Class 9: Scent of the South

A. Women of Algiers

0. Osher Info slide
1. Class title 1 (Delacroix and Gauguin)

The two images here, details of pictures by **Eugène Delacroix** (1798–1863) and **Paul Gauguin** (1848–1903), represent the termini or bookends of my class today, which is about how foreign cultures seeped up into France from the south. Let's start right away with the Delacroix: *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834, Louvre).

2. Section title A (Delacroix)
3. Gros: *Pesthouse at Jaffa* (1804, Louvre) and Delacroix: *Sardanapalus* (1827, Louvre)

Sometime in the early 19th century, French artists became fascinated with cultures to the south and east of them, at the opposite shores of the Mediterranean. This interest may have begun earlier, though, with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and the Middle East in 1798. Failure though it ultimately was, it cemented his fame, and paintings like *The Pesthouse in Jaffa* by **Antoine-Jean Gros** (1771–1835) captured the imagination. The Romantics, of course, loved Eastern subjects for their violence and color, and they could come from literature as easily as real life, as in **Delacroix's** *Death of Sardanapalus* (1827) based on **Byron**, which we have also seen.

4. Delacroix: *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834, Louvre)

But Delacroix' *Women of Algiers* is different. It was not violent, and it was real. France had invaded Algeria in 1830, and would continue to extend its dominion deeper and deeper into Africa for the next century or so, using a combination of trade, diplomacy, and force where necessary. Delacroix visited the country in 1832, two years after the invasion, as part of a diplomatic mission. He took his watercolors and sketched everything.

5. Delacroix in Algeria, 1832 (outdoor scenes)
6. Delacroix in Algeria, 1832 (people)

But what he really wanted to do was to see the interior of a Moslem house, and especially the rooms reserved for the women, the *harem.* Not surprisingly, he never succeeded. He managed to catch a Moroccan couple on their roof terrace, and sketch a woman with her servant in a very plain room.

7. Delacroix sketch and painting compared
8. Delacroix: sketches for *Women of Algiers* (1382)

But these sketches are very different from the final picture, which has a richness of detail, color, and texture. At the very end of the trip, though, he met a Jewish man who allowed the artist to venture very briefly indoors, where he dashed off a couple of sketches that he used as basis for the final painting. But most of that final picture seems to have come from his imagination, with details that he no doubt saw in North Africa, but assembled back in Paris using French models and fabrics that he brought back with him. So have to modify my statement that the picture was real: it is real in that it contains elements that the artist saw with his own eyes, or physically collected, but in all other respects, it is a work of the imagination. Which raises some questions: What was Delacroix after? What is the effect on the viewer? And what attitudes does the picture enshrine? Look again in more detail before you answer.

9. Delacroix: *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, video tour

So what about the picture in itself, as a physical object? One thing that should be obvious is that it is a feast of detail and color, a riot of paint. Wikipedia offers an ultra-high resolution image, which enables me to give details like these; what amazes me is how Delacroix manages to get so much in without the end result being a total clash of hues and patterns:

10. Delacroix: *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, left-hand woman
11. Delacroix: *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, central woman
12. Delacroix: *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, objects on ground
13. Delacroix: *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, wall in the rear
14. Delacroix: *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834, Louvre), repeat

What is the effect on the viewer? Delacroix gave us a very interesting comparison here. About 15 years later, he painted another version, now in the Musee Fabre in Montpellier. Compositionally, it is almost the same, but it is totally different in effect.

15. Delacroix: *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1849, Montpellier)

Do you see what he has done? He has softened the detail, reduced the color, and made the room a great deal more simple. He has reduced the presence of the servant and moved the women back, creating a more intimate space. The middle woman is now looking at us rather than her companion, which means that the total effect of the picture is that of the women inviting us in. *Would* they have invited us in in real life? Certainly not if we were men, and probably not even if we were women but not of their culture.

16. Delacroix: *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1834, Louvre), repeat

So what about the attitudes behind this painting? The Islamic world which the women inhabit is seen as lavish, ornate, and decadent. The women themselves are both sexualized and indolent; they have nothing to do but wait for some man. So far from a *harem* being a private space to which they may retreat, it has become a public one, open to voyeurs—and of course to men, their masters.

