptor*, 42.

more freedom with subject matter and materials. Under the rubric of scientific inquiry, Cordier could explore the overt sensuality of the black woman as Venus without violating the mythological territory reserved for white bodies.

### *Cordier's "Ethnographic" Project*

Like an armchair Orientalist who gathered his information and material from sources available in a European metropolis, Cordier was essentially an amateur ethnographer. Nonetheless, the artist became known for his skills at capturing both the physiognomy and the decorative beauty of different races and their costumes. The success of *Saïd Abdallah*, *Vénus Africaine*, and other exotic figures such as the *Chinois* and *Chinoise* (Chinese Man and Woman), (figure 68) of 1853, no doubt inspired Cordier to follow the course set by the success of these works.

By 1853, Cordier began to make plans to visit North Africa. He requested a grant from the state to send him on a mission to Algeria to document and reproduce the different types that were in danger of "merging into one and the same people."<sup>347</sup> His idea was to return with a collection of busts to be exhibited at the Universal Exhibition planned for 1855 in Paris. In spite of his earlier successes, Cordier needed to travel to the Orient in order to solidify his status as a true

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<sup>347</sup> As quoted in Margerie, "Chronology," 131.

Orientalist/ethnographer. As previously stated, a crucial part of the education and training necessary for an artist to become an authentic Orientalist was to experience the Orient firsthand. The contact and interaction with exotic subjects were the credentials needed to be considered an accurate interpreter.

Unfortunately, his plan to travel and produce a gallery of new works did not materialize in time for the Exposition. Instead, he re-submitted *Saïd Abdallah, Vénus Africaine*, and the Chinese couple to the exhibition. Receiving an honorable mention, Cordier established his niche as a sculptor of ethnographic types in a forum designed to showcase the arts and industries of the new French Empire.<sup>348</sup>

In 1856, Cordier received funds for his mission to sculpt different types in the French colony of Algeria. Whereas his earlier work pointed to the French colonial presence in North Africa, his state-sponsored travels were an arm of the colonial incursion into Algeria, integrating his artistry with the colonial project. The French invaded Algeria in 1830, beginning a long and contentious battle for colonial rule in the North African country. The establishment of a French presence there fueled the Orientalist movement. As Edward Said theorized, the European artist/writer/scholar operated from a position of power when documenting or analyzing the Oriental subject, particularly in light of the uneven colonial relationship. This

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<sup>348</sup> Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867*.

notion of the power to document the “Other” permeates the engagement of the arts and sciences with the Oriental subject.

Typical of early ethnographic processes, Cordier’s intent to document the world’s people revealed an assumption that he had the knowledge and skill to authenticate and articulate a series of racial and cultural “types” that he had yet to encounter. Because his work was conflated with the science of ethnography, it had the power as well as the explicit goal to educate European audiences about the Orient. Cordier embarked on his journey armed with the sanction of the French government and the authority of the “sciences” of race. Yet the objects that resulted were highly aestheticized works of art, more closely related to decorative objects than to scientific documents.

In 1857, Cordier exhibited twelve busts made from studies done on his trip to the Orient at the Paris Salon. After travels to Greece and Italy in 1858, he had fashioned enough works to present an Ethnographic Gallery at the *Palais de l’industrie* in 1860. He presented fifty sculptures that included types from North Africa, Greece, Italy and the French provinces. Of all the works he created for this gallery, *Nègre du Soudan* (figure 4) would be his signature piece, remaining emblematic of ethnographic Orientalism to the present day.

## **Nègre du Soudan**

A complicated symbol of empire, art, and ethnography, *Nègre du Soudan* is perhaps Cordier's most fully realized example of the black exotic. The combination of the black body and Oriental materials in an artfully rendered object demonstrates the conflation of blackness with the decorative that encased the image of the exotic black for centuries. Since the Renaissance, the formal qualities of black bodies and their ability to interact with color, as well as whiteness, enhanced the vitality of the painted image. Cordier harnessed the traditional power of blackness to enhance color in the medium of sculpture and created a new language of exoticism in decorative sculpture.

