

# NOMA

## *Orientalism: Taking and Making* Hyams Gallery Guide for Docents



### **Main wall panel:**

"Orientalism" describes the widespread popularity of European and American artists taking inspiration from art and people--both real and imagined--of Middle Eastern, North African, and East Asian cultures. The 19th-century Western art in this gallery celebrates diversity and progress made through worldwide trade and transportation networks, but it also resonates with undercurrents of oppression, racism, and superficial understanding of complex cultures.

Until the 1800s, European contact with Eastern cultures was through limited trade and occasional military conflict. In 1798 General Napoleon Bonaparte's army invaded and occupied Egypt until 1801. In 1854, Commodore Perry's American war ships arrived in Tokyo Bay to force an end to Japan's *sakoku* (isolationist) policy. The British Empire controlled 400 million people, including the 1858 to 1947 "British Raj" rule of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The Western fashion for Egyptomania, Orientalism, and Japonisme is rooted in imperialism.

Artists often traveled with a genuine desire to accurately record and disseminate architecture, geography, fashion, and customs. But what they recorded was often seen through a lens conditioned by Western values and ambitions. As a result, their artwork often presented non-Westerners in negative ways—as lazy, barbaric, or hyper-sexualized. Their impressions were informed by broad and potentially harmful assumptions about the people they visited. Instead of merely *taking* an impression, Orientalist artists were *making* new identities that were, at the very least, inaccurate.

Orientalist vision was powerful and effective in the West because it was both titillating and aesthetically alluring. **Academically, this material gives us complicated and conflicted material to consider our own history, and how "exoticism" continues to color the ways we view other cultures today.**

*"[This] is the main intellectual issue raised by Orientalism. Can one divide human reality...into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?... I mean to ask whether there is any way of avoiding the hostility expressed by the division, say, of men into "us" (Westerners) and "they" (Orientals).*

- Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978

**This gallery as microcosm of 19th-century art:**

- History painting, switch to "contemporary"
- Theatrical scenes
- Landscape (some)
- Portraiture
- Early photography
- Emergence of "Impressionism"
- Decorative arts on par with fine arts



**Things to remember:**

- All of this art is American or Western European, all 1800s (A few exceptions in the early 1900s)
- Artists look to cultures that are not their own for subject matter or artistic inspiration
- This "Orientalist" art tells us about Western aspirations and fashion, not necessarily about the Asian and Middle Eastern cultures represented
- Look for layers of factual inaccuracies
- Consider undercurrents of oppression, racism, and superficial understanding of complex cultures

**Questions to ask:**

- What was the Western motivation to be in the Middle East? There was military dominance to "rescue" Christian sites from Muslim hands.
- What were the artist's goals (or propaganda) behind the artwork?



## Meissen Porcelain Manufactory

German, Saxony, 1710-present

*The Four Continents: Europe*, ca. 1860, after a 1745 design  
After a model by J. J. Kandler (German, 1706-75)  
Hard paste porcelain: molded, glazed, and gilt  
Museum purchase, Lois W. Hawkins Fund, 2006.56

*The Four Continents: Africa*, ca. 1860, after a 1745 design  
After a model by J. J. Kandler (German, 1706-75)  
Hard paste porcelain: molded, glazed, and gilt  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. H. Lloyd Hawkins, Jr., 97.479

Figures symbolizing Europe, Asia, Africa, and America are an allegorical theme dating back to the Renaissance, when only four continents were known to Europeans. At first glance it is obvious that the black-glazed woman with an elephant headdress is not an example of African artwork. We understand these as fanciful Euro-centric symbols of the wealth each continent offered: Africa's elephant ivory, Asia's silk and incense, America's cornucopia of gold and jewels. In contrast, Europe herself is shown astride a horse, her righteous power and knowledge represented by a crown, scepter, books, and a globe. These allegorical figures are an extreme example of one culture looking greedily at another, but in this gallery of 19th-century Orientalism, they remind us of the dark side of one culture summarizing another, as each continent is reduced to a stereotypical assemblage of icons.



