

Audio Visual Write-Up

Marie Lucas-Robiquet & a case study of the *Intérieur à Breth-Ounif (Sud-Oranais)*, from *The Weavers Series*

This is my audio-visual guide script. The bibliography used for this is found at the bottom of this document.

This audio-visual guide will provide a case study and examination of a female French Orientalist artist Marie Lucas-Robiquet. One of her paintings, *Intérieur à Breth-Ounif (Sud-Oranais)* [*Interior beni Ounif (South Oran)*], will be analyzed in-depth. It depicts a Tunisian woman making textiles. The broader meaning of this guide will be the trans-Mediterranean connections perceived through this particular painting as a woman from France is painting native women of Tunisia practicing a daily ritual in their home.

Orientalist art flourished in Europe during the nineteenth century in particular places such as France, Italy, and Britain.¹ Orientalist artists in France in particular, displayed their art in various Orientalist *Salons* in Paris. While most of these artists were men, Marie Lucas-Robiquet displayed her work at these salons and earned herself a reputation of being one of the best Orientalist artists in Paris.

Marie-Lucas Robiquet was a French Orientalist painter active in the late 19th and into the early twentieth century. She is known for her portrait and landscape scenes, and was a well-established and highly regarded French Orientalist artist who worked within the *Salon of the Société des Artistes Français* and exhibited many of her works at these Parisian *Salons*. While she was highly regarded, Lucas-Robiquet was living during a time when being a woman artist in Paris was not an easy life. Lucas-Robiquet was trained through private art tuition c. 1875

¹ Mary Healy, "Uncovering French Women Orientalist Artists: Marie Elisabeth Aimée Lucas-Robiquet (1858-1959)." *Women's Studies* 44, no. 8 (2015), 1185.

because women were not permitted entry into the *École des Beaux-Arts*.² Despite her lack of professional training, she was an immaculate artist whose subject matter ranged from scenes of children, landscapes and *plein air* genre scenes, market scenes, portraiture work, and military scenes. In particular, and what this audio-visual guide will focus on are the North African portraiture and genre scenes that she produced between 1880 and 1934. In particular, her works from North Africa, specifically in Tunisia and Algeria, are the most famous. These paintings were first seen by the public in 1892 at one of the *Salons* of Paris. The exhibition catalogs for this can be seen here. ³

The Orientalist works of art created by Marie Lucas-Robiquet were created within the time frame of French occupation of Tunisia, which commenced in 1881 and ended in 1956.⁴ Lucas-Robiquet moved to Northern Africa to Tunisia and Algeria with her husband, Maurice Edouard Louis Henri Lucas, where he was being stationed. Most of the works she produced while in Africa focused on women working in interior and exterior spaces. These include women working in textile production, children, and family matters. These works were displayed at the Orientalist *Salons* of which she displayed work from 1895 to 1914. In the same *Salons*, Orientalist artists whose works were being displayed include Eugene Delacroix, Auguste Renoir, Etienne Dinet, and Léon Carré.⁵ Despite her association with so many well-known and highly regarded artists, Lucas-Robiquet was lost to history for some time. It was not until the 21st century that scholars began to write about her and give her attention. The most well-known of these scholars is Mary Healy. Healy has discussed the role of Marie Lucas-Robiquet as an Orientalist painter, and in particular, her works that focus on the domestic spaces of Berber

² Ibid., 1187

³ Healy, "Uncovering French Women Orientalist Artists," 1182.

⁴ Ibid., 1181.

⁵ Ibid.

women in Tunisia. This video will focus on what is known as *The Weavers Series* created by Lucas-Robiquet while living in Tunisia.

Paintings Case Study

One painting that is a part of this series is known as the *Intérieur à Breth-Ounif (Sud-Oranais) [Interior beni Ounif (South Oran)]* from 1909 and is currently held in a private collection. While this is one of her 'later' paintings while working and living in Tunisia, it highlights Lucas-Robiquet's love for depicting family, children, and women within Berber households. This painting depicts four children working on a loom, while one young girl with her head in a red turban has a child attached to her back. Two children on the right are dressed in red. This child on the right spins the wool in a basket next to her that is being used on the loom. Two other young girls dressed in white are attentively tending to the loom, making a work of embroidery. The space appears to be an interior setting, as suggested by the title of this work, most likely in the home of these children, as carpet-making was often a familial tradition in Tunisian households. The women to the left of the painting are wearing traditional Berber attire and jewelry.⁶

What is fascinating about this painting is the light and shadow that Lucas-Robiquet is able to capture in the composition. At the top of the composition, streaks of light are seen beaming in from what must be an open ceiling. The light is also seen on the wall behind the loom and even reflects off of the material on the loom itself. This painting is most definitely intended to depict a certain time of day and, in a way, almost appears like a photograph. This is due to its ability to capture such a specific moment in time.

Like many of Lucas-Robiquet's other paintings, the brushstrokes are quite large, and it is almost as if you can see the texture that the paint is creating on the canvas. The texture

⁶ Healy, "Uncovering French Women Orientalist Artists," 1190.

associated with the paint is also reminiscent of the texture associated with textiles, as they do not create a smooth surface.

In another painting that was a sketch for *Intérieur à Brete-Ounif (Sud-Oranais)* [*Interior beni Ounif (South Oran)*], called *Tahedat filant*, Marie Aimee Lucas-Robiquet, 1909, 33.5 x 41 cm. (13 ¼ x 16 ⅛ in) depicts a child winding thread. This child, like the other women in the other painting, is shown in traditional Berber attire and jewelry.

Looking at the children in this painting, including the others, one can also not go without noticing the clothing that they are wearing. Are they wearing garb that was created on a loom?

What is also fascinating to consider is the access Marie Lucas-Robiquet would have had to these interior spaces. How did she gain access? Who gave her permission? Was there any type of resistance against her work and the ways in which she created her art?

While these artworks are of families working on looms together to create textiles, their broader meaning is one of trans-Mediterranean connections. Lucas-Robiquet was a female artist living in Tunisia during the French occupation. She was a French woman painting Tunisian women representing a combination and spread of an awareness of cultural practices geographically from one end of the Mediterranean and further into the landscape of Europe.

While this discussion has focused on the themes of Orientalism and French occupied Tunisia, there are many other resources available to learn more about this subject matter. For more information about Orientalism please refer to the following teaching tools and further resources as seen in this audio-visual guide.

- Khan academy provides an overview of Orientalism as a term and its use in art history.

- Edward Said's book, *Orientalism*, is where the term originated. In addition, there are art works listed below that are key examples of artists and artworks that pertain to ideas surrounding Orientalism.
- One of the most famous is the *Snake Charmer*, by Jean-Leon Gerome from 1879, of which shows a child standing in front of a group of men holding a snake.

Conclusion:

Thank you for listening to this audio-visual guide, and this discussion of Marie Lucas-Robiquet's paintings and their association with Orientalism and Tunisian textile artists.

Figures (of importance):



Figure 1: Marie Lucas-Robiquet, *Intérieur à Breti-Ounif (Sud-Oranais)* [*Interior beni Ounif (South Oran)*] c. 1909, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 166.1 cm, private collection.



Figure 3: *Tahedat filant*, Marie Aimee Lucas-Robiquet, 1909, 33.5 x 41 cm. (13 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{8}$ in)

Bibliography

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