B. The East, Westernized

17. Section title B (Gérôme: *La danse de l'almée*)
18. — still from the above

Here is a rather later French painting, by the master of exotic realism **Jean-Léon Gérôme** (1824–1904). Can we analyze the attitudes here? What does this say about the Islamic world it claims to represent? Any sexual implications of the Delacroix painting have here become overt. Private has become public. On the other hand, while there is a clear power dynamic radiating from left to right, there is no ownership involved; the men have presumably paid to watch a performance, which the belly-dancer (*almée*) and her musicians are voluntarily putting on.

19. Edward Saïd: *Orientalism*

Meet the Palestinian-American writer **Edward W. Saïd** (1935–2003). A product of Princeton and Harvard and a professor at Columbia, Saïd virtually founded the field of Post-Colonial Studies and coined the word **Orientalism**, the title of his widely-honored but also controversial book of 1978. Saïd's thesis is that most Western depictions of what the calls the "Orient," including North Africa and the Middle East, are not objective representations of the various cultures but Western fantasies about them, based on stereotypes. I found a short video on YouTube; it is visually too messy to show, but I can play the sound.

20. Edward Saïd: *Orientalism*, with audio summary

Look at the two book covers on the slide. Between them, they depict two of the most common stereotypes of the Islamic world: **cruel male dominance** and **female submission**. These stereotypes are not confined to the 19th century or to France. *The Abduction from the Seraglio,* the first opera written by **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–91) after he arrived in Vienna in 1782, depends entirely on the assumption that the Pasha will treat his women as chattels under his command. When the Spanish heroine, **Konstanze**, is captured by pirates and sold to **Pasha Selim**, she comes to respect him and tries to teach him that true love cannot be exacted by force. But he gets tired of waiting, which in turn precipitates the first real dramtic climax of the opera. This is the dialogue before Konstanze's great aria, "Martern aller Arten" (tortures of every kind), in **Sir David McVicar's** Glyndebourne production, with **Sally Matthews** as Konstanze and Franck Saurel as the Pasha.

21. Mozart: *Die Entführung aus dem Serail,* Pasha/Konstanze dialogue

In the end, though, the Pasha proves himself to be a better exemplar of Enlightenment values than the Westerners. But 19th-century painters are seldom willing to concede that point; the profit in exploiting the frisson of fantasy is too great. Of the two strands featured in Saïd's book covers, I am only going to focus on the female side. I can sum up the factor of cruel male dominance by a single slide, *Summary Execution under the Moorish Kings of Granada* (1870) by the short-lived **Henri Regnault** (1843–71).

22. Regnault: *Summary Execution under the Moorish Kings of Granada* (1870, Orsay)

23. Théodore Chasseriau: *La toilette de Esther* (1841, Louvre)
24. Théodore Chasseriau: *Orientalist Interior: Nude in a Harem* (1852, pc.)

Pictures of women, however, show a very wide range. One of the more surprising is this, painted by **Théodore Chasseriau** (1819–56) in 1841. If you don't happen to know, can you guess what its subject is? It has all the ingedients of the Orientalist aesthetic, clearly some young woman being prepared for a sexual encounter with some very rich man. And that's indeed what it is—but the young woman in question is **Esther** from the Bible, being prepared to be presented to **King Ahasuerus** as a possible queen. Compare it to this other picture from a dozen years later: exactly the same ingradients (plus the clearly non-virile old man asleep in the background), but this time more clearly sexualized. Not that the *Esther* isn't sexualized also—that is implicit in the story—which makes it hard to label one as sacred and the other one profane.

25. The two Ingres nudes below

Painting such pictures is not just a matter of catering to the voyeuristic appetite. Study of the nude was (and to some extent still is) a requirement of academic art training, and Orientalist subjects gave artists an excuse to display their skill in a more-or-less believable context. Even Delacroix's arch-rival and temperamental antithesis **Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres** (1780–1867), who more or less defined academic art, would turn to Orientalism—and he was some decades ahead of Delacroix in doing so. Compare these two nudes from the first half of his career. Just one question: which is the more realistic?

