

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Francesco Guardi
(Venice 1712 – 1793)

Venice: A Panoramic View of the Bacino di San Marco with San Giorgio Maggiore, the Punta della Dogana and Santa Maria della Salute.

Pen and brown ink and brown wash, over underdrawing in black chalk.
The buildings in the background are identified with the letters "A" to "I", faintly inscribed in brown ink, partly erased.

47.3 x 80.2 cm. (18 5/8 x 31 5/8 in.)

Provenance:

With Galerie Charpentier, Paris, 1947;
Private collection, Paris;
Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, 6 July 2004, lots 87 and 87A (catalogued as Giacomo Guardi, but sold as Francesco Guardi following saleroom notices);
Private collection, Paris;
With Jean-Luc Baroni, London, 2005;
From whom acquired by a private collector;
Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, 5 July 2017, lot 36 (as Francesco Guardi; unsold).

Literature:

Succi, D. *Guardi. Itinerario artistico. Catalogo dei dipinti e disegni inediti*, 2021, pp. no. 427.

Exhibited:

Paris, Galerie Charpentier, *Paysages d'Italie*, 1947, no. 201 ("L'Entrée du Grand Canal, à Venise, vue du Palais des Doges"), as Antonio Guardi.
New York & London, Jean-Luc Baroni, *An Exhibition of Master Drawings and Oil Sketches*, 10 May - 3 June 2005, no. 29.



The present imposing and intricately rendered drawing by Francesco Guardi - *Venice: A Panoramic View of the Bacino di San Marco with San Giorgio Maggiore, the Punta di Dogana and Santa Maria della Salute* - stands among the most significant achievements of his early career as a *vedutista*.

Rediscovered following a 2004 auction, together with its pendant - *Venice: A Panoramic View of the Bacino di San Marco with the Doge's Palace, Molo and the Riva degli Schiavoni* (Fig. 1)- it ranks not only among the largest extant Guardi sheets but also as vital evidence of his evolving artistic practice in the late 1750s and early 1760s. The drawing, executed in pen and brown ink, with brown wash over rapidly sketched underdrawing in black chalk, fills the sheet to within a fraction of the margins. The condition of the ink and wash remains remarkably fresh, preserving the original clarity of Guardi's line and the subtlety of his atmospheric effects. It displays a broad view of the Bacino di San Marco, as though perceived by someone approaching Venice by sea. The sheet depicts San Giorgio Maggiore at left, Santa Maria della Salute and the Dogana at right, with the Giudecca on the horizon. The foreground is filled with sailing craft - "bragozzi", gondolas, sandolos, and trading barges - whose tall masts and furled sails punctuate the sky. Such rich maritime detail testifies to Guardi's characteristic skill in conveying bustling traffic and the shimmering interplay of lagoon light.



Fig. 1. Francesco Guardi, *Venice: A Panoramic View of the Bacino di San Marco with the Doge's Palace, Molo and the Riva degli Schiavoni*, pen and brown ink and brown wash, over underdrawing in black chalk. Private collection.

The companion sheet's depiction of Santa Maria della Pietà's façade in a state of completion revealed to be useful for the dating of the pair. It is known that Giorgio Massari's 1730s design was never fully realised, and the façade remained unfinished until 1906 (Fig. 2). The decision to show it complete likely reflects the wishes of the unknown patron, possibly someone associated with the church who wished to commemorate its festive consecration in 1760.

Elsewhere, Guardi's accuracy is unusually meticulous, as seen in the Torre dell'Orologio with its recently added upper storeys, known to have been completed in 1755 - an architectural detail providing a firm post-1755 date (Fig. 3).



Figs. 2-3. Francesco Guardi, *Venice: A Panoramic View of the Bacino di San Marco with the Doge's Palace, Molo and the Riva degli Schiavoni* (Details of the Chiesa della Pietà and Torre dell'Orologio). Private collection.

