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EST. 1817

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**Johann Geyer** (Augsburg 1807 - 1875)

*Balloonists*

Signed on the basket 'Geyer'

Oil on canvas

10 x 8 ½ in. (26.6 x 21.6 cm.)

A red wax seal on the stretcher bears the name  
"Augsburg".



## Provenance

F. Victor Rolff, Gut Gladbach Castle, Germany.

## Exhibited

Bonn, Bundeskunsthalle, *Wetterbericht. Über Wetterkultur und Klimawissenschaft*, 7 October 2017 - 4 March 2018, no. 49, illustrated.

Johann Wilhelm Rudolf Geyer (born January 7, 1807 in Augsburg, died November 26, 1875, in the same city) was a genre and history painter, and a typical representative of the Munich school of painting in the nineteenth century. After initially enrolling in the Augsburg school of art, in 1826 he moved to Munich where he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts with Clemens von Zimmermann.

In 1833 he was appointed professor at the Polytechnic in Augsburg. In 1836 he received an award at the industrial exhibition in Munich, and in 1865 he left his teaching position following the closure of the Polytechnic. In 1830 Geyer embarked on study tours through Belgium and France, likely when the present painting was executed, and he must have been influenced by the ballooning and scientific escapades of the aeronauts Eugène Godard and Félix Nadar (see below). Eugene Godard (1827 - 1890) was known as the "Aeronaut of the Emperor of Austria".

He carried out more than 2,500 balloon flights in France and abroad, and in 1863 he built the largest balloon up to that time. In 1880 - 71 during the siege of Paris he organized an aerial postal service using aerostats. Félix Nadar was the pseudonym of Gaspard-Félix Tournachon (1820 - 1910). He was a

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photographer, caricaturist, journalist, novelist and balloonist. Nadar took his first photographs in 1853 and pioneered the use of artificial lighting in photography, working in the catacombs of Paris. Around 1863, Nadar built a huge (6000 m<sup>3</sup>) balloon named *Le Géant* ("The Giant"), thereby inspiring Jules Verne's *Five Weeks in a Balloon*. Although the 'Géant' project was initially unsuccessful Nadar was still convinced that the future belonged to heavier-than-air machines. Later, *The Society for the Encouragement of Aerial Locomotion by Means of Heavier than Air Machines* was established, with Nadar as president and Verne as secretary. Nadar was also the inspiration for the character of Michael Ardan in Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon*.

Some 180 painting by Geyer are displayed in various German museums, many of them now in the Städtischen Kunstsammlungen, Augsburg. A substantial amount of his work is known through contemporary lithographs.



*Nadar élevant la Photographie à la hauteur de l'Art* (Nadar elevating Photography to Art). Lithograph by Honoré Daumier, appearing in *Le Boulevard*, May 25, 1863.