26. Ingres: The Valpinçon *baigneuse* (1808, Louvre)
27. Ingres: *La grande odalisque* (1814,, Louvre)

Well? The first painting, though quite artificially composed, is chaste in its detail, but also entirely realistic. The later one does not have much detail either, but those it has—the fan, the jewelery, the pipe, even the title (an ***odalisque*** is a women in a harem)—are virtually Orientalist labels. And yet it is not realistic at all. Someone said that the Odalisque's spine has at least three extra vertebrae; a contemporary critic complained that she seemed to have no bones at all. Whatever Ingres was doing with his manipulation of the body, he was not demonstrating his academic drawing skills. He would turn to Orientalist subjects throughout his career whenever he wanted the freedom to explore the idea of female flesh as Play Doh, as for example in his great late work, *The Turkish Bath* (1863). This was another Orientalist excuse to paint a lot of nudes, as you see in the smaller and more realistic picture by Gérôme, but Ingres was something else again.

28. Ingres: *The Turkish Bath* (1863, Louvre)
29. Delacroix: *Woman with a Parrot* (1827, Lyon)

Delacroix's interest in Orientalist subjects had already begun before he went to Algeria. We saw his imagination run wild in *The Death of Sardanapalus*. In the same year (1827), he painted this small picture of a *Woman with a Parrot*. It is not labeled an *odalisque*, but in all important respects it clearly is one: the indolent pose, the lavish surroundings, the exotic bird. But I think Delacroix knew that these aspects were the products of fantasy; perhaps one of the things he was trying to do in Algiers was to see the real-life equivalent. He had to settle for a compromise between what he imagined and what he saw.

30. Odalisque splash

The *odalisque* was a remarkably persistent theme in French art, lasting well into the 20th century. I have put together a *montage* of six examples covering a century from 1842 ro 1941. The music is part of Delilah's aria of seduction from the opera *Samson et Dalila* (1877) by **Camille Saint-Saëns** (1835–1931), another piece of sexualized Orientalism, but now with the woman holding the power. You will notice, incidentally, that some of the women here are naked, some clothed, and some partially clothed; it is not the nudity that matters so much as the indolence and the luxurious trappings.

31. Odalisque montage

C. Musical Journeys

Although there will be a few more paintings to come, and even a poem, I want to turn the remainder of this class over to music. Musical Journeys, remaining in the Islamic world for now, but going after the break to India, Spain, the South of France, and some faraway island. My short title video stays with **Saint-Saëns**, who used to spend his winters in Algeria or Egypt, and let the atmosphere seep into his music. This is the start of the slow movement of his *Suite Algérienne* (1880)

32. Section title C (Saint-Saens: *Suite Algérienne*)
33. Bizet works

I thought of having an entire segment on **Georges Bizet** (1838–75) who managed to depict a whole lot of exotic places in a short career: the South of France in the incidental music he wrote for the play *L'Arlésienne,* the Middle East in his early opera *Djamileh,* and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Spain in his later ones *The Pearl Fishers* and *Carmen.* In the end, though, I decided to feature only *Djamileh* (1872). Bizet based his one-act opera on the poem *Namouna* by **Alfred de Musset** (1810–57). It is a simple story: the Bey Hassan gets a slave merchant to deliver him a new woman every month. But the current woman, Djamileh, has fallen in love with him, and believes that he loves her also. So she gets the merchant to present her, suitably veiled, as the next month's consort, and dances a belly dance that so enraptures Hassan that, even when her identity is discovered, he declares he loves her and wants to keep her. The opera was not a success. Critics were baffled by Bizet's unusual harmonies, but the notoriously picky Viennese columnist Edouard Hanslick (famous as a detractor of Wagner) spoke highly of the originality of the dance you are about to hear.

34. Bizet: *Djamileh,* dance
35. Class title 2 ("Seduction," still from the above)

D. Passage to India

36. Section title D (*Lakmé* score)

For some reason, no notable French painter seems to have gone to India, but composers did, at least in their imagination. The slide shows the cover page of the 1883 opera *Lakmé* by **Léo Delibes** (1836–91); the music was the opening of the famous Bell Song. The action is set in the British Raj and tells of the forbidden love between the title character, who is the daughter of a Brahmin priest, and an English officer. Delibes places the famous "Flower Duet" near the beginning of the opera to esatblish the innocent richness of the natural atmosphere before the British visitors disturb it. Of course, it is Orientalist through and through, its lushness a Western fantasy of "The Scent of the South," as I have called this class. The singers in this Australian production are **Emma Matthews** and **Dominica Matthews**; I have no idea if they are related.

