

IN-SIGHT

RADEN SALEH, OSMAN HAMDİ BEY AND HAKOB HOVNATANYAN

ART OF THE WORLD IN THE BELVEDERE COLLECTION

Upper Belvedere

9 September 2021 to 27 March 2022



Osman Hamdi Bey, Meditation on the Qur'an, 1902

Photo: Johannes Stoll / Belvedere, Vienna

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What are the asserted "highlights" of a collection? How is it that specific works get exhibited ... and others not? One look at the history of such curatorial choices illustrates the Eurocentric bias often behind these decisions. With this in mind, the Belvedere now presents three remarkable works from its collection rarely shown before, painted by artists considered pioneers of modern painting in their native countries: Raden Saleh, Osman Hamdi Bey, and Hakob Hovnatanyan.

CEO Stella Rollig explains: „There is a good reason why diversity and plurality are playing an increasingly important role in museums today. With this exhibition, the Belvedere seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the many perspectives of historical works from artists at the crossroads of different cultures. With Saleh, Hamdi Bey, and Hovnatanyan, we find high-caliber artists on the cusp of modernity who have so far received little recognition in the context of our collection.“

Three 19th-century paintings from the Belvedere's collection – three artists of world renown who have long been held in high esteem in their native countries and who, in recent decades, have gradually conquered the international art scene: Raden Saleh from Java in today's Indonesia, Osman Hamdi Bey from Turkey, and Armenian native Hakob Hovnatanyan, who worked in Georgia and Iran.

The *IN-SIGHT* exhibition opens up a new perspective on an era in which the European art world was undergoing radical change, and one that is at the heart of the museum's collection. At the

center of the show are three large paintings: *Tigers Fighting over a Dead Javanese* (Saleh), *Meditating on the Qur'an* (Hamdi Bey), and *Nāser ad-Din, the Shah of Persia* (Hovnatanyan). The works arrived in Vienna shortly after their creation, either as gifts from the artists to Emperor Franz Joseph I (Saleh and Hovnatanyan) or through acquisition on behalf of the imperial painting collection (Hamdi Bey). Although they have since been part of the inventory of Viennese museums (initially the Kunsthistorisches Museum and later the Belvedere), they were stored away for most of the time. So how did these key works by artists who created their own artistic style through the interaction of European training and the painting traditions of their native countries remain "invisible"? Who in their native countries are considered pioneers of modern painting?

Curator Markus Fellingner notes: *„Until a few years ago, these three works of non-European provenance were the only ones in the Belvedere collection that did not quite fit into the context of the collection. They are, however, museum masterpieces by important artists whose biographies are just as exciting as their paintings. Their works share in common the breakdown of assumed boundaries separating the culture of their native country from that of Europe. They represent a view of European art from the outside and allow us to challenge in many ways the familiar Eurocentric view of the world.“*

Osman Hamdi Bey and Hakob Hovnatanyan lived to the east of Europe's centers. Hamdi Bey established the first state art academy in Istanbul in 1882, and in later years became the founding director of the Imperial Museum (Müze-i Hümayun) in Istanbul. Whereas Saleh and Hamdi Bey left their native lands for Europe, Hovnatanyan followed a different path. He was born in Tbilisi in 1806 and was initially trained in the local tradition. Later he devoted himself to European realism before, at an advanced age, embracing the traditions of the Persian

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school of painting. The artist thus merged the cultural and artistic traditions of Armenia, Georgia, Persia, and Russia.

The unusually large, life-size portrait of *Nāser ad-Din, the Shah of Persia* in the collection of the Belvedere in Vienna – the only known painting by Hovnatanyan in a European museum outside Russia – is regarded as the main work from his Persian period.

Raden Saleh's native island of Java was colonized by the Netherlands. His work was widely covered in contemporary cultural columns of the newspapers of Europe, where he lived from 1829 to 1851 and from 1875 to 1878. While his creativity and artistry were never called into question, both he and his work were continually examined through the lens of exoticism by contemporary media and art critics. In his native country, on the other hand, Saleh's originality was frequently called into question: he was labeled as "Europeanized" and criticized for his idealized depictions. Within this range of refraction, Raden Saleh continues to be a subject of debate.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the three paintings in the exhibition were transferred from the former holdings of the imperial painting collections to the Belvedere, presumably because they are oil paintings rendered essentially in a European technique and style. However, their classification in the canon of Eurocentric art history is still difficult today. In the meantime, works by the three artists fetch millions in the art trade.