For European artists, the experience of color and light was a draw to the Orient. It was not unusual for an artist to return from the Orient with an entirely different concept of color and light in rendering Orientalist subjects. Delacroix is a well-known example of an artist whose concept of the Orient prior to the voyage was literary in nature, shaped by the exoticist mythologies circulating in European arts and letters. His experiences in North Africa changed not only his subject

matter, but altered his palette, infusing his work with a warm and natural light.<sup>349</sup>

Cordier's work experienced a similar transformation after his journey to North Africa. Prior to his visit to Algeria, Cordier's experience with polychromy was limited to his enameled bronzes of the Chinese couple.<sup>350</sup> Upon returning from Algeria, his use of color "brought a genuine and inspired freshness to the medium...."<sup>351</sup>

Utilizing colored marbles, Cordier reinvented his ethnographic sculpture with a decidedly Orientalist flavor. Contributing to the marriage between ethnography, polychromy, and Orientalism was the presence of rediscovered ancient Roman imperial marble quarries near Constantine, Algeria. Also known as antique or Oriental alabaster, this stone was plentiful and easy to carve. The striated marble became the preferred material for Cordier's polychrome sculpture.<sup>352</sup> Also facilitating the use of this material was the establishment of the Algerian Onyx Marble Company. The company

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<sup>349</sup> Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism*, 127.

<sup>350</sup> Cordier's enameled bronze Chinese couple was criticized as being more industrial than artistic. Papet, "'To have the courage of his polychromy" Charles Cordier and the Sculpture of the Second Empire," 58-63.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>352</sup> Édouard Papet, "The Polychromy Techniques of Charles Cordier," in *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827 - 1905) Ethnographic Sculptor* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 2004), 83.

provided the raw materials for an industry of luxury goods that were successfully marketed in Europe.<sup>353</sup> Cordier used marble from this source for many of his Orientalist sculptures and decorative pieces.

Cordier's use of Algerian materials was fueled by colonial industry. Sumptuous objects fashioned from the marble, such as *Nègre du Soudan*, promoted this industry, and served in the process of integrating French culture into the colonial project. This underscores Said's contention that various types of Orientalist production were interrelated, and as a whole, created a system in which all parts were complicit in the exercise of economic and political control over the Orient.

At the Salon of 1857, Cordier debuted his first version of *Nègre du Soudan* (figure 4). He used a combination of oxidized silvered bronze for the head and onyx marble for the clothed body and turban. The technique of combining bronze and marble was common in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century portraiture. Like *Saïd Abdallah*, *Nègre du Soudan* is an individualized "portrait" of a black African male. From a bronze version of the work without the marble turban, *Nègre du Soudan*, 1865 (figure 69), we see that the sitter had a clean-shaven head with the exception of a small patch of hair at its crown. With

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<sup>353</sup> The material was presented by Alphonse Pallu & Cie at the 1860 Exhibition of Algerian Products where it met with success. It was used in the production of goblets, pedestals, and other luxury items. Ibid.

self-assured comportment, the figure stares forward. The dark bronze skin, originally silvered, is juxtaposed with a tunic carved from multi-toned onyx-marble. Fashioned from the same marble, a turban is cocked to the side of his head, revealing his entire forehead and part of his hairline. Decorative patterns and buttons adorn his clothing and turban. The figure has three small scars incised on each side of his mouth. The marks probably represent ritual scarification common to some African culture groups.<sup>354</sup> Without information on the model, we do not know if Cordier recorded the scars as they existed on his face, or if he added them as an “authenticating detail.” Evocative of Harwood’s *Head of an African* (figure 55), his markings are a reminder of the primitive nature of the “Nègre” from Sudan, whose regal bearing and sumptuous materiality recall a much nobler heritage. The tension between the savage and the beautiful is at the heart of decorative exoticism.

