SPHINX FINE ART



Jacob Philipp Hackert (Prenzlau 1737 - San Pietro di Careggi 1807)

Lake Nemi from the North, with the Town of Nemi and the Town of Genzano beyond, with a Donkey and Travellers on a Path in the Foreground

signed, inscribed and dated 'Lago di Nemi, Filippo Hackert, 1803' (lower left)
oil on canvas
64.8 x 88.3 cm (25½ x 34¾ in)

The influence of Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789) on Jacob Philipp Hackert is clear in this work; Vernet had painted a similar view of Lake Nemi in 1748, now in the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. In his version of the same scene, Hackert bathes his picture in a warmer light and has skilfully constructed the intimate foreground scene of the composition as the focal point, rather than the factual topography as Vernet, and earlier artists, had done. *Lake Nemi from the North, with the Town of Nemi and the Town of Genzano beyond, with a Donkey and Travellers on a Path in the Foreground,* painted nearly fifty years after Vernet's interpretation, is a mature and structured work, typical of Hackert's refined oeuvre. The viewer's eye is guided into the landscape by the heavily laden donkey in the left foreground, its head muzzled with a decorative feed bag. To the left, a group of travellers amble down a rocky path; a maiden rides side-saddle and holds a woven basket whilst her companion walks alongside; the couple exemplify the ideal rusticity Hackert wished to represent in this Italianate landscape.

This hitherto unrecorded picture signed, inscribed and dated 1803, shows the small volcanic crater of Lagodi Nemi in the Celli Albani range of mountains south of Rome, bathed in a characteristically even, gentle light. The picturesque town of Nemi is perched on the hilltop with its monumental *palazzo buonovale,* and on the opposite side of the lake in the distance is the small town of Genzano. The sea is visible on the horizon with the soft silhouette of Monte Circeo beyond. The three small fishing boats on the lake hint at the Emperor Caligula's famous scuttled pleasure boats, rediscovered during the Renaissance and which were finally salvaged in 1929 on the orders of Benito Mussolini (1883-1945). The name Nemi derived from the Latin *neumus Ariceum,* or 'grove of Ariccia', which was the ancient site of a temple sacred to the goddess Diana. Hackert appears to have only painted this particular view

in two other versions, both dated 1784.

The landscape of Lake Nemi was also treated by Hackert's travelling companion, the British Romantic painter and watercolourist John Robert Cozens (1752-1797). Like Hackert's, Cozens' work often reflected the classical compositional formulae of Claude Lorrain (c.1604/5-1682), Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) and Gaspard Dughet (1615-1675).

Hackert was active in Italy from 1768. In summarising the artist's skills, the celebrated writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), a friend and admirer of the artist as well as his travelling companion and biographer concluded that Hackert had 'eine unglaubliche Meisterschaft die Natur abzuschreiben', an amazing ability to capture nature. Such aptitude was first developed at the Berlin Academy, where Hackert encountered the twin influences of Dutch seventeenth-century landscape painting and the art of Claude Lorrain who would be an enduring influence on Hackert's development. Hackert shared Claude's preference for creating the 'ideal landscape', as he sought to portray an image that was more beautiful and better ordered than nature itself. *Italian Landscape* in the Hermitage's collection epitomises this Claudean philosophy. Bathed in soft peachy hues, the tranquillity of the waters are juxtaposed with the rising architecture of the small hill town showing a classical, idealised landscape bearing close similarities to the present work.

Later when Hackert moved to work in Rome, he became one of the 'Roman Germans' to turn to the ideas of the French classical painter Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) and apply neo-Classical principles to landscape painting. Much of his output was devoted to views of famous sites and idyllic rustic landscapes, which were eagerly sought by foreign visitors to Italy; for instance *Great Casacdes at Tivoli* in the Hermitage. It is possible that the present work was executed with this European market in mind.

Hackert came from a family of artists and often collaborated with his brother Johann Gottlieb Hackert (1744-1773). After receiving a basic artistic education from his father and uncle, who were both painters, Jacob Philipp Hackert attended the drawing classes of Blaise Nicholas le Sueur (1716-1783), the director of the Berlin Academy in 1758. With an early interest in landscape painting, Hackert began copying the works of Claude and Dutch seventeenth-century artists. He travelled in northern Germany where he received commissions for decorative cycles in Stralsund and Rügen, and in 1764 he visited Sweden. From 1765 until 1768 Hackert lived in Paris, where he met landscape and marine painter Claude-Joseph Vernet (1714-1789) and eventually invited his brother Johann, also a landscape painter, to join him. In Paris, Hackert's popular paintings, gouaches, and drawings were already being reproduced in print form.

In 1768, the Hackert brothers left for Rome, which would remain their main residence until 1786, although they made countless trips in search of different types of landscape. In 1770 they visited Naples, a city which, with its natural and cultural treasures, was an important destination for any traveller to Italy.

In 1771, Hackert received an important commission from Catherine the Great of Russia (1729-1796) to paint a series of canvases depicting Russia's naval victory over Turkey. In depicting the battle, the artist enlisted the advice of Count Alexey Orlov (1737-1808), one of Catherine's lovers and commander-in-chief of the fleet sent against the Turks and Sir Samuel Greig (1736-1788), a distinguished British naval officer in Russian service, as well as specially produced plans of the Bay of Chesme and the location of

the two squadrons. As Hackert was not present at the battle, a Russian ship was exploded in the port of Livorno to replicate the effect. In 1772, the painting was sent to St. Petersburg together with Turkish military trophies and shown to the Empress, after which it entered the Winter Palace.

