

SAINT GEORGE AND THE DRAGON after Carpaccio

“As of Carpaccio, I'll tell you about him when I can find enough admiring phrases for that; what a painter!”

Draft of a letter from Gustave Moreau to Edgar Degas [early October 1858]

TO CONSULT ON SITE
ON THE 3RD FLOOR



Gustave Moreau, Copy after *Saint George and the Dragon* by Carpaccio
Oil on canvas, Cat. 195
© RMNGP / René-Gabriel Ojeda

In early June 2024, the copy of *Saint George and the Dragon* by Vittore Carpaccio (c. 1465 - c. 1525) was restored by Véronique Sorano-Stedman.

Due to its identical dimension as the original, the imposing size (3.58 m x 1.40 m) of this canvas explains why it has never left the 3rd floor studio since the opening of the museum, in 1903. Its removal from the walls is therefore an exceptional opportunity for the museum's scientific team to observe and study it closely.

The work was last removed and restored over 30 years ago, when the 3rd floor rooms were renovated in 1993 under the direction of Geneviève Lacambre, then director of the museum. The operation was carried out to consolidate the fragile original canvas and clean the top layer of paint, which had been darkened by the oxidation of the varnish and a heavy layer of dust.

The fabric that had initially covered the frame, which had become brownish and severely torn, was removed and replaced by a fabric of identical texture, specially manufactured and dyed according to the colors found on a few fragments protected from light (an intense pink color with a pattern of yellow dots). This operation received financial support from the Friends of the Museum.

The stay in Italy

In 1849, after two unsuccessful attempts at the Prix de Rome, Gustave Moreau left the École des Beaux-Arts. In keeping with the academic tradition of the time, and in order to complete his training, he decided a few years later to take a study trip to Italy - at his own expense.

From October 1857 to September 1859, he spent time in Rome, Milan, Venice and Naples. In Rome, he frequented the Villa Medici boarders and befriended Degas. In Venice, where he stayed from mid-September to December 1858, he studied and copied the works of painter Vittore Carpaccio.

A contemporary of Michelangelo and Raphael, this painter attracted the attention of artists in the 1850s, including Théophile Gautier, who, in his *Voyage en Italie*, enthused about the artist: "We are astonished that the name of Carpaccio is not more generally known; he has all the adolescent purity, all the graceful seduction of the painter of Urbino [Raphael] in his first manner, and moreover that admirable venetian coloring that no school has been able to achieve".

This art of coloring corresponded to Moreau's interests, as he wrote to his parents: he intended to devote himself to "studies of value and decorative tones", and the numerous copies he made of Carpaccio's monumental compositions during his brief stay in Venice testify to a genuine fascination for him.

Degas, who was waiting for him in Florence, had to call him to order in a letter dated November 27, 1858: "It's enough to be complacent about your penchant for color [...] for I have a great desire to see you again before I go to France, and you promised me you wouldn't be away for so long. [...] Come on, roll up that famous Saint Georges, and the little pieces after Carpaccio, and come and draw a little here".

Moreau and Carpaccio

Saint George and the Dragon is kept at the Scuola San Giorgio degli Schiavoni, on the ground floor in the room known as the Dalmatian Room.

To copy this work, Moreau first made a precise tracing of the composition on tracing paper. He certainly needed to use a scaffolding, as it is set high up in the woodwork.

This tracing, still preserved in the museum, was then carefully transferred to the canvas. Once he had finished, the painter rolled up his copy and sent it to Paris on November 28, 1858. An authorization issued by the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Venice testifies to this.

Among the other paintings by Carpaccio copied in Venice are the following, also preserved at the Scuola: *Saint Jerome leading the wounded lion to the monastery* and *The Triumph of Saint George*, as well as four of the nine episodes of *The Legend of Saint Ursula* on display in the Academy's galleries (*The Arrival of the Ambassadors to the King of Brittany*, *The Departure of the Ambassadors*, *The Meeting with the Pope in Rome*, *The Apotheosis of Saint Ursula*).

Much later, Moreau chose to hang these copies in the *Cabinet de réception* on the 1st floor of his house museum, where they can still be seen today.

To be seen on the 1st floor of the museum in the *Cabinet de réception*



Gustave Moreau, Copy after *The Departure of the Ambassadors* by Carpaccio
Oil on canvas, Inv. 13612
1,03 m x 0,94 m
© RMNGP / René-Gabriel Ojeda



Gustave Moreau, Copy after *The Arrival of the Ambassadors to the King of Brittany* by Carpaccio
Oil on canvas, Inv. 13633
0,30 m x 0,60 m
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Authorization issued by the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Venice
© Gustave Moreau Museum

Unhooking: a complex and delicate operation



The canvas being removed from the wall
© Gustave Moreau Museum

