

ORIENTALISM AND THE ARABIAN HORSE: PART 3

VICTOR ADAM

By Judith Wich-Wenning

THE ARABIAN HORSE WAS – AND STILL IS – A POPULAR SUBJECT FOR ARTISTS. ONE OF THE TRUE MASTERS IN THIS FIELD WAS THE FRENCH VICTOR ADAM. HE DEVELOPED EXCELLENCE IN IMMORTALIZING THE BEAUTY OF THE ARABIAN HORSE ON PAPER. UP TO THIS DAY, HE IS RANKING AS ONE OF THE VERY BEST ARTISTS IN THIS BRANCH.

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.

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 unusual gift for drawing met much recognition from the public. At the Paris Salons, he was awarded a gold medal in **1824** and a



One of the very classic, refined pictures by Victor Adam: “Grey Stallion”, owned by Judith Wich-Wenning

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 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 favourites. 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 favourite 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.



Original 19th century lithograph by Victor Adam: "The Arabian Horse", from the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning


“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.”

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 colours of the desert. A beautifully drawn framework enhances a number of Victor Adam’s pictures, 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.

When we marvel at old Arabian horse pictures today, we should briefly think of the brilliant artists who left us this source of inspiration. They were thrilled by the same passion as we are today: The beauty and spirit of the Arabian horse! 

All photos by Judith Wich-Wenning



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