**Jean-Léon Gérôme**

French, 1824-1904

*The Snake Charmer*, ca. 1880-90

Oil on canvas

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Chapman H. Hyams, 15.13

Gérôme was among the most honored and financially successful French artists in the 1800s. He was a master of Academic art, meaning formal art sanctioned by the major European art academies. Beginning in the late 1850s, Gérôme travelled to Egypt, the Holy Land, and Asia Minor recording what he saw in sketches and photographs, and then painting his popular Orientalist genre scenes. His attention to details, like the tattered edges of the Oriental carpet and hanging basket in this painting, lend veracity to the scene, **clouding the fact that Gérôme's imaginative paintings are carefully composed for maximum dramatic effect.**



**Jean-Léon Gérôme**

French, 1824-1904

*Turkish "Bashi-bazouk" Mercenary Soldiers Playing Chess*, ca. 1870

Oil on canvas, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Chapman H. Hyams, 15.14



Notes:

*Othello* written by Shakespeare about 1603.

Shakespeare regained popularity among 19th-century French romantics, a French translation of *Othello*, titled *Le More de Venise* premiered at the Comedie-Fraincaise in October 1829. (Same year as this painting).

Theme: For both Shakespearian times, and again in this 19th century work, Westerners apply characteristics of barbarism, treachery, jealousy and libidinousness onto those who are considered 'other', like the Moorish General Othello, who is shown here after he smothers his wife Desdemona in Jealousy.

### **Alexandre Marie Colin**

French, 1798-1875

*Othello and Desdemona*, 1829

Oil on canvas

Museum Purchase, The Bert Pison Fund, 2001.329



### **Adolf Schreyer**

German, 1828-1899

*Charge of Arabs*, 1878

Oil on canvas

Gift of Eugenia U. Harrod in memory of her husband, Major Benjamin Morgan Harrod, 15.25

With his variations on the theme of Arabian riders and their horses, Adolf Schreyer became one of the most successful Orientalist painters of the 19th century. *Charge of Arabs* displays a careful academic study of equine anatomy, and also how Schreyer's turbulent painting style differs from the tight details of his German colleagues. Though Schreyer learned several Arabic dialects while traveling through Syria, Egypt and Algeria and rode horses with Bedouin tribes, his artwork is not an ethnographic study. Rather, Schreyer made a thirty-three-year career painting in a frenzied, muted palette these dramatic impressions of Bedouin horsemen. American and European collectors eagerly collected images of this imagined, dangerous world of rugged masculinity.



**Antoine-Jean Gros**

French, 1771-1835

*First Sketch for The Pest House at Jaffa, 1804*

Oil on canvas

Museum purchase, Ella West Freeman Foundation Matching Fund, 67.24

In this painting, a study for the monumental final version now in the Louvre, painter Antoine-Jean Gros shows General Napoleon Bonaparte visiting plague-stricken French soldiers in Syria in 1799. The final artwork was shown at the Paris Salon of 1804 as **propaganda in support of French imperialism, depicting Napoleon as a brave leader impervious to disease** and directly confronting allegations that Napoleon poisoned his own diseased troops to prevent spread of the plague. Compare NOMA's sketch to the final version, and notice how Gros strengthens his support of Napoleon by moving the General's body into a prominent shaft of light and extending his arm to directly touch a soldier's wound. Gros foreshadows the Orientalists in presenting the French leader as a stoic savoir amongst the weak and wounded Middle Eastern population. The final painting reveals Gros' close attention to Syrian dress and architecture details, but in this preparatory sketch his turbulent brushwork conveys the hospital's emotional atmosphere of pain and suffering.



**Antoine-Jean Gros**, *Bonaparte Visiting the Victims of the Plague at Jaffa*  
March 11, 1799, 1804. Oil on canvas; 205 x 281 in. **Musée du Louvre.**



**A. and H. Lejambre**

American, Philadelphia, 1865-ca. 1907

*Parlor cabinet*, ca. 1880

Carved and ebonized cherry; gilt and polychrome lacquer; silk velvet

Museum purchase, William McDonald Boles and Eva Carol Boles Fund, 96.100

- Japonisme cabinet installed with Rookwood Pottery inspired by Oriental aesthetics.

-This parlor cabinet is a western form of furniture, with applications of ornament that allude to Japan.

