

Lot 1341



Auction **Fine Art**

Date 14.11.2024, ca. 16:47

Preview 07.11.2024 - 10:00:00 bis
10.11.2024 - 18:00:00

SALEH BEN JAGGIA, RADEN
1811 Samarang (Java) - 1880 Buitenzorg

Title: Landscape with a View of the Merapi Volcano on Java.

Date: Ca. 1867.

Technique: Oil on canvas.

Measurement: 30 x 43,5cm.

Frame: Framed.

Certificate:

Werner Kraus, Passau, 17/07/2024, copy available.

Material analysis:

Art in Lab, Paris, 12/06/2024, copy available.

The painting was subjected to the following analyses in May-June 2024 Examination with ultraviolet light, digital microscope, X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (SFX), and Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR). These analyses show that the pigments match the biographical data of Raden Saleh (1811-1880) and indicate that the work was created in the years 1850-1860.

Provenance:

Private ownership, France;

Art market, London (as 'Dutch School');

Art market, Belgium (as 'Calame Umkreis').

Mount Merapi, literally meaning fire mountain, is one of the most active volcanoes on the island of Java. Its Javanese name is derived from Meru, the exemplary centre of Hindu and Buddhist cosmology, and api, which means fire. Its name alone makes it the imaginary centre of the world, the pivot and nail in the universe.

For millions of years, the periodic eruptions of the volcano have supplied the soil in its immediate vicinity and in neighbouring areas with abundant mineral nutrients. At the same time, its gentle slope, which extends to the southern sea, enabled the establishment of complex and extensive irrigation systems, which formed the basis for the successful

cultivation of wet rice. The resulting agricultural wealth was in turn the basis for the establishment of local states and the adoption of more complex Indian-style administrative and religious structures. Witnesses of the resulting Hindu-Javanese high culture, namely architectural and sculptural highlights such as the temple complex of Prambanan or the Buddhist stupa of Borobudur, still inspire us today. No economic, political and cultural developments would have been possible without the central role of the Merapi volcano. It is the main player in this system, which is emphasised by its central position in Javanese state theory and mythology to this day. Merapi is not just one of many mountains of fire on the island: it is the central mountain.

This central significance of the volcano found its way into the state theory of the Kingdom of Mataram and its successor states. The rulers of these political entities saw and still see themselves as mediators between the spiritual representation of the mountain and that of the Southern Ocean, a role that guarantees the fertility and well-being of the land and its inhabitants. A significant part of their legitimisation stems from this understanding.

Men as diverse as the brilliant geologist Wilhelm Junghuhn and the painter Raden Saleh understood this central importance of Merapi in Javanese culture. Junghuhn, who climbed and described all 43 volcanoes in Java, began with Merapi in 1838, and Raden Saleh painted no other mountain in Java with the same attention and precision as Merapi.

The Merapi volcano can be found as a motif in at least 12 paintings by Raden Saleh. In most of these paintings, the mountain is the central theme; one could almost speak of 'portraits' of Merapi. Unlike the mountains around Bogor, such as Gunung Salak, Gunung Gedeh and Gunung Pangerango, which often appear as backgrounds in his West Javanese landscape paintings, Raden Saleh (mostly) depicts Merapi as a solitaire. This indicates that he was aware of the mystical significance, the sublimity, of the mountain and expressed this in his painting.

In 1865, Raden Saleh decided to spend some time in Central Java. There were various reasons for this. Firstly, he planned the trip for artistic reasons - he wanted to broaden his view of Java's landscape. While he had previously mainly used West Javanese landscapes as motifs, he now wanted to expand his spectrum to include the rice plains, volcanic cones and temple ruins of Central Java. In addition to this basic motif, however, he was also driven by the hope of finding a suitable wife in Yogyakarta. His marriage to Constantia von Mansfeld had foundered on the rocks of colonial racism and Raden Saleh wanted to put down new roots in his homeland. In doing so, he endeavoured to distance himself to a certain extent from the colonial inventory. A Javanese woman with an aristocratic background would have been very helpful.

However, travelling from Batavia to the principalities (Central Java) was not easy. Permission from the authorities was needed, i.e. a passport, and this was only available if you could provide convincing reasons for the journey. Saleh had already applied for such a trip to Central Java in 1855, ten years earlier, to make studies for his painting 'Arrest of Diponegoro'. However, the government was not convinced of the necessity of this trip and rejected the request.

