SPHINX FINE ART



Giacomo Guardi (Venice 1764 - Venice 1835) and Francesco Guardi [Venice 1712 - Venice 1793)

A View of the Venetian Lagoon with the Island of San Giacomo di Paludo

inscribed on the reverse in an old hand, possibly the artist's own: 'di S. Jacopo di Paludo di Venez[ia]'

oil on panel

17.3 x 25 cm (6¾ x 9⅞ in)

This beautifully serene depiction of the Island of San Giacomo in Paludo is, according to Professor Dario Succi, principally the work of Giacomo Guardi with the hand of Giacomo's father, Francesco Guardi discernable in parts of the staffage. The painting is executed in the style of Francesco Guardi (1712-1793) and shows the great inspiration that Giacomo took from his father. The flat glossiness of the lagoon, the sketchiness of the buildings and the spirited brush strokes and impressionistic feel of the paintwork resemble Francesco's work. His characteristic style, known as *pittura di tocco*, was loose and informal, consisting of small dotting and quick strokes of the brush. This style, adopted by Giacomo, differed vastly from the linear, architecturally accurate approach of artists such as Canaletto, and gives the viewer a unique impression of life on the Venetian waterways.

The dominant feature of the painting is the church and convent of San Jacopo di Paludo, both of which were demolished in 1810. The spire and crucifix stand boldly delineated against the warmth of the sky, whilst gondolas pass by on the murky waters, one of them about to dock by a wooden jetty that leads to the entrance to the church. The island takes its name from the church that once stood there, and is today known as San Giacomo in Paludo, and is located in the Venetian lagoon, between the islands of Murano and Madonna del Monte. The island's name translates to St. James in the marsh, an appropriate name considering the church's watery foundations. The view is based upon Antonio Visentini's engraving of the same site, one of twenty islands featured in the *Isolario Veneto.*[1]

In 1046, the island was given to Giovanni Trono of Mazzorbo for the purpose of building a monastery dedicated to San Giacomo Maggiore, which was to serve as a stopping point for pilgrims. In 1238, the convent was passed on to Cistercian nuns who inhabited it until 1440, after which they moved to Santa Margherita Abbey in Torcello. In 1546, the church complex was temporarily converted into a hospice, after which it was inherited by a Franciscan order. Despite its regular use and maintenance, the banks of the island increasingly eroded causing the buildings to decay. During the Napoleonic occupation of Venice, religious orders were suppressed and the monastery, like many others, was demolished. From that point it was used as a military outpost, after which, the island became a munitions depot and in the nineteenth century the Austrians, and then Italians built a rampart from which they controlled the navigation in the north Laguna. Today it lies in partial ruin.

Giacomo Guardi was primarily a painter in gouache, only occasionally venturing into oil painting. *Viewof the Piazza San Marco* in The Courtauld Gallery is an example of his work in gouache, whereas *Viewof the Isola di San Michele in Venice* in the Rijksmuseum, like the present work, is a rare example of a composition in oil. The size of the panel in the Rijksmuseum is 14 x 21.5 cm, slightly smaller than the present painting, and both are typical of Guardi's minute jewel-like works.

What is evident in *A Viewof the Venetian Lagoon with the Island of San Jacopo di Paludo*, is how Guardi appears to approach oil painting in a similar manner to painting with gouache or bodycolour, applying the pigment in as few layers as possible, which when translated into oils, gives the composition a loose and fluid finish.

Elements in both the present painting and *Viewof the Isola di San Michele in Venice* display characteristics associated with watercolour. The uniformity of colour and tone in both paintings gives the impression of having been created with a wash, and areas of the composition are blurred and blended in a manner reminiscent of wet in wet watercolour painting, while other details, such as the sky are more delineated, and formed using a drier brush. Guardi also employs methods such as scratching out, which is primarily associated with works on paper. Guardi's interest in the contrast between light and shadow is evident throughout his *oeuvre* and gives his compositions a strong sense of form, compensating lesser embellished works. Although the architectural details in his gouaches, are bold and outlined in black ink, these details are mostly omitted in his oil paintings. Instead of appearing bland and featureless on account of this economy of colour and line, the architecture is dynamic and expressive, and the reflection of the buildings in the murky water is just hinted at in order to give the composition greater depth. In both the present painting and the Rijksmuseum example, the opacity of the lagoon, as well as the overcast sky, adds to the mystery and romanticism of the Venetian view.

The figures in Guardi's oil compositions, made up of dashes and dots of paint, are striking in their simplicity and barely indicate details of clothing or hairstyle. This pared down approach allows the viewer to appreciate the entirety of the composition without focusing on the figures, and they harmonise with the other elements of the painting instead of competing with them.

In *A Viewof the Venetian Lagoon with the Island of San Jacopo di Paludo*, the staffage, which is thought to be painted by Francesco Guardi, reveals the great range of expression and movement that can be conveyed with a bare minimum of delineation or variation in colour. The sparing use of white to heighten selected parts of the staffage, such as the oars of the gondoliers who gently navigate their gondolas and more utilitarian traghetti through the lagoon, is particularly effective. This method is

replicated in Francesco Guardi's painting *Viewof the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore* in the Hermitage, which is a larger and highly finished composition, depicting a busy scene on the lagoon and the grander and more elaborate building complex of San Giorgio Maggiore. Certain elements of the painting, however, particularly the way in which the vessels are depicted, and the posture and movements of the gondoliers are very similar to the present image, as is the presence of a fishing boat in the left of the panel, whose mast echoes the vertical of the bell tower.