Cordier’s invocation of the antique with *Nègre du Soudan* transcended general stylistic convention, drawing specifically upon Algeria’s ancient Roman heritage. While Delacroix had romanticized Algeria as the new source of classical inspiration in his often-quoted

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<sup>354</sup> I have found no mention of these scars in the literature on *Nègre du Soudan*. Without knowing more about the model it is difficult to determine their source or significance. For more on scarification see Arnold Rubin, ed., *Marks of Civilization: Artistic Transformations of the Human Body* (Los Angeles: Museum of Cultural History, University of California, 1988).

statement “Rome is no longer in Rome,”<sup>355</sup> Algeria’s Roman past became an official aspect of the French justification for the colonial program.<sup>356</sup> Part of France’s multi-level incursion into Algeria during the 1840s was the documentation of the ancient Roman presence as well as the excavation of the remains of its Empire. Antique objects from Algeria were sent to Paris and placed on permanent display at the Louvre beginning in 1847.<sup>357</sup> In the tradition of the Napoleonic program in Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century, the role of the *savant*, or scholar, in documenting, excavating, and “preserving” antiquities became part of the colonial process. Ancient objects were absorbed into the cultural patrimony of France, and their forms became part of the language of French national identity.<sup>358</sup> Utilizing classical modes and materials, Cordier’s black Algerian represents the dominion of Second-Empire France, by way of the Roman Empire. Accumulating the objects of empire, Napoleon III purchased *Nègre du Soudan* for his personal collection in 1861.

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<sup>355</sup> From an 1832 letter to August Jal, as quoted by Jobert. Jobert, *Delacroix*, 175.

<sup>356</sup> Peter Benson Miller, “By the Sword and the Plow: Théodore Chassériau's Cour des Comptes Murals and Algeria,” *The Art Bulletin* 86, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>357</sup> See footnote 78. *Ibid.*: 696.

<sup>358</sup> See discussion of Musée d’Égypte in Porterfield, *The Allure of Empire: Art in the Service of French Imperialism*, 81-116.

Yet, in spite of the innovative use of materials and the imperial allusions, *Nègre du Soudan* remained typological in nature, bound to ethnography and the tropes of negritude. Marc Trapadoux published a descriptive catalogue of the 1860 exhibition of Cordier's ethnographic works. More than a simple report, Trapadoux's comments interpret the North African figures using Orientalist typologies such as the sexualized dancer, the frenetic musician, and the spiritual priestess. He embellishes the sculpture with stories of their racial lineages, their talents, and their spirituality. *Nègre du Soudan* is described as a tam-tam player in religious festivals, a type often commented on in travel literature. Trapadoux evoked the idea of the noble savage as he wondered what gave this man a regal affect, stating "Est-ce que le sentiment qu'il a de l'importance des ses, est-ce une noblesse native qui lui donne cet air d'empereur romain?"<sup>359</sup> He continued, claiming "n'y a-t-il qu'une âme d'enfant...," suggesting that blacks existed in a state of perpetual childhood.<sup>360</sup> Trapadoux

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<sup>359</sup> "Is it the feeling that he has the importance of his duties, is it a native nobility that give him this air of a Roman emperor?" Marc Trapadoux, *L'Oeuvre de M. Cordier: Galerie Anthropologique et Ethnographique Pour Servir a l'Histoire des Races* (Paris: Lahure et Cie, 1860), 14.

<sup>360</sup> "...isn't there only a soul of a child..."

concluded that whatever it may be “la sculpture le déclare roi dans le monde des formes.”<sup>361</sup>

Unable to reconcile blackness with imperial stature, Trapadoux concludes that the sculpture, not the man, is king. The formal qualities of the black triumphed once again. In spite of his attempts to operate in a scientific, documentary mode, Cordier’s use of precious marbles and silvered patina of the black figure resonated with the strong decorative tradition of the black exotic, particularly the figure of the Blackamoor.<sup>362</sup>

## **Ornamental Blackness, Cordier, and the Decorative Tradition**

### ***Ornamentality***

Cordier’s stunning combination of ethnographic portraiture and exotic materials, often contested as art even in its own time, was closely related to the tradition of using black figures in decorative arts

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<sup>361</sup> “sculpture makes him king in the world of form.”