The *IN-SIGHT* series takes a closer look at the works of these three personalities, shedding light on the greater context and placing a focus on the distinctive qualities of art that merge European and Asian cultural traditions.

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

RADEN SALEH

- 1811 Raden Saleh is born in Semarang, Java. He grows up at the court of his uncle, the regent of Semarang.
- 1819 First drawing lessons with Jannus Theodorus Bik and Antoine Payen.
- 1829 Travels to the Netherlands. Until 1834, painting lessons with Cornelis Kruseman and Andreas Schelfhout.
- 1834–39 First exhibition participations and commissions as an independent artist in the Netherlands.
- 1839 During a European trip prior to his scheduled return to Java, Raden Saleh arrives in Dresden. He stays for four years. Close friendship with Prince Ernst II of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, through whom he establishes contacts with the European high aristocracy.
- 1845 Raden Saleh transfers residence to Paris.
- 1850 Residency in The Hague. King Willem II awards him the title "Painter of the King".
- 1851/52 Returns to Java and settles in Batavia.
- 1857 Builds a house in Batavia with his wife Constancia Winkelhaagen, formerly the widow of a wealthy German merchant; they separate in 1862.
- 1867 Marriage to Raden Ayu Danudirja, niece of the sultan of Yogyakarta.
- 1869 Raden Saleh is falsely accused of participating in a revolt and is arrested; his house is searched.
- 1870 In planning for his return to Europe, Raden Saleh donates large paintings to the rulers of Austria-Hungary, Prussia, and France. The Austrian emperor awards him the Commander's Cross with Star of the Franz Joseph Order.
- 1875–78 Second trip to Europe with his wife and adopted daughter. Longer stays in France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy.

- 1879 Final return to Java.
- 1880 Raden Saleh dies on 23 April in Bogor after suffering a stroke.

HAKOB HOVNATANYAN

- 1806 Hakob Hovnatanyan is born in Tbilisi, the son of the painter Mkrtum Hovnatanyan. Only a few years earlier, the city had become part of the Russian tsarist empire.
- Circa 1820 Hovnatanyan trains in his father's studio and concentrates on portraiture. At a young age he is a sought-after portraitist.
- 1829 Applies for admission to study painting at the Imperial Academy of St. Petersburg. He is rejected due to the mandatory age limit of twenty.
- 1841 For his participation in an exhibition at the St. Petersburg Academy of Art, Hovnatanyan receives the title of an (independent) artist "without rank".
- 1842 He is awarded a gold medal from the Academy and holds an office of the 14th grade after finding limestone suitable for producing lithographic plates in the Karabakh region.
- 1858/59 At an advanced age, Hovnatanyan relocates to Persia, where he lives and works first in Tabriz and later in Tehran. Naser ad-Din Shah commissions an oil painting of Imam Ali and a miniature portrait of the same for the Imperial Order of Imam Ali.
- Circa 1860 Hovnatanyan portrays the shah and his successor to the throne, Mozaffar ad-Din, several times, including in equestrian portraits. He presents two of the shah's portraits as gifts to the Austrian emperor and the Prussian king. He receives the Knight's Cross of the Franz Joseph Order and the Prussian Order of the Red Eagle, 4th Class.
- 1861 The shah awards him the title of court painter (naqqash-bashi). Hovnatanyan is also decorated with the Imperial Order of the Sun and the Imperial Order of the Lion, 3rd class.
- 1863 He returns to Tbilisi. His daughter, Nune, marries Tsaturkhan (Sattur Khan) Setkhanian, a Tabriz resident from an influential Armenian-Persian family.

