



**Deception** (The Sad Bedouin Woman with her Child)

c.1932

Oil on canvas

54 x 45.5 cm (21.3 x 17.9 in.)

Naji and Hoda Skaff Collection



# HABIB SEROUR

## 1863-1938

### Italian classicism, Oriental subjects

Habib Serour discovered Italy around 1870, when his parents moved to Rome. There, he later decided to become a painter and enrolled at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts to study art in the most classical Italian way.

Serour spent a few years in Naples for health reasons, after which he crossed the Mediterranean back to the Middle Eastern shores. He briefly stopped in Egypt before establishing himself as a painter in Beirut in 1890, setting up a studio and quickly receiving numerous requests for portraits. He taught art at the Imperial Ottoman School of Bashoura as well as at his studio, where his students included the painters Saliba Douaihy and Moustafa Farroukh.

In many ways, Serour's paintings do not diverge from those of other artists of his generation: portrait commissions and religious works dominate his production. He painted Lebanese and Arab high society, political and religious dignitaries, and officials of the Ottoman Empire. Detailed and eminently classical, the sitters emerge from dark backgrounds and gaze solemnly into the distance. Whether immortalized in full length, seated on thrones or cropped to their busts, the portraits' subjects are always majestic, in their Sunday suits or official uniforms. His portraits of women sometimes bring to mind French Orientalists such as Eugène Delacroix, to whom General Gouraud often compared Serour. He also kept to tradition in his religious works, where he perpetuated the historical types of Italian art. He portrayed the Holy Virgin dressed in blue, floating on cottony clouds; holding her Son the Christ, she is surrounded by saints and winged cherubs. Serour can seem almost too conventional, as though he were striving to satisfy his patrons' tastes with his technical and stylistic mastery of Italian art.

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Yet, although the developments of Modern art failed to affect Serour, he did not blindly pander to clients' requests. He occasionally tried his hand at other pictorial modes such as genre scenes, still lifes and landscapes, where he gave in fully to his own inspiration. His still lifes are reminiscent of both the Spanish Baroque and French Rococo; they almost invite viewers to devour the plump fruit and lose themselves in the inebriating perfume of the flowers. His village scenes attest to his attachment to the light and colors of Lebanon, to its farmers, herders, and red-roofed houses. Serour also painted Bedouin scenes, seeking to uncover the mystery and sensuality of their women and the pride of their men. He died in 1934, the year of a rare retrospective of his work at the Saint Georges Hotel in Beirut.



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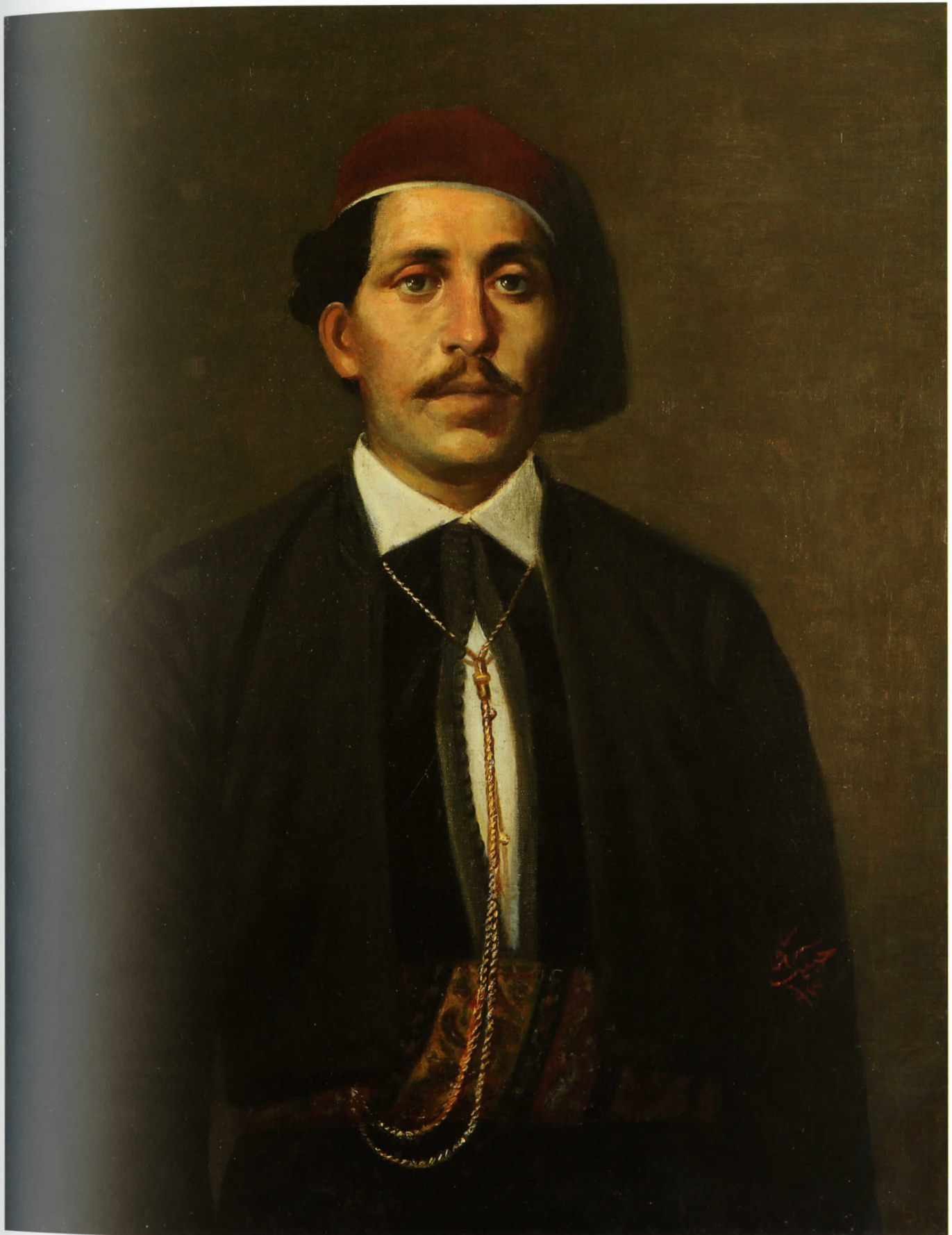


