



# THE ALBEMARLE HAVANA VIEWS

by Dominic Serres

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THE PROPERTY OF THE HEIRS OF THE LATE  
DIANA, COUNTESS OF ALBEMARLE (1909-2013)

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ENQUIRIES



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# THE ALBEMARLE HAVANA VIEWS

Four important views of Havana, Cuba, in 1762,  
by Dominic Serres

This spectacular and important series of paintings represent some of the earliest views of Havana, Cuba, painted between 1770 and 1775. The four pictures belong to a group of eleven paintings depicting specific stages of the siege and capture of the town, based on drawings done on the spot as events unfolded, that were painted for members of the Keppel family by Dominic Serres. Originally born in Gascony, Serres went to the West Indies as a young man and spent several years in Havana working as a ship's captain on Spanish galleons, before being captured by the British and taken to London. In 1752 he returned to Havana once again, this time as master of an English merchantman, and he was therefore intimately acquainted with the topography of the city and its surrounding environs. Of the original eleven paintings from the group, six are now in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, all eleven having been on long term loan there since 1948.

The British capture of Havana in 1762 was the last major engagement of the Seven Years' War, and the decisive military action that finally brought to an end a conflict that ravaged the globe between 1756 and 1763. A contest for global supremacy, the war involved most of the major European powers of the day, as well as their colonies, divided into two giant coalitions led by Britain and France respectively. In 1761 Spain joined the conflict as an ally of France and between March and August 1762 British naval and ground forces under the joint command of General George Keppel, 3rd Earl of Albemarle (1724-1772) and Admiral Sir George Pocock (1706-1792) besieged and captured the city of Havana, the capital of Spanish Cuba and Spain's principal naval base in the West Indies. Also serving among the British forces were two of Albemarle's younger brothers; Admiral Augustus Keppel, later 1st Viscount Keppel (1725-1786), who was second-in-command of the fleet, and Colonel William Keppel (1727-1782), who was one of his eldest brother's two divisional commanders and later succeeded him as British Governor of Cuba.



## DOMINIC SERRES, R.A.

Auch 1722 - 1793 London

THE CAPTURE OF HAVANA, CUBA, 1762:  
VIEW OF THE MORRO CASTLE AND BOOM  
DEFENCE BEFORE THE ATTACK

signed and dated, lower right: *D. Serres . 1770 .*  
oil on canvas  
85.5 by 176.5 cm.; 33½ by 69½ in.

£400,000-600,000

### PROVENANCE

Painted for General George Keppel, 3rd Earl of Albemarle (1724-1772) or his brother, Admiral Augustus Keppel, 1st Viscount Keppel (1725-1786), and thence by inheritance to the present owners.

### EXHIBITED

On long term loan to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 1948 to 2015.

### LITERATURE

A. Russett, *Dominic Serres R.A. War Artist to the Navy*, Woodbridge 2001, pp. 57-63, reproduced in colour pl. 13.

This painting shows the Spanish preparations before the siege. Havana had one of the finest deep water harbours in the West Indies, as well as major shipyards capable of building first rate Men-o-War, making it a vitally important strategic target as both the capital of Spanish Cuba and Spain's principal naval base in the Caribbean. On 6th June 1762 the British fleet was spotted approaching the city from the North, to the windward side of the island, having sailed through a treacherous stretch of sea known as the Old Bahama Channel. The Spanish garrison at Havana had expected an attack from the West, from the British naval base at Port Royal on Jamaica, and the unexpected sighting of the fleet in the North created panic among the city's defenders. A council of war was held by the Spanish governor, Juan de Prado Mayera Portocarrero y Luna (1716-1770), at which it was decided to sink three large ships across the narrow mouth of the harbour to block the British from entering but also trapping the Spanish fleet inside. To the left of the painting can be seen the Castillo de los Tres Reyes de Morro, known to the British as the Morro Castle, on the rocky Cavannos Ridge guarding the mouth of the harbour. On the right is the narrow channel that gave entrance to the harbour itself, blocked by the sunken ships and a floating boom defence strung across its mouth, whilst men and supplies are loaded into the fort. A cannon is being hoisted up the cliff face above the Shepherd's Battery and in the centre can be seen the well-fortified, star-shaped Apostles' Battery (so named for its twelve embrasures) immediately to the right. The large cloud of smoke rising from behind the fort indicates that the British bombardment from the landward side has begun.





