

Antique Arabian Horse Sculptures

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Antique Arabian Horse Sculptures have an ever-growing circle of admirers and collectors around the world. Horse breeders as well as people with a sense for beauty, elegance and art were and are fascinated by the strong aura of these antique works. The 19th century saw a group of sculptors, the so-called "Animaliers", who specialized in the realistic modelling of animals. As Orientalism and Arabian subjects were so much "en vogue" during this time, Arabian horses were a favourite motif.



The sculpture "Fauconnier à Cheval" by Pierre-Jules Mène is one of the most impressive and dynamic Animalier sculptures.

Antoine-Louis Barye

1796 – 1875

Before the year 1830 little attempt was made to produce bronzes of animals as such. Today many art historians give Antoine-Louis Barye a premier position in the field of animal bronzes. His reputation and influence was indeed enormous. Barye did not follow in the footsteps of other artists; he created a movement in art of his own.



One of the most impressive sculptures ever created: Antoine-Louis Barye's work "Cheval Turc"



The beautiful bronze "Cheval attaqué par un lion" by Antoine-Louis Barye, ca. 1890

Antoine-Louis Barye was born in Paris in 1796, the son of a jeweller from Lyon. Barye began his career as a goldsmith, like many sculptors of the Romantic Period. At the beginning his father taught Barye the basics, but when he was around 14 years old, Barye started to work under the goldsmith of Napoleon. Later on he studied under the famous Orientalist and painter Baron Antoine-Jean Gros. A few years later he discovered his true passion and destination: Barye watched animals in the park Jardin des Plantes. The great botanical gardens in Paris provided Barye with the important practical knowledge of animals.

In 1831 he had his first important success at the well-known and influential competition "Salon". His style was very true to nature, passionate, energetic, expressive and full of movement. This was in great contrast to the usual academic style. Barye's works excelled in quality and technique. The Louvre owns today the most complete collection of his charming bronzes in smaller scale.

One of his most beautiful sculptures is called "Turkish Horse". It shows an Arabian stallion with all characteristics of a fine Koheilan. He is full of power and strength with masculine expression, rounded forms and muscular hindquarters. This stallion has a very strong aura with his wind-swept mane, upright movement and opened mouth. This bronze was casted in four versions and different sizes due to its success. It is one of the icons of both Romantic and Animalier sculpture of the 19th century. Here Barye was certainly inspired by one of Theodore Gericault's paintings of powerful, unrestrained horses.

Barye was a true perfectionist. He spent a great deal of time and energy to secure the correct patina on his bronzes. Barye was one of the rather few artists during that time who numbered the casts of his bronzes. As today we can be sure that many bronzes were destroyed, lost or damaged severely by time, a well-conserved bronze by Barye is a valuable and rare collector's item. Barye passed away in 1875 at the age of 79 years after a very prolific life. Today the public "Square Barye" in the centre of Paris is named after the famous sculptor.



The impressive sculpture "Cavalier Arabe" was modeled by Alfred Barye and Emile Guillemin. Original 19th century bronze.

Arthur Waagen

1869 – 1898



The magnificent bronze group "A Kabyle Returning from the Hunt" by Arthur Waagen is a true masterpiece. 19th century bronze. Photograph Courtesy of Sotheby's, Inc. (C) 2013

Arthur Waagen belonged to a community of German artists of Baltic origin and was born in 1869 in the small Baltic port town of Memel. Rather little is known about this exceptional artist. Waagen was immensely fascinated with the Orient and therefore chose to live in France because he found many sources of inspiration there. Waagen settled permanently in Paris. He was a sculptor specializing in oriental figures and animals. Arthur Waagen was a regular exhibitor of Animaliers and North African subjects at the Salon in Paris from 1861 to 1887. Moreover he had a successful international career and participated at the 1876 and 1893 World Fairs held in the United States.

His masterpiece is unquestionably "A Kabyle Returning from the Hunt". This bronze group is certainly one of the finest Orientalist sculptures ever. On oval base it unites an Arabian horseman and his stallion surrounded by three dogs. The rider's outstretched hand holds up the head of a lion he has just captured. In his saddle he carries a live lamb, which he just rescued from the claws of the lion. The dogs seem to admire and praise the hunter's success. This sculpture shows not only an expression of victory, the liberation of the lamb from its predator is also a gesture of the hunter's kindness. This sculpture is of greatest technical mastery and secured Arthur Waagen a place in Animalier history. All details, as for example the reins of the horse, are executed in the most stunning refinement and precision. A cast of this exceptional work was exhibited at the 1876 World's Fair in Philadelphia. The famous Rockefeller family, New York owned a cast of this sculpture. Another one is exhibited in the Dahesh Museum in New York. Arthur Waagen passed away in 1898.