Ten years later, he tried again to obtain a travel permit and this time he was less naive in his dealings with the administration. Saleh skilfully offered his services to the Bataviaasche Genootschap van Wetenschappen en Kunsten as a procurer of Javanese manuscripts. Stuart Cohen, a board member of the Genootschap (and one of the pioneers of Dutch Javanology), knew that the Javanese were extremely reluctant to part with old manuscripts, which they generally regarded as pusaka (heirlooms with magical powers). He found the idea of utilising Raden Saleh's services as a cultural broker very charming.

The board of the Genootschap therefore submitted a travel application with free use of post horses for Raden Saleh, which was approved by the government in May 1865. This cleared all obstacles out of the way and Raden Saleh was soon on his way. He arrived in Yogyakarta in August 1865.

Between October and December 1865, the Merapi volcano was in a very active phase. Endless clouds of smoke and ash rose into the sky and millions of cubic metres of lava flowed over the crater rim. Raden Saleh climbed the smoking and rumbling mountain with a group of Dutchmen and local dignitaries and captured the magnificent natural spectacle on two canvases - Merapi erupting by day and Merapi erupting by night. He would later produce three replicas of this

highly successful pair.

Today, these depictions of the erupting Merapi volcano are among his masterpieces. However, we are also familiar with his paintings that show Merapi as a source of fertility and a symbol of universal harmony. In this case, the mountain is enthroned in the centre of the picture, surrounded by rice fields (if painted from the south) or untouched nature (if painted from the north or east).

One of these 'portraits' of Merapi (and its twin mountain Merbabu) was painted in 1867 and exhibited at the famous Internationale Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel Tentoonstelling in Amsterdam in 1883. The painting was entitled 'Gezicht op den Merapi en Merbabu'. Unfortunately, we have no information about the current owner of this painting, nor do we know of any image of it.

Also, there are several other Merapi paintings, two of which date from 1871, both of which are accurate depictions of the volcano from different angles, and the first in particular (Merapi with rice fields) is somewhat reminiscent of the present painting.

Raden Saleh's depictions of Merapi have a different quality to his landscape paintings from West Java. The majesty of the Javanese central volcano has a great effect on the painter, and this appears clear and powerful on his canvases.

Even after almost 170 years, Werner Kraus feels touched when looking at his Merapi pictures and is reminded of the ingenious mountain poem by Li Bai (701-762), which Günter Eich translated so congenially. Translated into English it says:

A flock of birds, high flight vanished.
An orphaned cloud that fled away.
We both felt no weariness,
To look at each other, the mountain and I.

After this, admittedly overlong introduction, back to the subject, back to the painting 'Gunung Merapi and Rider', which clearly bears Raden Saleh's artistic signature, and which Werner Kraus considers to be an original painting by Raden Saleh.

The central theme of the painting is the recognisable volcano Gunung Merapi. Its imposing structure and the sky take up more than two thirds of the painting, as we know it from classical Dutch landscapes, but also from Caspar David Friedrich, whose paintings Raden Saleh must have seen in Dresden. There, too, the sublimity is created by oversized skies. There is a light mist over parts of the landscape and a morning mood prevails. The light comes from the left. The only person in the picture is riding a small Javanese horse over a simple bridge: A small person in the overwhelming grandeur of nature. A stream coming from the mountain divides the foreground. Rice grows in the fields to his left and right. The trees and the hill in the middle ground are blurred and insignificant and in no way compete with the grandeur of the mountain.

Since this work, like several other paintings by Raden Saleh, is not signed, we must use other parameters in addition to a trained eye to determine its authorship. It has already been explained that Raden Saleh spent time in Central Java (Yogyakarta) between 1865 and 1868 and that he had the Merapi constantly before his eyes. Werner Kraus dates the painting to 1867, the year in which the mountain was peaceful and inactive after a previously very active phase. But of course, the picture could also have been painted a few years later, between 1867 and 1871, based on existing sketches.

