
Title of Object

View up the Grand Canal toward the Rialto

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Francesco Guardi

Country: Italy

Date of Object: c. 1785

File Created: 11/1/2016

Accession Number: 56.41

Author of File: Ingrid Roberts

Material/Medium: Oil on canvas

Reviewer of File: Kara ZumBahlen

Department: Paintings

Last Updated/Reviewed: 6/21/2017

Culture: Italian

Tour Topics

Group 4, Highlights 1600-1850, passion-place, Passion for Place, Vendita (Point of View), Water scenes, Italian daily life, Sources of Inspiration for Impressionism, Grand Tour destinations, landscapes, water, daily life/genre scene, architecture, Venice, formal elements, brushstrokes, storytelling/stories

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. (*see) Our first stop on our tour of “places” was also a destination on the Grand Tour of Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. This Grand Tour experience served as an educational rite of passage for aristocratic (upper-class) British men and allowed them the opportunity to experience the art, culture, architecture and sophistication of cities such as Venice, Italy. *Take a moment to look at the scene of the Grand Canal, in Venice. What details do you see that catch your attention and appeal to your eye?
2. (*think) Artist Francesco Guardi painted vendute or view paintings that featured highly detailed cityscapes or other recognizable views (often including iconic features – ie: Rialto Bridge). * Why do you think Guardi chose to paint this particular view of the Grand Canal?

3. (*think) Artist Francesco Guardi used a painting style known as *pittura di tocco* (known as “of touch”) which meant that his brush strokes were loose and not exactly precise (not an exact representation). He also loved light and how it sparkled and reflected off the water. What do you notice about the way the artists painted the buildings in this piece? Where do you see how does the artist includes light in this work? How would you describe his use of light in this painting? (Activity: Step back and take a look at the Canaletto painting also hung on this wall. What are 2 things you see that are similar between the two paintings? What are 2 things you see that are different?)

4. (*connect) *Vedute* (point of view) paintings served as a “picture postcard” or visual souvenir of their day allowing travelers to bring home an image of a prominent city scene or landscape. * In today’s world, how would you chose to capture a city image for remembrance and also share it with others? * What would you consider to be a familiar or iconic *vedute* image(s) from the Twin Cities that is often depicted for viewers? (Lake Harriet Bandshell, Sculpture Garden, St. Anthony Falls / Stone Arch Bridge, Rice Park (St.Paul), The State Capitol Building, etc...) ** Show photo images of current Rialto Bridge / Venice and also Stone Arch Bridge / Minneapolis.

Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

- Subject is a water front scene of the Grand Canal, in Venice, Italy. The paint colors are darker and muted, but the artist (Francesco Guardi) plays with the element of light in the sky, reflections and shimmering quality on the water, and shadows on the buildings. The scene on the canal is a working environment. Gondolas are transferring goods across the water and the figures appear to be laborers or workers, versus relaxing passengers in the gondolas (figures are not the focal point of the painting). Facades of buildings line either side of the canal (some are easily identifiable today, ie: Ca’ Farsetti (hotel) and Palazzo Loredan (present day City Hall) and the famous Rialto bridge is a focal point up the canal in this painting (which still exists today).
- Venice was considered by the British as the "locus of decadent Italianate allure," making it an epitome and cultural setpiece of the Grand Tour. (Wikipedia) Venice = pleasure, Rome = Classical antiquity, Florence = Renaissance architecture and art, Naples = warmer weather.
- This type of painting is called a *Veduta*, or view painting, and is in the genre of Landscapes. *Veduta* painting is characterized by a highly detailed, usually large-scale image of a cityscape or other vista. Familiar *vedute* scenes from the Grand Tour itinerary included the Roman Forum or the Grand Canal in Venice. (Wikipedia)
- Guardi’s painting style is known as *pittura di tocco* (of touch). This style is characterized by small dotting of the paint, and “spirited” brush strokes. Guardi’s style was a much looser way of painting and focused on water and light. This differed from the more linear and architecturally accurate style of Canaletto’s painting. *Guardi’s (of touch) style later lead to his works being highly prized by French Impressionist painters. Guardi is considered a precursor and influencer of the Impressionists. (Wikipedia)
- Guardi was influenced by Canaletto, a more famous *veduta* painter of the time, but Guardi developed his own style of painting within this genre. While Canaletto was known for his more “glamorous urban architecture” representation, Guardi’s buildings seem to be “melting” or “sinking into the murky lagoon”. Figures were not the focus of Guardi’s scenes. Guardi loved the Venetian light and its dazzling effects on water. His paintings appear to have a hazy quality to their presentation, versus