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1 **Untitled**  
c. 1910  
Oil on canvas  
41 x 33 cm (16.2 x 12.9 in.)  
The Mokbel Art Collection, Lebanon

2 **Bedouin**  
c. 1910  
Oil on canvas  
46 x 37 cm (18.1 x 14.6 in.)  
Yolande Serour Collection

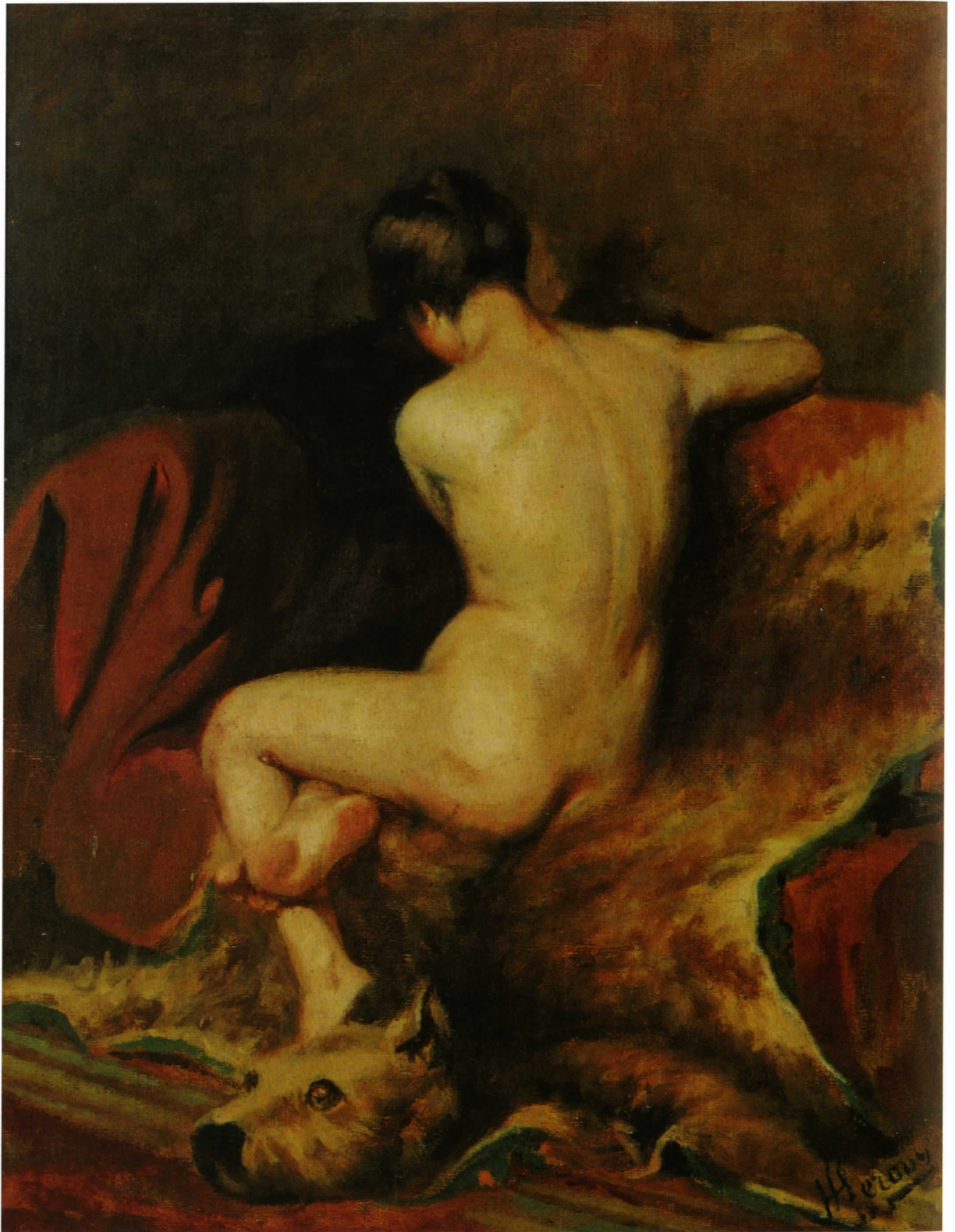




Presumed portrait of Nassif al-Yazigi  
1893

Oil on canvas  
74 x 57 cm (29.1 x 22.4 in.)  
Emile Hannouche Collection





**Nude Sitting**  
**Before 1928**  
Oil on canvas  
98 x 48 cm (38.6 x 18.9 in.)  
Nicolas Ibrahim Sursock Collection





## EXHIBITIONS AND PRIZES

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Among Habib Serour's rare exhibitions were a group show at Beirut's School of Art and Crafts in 1931, and an exhibition organized by the newspaper La Syrie at the Saint Georges Hotel in 1934.

**Fowls**  
**c. 1912**

27 x 40 cm (10.6 x 15.7 in.)  
Oil on canvas  
Emile Hannouche Collection