37. Delibes: *Lakmé,* flower duet
38. Maurice Delage

One French composer who did go to India—albeit taking us into the 20th century—was **Maurice Delage** (1879–1961), a pupil of Ravel's who made an extended visit between 1911 and 1913. While his music would certainly appeal to the armchair traveler's taste for the exotic, there is an unpredictability to it which suggests that Delage was deliberately using the melodic and formal materials he actually was hearing around him. I am going to play a short promo of his *Four Hindou Poems* (1912) from a concert by **Julia Bullock** with the Berlin Philharmonic under **Sir Simon Rattle**. I have made no attempt to look up the words and provide a translation; I am just content to immerse myself in their sound and color.

39. Delage: *Four Hindu Poems,* promo

E. España

40. Section title E (Debussy *Sérénade interrompue* with Manet pictures)
41. Manet's matador paintings

From the mid-19th century on, a few French artist and composers became curious about Spain. Probably the most Spanish-influenced of the visual artists was **Édouard Manet** (1832–83). These images of Spanish dancers are somewhat deceptive because, unlike the composers I shall play, Manet was not as interested in the splashy color of Spain so much as the somber realism he took from **Velazquez**.

42. Chabrier, Lalo, and Ravel

But French composers were very much attracted to the exotic qualities of Spain: the strum of guitars, the flash of flamenco, the intense colors and strong contrasts between light and dark. I suppose it is the

Hispanic equivalent of Orientalism. The music I played under the title was one of several piano and orchestral pieces with a Spanish flavor by **Claude Debussy** (1862–1918). I'll follow with three well-known works by the composers here: the orchestral piece *España* (1883) by **Emmanuel Chabrier** (1841–94)—shown in a frankly pretty awful portrait by **Manet**—the violin concerto *Symphonie Espagnole* (1873) by **Édouard Lalo** (1823–92), and a version of the well-known *Boléro* (1928) by **Maurice Ravel** (1875–1937). I wish I could play complete movements but all are long; still I think that at least two of my excerpts are fairly substantial. Let's start with the opening of *España,* played by the Frankfurt Radio Symphony under **Alain Antinoglu**.

43. Chabrier: *España,* opening
44. Augustin Hadleich

Although called a symphony, Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole* is an essentially a violin concerto, written when Spanish-themed music was all in voge; it premiered in 1875, just a month before Bizet's *Carmen*. The soloist here is Augustin Hadelich, with the Orchestre national de France conducted by **Cristian Macelaru**. Again, the movement I want to play—the last—is too long; I'll give you the opening, then cut to the end, for this is a very unusual concerto that ends very quietly.

45. Lalo: *Symphonie Espagnole,* last movement
46. Maurice Béjart

Ravel's ballet *Boléro* (1928) is a 15-minute work that obsessively builds and builds upon a single theme. I will show the final five in the now-iconic choreography by **Maurice Béjart** (1927–2007). Ravel's original scenario involves a female dancer leaping onto an inn table and dancing as the men around her cheer her on. It made be think of the Gérôme painting I showed earlier, another situation of a woman dancing for men. Only in Béjart's choregraphy, as danced by **Sylvie Guillem**, the power dynamic has flipped.

47. Ravel/Béjart: *Boléro,* ending

F. Some Distant Land...

48. Section title F (Matisse)
49. Matisse: *Luxe, calme, et volupté* (1904, Paris Orsay)

This painting, *Luxe, calme, et volupté* by **Henri Matisse** (1869–1954), takes its title from a poem, *L'invitation au voyage,* by **Charles Baudelaire** (1821–67). It's quite short. Let's hear it read in French, then look at a translation.

50. Baudelaire, *L'invitation au voyage,* reading
51. — translation of the above

How do you interpret this? I see this as a voyage to some Neverland, a place that neither the speaker nor the listener see as a real-world place that can be reached, even by boat. One of the things that

fascinates me about preparing these classes is how I can start out with one kind of idea and see it change into something different before the class is finished. In this case, I planned a class about how French artists and composers visited the lands to the South and East of them, and brought back new impressions to influence their work. But I see now that it is really about people who have an idea about a place in their imagination, go there, and *don't* find it. Delacroix, for example, had an imagined image of an Arabian *harem,* but when he got there he couldn't get in, or did so only briefly. So his paintings are a kind of negotiation between what he imagined and what he actually saw. We will see this again in the paintings **Paul Gauguin** sent back from Tahiti. But first, let's hear two musical settings of the Baudelaire poem: a song by Henri Duparc (1848–1933) sung by **Gérard Souzay**, and then a version by the singer-songwriter **Léo Ferré** (1916–93).