**Rookwood Pottery**

Cincinnati, Ohio, active 1880-1967

Glazed earthenware



*Drip glaze vase*, 1932

Museum Purchase, Françoise Billion Richardson Fund, 91.112



*Vase*, 1927

Decorated by Charles "Carl" Schmidt (American, b. Germany, 1875-1959)  
Gift of Antoinette Quincy Siddall in memory of her father, Lyman Quincy, 92.185



*"Vine and Berries" standard-glaze vase*, 1898

Museum Purchase, Françoise Billion Richardson Fund



*Bowl*, 1927

Decorated by William E. Hentschel (American, 1892-1962)  
Gift of Mrs. J. Thornwell Witherspoon, 91.98



*Sang-de-boeuf (oxblood) glaze vase, 1936*

Gift of Antoinette Quincy Siddall in memory of her father, Lyman Quincy,  
92.184



*Wild mushroom" vase, 1903*

Decorated by Charles "Carl" Schmidt (American, b. Germany, 1875-1959)  
Gift of Marvin "Don" Ezell, 97.237



*"Oriental brush pot" vase, 1919*

Gift of E. John Bullard in memory of Dreux Van Horn, 2009.162



*"Oriental ribbon" plate, 1885*

Museum purchase, Françoise Billion Richardson Fund, 91.113



*"Egyptian design" vase, 1937*

Gift of E. John Bullard in memory of Dreux Van Horn, 2009.160



*Humidor, 1885*

Decorated by Albert R. Valentien (American, 1862-1925)

Gift of Mary C. Darken, M.D. in honor of Daniel Piersol and Jackie Sullivan,  
96.378.a-.b



*Two-handled standard glaze vase, 1890*

Decorated by Matthew Andrew Daley (American, 1860-1937)

Museum Purchase, George S. Frierson, Jr. Fund, 91.26





**George Jakob Hunzinger**  
 American, b. Germany, 1835-1898

*Side chair*, patented 1869, ca. 1875  
 Ebonized and gilt hardwood, original velvet seat panel, modern upholstery  
 Museum Purchase, Mervin and Maxine Mock Morais Fund, 97.637

George Hunzinger was one of America's most innovative and idiosyncratic furniture makers, patenting a variety of Victorian-era chairs, beds, and tables. This chair is quintessential Hunzinger. Its sticks and knobs playfully reference the machines that made its mass-production possible, but those same elements are also reminiscent of Asian-style bamboo furniture. A genius marketer, Hunzinger sold his mass-produced chairs as "fancy" chairs (accent pieces), meaning a consumer could buy one item that aligned with the ca. 1870 trend for Japonisme.



**Samuel Bourne** English, 1834-1912  
*Scene in India - Sati Chaura Ghat*, ca. 1865  
 Silver print from glass negative  
 Museum purchase, Zemurray Foundation Donation, 74.173

**Felice Beato** British, c. 1834 - 1906  
*Interior of the Secundra Bagh, Lucknow, after the Indian Mutiny of 1857-1858*, ca. 1858  
 Albumen print  
 Museum purchase, 1977 Acquisition Fund Drive, 77.67



The top view shows the Sati Chaura Ghat embankment of the river Ganges, and the bottom view the Secundra Bagh walled garden at Lucknow, India. These were both pivotal sites during the 1857 Indian Rebellion (as called by the British) or the First War of Indian Independence (as known to the Indians). This period of violent suppression and uprising dissolved the ruling British East India Company, but ended with the British crown instead controlling the Indian subcontinent. At Sati Chaura Ghat, Indian savoyes (soldiers) killed hundreds of British soldiers, women, and children. The tranquility and reflection in Bourne's photograph captures the location as a peaceful monument to the loss. In contrast, Beato's photograph heightens the gruesome effect of the Secundra Bagh's courtyard, where the British retaliated against uprising by killing 2,000 Indian rebels, scattering their bones, and intentionally leaving them unburied.