<sup>362</sup> Heads or busts of Africans representing Roman emperors were fashionable motifs in Elizabethan cameos. This specific instance of using blacks in decorative exoticism has been linked to the complexities of Elizabethan iconography. Karen C. C. Dalton, “Art for the Sake of Dynasty: The Black Emperor in the Drake Jewel and Elizabethan Imperial Imagery,” in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race and Empire in Renaissance England*, ed. Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

that developed in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe.<sup>363</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, the “ornamentality” of the black that punctuated European painting became embodied in the decorative arts as well.

One of the most elaborate instances of ornamental blackness is German sculptor Balthazar Permoser’s (1651 – 1732) *Moor with Emerald Tray* of 1724 (figure 70).<sup>364</sup> The lacquered pear wood figure of a moor was adorned with a lavish program of jewels. He wears a feather hat and skirt encrusted with multi-colored jewels, and one large hoop earring. Grinning with teeth exposed, he holds a tray of unpolished emeralds. Fundamentally, he evokes the association of blacks with slavery and colonial labor.<sup>365</sup> However, with the sumptuous trimmings he becomes more than a servant; he is the ultimate in opulence. He represents the essence of the unabashed accumulation and consumption of exotic luxury goods by wealthy

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<sup>363</sup> One reviewer of Cordier’s anthropological gallery stated that from the point of view of science, the gallery would benefit the world, but from the artistic point of view, the gallery said nothing. See Andréï, “Galerie Anthropologique et Ethnographique de M. Cordier,” *L’Art Aux Dix-Neuvième Siècle* (1860).

<sup>364</sup> This work was jeweled by the famed baroque jeweler Johann Melchoir Dinglinger. It evokes the splendor of Baroque Dresden. It is now in the State Art Collections, Dresden, Germany.

<sup>365</sup> Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, 212.

Europeans throughout the age of Empire. Cordier's polychrome blacks are part of the lineage of this tradition in both spirit and form.

One area of the decorative tradition that is seldom linked to sculpture but is relevant in terms of the fashioning of the black exotic is jewelry design. As we have seen in paintings by Titian and Mignard, jewelry worn by black servants signified their status as luxurious commodities. Possibly growing out of this trend, Europeans manufactured sumptuous jewelry fashioning Africans in precious materials. Moor's head cameos (figure 71) were mass produced in Italian workshops and sold throughout Europe from the latter part of the sixteenth century.<sup>366</sup> An eighteenth-century Venetian Blackamoor pendant embellished with coral, diamonds, and enamel (figure 72) demonstrates the association of blacks with exotic luxury accoutrements.<sup>367</sup> Much like the trend in painting, the association with exotic blackness signaled European wealth and worldly status.

### ***Architectural Ornament***

With the resurgence of polychromy in the Second Empire, Cordier fused his ethnographic interests with the formal possibilities of ornamental blackness into a distinct style of decorative sculpture.

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>367</sup> Doretta Davanzo Poli, *le Arti Decorative a Venezia* (Edizioni Bolis, 1999), 164. Blackamoor pendants of precious materials are produced in Venice today.

His *Atlantes* and *Caryatids*, 1861 (figure 73), combine ethnographic sensibilities with decorative interior design in the Grand Salon of the *Château de Ferrières*.<sup>368</sup> Commissioned for the Château by Baron James de Rothschild, (1805 – 1886)<sup>369</sup> the work was inspired by the seventeenth-century tomb of Giovanni Pesaro (1568 - 1659), Doge of Venice (figure 74), by sculptor Barthel Melchior (1625 – 1672).<sup>370</sup> By quoting Melchior, Cordier directly aligned himself with the baroque tradition of polychrome sculpture.

