

# ÉMILE JEAN-HORACE VERNET

(Paris 1789 - Paris 1863)

## *Returning from the Market*

signed, inscribed and dated 'St. Petg. Vernet 1843' (lower right)  
oil on canvas  
36 x 31 cm (14 x 12 in)

**R**ETURNING FROM THE MARKET IS AN INTERESTING example of Émile Jean-Horace Vernet's work and a departure from the immense large-scale battle scenes for which he became known. Born in his father's lodgings at the Palais du Louvre, Vernet largely rejected the academic French style and the classicist influences of Jacques-Louis David, and instead painted subjects taken from contemporary culture. He depicted the French soldier in a vernacular manner, for example, *Dog of the Regiment*, *Trumpeter's Horse* and *Death of Poniatowski*. *Returning from the Market* is a portrait carried out in this vein. It bears a resemblance, in treatment, subject and reversed composition, to Vernet's work, *A Fisherman Setting Out* (1824), shown in fig. 1. Louis Adolph Thiers (1797-1877) pointed out that Vernet's realism was achieved by an absence of conventions and rules: 'no subject is forbidden him, no manner of treating them is imposed on him'.



Horace Vernet,  
*A Fisherman Setting  
Out*, 1824  
(Figure 1)

Vernet's naturalism, which appeared as early as the 1830s, see for example the *Duc d'Orléans Leaving the Palais Royal* (1832; Versailles), can be seen to foreshadow that of Gustave Courbet, (cat. no. 56), or Edouard Manet.

*Returning from the Market* bears the inscription 'St. Petg', indicating that it was painted in St. Petersburg. The figure wears traditional Russian furs and boots, making his way across a snowy landscape. Vernet lived and worked in Russia for several years. His first trip there was in 1836 and he returned again in 1842, when Vernet was instructed by Louis-Phillipe to visit the Tsar of Russia to improve French-Russian relations. Vernet spent September and October of that year travelling with Nicholas I and his generals, returning to Paris in July 1843. Though Vernet travelled to Russia at the height of the rigid and uncompromising régime of Tsar Nicholas I, he was favourably impressed by what he saw. Indeed, this is reflected in *Returning from the Market*; the young man in this picture has fine handsome features and is shown here passing a chevroned wooden boundary marker, alluding to the distance travelled in

order to reach the nearest market. A rope wound securely around his gloved hand, he pulls his weighty sledge topped with a capacious woven basket. It is brimming with goods; several glass bottles, some sapling branches wrapped up to protect their fragile leaves, and fish fresh from the market. It could be said that this basket, together with his substantial clothing, which is in good condition, suggests a healthy abundance. In this scene, one is reminded of the Russian genre painting of artists such as Alexsei Venetsianov (1780-1847) who created idealistic representations of peasants and depicted the virtues of peasant life while using natural light and natural environment.

Vernet was the son of the painter Carle Vernet. His grandfather was Claude Joseph Vernet (see Sphinx Fine Art inventory), and his maternal grandfather was Jean-Michel Moreau. His early training in his father's studio was supplemented by formal academic training with François-André Vincent until 1810. He first exhibited at the Salon in 1812 and two years later Vernet received the Légion d'Honneur for the part he played in the defence of Paris, which he commemorated in the *Clichy Gate: The Defence of Paris, 30 March 1814* (1820; Paris, Louvre), a spirited painting that represented a manifesto of liberal opposition to restoration oppression. His painting in the Wallace Collection, London, *The Veteran at Home* (fig. 2) could be seen as a comment on his own status as returning hero.

In 1824 the government commissioned two official portraits and made Vernet an Officer of the Légion d'Honneur, from this point Vernet's career was secure. In 1826 he was elected to the Institut de France and from 1828 to 1834 he was director of the Académie de France in Rome. In 1835 he was appointed professor at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris, a post he held until his death.



Horace Vernet,  
*The Veteran at Home*, 1823,  
The Wallace Collection  
(Figure 2)