## DOMINIC SERRES, R.A.

Auch 1722 - 1793 London

### THE CAPTURE OF HAVANA, CUBA, 1762: THE ENGLISH BATTERY BEFORE THE MORRO CASTLE

signed and dated, lower right: *D. Serres . / 1770 .*  
oil on canvas  
84 by 122 cm.; 33 by 48 in.

£200,000-300,000

#### PROVENANCE

Painted for General George Keppel, 3rd Earl of Albemarle (1724-1772) or his brother, Admiral Augustus Keppel, 1st Viscount Keppel (1725-1786), and thence by inheritance to the present owners.

#### EXHIBITED

On long term loan to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 1948 to 2015.

#### LITERATURE

A. Russett, *Dominic Serres R.A. War Artist to the Navy*, Woodbridge 2001, pp. 57-63, reproduced in colour pl. 14.

The British forces under General Albemarle had the benefit of a fairly detailed report on the defences at Havana, provided by the Governor of Jamaica, Admiral Knowles. Knowles had memorized the details of the city's fortifications from a trip he had made to Havana in 1756 and knew that the weakest point in the Spanish defences was the rocky ridge of the Cabana hills, known to the Spanish as Los Cavannos. On high ground to the South-East of the city, the Cabana heights overlooked the Morro Castle, which commanded both the entrance to the harbour and the town on the west side of the bay. Whilst the castle itself was virtually impregnable, built on solid rock with formidable batteries facing the sea and massive rock-cut ditches defending it to landward, the Spanish defences on the ridge were relatively light. The British landed troops on 7th June, and on the 11th Colonel Carleton led a successful assault on the heights, capturing a detached redoubt and setting up a battery. From here the British could bombard the Morro Castle from the South with heavy artillery whilst twelve British ships of the line blockaded the entrance to the harbour. This painting shows the inside of the battery, constructed from a timber platform with a parapet of fascines (bundles of brushwood). The gunners wear blue coats, whilst the regular infantry are distinguished by their scarlet tunics. Beyond can be seen the fortress of El Morro, with its formidable ramparts. On the left is the bell-tower of Havana cathedral silhouetted against the hills beyond. The main harbour lies below, hidden by the trees below the ridge.





## DOMINIC SERRES, R.A.

Auch 1722 - 1793 London

THE CAPTURE OF HAVANA, CUBA: THE  
TAKING OF THE TOWN BY BRITISH FORCES  
UNDER THE COMMAND OF THE EARL OF  
ALBEMARLE, 14 AUGUST 1762

oil on canvas  
125.7 by 187.9 cm.; 49½ by 74 in.

£800,000-1,200,000

### PROVENANCE

Painted for General George Keppel, 3rd Earl of Albemarle (1724-1772) or his brother, Admiral Augustus Keppel, 1st Viscount Keppel (1725-1786), and thence by inheritance to the present owners.

### EXHIBITED

On long term loan to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 1948 to 2015.

### LITERATURE

A. Russett, *Dominic Serres R.A. War Artist to the Navy*, Woodbridge 2001, pp. 55-63.

On 22 June four British batteries, totalling 12 heavy cannon and 38 mortars, opened fire from the Cabana heights, pounding the Morro Castle. By the end of the month the British gunners were scoring 500 direct hits a day, inflicting heavy casualties on the defenders and exhausting Spanish efforts to repair the breaches in the walls. By July, under cover of the artillery bombardment, breastworks had been erected and sappers began sinking mines under the walls. Finally on 29th July the mines were sprung and the British stormed El Morro, mortally wounding the Spanish commander during the fierce hand to hand fighting. With the fort captured, batteries were built along the north side of the harbour, from the Morro to the Cabana heights. By 11th August the batteries were complete, and following repeated Spanish refusals to surrender, Albemarle opened fire on Havana. By 2pm the city's remaining defences in the Castillo San Salvador de la Punta had been silenced and the Governor, Don Juan de Prado, sued for terms. He had no other choice but to surrender. The terms of Spanish capitulation were concluded on 13th August, and this painting shows British land forces in flat boats going to take possession of the Punto Castle and the north gate of the city. On the left His Majesty's Sloops of War Bonetta and Cygnet can be seen assisting to open the boom defence, whilst the Union Jack flies from the flagpole atop the Morro Castle. To the left is a magnificently detailed and extensive panoramic view of the walled city of Old Havana, surely the finest and most important early view of the city, with the harbour beyond surrounded by lush tropical vegetation.