Probably the most conspicuous sign of age and change in the image layer of paintings is craquelure, the fine network of cracks and fissures that is usually more or less clearly recognisable in every older painting. The nature of the craquelure depends on the materials used for the painting (support, primer, pigments, binder) and the atmospheric conditions to which a painting has been exposed. The craquelure of the painting is good (even) and indicates its age.

The stretcher frame of the painting appears to be the original one. It bears an old label, the inscription of which can unfortunately no longer be deciphered. At the top left, we see either a seal bearing the name A. Calame, which refers to the Swiss landscape painter Alexander Calame (1810-1864) or his son Arthur Calame (1843-1919). However, this does not mean that either of them could be the author. The work of the two Calame's is of a completely different nature and neither of them ever travelled to Java or painted subjects that are in any way like the Merapi painting. The seal also does not show the Calame's' signature, and we can safely assume that the authorship of the painting is not connected to either Alexander or Arthur Calame. Nevertheless, the painting was attributed to the Calame circle at an earlier auction in Belgium, while a later auction at Christie's in London located the painting as 'Dutch School'.

If we compare the stretcher frame of the painting, which is original, with that of another Raden Saleh painting from the same period, the similarities in the stretcher technique are obvious. Raden Saleh did not make his stretcher frames himself but commissioned local craftsmen to whom he had explained the technique. The wood has not yet been examined, but visual inspection seems to confirm that it is 19th century tropical wood.

However, to achieve greater certainty in the attribution of the painting, a recognized Parisian laboratory was commissioned to carry out a comprehensive pigment analysis of the painting. This involved checking whether the pigments used in the painting had already been invented around the middle of the 19th century and were available to artists. This is because the development of pigments was very dynamic, especially in the 19th century, and it is often possible to determine down to the year when which pigments came onto the market and could be used by artists.

The results of the 20-page investigation are summarized in the report (which is available for inspection). The decisive sentence of the expert report reads: 'No pigments invented in the second half of the 19th century were identified in the original paint layer'. This prominently supports Werner Kraus' thesis that the painting was painted around 1867.

What painting materials and pigments did Raden Saleh use in Java?

As there were of course no specialized artists' shops in the 19th century in the relatively "art-free" colony of the Dutch East Indies, of which Java was a part, the question arises as to where Raden Saleh obtained his painting materials. Although ready-mixed paints in lead tubes had already been patented by the American John Goffe Rand (1801-1873) in 1841, the tube was only introduced to the market by the English paint manufacturer Winsor & Newton, who presented their new product at the 1851 World's Fair. The tubes were not ready for the market until later and a real demand for the easily sealable and transportable tube only developed because of Impressionist open-air painting.

In Java, Winsor & Newton products were offered for the first time on 12.2.1862 in an advertisement in the Java-Bode newspaper, but Winsor & Newton's Illuminating Colours were probably watercolours and not oil paints in tubes. The various hobby painters who already existed in Java at that time worked with watercolours.

This question about the origin of Raden Saleh's painting material in Java has not yet been answered. What we do know is that when he left Europe in 1851, he bought a lot of painting material, certainly including pigments, in Brussels. It is not known how long this supply lasted, but Werner Kraus assumes that it had long been used up by 1867. Saleh must therefore have had a reliable source for the supply of pigments.

What we do know is that he bought primed canvases from London and used them for special paintings. There is a canvas stamp on the painting 'Ascent to the Megamend' 1862, which he painted for General Major Curt von Schierbrand. It is the stamp of the English company G. Rowney & Co, 51 Rathbone Place, London. The same canvas stamp can be found on the above-mentioned 'Portrait of Sultan Hamengkubuwono in Uniform' from 1867. Without possessing a document about this, Werner Kraus assumes that Raden Saleh ordered pigments as well as canvases from the globally active Rowney company. Whether he also had direct contact with William Winsor and Henry Newton, who were already selling tube colours at this time, has not yet been clarified. In those years, Winsor & Newton had their shop remarkably close to G. Rowney & Co. at 38 Rathbone Place, London.

The transfer of the latest pigments from Europe to Java will probably always have taken place with some delay. It is therefore my conviction that the picture examined here, which in the author's opinion cannot have been made before 1865, is consistent with the scientific examination of the pigments from the Paris laboratory. All the criteria analysed support the expert's opinion and the authorship of Raden Saleh.

Estimate: 40.000 € - 80.000 €; Hammer: 43.000 €