Both Giacomo and Francesco Guardi's style is very much in contrast to that of other prominent Venetian artists, such as Canaletto (1697–1768), who was noted for his precisely depicted views of Venice, which were painted for the tourist market and particularly favoured by English collectors. They often record lavish Venetian public ceremonies such as *Reception of the French Ambassador in Venice* in the Hermitage, which is a riot of colour and splendour, in contrast to the more subdued style of the Guardi family. The meticulously painted gondolas in the foreground of Canaletto's painting, their oarsmen and the figures crowding around the Doge's palace, of which every architectural detail is indicated, differ greatly from the impressionistic style of the present painting. *A Viewof the Venetian Lagoon with the Island of San Jacopo di Paludo* depicts its subject matter with vagueness instead of painstaking precision, yet manages in a few hasty brush strokes to convey the essence of the scene.

Giacomo Guardi was born in Venice in 1764, and was the son of Francesco, and grandson of Domenico Guardi (1678 – 1716), who founded the family workshop of *veduta* painting in Venice, the golden age of *Vedutismo* being the art of painting Italian views of cities, towns, and villages, popular in the eighteenth century.

The business was inherited by Francesco and his older brother, Giovanni Antonio (Gianantonio), one of the founders of the Venetian Academy. Francesco, now recognised as the last of the great Venetian *vedutisti*, spent many years working alongside Gianantonio painting altarpieces, and only began specialising in Venetian views around 1760. Though Francesco's style was influenced by the other great Venetian Veduta painter, Canaletto, he was also influenced by another Venetian painter, Luca Carlevaris (1663–1730), who may have been a teacher of Canaletto. Francesco's cityscapes evolved to embrace a more free-handed style which created atmospheric effect.

Giacomo studied with his father and from *c.* 1780 onwards painted numerous views of his native city, which were considerably influenced both in subject and style by his father. His paintings capture the picturesque beauty and atmospheric drama of Venice in an imaginative and distinctive fashion. Collectively, the Guardi family are often said to be the last true painters of the Venetian School in its classical form.

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[1] A second edition was published in 1777 by Teodoro Viero.

Provenance:

Sir Thomas Fermor-Hesketh, 1st Baron Hesketh (1881-1944), Rufford Hall, Ormskirk, Lancashire in August 1917;
Thence by family descent to the previous owner.

Literature:

Anon. compiler, *Specification of Pictures and Furniture belonging to T. Fermor-Hesketh Esq., at Rufford Hall, Ormskirk, Lancashire, August 1st 1917*, 'Two ditto by Guardi (very small) £200'.

Artist description:

The Guardi Family

Domenico (1678–1716) founded the family bottega or workshop of veduta painting in Venice and the business was carried on by his two sons, Giovanni Antonio (Gianantonio) (1699–1760), one of the founders of the Venetian Academy, and Francesco (1712–93). Recent researches have radically altered our conception of Francesco Guardi's early development and training. Previously known as a painter of views and commemorative pictures of state visits, it is now certain that he only began to specialize in this genre towards 1760 after a long period of association with his brother Giovanni Antonio, a painter of large altarpieces, including the *Death of S. Joseph* (Berlin, Gemäldegallerie) and probably the *Vision of S. Giovanni di Matha* (Pasiano di Pordenone, parish church). Francesco worked under Gianantonio in the family studio, and their individual contributions to joint works during the period 1730–60 are not determined. There are a few signed drawings from this period. Most of the paintings concerned are altarpieces with large figures and very little landscape: an exception is the *Stories of Tobias* painted for the organ loft in the church of the Angelo Raffaele in Venice, where figures and landscape are of equal importance. Current opinion favours Gianantonio as the creator of the Tobias series, although in style they anticipate the Rococo vitality of Francesco's work.

Francesco became the most famous of the family, largely because of his success as a view painter. Where Canaletto aimed at firm structure in his paintings Guardi preferred the effects of a vibrant atmosphere on buildings and water. His handling of paint derives from Magnasco, whose sharp angular touch he adopted and transformed into Rococo fantasy. Guardi's many beautiful drawings have an unmistakable style. In general his pictures are small (some measure half the size of a postcard), but at Waddesdon (Buckinghamshire, UK) there are two colossal views measuring 3 m×4 m (9×14 ft). His capricci, dating from the latter part of his life, are more purely imaginative than Canaletto's. They represent an international trend towards greater fantasy, seen also in the late landscapes of Gainsborough and the exotic fairy-tale romances and plays of the period. Francesco Guardi never achieved Canaletto's social, academic, or financial success. John Strange, the English resident, commissioned works from him, and in 1782 Peter Edwards gave him a cautiously worded commission to paint four views of the ceremonial visit to Venice of Pius VI (one at Oxford, Ashmolean Museum).

Francesco's son Giacomo, a prolific artist in watercolour and gouache, produced a very limited number of oils, such as this one.

Collections

Giacomo Guardi is represented in the following collections: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Gallerie di Palazzo Leoni Montanari, Vicenza; MacKenzie Art Gallery, Saskatchewan; Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan, amongst others.

Francesco Guardi is represented in the following collections: Alte Pinacoteca, Munich; Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan; Fine Arts Museums, San Francisco; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg; Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna; Louvre, Paris; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City; Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; National Gallery, London; Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Akademie der Bildenden Künst, Vienna; Amarillo Museum of Art, Texas; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Ball State Museum of Art, Indiana; Ca' Rezzonico - Museo del Settecento Veneziano, Venice; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio; Columbia Museum of Art, South Carolina; Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Frick Collection, New York City; Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon; The Wallace Collection, London; Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid, amongst others.