





“BONAPARTE BEFORE THE SPHINX”

(ALSO KNOWN AS “OEDIPUS”), JEAN-LÉON GÉRÔME
(1824–1904), FRENCH, OIL ON CANVAS, 1867–68.
H: 24 ¼”; W: 40 ½”

Seen in profile with his cavalry reduced to shadows behind him, the French general contemplates the ancient enigma of the Sphinx’s visage. The depiction of scenes like this evolved in response to foundational work created by the cadre of artists and antiquarians who accompanied Napoleon on his unsuccessful Egyptian military campaign of 1798. The work of these artists eventually helped catalyze a movement known as “Orientalism,” since at that time, the Orient was perceived to include North Africa and the Near East. Gérôme, whose realistic academic style of art complemented the Orientalist subject matter, fed the public’s passion for the exotic through his paintings, prints, and sculpture.