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Giovanni Antonio Canal, called
CANALETTO

(Venice 1697-1768)

*Piazza San Marco
from the Southwest Corner,
with the Procuratie Nuove on the Right*

Brown and grey wash, brown ink, and black chalk on paper
23 x 34 cm; 9 x 13 3/8 in.

Provenance

Henry Reveley (1737-1798);
By descent to Algernon Jelf Reveley (1879-1974);
With Colnaghi (1960-61);
From whom acquired by Dr Rudolf J. Heinemann (1901-1975);
Sale, Christie's London, 1 July 1997, lot 78;
Private collection, Paris.

Literature

The Reveley Collection of Drawings, London 1858, pl.19.
K.T. Parker, *The Drawings of Antonio Canaletto in the Collection of His Majesty the King at Windsor Castle*, Oxford and London 1948, p. 40, under no. 57.
K.T. Parker and J. Byam Shaw, *Canaletto e Guardi*, exh. cat. Venice (Fondazione Cini) 1962, under no. 28.
W. G. Constable, *Canaletto*, Oxford, 1962, I., pp. 153, 191, 2nd ed. revised by J.G. Links, 1989, I., pp. 153, 191; II., under no. 525 (as an autograph version of the Windsor Castle drawing).
J. Byam Shaw and G. Knox, *The Robert Lehman Collection, VI, Italian Eighteenth-Century Drawings*, New York, 1987, pp. 25-26, under no. 21;
New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Canaletto*, 1989, under no. 110, note 2.

Exhibited

New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, *Drawings from the Collection of Lore and Rudolf Heinemann*, 1973, no. 29 (reproduced).

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This highly finished drawing by the Venetian master Canaletto perfectly encapsulates the artist's graphic oeuvre and bears unbroken provenance from its inception to the present day.

Canaletto portrays a picturesque view of Saint Mark's Square, instantly identified by the iconic church and bell tower in the background. Groups of people and animals are portrayed meandering through the piazza and underneath the receding arcade of the *procuratie nuove*.¹ Drawing the piazza with precise and confident lines, the artist demonstrates his deep knowledge of Venetian architecture, and employs a few compositional tricks to make the scene convincing and appealing. Besides using the foreshortening of the *procuratie* to pull attention towards the centre of the drawing, Canaletto also chooses to omit a pilaster that should be right in front of to the viewer, opening up the entire scene. The sheet radiates a sense of rhythm and dynamism through the looser touches of wash added to the figures.

This composition is one of Canaletto's most successful *vedute*, explored at least four other times by the artist. Two drawings, nearly identical to the sheet presented here, are at Windsor Castle and The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figs 1-2). A further drawing, depicting the three figures in the foreground, is at the British Museum, and a vertical canvas depicting the scene is at the National Gallery (Fig. 3-4).

Given the innovative, yet assured composition, and the absence of water features, all these works surely date from the later phases of Canaletto's career. That said, as the last storey of the side-wings of the clocktower are missing, the drawing cannot be dated past the mid-1750s. Considering that Canaletto returned from his English sojourn in 1756, scholarship has fixed the date of production for these drawings around that year.

The revisitation of the same subject in a short period of time is central to Canaletto's *modus operandi*, especially after he became famous. As his clientele mainly consisted of English noblemen on their Grand Tour, the artist endeavoured to select the most picturesque views of his home city for his discerning foreign customers. One such customer was likely Henry Reveley, a Welsh excise agent

¹ So-called due to them being part of the complex administered by the procurators (caretakers) of San Marco. The Procuratie are composed of three parts: the *Vecchie* (seen to the left of the drawing, supposedly built between 1514 and 1538 by Pietro Bon and Zuan Celestro), the *Nuove* (seen from below to the right of the present sheet, built by Vincenzo Scamozzi and Francesco Smeraldi) and the much later *Nuovissime* (built in the nineteenth century).

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whose collector's stamp is visible on the work. In 1756, Reveley would have been nineteen, prime age for conducting a whistlestop tour of the Italian peninsula.

After Henry's death in 1798, the drawing remained with the Reveley family until the 1960s, when it was sold through Colnaghi to Rudolf J Heinemann. The specificities of the transfer from the Reveley family to Heinemann, hitherto a mystery to scholarship, has now been resolved thanks to the Colnaghi archive. After Heinemann's purchase of the work, in 1973 he lent it -- as one of the very finest drawings in his collection -- to the Morgan Library.

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Fig. 1. Giovanni Antonio Canal, called Canaletto. *Piazza San Marco from the Southwest Corner, with the Procuratie Nuove on the Right*. Pen and brown ink, brown and grey wash. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig. 2. Giovanni Antonio Canal, called Canaletto. *Venice: Piazza San Marco, looking north-east from the Procuratie Nuove, ca. 1745*. Pen and ink, with bluish-grey wash, over free and ruled pencil and pinpointing. Windsor Castle.

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Fig. 3. Giovanni Antonio Canal, called Canaletto. *Two men seated on a bench and one standing*, ca. 1756. Pen and brown ink with grey wash. London, British Museum.

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Fig. 4. Giovanni Antonio Canal, called Canaletto. *Venice: Piazza San Marco and the Colonnade of the Procuratie Nuove*, circa 1756. Oil on canvas. London, National Gallery.