Our drawing offers the complementary scene from the Piazzetta's side, looking across to San Giorgio Maggiore and the Dogana. James Byam Shaw, comparing the associated painting at Waddesdon Manor, notes the ambassadorial gondolas in the foreground - a thread of blue and gold - lending pageantry to the lagoon. The sheet bears lettered annotations above the principal architectural landmarks, strongly suggesting that Guardi, or a prospective printmaker, intended to create engraved keys for identifying the most prominent sites. Although no extant prints of these precise views have come to light, the possibility that they were destined for reproduction by an engraver such as Dionigi Valesi (also known as Valesio) is very plausible. Valesi is documented as having translated a number of Guardi's large-scale views into etchings - energetic renderings that capture the artist's spirited lines and distinctive effects of light.¹

Unusually for Guardi, the present drawing and its companion served directly as preparatory studies for the grandest of his signed view paintings: a pair of monumental canvases (measuring approximately 285 × 423 cm) now in the Rothschild collection at Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire (Figs. 4-5).² Those spectacular oils, likewise representing the Bacino di San Marco from opposing angles, are often considered the highlight of Guardi's oeuvre. Despite the grandeur of the Waddesdon paintings and the sophistication of these preparatory sheets, almost nothing is known of the individual who commissioned them.

¹ See D. Succi. "Gli Incisori Di Francesco Guardi : Cinque Capricci Architettonici Disegnati Da Dionigi Valesi." *Guardi / Scritti Di Paolo Casadio. Comune Di Gorizia, Assessorato Alla Cultura.*, 1987.

² A. Morassi, *Guardi. I dipinti*, Venice, 1973, nos. 390, 419, II, figs. 414, 441-2).

Scholarly consensus leans to the idea that he or she was closely associated with the Pietà - hence the façade's imaginary completion - and presumably commanded the resources necessary to install two paintings nearly three metres high and four metres wide in a suitably imposing setting - perhaps a great hall in a Venetian palace, where the paintings would have faced one another in a dramatic evocation of arrival by sea. Their date has also long been debated: Ellis Waterhouse proposed 1755–60, James Byam Shaw inclined to c. 1760, while F. J. B. Watson and Michael Levey argued for 1760–63. What is clear is that the Torre dell'Orologio's finished wings fix a terminus post quem of 1755, and the depiction of an idealised Pietà façade is linked to the year 1760.

The consensus therefore confines these works, and the two drawings, to roughly the period 1755–63. By then, Francesco Guardi was establishing himself as a premier vedute painter, enjoying considerable success for his lively brushwork and the “quivering air” of his Venetian scenes. These documentary references also coincide with Guardi's break from the shadow of his elder brother Giovanni Antonio, underscoring the shift from history painting to the creation of views that swiftly attracted foreign patrons.



Fig. 4. Francesco Guardi, *The Bacino di San Marco with the Molo and the Doge's Palace*, ca. 1755-60, oil on canvas. Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire, Rothschild collection.



Fig. 5. Francesco Guardi, *The Bacino di San Marco with the Churches of San Giorgio Maggiore and Santa Maria della Salute*, ca. 1755-60, oil on canvas. Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire, Rothschild collection.

Born in Venice in 1712, Francesco Guardi is thought to have trained with his brother-in-law, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, although he never sought foreign renown in the manner of the Tiepolos or Canaletto. For much of his early career, Guardi collaborated with his elder brother, Giovanni Antonio Guardi (Gian Antonio), on religious and history paintings. Indeed, it was only in his middle years that Francesco turned decisively to the vedute that would secure his enduring reputation - his membership in the Venetian painters' guild in 1761 marking a key milestone. Contemporary evidence suggests he may even have worked in Canaletto's studio briefly in the late 1750s or early 1760s, as one source (in 1764) refers to him as "a good pupil of the celebrated Canaletto." While the precise truth of that claim remains uncertain, scholars universally acknowledge Canaletto's deep impact on Guardi's early cityscapes.

James Byam Shaw observed that Guardi's vedute from about 1755 to 1765 are distinguished by tighter topographical correctness, an influence traceable to Canaletto's meticulously observed perspectives (see Figs. 6-7-8 for reference). As Byam Shaw put it, "*While Canaletto looked at Venice through the camera obscura, and corrected perspectives by rule and line, Guardi painted his immediate impression...the quivering air and the glittering lagoon.*" This period likewise reveals a more "Canalettesque" style in Guardi's draughtsmanship, with a tendency to delineate architectural specifics in greater detail before allowing his famously loose, spirited brush or pen to lend a shimmering vibrancy.³ The sheet presented here forms part of what Byam Shaw identified as a "clearly defined group of large views of Venice"

³ James Byam Shaw, 'Unpublished Guardi Drawings II', *The Art Quarterly*, summer 1954, p. 159

datable to Guardi's earliest *vedute* phase. This drawing is notable for its substantial dimensions, lively penwork, and more literal approach to topography than is found in Guardi's later and smaller capricci. Such characteristics have occasionally led to misattributions to Canaletto.