Cordier's four black figures hold spheres above their heads as they flank the door of the Salon. Two men and two women, they are in the mode of allegorical typologies, although they do not represent the four continents. Three are African types, while one female wears a feathered headdress, symbolic of the Americas. The figures' bronze torsos emerge from gilt wood plinths. A lion skin carved out of onyx marble is wrapped around the waist of both male figures recalling Ripa's association between Africa and the lion. The female figures are similarly wrapped in marble drapery. One of the male figures closely

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<sup>368</sup> Atlantes are the sculpted male figures used in place of a column as supporting features in architecture. Caryatids refer to the female supporting figures. Ian Chilvers, Harold Osborne, and Dennis Farr, *The Oxford Dictionary of Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 29.

<sup>369</sup> , Margerie and Papet, *Facing the Other: Charles Cordier (1827-1905) Ethnographic Sculptor*, 148.

<sup>370</sup> Papet, ““To have the courage of his polychromy” Charles Cordier and the Sculpture of the Second Empire,” 58.

resembles the portrait of *Saïd Abdallah* (figure 2), particularly the twin-peaked beard. Cordier could have used the bust of *Saïd Abdallah* as a prototype or employed Seïd Enkess as the model for this work. One of the African women has hair similar in style to *Vénus Africaine*. By individualizing these figures, Cordier used the language of his ethnographic work to distinguish the beauty of these dark races in the format of the decorative.

The atlas/caryatid form dates back to antiquity and is not reserved for black figures. However, the decorative style featuring black Africans as support figures in architecture, furniture, and other objects developed out of this convention. By the nineteenth century, exotic blacks could be found supporting tables as seen in the Frick Collection's console table (figure 15), holding candlesticks (figure 16), carrying clocks (figure 75), and providing service in any number of decorative formats. With his life-size polychrome *torchères* of women such as *Jeune Mulâtresse* (Young Mulatto Woman), 1862 (figure 76), Cordier fused the black exotic with the vogue for elaborate lighting fixtures for the grand interiors of Paris.<sup>371</sup>

As Cordier's tastes and skills developed in ethnography and polychromy over the 1850s and 1860s, his work, like many of his era, was increasingly destined for a commercial market. Prestigious

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<sup>371</sup> Blühm, "In living colour: A short history of colour in sculpture in the 19th century," 139.

commissions such as the Château de Ferrières allowed sculptors to practice their artistry in the decoration of important residences. However, the small-scale serialization of Cordier's work moved his exotica from the galleries and grand salons into bourgeois households.

### **Serialization**

The reduction and serialization of Cordier's black figures, although evocative of the tradition of ornamental Blackamoors, is also in keeping with the widespread commercialization of sculpture over the second half of the century. Because of improved reproduction techniques, serialized sculpture increased in popularity during the 1840s.<sup>372</sup> Some of the most prominent sculptors of the era, including Antoine-Louis Barye (1796 – 1875) and Jean-Baptiste Carpeaux, circulated their works in full-scale reproductions and serialized reductions. Cordier's small ornamental exotic blacks are indicative of the democratization of art in general and the proliferation and popularization of black exotica in particular. Jacques de Caso points out that serial sculpture does not infer uniformity or multiplication, but a “dynamic” repetition.

Cordier's *Saïd Abdallah* and *Vénus Africaine* were successful in the reproduction market. According to the existing works recorded in

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<sup>372</sup> Caso, “Serial Sculpture in Nineteenth-Century France,” 4.

the recent catalogue raisonné, they were the most reproduced works in his oeuvre.<sup>373</sup> A total of 31 *Saïd Abdallahs* and 38 *Vénus Africaines* have been identified. Both images began as bronzes and were subsequently refashioned in increasingly decorative patinas and materials. There are eight polychrome editions of *Saïd Abdallah* and ten of *Vénus Africaine* (figure 77). These works were reproduced mostly in some form of bronze, although there is a record of each in polychrome marble in unknown collections.

After its initial appearance at the 1857 Salon, Cordier initiated serialization of *Nègre du Soudan*. Eighteen different versions of the piece are documented in the recent catalogue raisonné. Twelve combined onyx marble with bronze, while six were bronze only. Ten full size pieces and eight reductions are currently identified.

