



Moonrise, Tangier

Date

c. 1912

Primary Maker

Henry Ossawa Tanner

Medium

Oil on plywood

Description

Henry Ossawa Tanner studied with Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia before moving to Paris in 1891 for further training and to escape the racial prejudice he had encountered while attempting to establish a career as a Black artist in the United States. He first garnered success with his painting *The Resurrection of Lazarus* at the Paris

Salon of 1897. *Moonrise, Tangier* evokes the academic tradition of “Orientalism,” which had become popular in France in the late nineteenth century. Tanner was probably trained in this approach by Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant, his instructor at the Académie Julian in Paris. He visited the Near East for the first time in 1897; only later, after 1910, did he begin to travel to the parts of North Africa that had been colonized by the French. He painted this work in Morocco, and it, like many of his “Orientalist” paintings, may have been based on photographs and tourist postcards as well as on direct observation. Tanner’s interest in the Near East stemmed not only from his artistic training but also from the region’s suitability as a setting for religious content. In painting biblical subject matter, Tanner was not unique; Christian themes were common in visual arts of the period and could be found in the work of Eakins and John Singer Sargent, among other prominent American artists. Tanner may also have been influenced in this regard by his upbringing, however—his father was a prominent bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and editor of the *Christian Recorder* and *A.M.E. Church Review*. *Moonrise, Tangier* presents a fairly straightforward moonlit scene, but the two figures on horseback in the right foreground suggest the Flight into Egypt—a classic theme in the history of art that Tanner first essayed in 1899 and repeated numerous times throughout his career. Beginning in the late 1890s, as seen here, Tanner’s style and technique shifted under the influence of French Impressionism: he started to apply his paint much more thickly and in layers. In addition, to paint nocturnal scenes, such as this work, he applied thin glazes of bluish green and purple to convey a sense of moonlight. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017)

Dimensions

Overall: 19 1/2 × 23 1/2 in. (49.5 × 59.7 cm) Frame: 25 5/8 × 29 5/8 × 1 in. (65.1 × 75.2 × 2.5 cm)