Fig. 6. Google Street view of (1) *The Bacino di San Marco with the Doge's Palace, Molo and the Riva degli Schiavoni*



Fig. 7. Google Street view of (2) *The Bacino di San Marco with San Giorgio Maggiore, the Punta di Dogana and Santa Maria della Salute*



Fig. 8. Francesco Guardi likely made his first impressions from a boat around this spot

Parallels abound in works of similar size and date, including *The Grand Canal with the Ca' Rezzonico* and *The Grand Canal with the Palazzo Corner della Ca' Grande* in the British Museum (Figs. 9-10),⁴ the *Rialto seen from the Fondamente del Carbon* in the Musée du Louvre (Fig. 11),⁵ *The Grand Canal Above the Rialto* in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 12),⁶ *A Regatta on the Grand Canal* in the Getty Museum (Fig. 13)⁷ and *The Grand Canal with the Palazzo Bembo* in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Fig. 14).⁸ Bernard Aikema published yet another related drawing in 1990, revealing the same stretch of the Bacino di San Marco but altering the shipping.⁹ Some of these very drawings were turned into etchings by Dionigi Valesi for publication as *molte vedute della Dominante del celebre Francesco Guardi, e varij capricci pittoreschi di architettura*, further illustrating the strong commercial interest in Guardi's Venetian scenes.

The sheet here under discussion remains in a notably fine state, preserving the full strength of Guardi's pen line and the subtle gradations of wash which impart the flickering radiance so characteristic of Venetian light. Rapid underdrawings in black chalk - likely made on the spot, possibly from the vantage of a boat, as illustrated above - underpin the composition, reflecting Guardi's method of capturing an immediate and spontaneous impression of the lagoon. The carefully reworked pen outlines and subtle brown washes then transform those chalk notations into a finished image that would have appealed both to local collectors and foreign visitors alike seeking highly accurate yet atmospheric souvenirs of Venice. As said, the presence of lettering across the sky strongly indicates that Guardi (or his circle) intended to produce key-engraved prints of this imposing composition, presumably for a wider audience.

Moreover, the monumental scale of the drawing - mirroring the scale of the related vast Waddesdon canvas - makes an engraving project entirely plausible, as these compositions would have showcased Venice's architectural splendours to collectors far beyond the city itself. Although Guardi never pursued the international celebrity enjoyed by Canaletto or Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, he nonetheless developed a thriving market in Venice, furnishing visitors (particularly English and French Grand Tourists) with topographical drawings and paintings that captured the city in all its shimmering, unstable beauty. The present work, featuring an intricate interplay of architecture, shipping, and luminosity, epitomises that appeal. In its ambitious scale and deft interplay of graphic detail with luminous effects, it underscores Guardi's ability to reconcile the rigour of Canaletto's perspectival method with a more immediate and evocative sensibility, encapsulating both the tangible splendour of Venice and the intangible effervescence of its maritime setting.

⁴ A. Morassi, *Guardi. Tutti i disegni di Antonio, Francesco e Giacomo Guardi*, Venice, 1975, nos. 361–2.

⁵ *ibid.*, no. 364

⁶ *ibid.*, no. 377.

⁷ *ibid.*, no. 299.

⁸ *ibid.*, no. 381.

⁹ See "A new view of the city," in *Painters of Venice. The Story of the Venetian 'Veduta'*, exhib. cat., Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1990–91, p. 69, fig. 65.



Fig. 9. Francesco Guardi, *The Grand Canal with Palazzo Corner della Ca' Granda; with gondolas on the water*, pen and brown ink, with brown wash, over black chalk. London, British Museum.



Fig. 10. Francesco Guardi, *Gondolas on the Grand Canal with the Cà Mezzonico, Venice*, pen and brown and grey ink, with brown wash. London, British Museum.



Fig. 11. Francesco Guardi, *Rialto seen from the Fondamente del Carbon*, pen and brown and grey ink, with brown wash. Paris, Musée du Louvre.



Fig. 12. Francesco Guardi, *The Grand Canal Above the Rialto*, pen and brown ink, brush and brown wash, over black chalk. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 13. Francesco Guardi, *A Regatta on the Grand Canal*, c. 1778, pen and brown ink, brush with brown wash, over black chalk. Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum.



Fig. 14. Francesco Guardi, *The Grand Canal with the Palazzo Bembo*, pen and brown ink, brush with brown wash, over black chalk. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum.