

Eugene Fromentin (La Rochelle 1820 - Saint-Maurice 1876)

An Arab Caravan

Pen and grey ink and grey wash, with white heightening, over a pencil underdrawing on buff paper. Oval.
Signed and dated Eug. Fromentin 1845, over an earlier signature in pencil, at the lower right.
270 mm. (10 5/8 in.) diameter.

The present sheet, which is dated 1845, just predates Fromentin's first visit to Algeria, and is thus unlikely to have been based on something the artist would have seen at first hand. The subject may instead have been inspired by another, perhaps literary, source.

Artist description:

'Among the younger reputations, one of the most solidly established is M. Fromentin. He is neither precisely a landscape nor a genre painter; these two territories are too restricted to contain his free and supple fancy. If I said of him that he is a teller of travellers' tales, I should not be saying enough, for there are many travellers with neither poetry nor soul, and his soul is one of the rarest and most poetic I know.'

With these words Charles Baudelaire, writing about the Salon of 1859, gives an appraisal of the work of Eugène Fromentin that underscores the artist's lifelong fascination with exotic scenes. As a student he was attracted to the Orientalist paintings of Prosper Marilhat and Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps, and he discussed the work of these two artists, as well as Eugéne Delacroix, in one of his early writings; a review of the Salon of 1845. Fromentin was particularly interested in the people, culture and landscapes of North Africa. He made his first visit to Algeria in 1846, returning home after six weeks in the country with numerous drawings and sketches. Later trips to Algeria in 1847 and 1852 resulted in the publication of an account of his travels, entitled Un eté dans le Sahara and published in 1857. Fromentin exhibited regularly at the Salon, and among the masterpieces of his maturity is a painting of A Hunt with a Falcon in Algeria, bought by the State at the Salon of 1863 and now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.