

# The Art of *Victor Adam* Refinement and Elegance



Portrait of the artist Victor Adam (Paris 1801 – Viroflay 1866).

■ by *Judith Wenning*

Victor Adam was born in Paris in the year 1801. Bearing the same family name as the German artist Albrecht Adam was by the way just a coincidence – the two were not related. Victor Adam was the son of the esteemed engraver Jean Adam, who gave him his first drawing lessons. Already at the age of 13, Victor Adam entered the French academy “École des Beaux Arts”. Here he studied for four years. At the same time, Victor Adam learned also in the ateliers of Meynier and Régnault.

In the 19th century the Salon in Paris played a very important role. It was the official art exhibition of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. The Salons took place annually or biannually and were the greatest art events in the Western world. Showing at the Salon in Paris was essential for any artist to become successful. A critical jury often rejected works so that they could not be exhibited, or – in the best case – awarded prizes to the artists. Printed catalogues of the Salons are today important documents for art historians.



Detail of "Tetouan" (Etalon du Maroc), 19th century lithograph by Godard.

Of course, Victor Adam was excited about showing his work at the famous Salons. When Victor Adam was 18 years old, he debuted in public at the Salon with his work. His historic painting was very well received - a great start for the young artist! In 1819 he exhibited

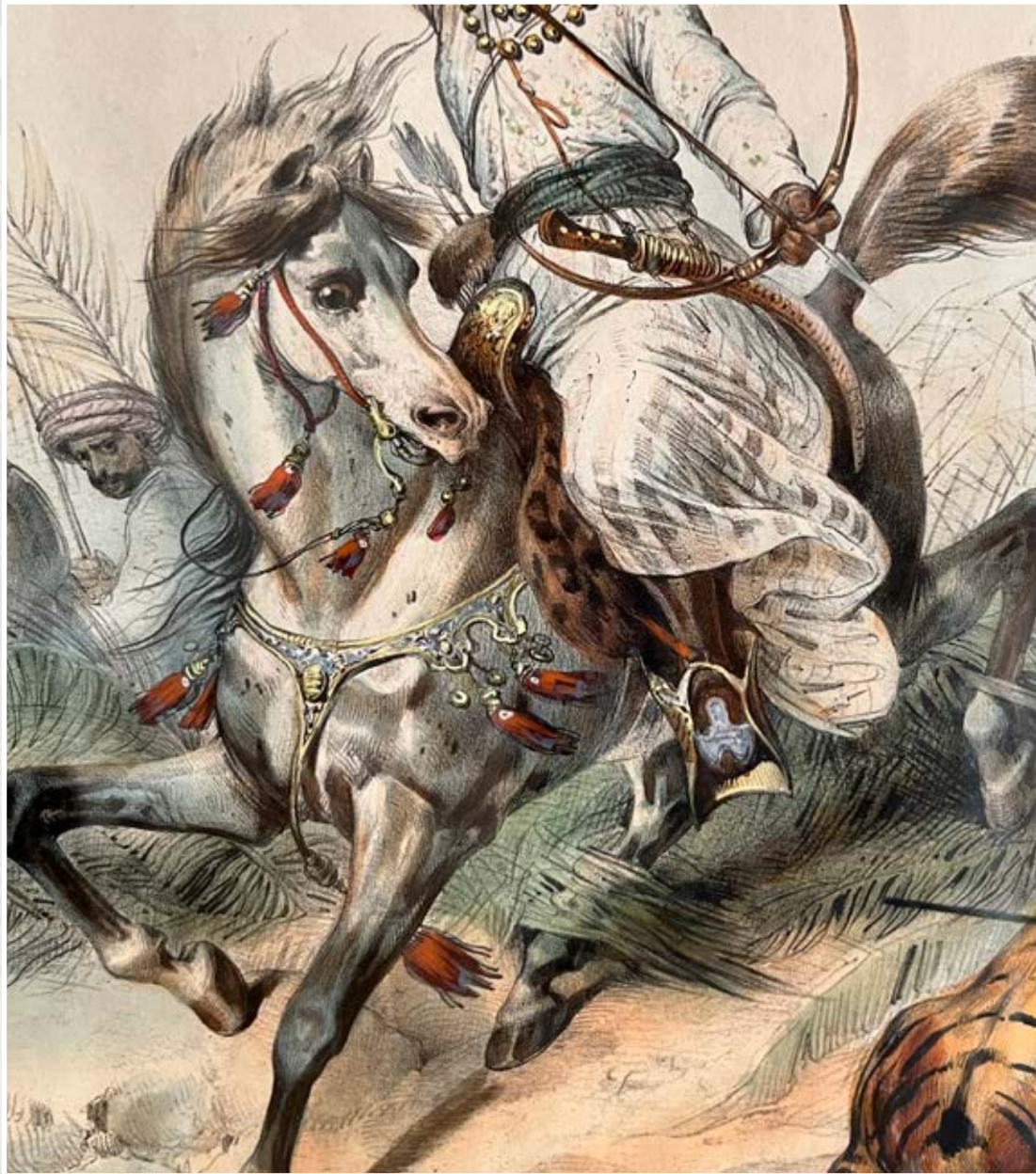
"Herminia succouring Tancred". Almost immediately afterwards, he received the commission to paint various subjects for the Museum at Versailles. In the following years, he regularly showed his paintings at the Salons. His great artistic talent and especially his