52. Duparc: *L'invitation au voyage* (Gérard Souzay)
53. Ferré: *L'invitation au voyage*
54. Matisse: *Luxe, calme, et volupté* (repeat)

What visual language does Matisse choose for his painting? What does it depict? Two things: it is a beach somewhere warm, probably at the South of France? And it is painted in the pointillist style developed by Seurat, but developed further by **Paul Signac** (1863–1935). Independently wealthy, Signac promoted other artists and helped them financially; he was the first to buy a painting by Matisse. He was also the first artist to discover the special qualities of the Midi, or French Mditerranean coast. Van Gogh and Gauguin had moved to Provence; Cézanne came from there and returned, but Signac went all the way to the coast. What do you think he saw there?

55. Signac: *Port d'Antibes* (1917)

This is a later painting, but he had been painting in this manner since the turn of the century. Is it too fanciful to see in the bright light, pure colors, and simplified forms some vision of another Eden, a harmonious paradise? I don't think so, because we know that Signac was a visionary and idealist. One of his early paintings (before the pointillist style) was quite explicit; its full title is *In the Time of Harmony; the Golden Age is Not in the Past, it is in the Future* (c.1895, Montreuil City Hall).

56. Signac: *In the Time of Harmony* (c. 1895, Montreuil City Hall)
57. Gauguin: *By the Sea* (1887, pc.)

Here is another artist, using a highly colored beach scene to create a vision of earthly paradise—though in this case it is a Caribbean island, not the French Riviera. This is the man I announced as my ending point: **Paul Gauguin** (1848–1903). Here was one artist who really did travel. Born in Paris, he spent much of his childhood in **Peru** (his mother's country), returned to France to begin a career as a banker, set up a household in **Copenhagen** with his Danish wife, but worked mostly in France, in **Paris**, **Provence**, and **Brittany**. He also made significant trips to **Martinique** (where he painted this picture), to **Tahiti** (twice), and to the **Marquesas Islands**, where he died.

58. Gauguin: *Self-Portrait with the Yellow Christ* (1889, Paris Orsay)

Something of what he was after can be seen in this 1889 painting from his time in Brittany, *The Yellow Christ.* He has gone to Brittany to be in a culture far removed from Paris, where the people still hold to simpler beliefs; you might call them **primitive** if you did not intend it as an insult. And he responds in similarly primitive style, abandoning illusionistic space or modeling, creating a design of strong flat colors as a simple statement of faith.

59. Tahiti around 1900
60. Gauguin: Two *Tahitian Women on the Beach* (1891, Paris Orsay)

So Gauguin was still in search of primitive simplicity when he went off to Tahiti. Unfortunately, Westers civilization had got there first, with steamships, suburban bungalows, and the Catholic Church. The indigenous people mostly lived in comparative squalor. Gauguin had the same problem as Delacroix in Algeria, though his situation was different. He had access, even intimate access; on all three of his visits, he too native wives. But he had to imagine the heroic moral values that he sought, and reconcile them with the undoubted stimulation of the landscape, the color, and the natural beauty of the people he saw all around him. He bought two books on Tahitian culture from the mid-19th century, before the Europeans came, read up on their ancient pre-Catholic religion, and tried to incorporate that into his painting. Works like *Mahana no Atua* (Day of the God) are every bit as much a negotiation as Delacroix's *Women of Algiers,* between what the artist imagined and what he actually saw, but in his case it led to a larger body of magnificent work.

61. Gauguin: *Mahana no Atua* (Day of the God, 1894, Chicago)

I originally thought I might end with a montage of Gauguin paintings to a song I have played before, *Youkali* by **Roger Fernay**, which is the perfect distillation of the French longing for the unattainable. But then I realized that the cognitive dissonance would be too great. It's not because the iconic setting of the poem is by a German, **Kurt Weill** (1900–50), for after all was he not an expatriate exile also? But I feared that Weill's tango might detract from what I see as the basic seriousness of Gauguin's vision. So here is the song all alone—either both verses or just the second, depending on time—in a different video with Barbara Hannigan than the one I showed before. However, I'll still end on one more Gauguin, *Riders on the Beach,* painted in the Marquesas Islands.

62. Weill/Fernay: *Youkali* (Barbara Hannigan)
63. Class title 3