## DOMINIC SERRES, R.A.

Auch 1722 - 1793 London

'THE CATHEDRAL AT HAVANA, AUGUST - SEPTEMBER 1762': VIEW OF THE CHURCH OF SAN FRANCISCO DE ASÍS, HAVANA, CUBA

oil on canvas  
83.5 by 122.3 cm.; 32¾ by 48 in.

£300,000-400,000

### PROVENANCE

Painted for General George Keppel, 3rd Earl of Albemarle (1724-1772) or his brother, Admiral Augustus Keppel, 1st Viscount Keppel (1725-1786), and thence by inheritance to the present owners.

### EXHIBITED

On long term loan to the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, 1948 to 2015.

### LITERATURE

A. Russett, *Dominic Serres R.A. War Artist to the Navy*, Woodbridge 2001, pp. 58-63, reproduced in colour pl. 17.

This is one of two scenes painted by Serres showing Havana after its capture. The other is a view of the Piazza at Havana and is now in the collection of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. The central building is the late colonial baroque church of San Francisco de Asís, a monastic church from the 1730's. Following the surrender of the town, great care was taken to grant the defeated Spanish magnanimous terms. In this picture Serres is at pains to show British troops and Spanish civilians in apparent harmony. The composition is taken from one of a set of six prints produced by Elias Durnford, an engineer stationed in Havana as part of Albemarle's occupying force, and the view of the church is taken from the Alcalde's (Spanish magistrate) house, looking across the square. Serres inclusion of a detachment of British redcoats marching towards a guard posted by a sentry box lends a more military feel that is absent in Durnford's original, though the composition and detailed staffage show an obvious debt to the work of Serres' close friend Paul Sandby, as well as the work of Canaletto, who had spent nearly ten years in England in the 1740s and 50s and whose work Serres would have known. Although Serres was not present at the capture of Havana himself, none-the-less he was intimately familiar with the city and had a detailed knowledge of its topography and surroundings, having lived there for several years in the 1740s.

## The Keppels and the Capture of Havana

The three remarkable brothers who played such a decisive role in the capture of Havana came from an ancient and noble Dutch family from Gelderland. Their grandfather, Arnold Joost van Keppel, had been a close associate of William of Orange, later King William III, and had come to England with the Prince in 1688. Their father, Willem van Keppel, 2nd Earl of Albemarle, was a distinguished soldier who married Lady Anne Lennox, daughter of the 1st Duke of Richmond, and the three Keppel boys all followed in the family tradition of loyal military service to the British crown. The eldest of the three, George Keppel, was, like his father, a distinguished soldier who had been with the Duke of Cumberland at both Fontenoy and Culloden. He succeeded as 3rd Earl in 1754, and in 1762 he was a Lieutenant-General in the army and Governor of Jersey when he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the invasion of Cuba. One of Albemarle's two divisional commanders at Havana was his younger brother William, who was Colonel of the 56th Regiment of Foot and had served with distinction with Lord Ligonier in the Low Countries. During the siege he directed the storming of the Morro Castle, and in 1763 he succeeded his eldest brother as British Governor of Cuba.

Perhaps the most distinguished of the three, however, was their middle brother, Augustus Keppel, who served as second-in-command of the naval forces during the siege. Augustus had first gone to sea at the age of ten, and in 1740 had accompanied Lord Anson on his circumnavigation of the globe aboard *HMS Centurion*. By the time of the Havana expedition he had already



Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Portrait of General William Keppel, 3rd Earl of Albemarle, with the storming of the Morro Castle, Havana beyond*, Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, Lisbon © Bridgeman Images

had a distinguished career in the Royal Navy, having served as Commodore Commanding the Mediterranean Fleet and Commander-in-Chief of the North American Station. He had distinguished himself in 1756 at the capture of Gorée, off the coast of West African, and at the Battle of Quiberon Bay in 1759, and in March 1761 he had commanded the naval forces at the capture of Belle Île; a joint expedition much like that at Havana the following year, from which he brought much valuable experience. Later to become First Lord of the Admiralty, his significant contribution to the British success at Havana was properly rewarded when Admiral Pocock, who commanded the naval forces during the siege, allowed his second-in-command to lead the victorious fleet into Havana harbour on 21st August 1762.





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