

ORIENTALISM AND THE ARABIAN HORSE PART V

ALFRED DE DREUX

By Judith Wich-Wenning

PARIS 1810 – PARIS 1860: ALFRED DE DREUX IS ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS EQUESTRIAN ARTISTS OF THE 19TH CENTURY. HE WAS BORN IN PARIS 1810 AS THE SON OF A SUCCESSFUL ARCHITECT. DE DREUX FIRST STUDIED WITH THE LANDSCAPE PAINTER LÉON COGNIET AND LATER ON ENTERED THE ATELIER OF ISABEY. THE GREATEST INFLUENCE HOWEVER CAME FROM GÉRICAULT, WHO WAS A CLOSE FRIEND OF DE DREUX' UNCLE AND PARENTS. HIS UNCLE, THE PAINTER DEDREUX-DORCY, SHARED AN ATELIER WITH THÉODORE GÉRICAULT. GÉRICAULT PAINTED THE YOUNG ALFRED DE DREUX SEVERAL TIMES.

The most famous of these works today is a portrait in the collection of New York's Metropolitan Museum. This early encounter with Géricault destined de Dreux for a career as an equestrian artist. Similar to his master, de Dreux turned into a passionate horse-lover and acclaimed painter of the higher equestrian society. He led an interesting life and was an independent character.

In 1831 Alfred de Dreux exhibited for the first time at the Paris Salon and won immediate fame. Alfred de Dreux had the chance to travel with King Louis-Philippe on an official visit to England. This trip was the first of several journeys to Great Britain. After the Revolution in 1848, the French royal family emigrated to England. De Dreux frequently visited them and painted many equestrian portraits of the exiled ruler and his sons. In England de Dreux was exposed to the works of British animal painters which influenced him. De Dreux' paintings reflected English society's deep love for horses, hunting and dogs. Also Queen Victoria admired his works and commissioned him. So, de Dreux had clients of the aristocracy on both sides of the Channel.

Alfred de Dreux' very elegant life as a Parisian dandy obliged him to work fast and a lot. In 1840 he started his famous series of portraits from the stables of the Duc d'Orleans. Furthermore, he studied and painted the impressive Arabian horses of Abd El Kadr who was imprisoned in France. Especially the famous Arabian stallion "Tamerlan", owned by Abd El Kadr, fascinated de Dreux.

Alfred de Dreux' style is easily recognizable: he painted very expressive and powerful horses, rounded with curved necks and beautiful, small heads. Although de Dreux never personally had the chance to visit the Near East, he studied souvenirs and photos which others had brought to Paris. They were easy to find in high numbers as orientalism was so in fashion at that time.

Especially impressive is Alfred de Dreux' series of

oil paintings showing Nubian grooms holding or riding Arabian horses. In these works, de Dreux played with colours and contrasts. His paintings are very strong works with bold use of colour. The horses possess tremendous energy and are often depicted in full gallop. Even when they are painted at a momentary halt, they seem to be ready to leap away in the next moment.

Alfred de Dreux was also an excellent engraver and several of his works were reproduced in impressive, sometimes large-sized lithographs.

Pictures by Alfred de Dreux are nowadays exhibited in numerous French and international museums, as for example the Musée du Louvre and the Musée Hermès in Paris, Queen Elizabeth's collection in London, the Uffizi in Florence and the Museum of Ermitage in Saint-Petersbourg.

Today we can even find Alfred de Dreux' work in the logo of one of the most stylish companies. A stylized reproduction of one of de Dreux' drawings is since 1945 the trademark for the world-famous French brand "Hermès".

Alfred de Dreux died in Paris in 1860 at the age of only 50 years. His passing remains somewhat mysterious. While many sources state that he died of a liver disease, rumours suggested that he had been shot to death in a duel by Comte Fleury, Napoleon's aide-de-camp. This theory claims that a dispute over an equestrian portrait of Napoleon III was behind de Dreux' tragic end. The real background of this remains uncertain. 🐾

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