Jean-Francois-Théodore Gechter

1795 – 1844



*A very detailed bronze by Gechter with beautifully colored patina.
From the collection of Judith Wich-Wenning.*

We owe some of the most beautiful sculptures of Arabian horses to Jean-Francois-Théodore Gechter. He was born in Paris in 1795. Gechter was a student of Baron Bosio and the very influential Orientalist Baron Gros. Baron Bosio was a much honoured and patronized sculptor of the French School whose influence was very wide spread, although he was not an Animalier. Similar to Barye, another student of Bosio and Gros, Gechter turned to smaller sculptures and animal subjects.

Gechter first exhibited in 1824 in a show of classical and mythological subjects. Gechter's prime occupation was first his portrait work. He was also very gifted in sculpting historical scenes. What made Gechter's work unique was how he managed to infuse emotions into his sculptures. This exceptional ability brought him numerous public commissions. He created for example a marble relief of the Battle of Austerlitz for the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. Gechter was famous for his sculptures of kings, gladiators, historic persons, etc. In his later years, Gechter came under the influence of the Animalier movement. The equine sculptures that he modelled in this second phase of his career were remarkable. Unfortunately, Gechter passed away at only 49 years. Had he lived longer we can assume that he would have produced even more works in this genre. His equestrian groups demonstrate careful, sensitive modelling of the horses. Important museums as the Louvre in Paris show today his works.

Pierre-Jules Mêne

1810 – 1871



One of the most well known bronzes by Pierre-Jules Mêne: "L'Accolade", 19th century bronze.

One of the most important artists of the Animaliers movement was certainly Pierre-Jules Mêne. He was born in Paris in 1810 as the son of a metal-turner. Mêne grew up in an apparently prosperous artisan family living in the hub of craftsmanship in Paris. His father was able to teach him not only the basics of metal foundry, he explained also the first steps regarding sculpting. Mêne was largely self-taught; he never attended any of the prestigious art schools. At the age of 22 years Mêne married and earned the living for his family by executing models for porcelain manufactures and small sculptures for the commercial market. In 1837 he opened his own foundry for the production of his casts.

Pierre-Jules Mêne was a very charming and outgoing man. Through his personality he attracted the best craftsmen to work for him in his foundry. Mêne had enormous success already during his lifetime. He won four medals at the Salons and at major exhibitions and received the Cross of the Légion d'Honneur in 1861. Mêne's bronzes were cast with the highest quality and set a new standard of excellence, which other foundries tried to meet. He took personal care to ensure that everything involved in the casting process was kept in perfect condition. It was very important for Mêne that even the last bronze of an edition was just as sharp and precisely detailed as the first one that was produced.



One of the finest examples of Pierre-Jules Mêne's work: "Chasseur Africain" ("African Hunter")



A charming sculpture by Pierre-Jules Mêne showing an Arabian Stallion being tied to a palm tree: "Cheval au Palmier", 19th century bronze.

Similar to Barye, Mêne studied animals as closely as possible. His choice of subject ranged more widely: It included domestic animals such as dogs, cows and sheep as well as exotic jaguars, panthers and gazelles. Mêne's favourite subjects however were horses, of which he is considered to be the master at portraying.

His equestrian sculptures are phenomenal. Mêne was widely influenced by the famous Arabian horse painter Carle Vernet and by the English artist Sir Edwin Landseer. Mêne produced a number of impressive Orientalist subjects featuring hunters and Arabian horses. One of the finest examples is his "Chasseur Africain" ("African hunter"). It was exhibited for the first time at the 1878 Salon in wax and again in bronze in the following year. It is a very well modelled, powerful sculpture of an African horseman, probably a slave, on a fine Arabian stallion. A small dead deer, the hunter's trophy, compliments the group. This sculpture is typical for Pierre-Jules Mêne: It shows the very detailed work he was famous for and has a great aura.

Many of Pierre-Jules Mêne's works are today housed at important museums as for example at the Petit Palais in Paris. Mêne managed to achieve huge commercial success as well as great critical acclaim. After his death in 1877, his son-in-law Auguste Cain continued his foundry. He continued to produce Mêne's sculptures as well as his own works in the highest standard of quality.

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