- 1864/65 He moves to Persia for good. A few portraits of high-ranking personalities and watercolors of typical figures of everyday Persian life are documented.
- 1881 Hakob Hovnatanyan dies in Tehran and is buried in the cemetery of St. George's Church.

OSMAN HAMDI BEY

- 1842 Born in Istanbul on December 30, Osman Hamdi is the son of Ibrahim Edhem Pasha (1819–93). His father had lost both parents in the Chios Massacre and was adopted as a slave by the future Grand Vizier Hüsrev Pasha; due to his unique talents, he was sent to study in Paris and later rose to minister, ambassador, and grand vizier.
- 1860 Sent to Paris by his father to study law, Osman Hamdi primarily engages in painting. He studies with Jean-Léon Gérôme and Gustave Boulanger.
- Circa 1865 Hamdi meets Agarite, who became his wife; the couple has daughters Fatma and Melek in 1887 and 1888.
- 1867 Participates in the Paris World's Fair art show with three paintings.
- 1868 Returns to Istanbul.
- 1869 Hamdi joins the staff of newly appointed governor Midhat Pasha, a leading reformer, in Baghdad, where he supervises archaeological excavations.
- 1871 He returns to Istanbul as a diplomatic service officer to the sultan's court. He is appointed head of the commission of the Turkish contribution to the Vienna World's Fair in 1873.
- 1872 In June, he travels to Vienna for the first time to prepare for the World's Fair.
- 1873 From December 1872 to September 1873, Hamdi most likely remains in Vienna, supervising the World's Fair. He meets Marie Palyart, who becomes his second wife, with whom he has three more children.
- 1874 In January he travels to Vienna, where he is awarded the Commander's Cross of the Imperial Order of Leopold.

- 1879 His father is appointed the Ottoman ambassador in Vienna. Osman Hamdi accompanies him to attend his inauguration in Vienna. Drawings from a sketchbook document his visit to the Imperial Collections at the Belvedere.
- 1881 He is nominated to be the founding director of the Imperial Museum (Müze-i Humayun) in Istanbul, which opens in 1891. Hamdi heads the museum until his death.
- 1882 Hamdi establishes the first State Academy of Arts in Istanbul, which opens the following year.
- 1884 The new Law for the Protection of Ancient Cultural Property, drafted mainly by Hamdi, is enacted. It prevents the uncontrolled export of ancient cultural goods.
- 1887 Hamdi leads the excavations in Sidon, in the course of which the famous Alexander Sarcophagus is found.
- 1893 He makes a last, short visit to Vienna.
- 1902 The painting *Meditating on the Koran* is purchased for the Imperial Picture Gallery in Vienna from the Paris Salon.
- 1906 Hamdi paints the first version of the painting *The Tortoise Trainer*, now considered the most famous work by a Turkish artist.
- 1910 Osman Hamdi Bey dies on February 24 at his home in Istanbul.

EXHIBITION PROGRAM

The Exhibition Program can be found under www.belvedere.at/programm.

Subject to the current valid regulations!

GENERAL INFORMATION

Exhibition title	IN-SIGHT: Raden Saleh, Osman Hamdi Bey and Hakob Hovnatanyan Art of the World in the Belvedere Collection
Dates	9 September 2021 to 27 March 2022
Exhibition venue	Upper Belvedere
Works	31
Curator	Markus Fellingner
Exhibition management	Tatjana Gawron
Exhibition catalogue	<i>Raden Saleh. Osman Hamdi Bey. Hakob Hovnatanyan.</i> <i>Kunst von Welt in der Sammlung des Belvedere</i> In-Sight Series Editors: Stella Rollig, Markus Fellingner Authors: Irina Dzutsova, Edhem Eldem, Markus Fellingner, Werner Kraus, Stella Rollig Graphics: Atelier Liska Wesle Printing and Binding: Gugler GmbH, Melk 128 pages, 86 illustrations Format: 16,5 × 23,5 cm, Softcover German Edition ISBN 978-3-903327-24-5 Price: EUR 19.00
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Regular Tickets	€ 18,- (Upper Belvedere)
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For more information on the exhibition and high-resolution press photos please visit <https://www.belvedere.at/en/press>. #BelvedereInsight