



RUDOLF VON ALT

1812 - Vienna - 1905

The Turkish Salon, Villa Hügel, Hietzing, Vienna

Watercolor.

Signed and dated lower left: *R. Alt (1)855.*

355 x 460 mm

PROVENANCE: August Ludwig Wilhelm Herzog von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel – Ernst August Herzog von Cumberland und Braunschweig-Lüneburg – Thence by descent

When the *Ancien Régime* perished in the frenzied purge brought about by the French Revolution the golden days of chinoiserie were numbered and with it, exotic rococo fondnesses as diverse as the taste for Turkish or Japan. However, the vogue continued on, in one form or another, through much of the nineteenth century. Where extravagance persisted, chinoiserie was on safe ground. And as the bourgeois embraced it, chinoiserie appeared in both drawing rooms and palaces¹. Later on in the nineteenth century, a Rococo revival took place, introducing mass-produced chinoiserie and Turkish motifs on to wallpaper, textiles and furniture. Many interiors were decorated with these patterns. The success of European and British imperialism demystified obscure areas of the globe making them shine in the clear light of topographical truth.

Although the nineteenth-century *beau monde* was no longer attracted by the architectural style of the pleasure gardens and richly decorated interiors continued to reflect the tastes of the rich and fashion-conscious – especially members of the aristocracy. The Royal Pavilion at Brighton, commissioned by George IV, was one of the most influential and admired archetypes. The Prince Regent was nineteenth-century England's greatest devotee of chinoiserie². His taste was highly eclectic and personal; he collected what he liked, and the furnishing of the Pavilion was as sumptuous and picturesque as its decoration. Carried by aristocratic society, the influence of his taste spread to the courts of Europe.

This magnificent interior depicts the Turkish salon at the Villa Hügel in Hietzing, Vienna. A second watercolor depicting a view of the Japanese Salon (fig.1) was recently sold. They are remarkable examples of the contemporary *Zeitgeist*. Each salon was furnished with a variety of exotica, pastiches and a number of specially designed lacquer items. The Japanese salon was packed with Asian porcelain, objects with ormolu mounts, lamps, candlesticks and sculptural figures, while the Turkish salon was decorated with superb ornamental furnishings. This included furniture with shining blue upholstery, grand oriental objects and beautiful wall fabrics and curtains.

¹ Dawn Jacobson, *Chinoiserie*, London 1993, p. 178.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 187-199.

In 1854 August Ludwig Wilhelm Duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel acquired the Villa Hügel in Hietzing on the outskirts of Vienna. In 1866 it passed to the enthroned King George V of Hanover and on his death in 1885, to Ernst August Duke of Cumberland³. Between 1859 and 1912 extensive building work was carried out. The impressive Turkish and Japanese salons were very probably decorated under Wilhelm Duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel by the architect Johann Julius Romano⁴ who may have used Rudolf von Alt's watercolours. Flamboyant and unrestrained, these reception rooms are magnificently recorded by von Alt. Alongside his famous views of the interior of the Liechtenstein Palace and the Lanckoronski rooms⁵ in Vienna they rank among the finest of his watercolors. They document both his mastery of the technique and his importance as one of the leading figures in nineteenth-century art.



Fig. 1: *The Japanese Salon, Villa Hügel, Hietzing*, watercolor, signed a. dated: *Rudolf Alt (I)* 855, 430 x 530 mm
See: *Rudolf von Alt*, exhib. cat., Thomas le Claire Kunsthandel, Hamburg 2006, cat. no. 2.

³ The Villa Hügel was built by Karl Alexander Anselm Freiherr von Hügel [1796-1870]. Hügel was an Imperial Officer who traveled on numerous occasions to India, Kashmir, and Australia. On his journeys he collected a large number of plants creating a famous garden at Hietzing. See, Gerhard Weissenbacher, *In Hietzing gebaut. Architektur und Geschichte eines Wiener Bezirkes*, vol. II, Vienna 1998, pp. 17-19.

⁴ F. C. Weidmann, *Album der Westbahn von Wien bis Linz*, Vienna 1858, p. 10.

⁵ *Master Drawings - Recent Acquisitions*, exh. cat., Thomas le Claire Kunsthandel, XIV, Hamburg 2003, no. 33.