

= Cleopatra and Caesar (painting) =

Cleopatra and Caesar (French : Cléopâtre et César) , also known as Cleopatra Before Caesar , is an oil on canvas painting by the French Academic artist Jean @-@ Léon Gérôme , completed in 1866 . The work was originally commissioned by the French courtesan La Païva but she was unhappy with the finished painting and returned it to Gérôme . It was exhibited at the Salon of 1866 and the Royal Academy of Arts in 1871 .

Gérôme 's painting is one of the earliest modern depictions of Cleopatra emerging from a carpet in the presence of Julius Caesar , a minor historical inaccuracy that arose out of the translation of a scene from Plutarch 's Life of Caesar and the semantic change of the word " carpet " over time . The work is considered a classic example of Egyptomania and was mass @-@ produced by Goupil , allowing it to reach a wide audience .

The painting was held by California banker Darius Ogden Mills and remained in the Mills family art collection for over a century until it was sold to a private collector in 1990 .

= = Background = =

Jean @-@ Léon Gérôme (1824 ? 1904) was a nineteenth century French painter and sculptor . At the age of twenty @-@ three , he came to the attention of the art world at the Salon of 1847 with The Cock Fight (1846) , a Neo @-@ Grec painting that was praised by Théophile Gautier . With works informed by his frequent travels throughout the Middle East and visits to Egypt , Gérôme specialized in historical and Orientalist painting and became known as a leader of the Academic art movement . According to historian Charles Sowerwine , Gérôme

painted erotic subjects with a photographic approach and sensual charge , but avoided ' indecency ' by the use of Oriental and historical contexts . . . To us , Gérôme 's nudes seem pornographic , but to contemporaries they were idealized by their removal from contemporary society and their insertion in the Oriental context .

French writer Prosper Mérimée first proposed the subject of Cleopatra and Caesar in a letter sent to Gérôme in December 1860 . La Païva , a wealthy French courtesan , later commissioned the painting from Gérôme , intending it for display in the Hôtel de la Païva , her mansion on the Champs @-@ Élysées . According to American art critic Earl Shinn , the work was originally painted on silk and was designed as a " transparency to be lowered or raised midway of a long saloon " in La Païva 's mansion , " which it was desirable to divide occasionally into two " .

= = Development = =

Gérôme made at least two previous oil paintings and a number of sketches in preparation for the work . One shows Cleopatra lying on the ground stretching out to Julius Caesar with Apollodorus crouching behind her . In one variation before the finished version , Caesar is shown by himself with his hands on the desk (instead of outstretched) without his four secretaries . When the work was finished in 1866 , Cleopatra 's position changed to show her standing before Caesar with Apollodorus bent down beside her .

Gérôme painted the scene based on the meeting between Cleopatra and Caesar written in the Life of Caesar by Greek historian Plutarch (c . AD 46 ? AD 120) more than a century after the incident took place . Even though Gérôme visited Egypt in 1857 , where George W. Whiting of Rice University notes " he acquired numerous abundant local color and exact detail " that informed the painting of Cleopatra and Caesar , the Egyptian background setting in the work is derived from a plate in a volume from the Description de l 'Égypte (1809 ? 29) that depicts a temple at Deir el @-@ Medina .

= = Completion and exhibition = =

La Païva disliked the finished painting she had commissioned and returned it to Gérôme .

Ackerman notes that La Païva felt the work was too expensive . Gérôme modified the painting by adding canvas to the back for strength , and it was subsequently purchased by his father @-@ in @-@ law , Adolphe Goupil (1806 ? 1893) of Goupil & Cie , the leading art dealership in nineteenth @-@ century France . Gérôme first met Goupil in 1859 and married his daughter Marie several years later . Cleopatra and Caesar was one of three works Gérôme presented at the Salon of 1866 where it was exhibited with the title César et Cléopâtre . The painting appeared at the Royal Academy of Arts exhibition in 1871 under the longer name Cléopâtre apportée à César dans un tapis (Cleopatra brought to Caesar in a carpet) .

= = Description = =

The painting depicts the year 47 BC , when Cleopatra stands before Julius Caesar after Apollodorus , her servant , has just finished smuggling her into the palace inside a rug . The figures are shown approximately half life @-@ size . Since the 1866 exhibition , the work has become known by other titles , such as Cleopatra Before Caesar , and more recently , Cleopatra and Caesar .

= = Critical reception = =

The American Egyptomania project at George Mason University describes the painting as a classic example of Egyptomania , containing " sex , slavery , nudity , and decadence " . Lucy H. Hooper called it a companion piece to Gérôme 's earlier work , Phryne before the Areopagus (1861) . The painting was one of two notable depictions of Cleopatra from the nineteenth century along with Cleopatra and the Peasant (1838) by Eugène Delacroix .

= = Historical inaccuracy = =

A translation of Plutarch 's Life of Caesar by John Langhorne and his brother William published in 1770 was the first source to use the word " carpet " to describe the material used by Cleopatra 's servant to sneak her into the palace . Although the original meaning used by Plutarch was more akin to what is today known as a duffel bag , at the time of Langhorne 's translation a carpet meant a type of " thick fabric " , not an actual rug . But by the nineteenth century , semantic change led to the word taking on a different meaning . The legend of Cleopatra hiding in a rug , although historically inaccurate , became the most popular image , with Gérôme one of the first to popularize it in modern art .

= = Influence = =

Gérôme 's professional relationship with art collector Adolphe Goupil allowed his paintings to become mass @-@ produced in the form of engravings and photographs , reaching more people and impacting the wider culture throughout Britain and the United States . Over time , both theatrical and Hollywood productions about Cleopatra looked to Gérôme 's painting for inspiration . Whiting argues that Gérôme 's work may have influenced Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw 's play Caesar and Cleopatra (1898) , particularly the carpet scene in Act III . Many of Gérôme 's history paintings influenced the composition of cinematic scenes portraying ancient history .

= = Provenance = =

The painting was bought by California banker , philanthropist , and New York real estate developer Darius Ogden Mills in the 1870s and remained in the Mills family art collection until it was sold to a private collector in 1990 .