The Victorian-era decorative objects in this case draw design inspiration from around the world. All were made in England, France, or America, but their ornament references Japan, China, India, and Islamic countries. Some are sensitive in their ornament. The strutting rooster and dragonfly facing off with the budding branch on the Vieillard & Cie plate captures the restraint, asymmetry, and drama of a 19th-century Japanese wood-block print. Other designs are less true to the spirit of their inspiration. Like the French pattern sample plate with radiating ornament including Renaissance Italian, Classical Greek, Gothic, and Persian, **the mania for Orientalism in decorative arts was about fashionable choice rather than the consumer's cultural understanding.**



**Thomas Webb & Sons**

English, Stourbridge, 1837-1990

*"Moon Flask"*, ca. 1890

Blown, tooled, and gilt blue glass

Museum purchase, Carrie Heiderich and Mervin and Maxine Mock

Morais Funds, 2002.326



**French, Paris**

*Pattern Sample Plate*, ca. 1830

Porcelain

Museum Purchase, Mervin and Maxine Mock Morais Fund, 2003.164



**J. Vieillard & Cie**

French, Bordeaux, active 1845-95

*"Japanese Cock" dinner plate*, ca. 1880

Tin-glazed earthenware (faience)

Museum purchase, Mervin and Maxine Mock Morais Fund, 98.59.2



**Royal Worcester Porcelain Co.**

English, Worcester, 1751-present

*"Moon flask" Vase*, ca. 1880

Porcelain, gilt

Museum purchase, Françoise Billion Richardson Fund, 94.17



**Jacob Petit Manufactory**

French, Paris, active 1830-1866

*Pair of candelabra bases*, ca. 1850

Porcelain

Museum purchase with funds from the Estate of Isaac Delgado, 86.436.1,2



**Robert Henri**  
American, 1865-1929

*The Blue Kimono*, 1909  
Oil on canvas  
Museum purchase, Ella West Freeman Foundation Matching Fund,  
71.16

Henri was an artistic rebel in an artistically rebellious time. Though the American artist was classically trained in Paris, he renounced the conservative "academic" artistic constrictions followed by most of the other painters in this gallery. Instead, Henri advocated for contemporary realism, advising his students to explore familiar subjects of their own time and of their own urban landscapes. His progressive "Ashcan school" group of artists documented the streets and characters of a new urban American immigrant environment.

Though different in style and intent to the "Orientalists," Henri's artwork still occasionally maintained an interest in Oriental subject matter. This full length painting of Miss Kaji, a Japanese-American model, was exhibited in the 1911 inaugural exhibition of the Isaac Delgado Museum of Art (now NOMA).



**Milton H. Miller**  
American, 1830-1899

*Seated Chinese Woman*, ca. 1863-64  
Albumen silver print  
Museum Purchase, George S. Frierson Jr. Fund, 95.370



**William Morris Grundy**  
British, 1806-1859

*Persian Merchant in a Bazaar Stall*, ca. 1857  
Albumen silver print from a glass negative  
Museum purchase, General Acquisition Fund, 82.113



**Christopher Dresser**

English, 1834-1904

**Hukin & Heath**

English, Birmingham, 1855-1953

*Claret jug*, designed 1881

Glass, electroplated metal, ebony

Museum purchase, George and Frances Armour  
Foundation Fund, 95.206a,b

**Johann Loetz-Witwe Glassworks**

Bohemian, active 1840-1940

*Vase*, ca. 1895-1900

Blown and tooled iridescent glass

Gift of Moise S. and Melba Steeg, 91.443

NOTES:

Objects show a loose, more abstract inspiration in a way that leads toward "Modernism" in design.



**Haviland & Co.**

French, Limoges, 1842-present

*Humidor*, ca. 1860

Porcelain

Museum purchase, Decorative Arts Discretionary  
Purchase Fund, 2008.60.a,.b

**Mount Washington Glass Company**

American, New Bedford, Massachusetts, active  
1837-1894

*"Napoli" Ewer*, 1894-96

Mold blown glass, enameled and gilt

Gift of E. John Bullard in honor of John W.  
Lolley, 2014

NOTES:

The "art glass pitcher" is a pattern called Napoli, referencing Renaissance Italian design motifs found on textiles and elsewhere. These same patterns originally trace back to Asian influences, such as the painted flower designs on South Indian palampore coverlets.