While the large-scale caryatids and torchères were designed for grand architectural interiors, both private and public, small-scale reductions were suited for bourgeois European consumers. Cordier exhibited and marketed these works at various Expositions in Paris, London, and Vienna. He also held private sales through dealers and in his studio. Collectors throughout Europe, England and America purchased Cordier's work in his own time and in the secondary resale

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<sup>373</sup> According to the works documented in the recent catalogue raisonné, these were Cordier's most reproduced pieces. Curators expect that there are a number of undocumented works outstanding that could change the statistics.

market. Serialized works were not considered uniform replicas, but, as Jacques de Caso stated, “dynamic” repetition.<sup>374</sup> Cordier’s use of colored marble and various patinas further distinguished his pieces such that each version was a distinct object.

The representation of blacks by Europeans had a long and ideologically charged history, and Cordier’s black Africans remained tethered to the tropes of blackness in spite of his intention to celebrate the races. Cordier added new dimension to historical mythologies of race and exoticism by proposing that his art could represent the advances in the science of race that were developing in tandem with his career. His efforts to utilize emerging “scientific” methodologies while maintaining fidelity to traditional sculptural practices resulted in a unique body of work that demonstrated the flaws inherent in the European “will to knowledge” about the “Other.”

As he continued to develop his interest in exotic peoples and explore the possibilities of polychromy in sculpture, his work became invested with the decorative materiality of the black body. He brought the formal and ideological issues surrounding the ornamental nature of the image of blacks into the thriving French decorative arts industry.

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<sup>374</sup> Caso, “Serial Sculpture in Nineteenth-Century France,” 1.

Blacks in Cordier's sculpture inherited the traditions of rhetorical darkness, ornamentality, sensuality, and servitude among other issues from the history this trope in the painted image. In tableaux such as Gérôme's *Moorish Bath* the black figures served to establish oppositions and define the nature of otherness among the figures in the image, and between the image and the viewer. When the black exotic was embodied in sculpture or a decorative object, the figure assertively injected the presence of the black body into the domestic interior. Interacting with the Europeans who occupied the space, the objects performed the binaries of blackness and provided a "spicy" counterpoint to the collectors who, in turn, become an active part of the theatrics of race and exoticism.

## Conclusion

Exotic black bodies were saturated with meanings that had accumulated through the centuries. As stated in the quote by Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby at the opening of Chapter 1, a black oriental is “not simply more oriental...but a sign associated with various specific histories.”<sup>375</sup> This dissertation has attempted to trace the specific trajectory of the image of the black oriental, or as I call it, the “black exotic,” and examine its impact on the visual discourse of Orientalism in the nineteenth century.

Qualitatively, the black exotic was rooted in the intersection of European ideas about the “Orient” and “blackness.” Through an examination of images of blacks from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century, several features of this construct consistently emerged in the imagery. Black exotics were most often depicted as types or characters, not individuals. These black characters were usually associated with some idea of the East, or the Orient. Before the nineteenth century, the association was usually general, and became linked to specific locations in the age of Orientalism.

Black exotic types were often cast in the role of slaves and servants. This role ostensibly corresponded to the history of black slavery in the Middle East and North Africa, but reflected the

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<sup>375</sup> Grigsby, 291-2.

European role in the slave trade and the slave economies of the modern era. This aestheticized servitude distanced the horrors of institutionalized slavery from the European colonial enterprises to a distant setting, frozen in time.

Binaries established by the exotic black were both formal and ideological. Exotic slaves were often used to bring contrasting color to the images of white Europeans, a formal tool that was thought to enhance the whiteness of the European body. The rhetorical opposition between black and white also implicated constructions of otherness in which black peoples were considered barbarians, outsiders, and infidels. In the nineteenth century, with the emergence of racial sciences, blacks came to represent the biological opponent of the European, serving to uphold whiteness at the zenith of a hierarchy of humanity.

An important characteristic of the black exotic was its relationship to the decorative. Exotic blacks signified the “East” as the locus of material opulence as well as European tastes in exotic luxury items. Both the adorned and the adornment, black exotics were fundamentally ornamental. The “ornamentality” of blacks ran through all forms of visual culture, the decorative arts and fashion.