“TWO BAY ARABIANS”, 19th century lithograph on tinted paper.



“Jumping Stallion”, 19th century lithograph.



Detail of "CHASSE AU TIGRE", very rare 19th century lithograph.

unusual gift for drawing met much recognition from the public. At the Paris Salons, he was awarded a gold medal in 1824 and a second-class medal in 1836. Later on, he received several more from Lille, Douai and other cities. After exhibiting numerous important paintings, he retired from publicity in 1838. When he started to show again his work in 1846, he restricted himself to lithography. Victor Adam proved to be an expert in this branch of art. Victor Adam left a huge opus of almost 8000 prints. Despite

his impressive paintings, his works in oil and in chalk, Victor Adam is first of all known through his fantastic lithographs.

Victor Adam left us impressive hunting and battle scenes. He was very passionate about Arabian horses and loved to depict them again and again. His lithographs of Arabians are treasures. They are easily recognizable: Victor Adam drew the Arabian in a delicate and sensitive style. Some lithographs seem almost



“DJODAR RACE, EL BEDAIVOUI (Etalon Arabe)”, 19th century lithograph by Lemercier.



“ELEGANT LADY RIDING AN ARABIAN STALLION”, 19th century lithograph by Lemercier.



“ARABIAN STALLION”, 19th century lithograph.

fragile in a very positive way. Victor Adam’s Arabians are very noble, with small, beautiful heads and huge, well-rounded, often fiery eyes. They are extremely typey horses and have rounded bodies with strong, but elegant legs. Exotic, charismatic Arabians were Victor Adam’s favorites. They appear light-footed, moving effortless over the ground.

Victor Adam depicted European noblemen and generals riding Arabians. He was an avid follower of Napoleon Bonaparte, immortalizing him in numerous pictures. Victor Adam’s portraits show Napoleon with his favorite Arabian stallion, as well as European kings and queens with their steeds. His works comprise also unique pictures of Spahis or of Islamic leaders, as for example Mohammed Ali – the Viceroy of Egypt – or Abd el Kader on their noble Arabian horses.

“LOUIS II, ROI D’ITALIE,  
CHASSE LES SARRASINS DE BARI”,  
19th century lithograph by Lemerrier.





“GREY STALLION”, 19th century lithograph.



“CHEVAL ARABE NR. 17”, 19th century lithograph by Lemerrier.

Some of Victor Adam’s most beautiful lithographs show Arabian horses in their natural environment. The pale background often strongly reminds us of the bright, light colors of the desert. A number of Victor Adam’s pictures are enhanced by a beautifully drawn framework, consisting of Oriental accessories like “Khanjars” (i.e. Arabian daggers) or “Djerids” (i.e. spears). Occasionally, Victor Adam signed his paintings just with his

monogram “V.A.” or they were not signed at all.

After a very prolific life, Victor Adam died at Viroflay, a small village close to Versailles, in 1867. Victor Adam’s bequest is a treasure, an unsurpassable tribute to the Arabian horse. His lithographs, drawings and paintings of Arabians are today the gems of private and public collections worldwide. □