SPHINX FINE ART

Francesco Giuseppe Casanova (London 1727 - Brühl 1803)

A Shepherd's Family Travelling with their Flock

signed 'F. Casanova.' (bottom right)
lead pencil and sepia wash
56.5 x 41.5 cm (22¼ x 16⅞ in)

Francesco Giuseppe Casanova's drawing shows a group of travellers making their way through a rocky landscape. The path, up which the travellers make their way, is framed by a wall of rock and a withered tree, so that the viewer's eye is led back into the extensive background. The group of people file through the scene, surrounded by their animals. The sheep suggest that they are shepherds, though their group of animals also includes a dog, horses and two heavily-laden mules. The heavy and full parcels they are carrying with them suggest that they are nomadic, perhaps moving to higher fertile grounds to graze their livestock over the summer months. On the left-hand side a figure kneels to pick something off the ground whilst to his right, another guides one of the mules. He points at something, perhaps warning the young family who follow of some uneven ground. At the back of the group another shepherd waits patiently for the flock, who slowly amble along behind the others.

In *A Shepherd's Family Travelling with their Flock,* Casanova has placed his figures in the type of rugged, rocky landscape that recurs throughout his work. The ground is uphill, barren and uneven. There is a wall of rock on the left-hand side, and the few trees that are in the scene are relatively bare with snapped branches. Casanova often depicted this sort of rough landscape, for example in *The Waterfall*. This drawing is characterised by the torrent of water spewing out from the craggy rock. It is a depiction of a nature which is wild and untamed. Despite being focused around the water it is in a similar vein to that of *A Shepherd's Family Travelling with their Flock.* Both drawings also demonstrate Casanova's tonal variation. In *A Shepherd's Family Travelling with their Flock* the area where the family are is illuminated, whereas the surrounding ground is cast in shadow. Similarly, in *The Waterfall* a bright light shines on the water and the top of the rock, and other parts of the drawing remain untouched by the intense sunshine.

Although born in London, where his actor parents had been touring, Casanova was raised in Venice and the art of that city was an important influence on his career. According to the *Mémoires* of his

brother, Giovanni Giacomo (1728/30-1795), Casanova studied drawing with Gianantonio Guardi (1699-1760) for ten years in Venice. In 1757 Casanova began working in Paris and quickly became a much sought after court painter of battle, hunting and equestrian scenes and his work was critically well received when exhibited at the Salon. In addition to numerous military paintings he also painted many landscapes, which are often dotted with rural figures such as farmers or shepherds, as seen in both *A Shepherd's Family Travelling with their Flock* and other works such as *Resting Herdsmen with Donkey and Herd* (Albertina Museum, Vienna). By about 1772, he had begun to design tapestry cartoons for the royal factories in Beauvais and Aubusson whilst continuing to exhibit publically until 1783 when he returned to Venice. Other significant patrons from the latter stages of his career included Prince Nicolas Esterházy of Hungary, Ferdinand IV, the Bourbon King of Naples and Catherine the Great of Russia.

Provenance:

Veil-Picardy Collection, Paris

Artist description:

Casanova was born in London, where his parents were touring, and spent his youth in Venice. The influence of Venetian art was an important feature of his work. In the *Mémoires* of his brother Giovanni Giacomo Casanova, it is said that in Venice he studied drawing with Giovanni Antonio Guardi during a 10-year period ending around 1749. The *Fortune-teller* (c. 1749; Rome, private collection) may be among Francesco's earliest surviving works. In Venice he made copies after the work of the history and battle painter Francesco Simonini who probably taught him in Florence from around 1749. Two years later he moved to Paris but in 1752 left for Dresden, where he came into contact with the work of Charles Parrocel and Philips Wouwerman.

In 1757 Casanova returned to Paris where, according to the *Mémoires*, he exhibited a picture at the Louvre, and rapidly became a much sought-after court painter of battle, hunting and equestrian scenes. Around 1760 he executed *Surprise Attack on a Wagon* (Moscow, Pushkin Museum of Fine Art) and the *Camp* (Schleissheim, Neues Schloss). Between 1761 and 1771 he exhibited at the Salon to much critical acclaim. On his marriage certificate of 1762 he was designated 'Peintre du Roi', a position he retained until 1783. He became a member of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in 1763, and paintings from this period include *Landscape with Shepherds* (c. 1770; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Béziers) and two pictures executed for Louis-Joseph, Prince de Condé (1736–1818), shown at the Salon of 1771— *Battle of Lens and Battle of Fribourg* (both c. 1771; Paris, Louvre). By about 1772 he had begun designing tapestry cartoons for the royal factories in Beauvais and Aubusson, including the fragment representing a *Kneeling Man* (c. 1772; Paris, Louvre) and the study of a *Fishing Scene* (early 1770s; St. Petersburg, Hermitage). Between 1779 and 1783 he continued to exhibit at the Salon and executed, for example, *Landscape with Rider* (1780; Moscow, Pushkin Museum of Fine Art).

In 1783 Casanova settled in Vienna. His paintings from this period include the *Equestrian Portrait* (c. 1783; Museum of Chorherrenstiftes, Klosterneuburg) and *Cavalry Battle* (1792; Kunsthistorische Museum, Vienna). During the early 1790s he was probably commissioned by Catherine II of Russia to paint a cycle of pictures representing the *Russian Victory over the Turks*, with which some preparatory studies (Vienna, Albertina) may be associated. In 1795 he travelled with Prince Nicolas Esterházy to Hungary, where he is said to have executed numerous equestrian sketches, and in 1797 he completed paintings for Ferdinand IV, the Bourbon King of Naples (1759–1825), including Fox Hunting (Naples, Capodimonte). His most significant pupil was Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg, who studied with him in Paris.

Collections

Casanova's work is represented in the following collections: Louvre, Paris; Hermitage, St. Petersburg; Kunsthistorische Museum, Vienna; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Béziers; Pushkin Museum of Fine Art, Moscow; Albertina, Vienna; Neues Schloss, Schleissheim; Capodimonte, Naples; amongst others.