Nineteenth-century Orientalism was impacted by a radical shift in thinking about race in the form of ethnography. The media used in the ethnographic process such as popular scientific journals,

photography and life casting of ethnic subjects impacted the “fine” arts. The rise of ethnographic interest and inquiry influenced artists such as Gérôme and Cordier. They invested their work in the trendy “will to document” the Orient. While Gérôme was touted as an ethnographer, Cordier pursued ethnographic science through his artistry. However, both artists’ works were infused with powerful art historical tropes and traditions that owed more to mythologies of race and formal conventions than to empirical science. In the end, ethnography was another layer of artifice that shaped the exotic black body.

### ***Epilogue***

When Gérôme’s *Moorish Bath* and Cordier’s Ethnographic Gallery were exhibited at the 1878 Universal Exhibition in Paris, the relative coherence of the Orientalist movement was starting to unravel in the wake of “modernity.” Africa was becoming an important sign of not only the Orient but also of the modern. Later, through the surge of avant-garde interest in the formal characteristics of African art at the turn of the century, modernist employment of the trope of Africa broke away from the Oriental/ethnographic approach that was epitomized in the work of Gérôme and Cordier.

The rise of the bourgeois classes and the interest in modern life has come to characterize mid-century in France when we see the first sparks of modernism. The tenor of this period has been associated with the development of new codes that spoke to alternative subjects and were employed to disrupt and intervene in the momentum of traditional art practices. In this environment of increased self-consciousness about art making, ideas about blackness became a notion around which some artists negotiated the new terms of modernity.

The paradigmatic image of modern life, Edouard Manet's (1832 – 1883) *Olympia* of 1863 (figure 78), is a prime example of how modern artists attempted to craft a sense of the modern by using traditional Orientalist constructions of race and sexuality.<sup>376</sup> In spite of its roots in tradition, *Olympia* became an icon of avant-garde disruptiveness, functioning as a model for modern anxiety and decay. The association of African-ness that was embodied in the African maid was redirected away from the traditionally exotic toward the ambivalence of modern society.

Artists such as Paul Gauguin (1848 – 1903), Henri Matisse (1869 – 1954) and Pablo Picasso (1881 – 1973) responded to Manet's

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<sup>376</sup> Griselda Pollock proposed that *Olympia* works with Orientalism by using the trope of the black attendant and white sexualized woman, while at the same time working over it by making its modernity explicit through the contemporary subject, class significations and revisions to the trope of the African woman. Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, 294.

critical reworking of Orientalist paradigms of race and sexuality by developing the idea of blackness and the primitive into a decidedly modern discourse, referencing not just black bodies, but black “art” as well. Henri Matisse’s *Blue Nude, Souvenir of Biskra*, 1907 (figure 79) is emblematic of the ambiguity of the modernist approach to Oriental Africa.<sup>377</sup> Matisse uses various unstable references to the racialized body oscillating between the Orient and Africa to question the canonical tradition of the classical nude. The blue tinted skin hints at a raced body, and the large Hottentot-like buttocks reference a mythical Africa. Yet the dominant whiteness of the skin and its direct link to the traditional nude render the suggestion of Africa unstable. Here Matisse incorporates both the African body and the forms of African art in his search for a new, modernist vocabulary.

Finely wrought representations of blackness fashioned by Gérôme and Cordier purporting to document Africa and Africans were inverted by modernists such as Matisse who utilized Africa to resist the power of tradition and to question the nature of representation itself. Through various shifts in the understanding of Africa in the nineteenth century and the epistemic crisis of modernity, the image of Africa was transformed from the quintessential representation of the exotic to the embodiment of the unrepresentable. Through the

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<sup>377</sup> James Herbert claims that Africa marks the body of the Blue Nude, but it remains ambiguous because definitive signs of ethnicity are not present. James D. Herbert, *Fauve Painting: The Making of Cultural Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 158.

appropriation of the formal qualities of African art, modernists used Africa as a destabilizing force that exposed the inconsistencies of modern society and the limitations of art.

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