Hackert's work found many prominent buyers, and he turned down an offer to become court painter in Russia, though his brother William settled in Russia in 1774 to become a drawing master. In 1782, Hackert returned once more to Naples and was introduced to King Ferdinand IV (1751-1825), who commissioned several works. Four years later Hackert became his court painter. In 1787 he met Goethe several times during the latter's stay in Naples; Goethe recorded their meetings in his *Italienische Reise* (1817). Goethe admired his works, took painting lessons from him, and it was Goethe who eventually urged Hackert to write his autobiography, which the writer adapted and published after Hackert's death.

Political unrest caused the royal family to seek refuge in Palermo in 1798, and the arrival of French troops in Naples one year later forced Hackert to leave the city and his life at court. After a year in Pisa, Hackert and his brother settled in Florence in 1800. Three years later Hackert bought a nearby estate in San Pietro di Careggi, where he worked and made careful studies of rocks, trees, and plants, which he regarded as the basis for his landscapes. Among a few other works Hackert wrote one short treatise on the use of varnish, *Sull'uso della vernice nella pittura* (1788), and one on landscape painting, *Theoretisch-praktische Anleitung zum richtigen und geschmackvollen Landschafts-Zeichnen nach der Natur.*

We are grateful to Dr. Claudia Nordhoff for her assistance in cataloguing this work.

Artist description:

Hackert studied first with his father, Philipp Hackert, then from 1755 with Blaise Nicolas Le Sueur at the Berlin Akademie. There he encountered, and copied, the landscapes of Dutch artists and of Claude Lorrain. The latter influence shows in two works exhibited in 1761, views of the *Lake of Venus in the Berlin Zoological Garden* (versions of 1764 in Stockholm, National Museum). These much admired paintings retain a rather rigid late Baroque style. Hackert's main interest in these early works was to arrive at a special understanding of a place through alternate views, with reverse directions of observation. This systematic documentation bears witness to his interest in the study of nature.

In 1762 Hackert left Berlin for a study tour in northern Germany. He stopped in Stralsund and the nearby island of Rügen, where he was a guest of Adolph Friedrich von Olthoff, the Swedish councillor in Pomerania. The stimulus these travels provided is reflected in six landscapes in tempera (c. 1763; Potsdam, private collection), painted for the Olthoffs, and four frescoes (1763) in the great hall of Schloss Boldewitz. In May 1764 Hackert went from Stralsund to Stockholm with Baron von Olthoff, who presented him at court. In Sweden he produced a *Viewof Karlsberg* (1766; private collection) for the King and some drawings for the Queen. In the former all traces of decorative painting have disappeared, and Hackert gives a personal interpretation of the Dutch 17th-century painting and the work of Claude that he had copied. During this time he also produced a series of etchings, *Vues de Suède*, which shows his development, from rather perfunctory beginnings, into a remarkably evocative printmaker.

In 1765 Hackert went to Hamburg, and from there to Paris, where there was a growing interest in the kind of landscape developed by Dutch painters. He modelled his work closely on the work of the most famous exponent of this genre, Jean-Claude Wille, and his small landscape gouaches, well suited to contemporary taste, brought him renown. This enabled him in 1768 to depart for Italy. After visiting Livorno, Pisa and Florence, he arrived at Rome, where he remained until 1786. During this period the colonies of French, German and English artists and scholars in Rome were growing more and more

numerous. Hackert brought to the German group, headed by Anton Raphael Mengs and Johann Joachim Winckelmann, an already rich and complex cultural experience. He upheld his classical formula of landscape through sketches made on study tours (to Sicily in 1777, to Switzerland in 1778), through oil paintings and through such prints as the four *Views Sketched in the Kingdom of Naples* (1779; Naples, Capodimonte), which mark a new independence for engraving as a medium for landscape.

In 1782 Hackert met King Ferdinand IV of Naples, and in 1786 he settled in Naples as court painter. During his 13 years in the city he consolidated his European fame, largely through the advocacy of Goethe, whom he met in 1787 and who became his close friend. He also started his own school, propounding his ideas about landscape painting to engravers, including his brother Georg Hackert and W. G. Gmelin (c. 1760–1820), and such painters as Christopher Kniep (1755–1825), Michael Wutki (1738–1822), and the Neapolitans Vincenzo Aloja (fl 1790–1815) and Salvatore Fergola (1799–1874). Perhaps Hackert's finest Neapolitan works were the *Four Seasons*, luminous Neapolitan vedute enlivened by figures in local dress. The originals, intended for King Ferdinand's hunting-lodge on Lake Fusaro, were destroyed by 1799, but smaller copies by Hackert survive (Spring, Switzerland, private collection; Summer, Winter, Nuremberg, Germany National Museum; Autumn, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum). Hackert's intellectual interests can be seen among the pictures (1792–3) painted for Queen Maria Carolina's bathroom in the Belvedere di S Leucio near Caserta. Some of these use the old encaustic technique and are inspired by objects that came to light during the archaeological excavations at Herculaneum. Hackert did not merely evoke the Antique; he re-lived the tradition in his own personal way, again confirming his acuteness in interpreting the most recent cultural trends of his time. Another work painted at S Leucio, the *Harvest Festival* (1782; Caserta, Palazzo Reale) is a fine example of his idyllic interpretation of the landscape around him.

When the Revolution of 1799 forced him to leave Naples, Hackert settled permanently at San Pietro di Careggi, near Florence. Here he returned to his old interest in nature with renewed perception, in fact becoming a sort of proto-Romantic landscape artist. After his death his memoirs were edited and published by Goethe.