Canaletto's lighter and more precise representations of familiar scenes and their included activities. (Wikipedia)

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

- Francesco Lazzaro Guardi was an Italian painter of *vedute* (view paintings), a nobleman and a member of the Venetian School (b. 1712 in Venice, d. 1793). He was considered one of the last practitioners of the classic Venetian school of painting and was one of the traditional great Old Masters painters of the 18th century, along with Canaletto. (Wikipedia) By about 1730 a Guardi family workshop was in existence in Venice, and after his father's death, Francesco began painting within that workshop in the 1730s and eventually branched out and accepted independent commissions in the 1750s. (NGA)
- Francesco's activity as a *vedute* painter probably grew out of the Guardi family practice of copying the works of other artists rather than from any formal training with another master and appears to have begun in the early to mid-1750s: none of his views can be dated before about 1754 based on topographical details. Francesco's earliest views...employ a style derived primarily from that of the mature Canaletto (1697-1768) and also Michele Marieschi (1710-1743). Francesco often borrowed entire compositions from paintings and prints by both artists, although he increasingly worked from his own drawings. The earliest view to bear both Francesco's signature and a date, 1758, is a *Mardi Gras in the Piazzetta* (Sotheby Parke Bernet, New York, 11 January 1990, no. 121). (NGA)
- "After about 1770 Francesco's chronology becomes slightly more secure, and in the 1780s can be established around several documented commissions. In the 1770s, Francesco's brushwork became increasingly loose and fractured, and was combined with a softer, increasingly cool palette and subtle effects of changeable color that create a shimmering atmospheric veil across the surface of now smaller canvases. He also began to modify both the relative proportions of buildings and the perspectival recession for expressive effect. In his last years (c. 1780-1793) these developments continued, with still looser brushwork, more expressive manipulation of perspective, and renewed interest in *chiaroscuro* effects.

Francesco's extremely prolific output seems to have been purchased mainly by middle-class Venetians and English visitors of modest means. Their recorded statements show an appreciation for Francesco's painterly brio and poetic vision, while others criticized these same qualities as poor technique and carelessness in the depiction of specific sites." (NGA)

- Venice was a "must see" destination on the Grand Tour of the 16th – 17th centuries. Per the Metropolitan Museum: "Beginning in the late sixteenth century, it became fashionable for young aristocrats to visit Paris, Venice, Florence, and above all Rome, as the culmination of their classical education. Thus was born the idea of the Grand Tour, a practice which introduced Englishmen, Germans, Scandinavians, and also Americans to the art and culture of France and Italy for the next 300 years. Travel was arduous and costly throughout the period, possible only for a privileged class—the same that produced gentleman scientists, authors, antiquaries, and patrons of the arts."

The Grand Tour was a traditional European trip undertaken by mainly upper-class (British) young men of means. It was considered an educational rite of passage and was associated with a standard itinerary (France, Italy, Germany, etc.). The purpose was exposure to the "cultural legacy of classical antiquity and

the Renaissance”. The Grand Tour could last for several months, or years, depending on funds. (Wikipedia and the Met)

- Venice, Italy was considered a “must see” on the typical Grand Tour itinerary. The Grand Canal, in Venice, is one of the major water traffic corridors in the city. One end of the canal leads into the lagoon near the Santa Lucia railway station and the other end leads into St. Mark Basin (in between it makes a large reverse –S shape through the central districts of Venice). It is 3.8 km long, and 30 to 90 m wide, with an average depth of 5 meters (16.5 ft). There are more than 170 buildings lining the banks of the Grand Canal and are examples of Venetian-Byzantine style architecture featured in the Guardi’s painting. (Wikipedia)

Travelers loved to purchase veduta paintings as souvenirs: “Veduta, or view paintings, became popular as souvenirs of this important period in one’s life. Living with vedute, the traveler might find that his specific memories of Venice would gradually merge with the painting’s sunny image of vivacious city life and perpetually rosy summer. (Seattle Art Museum)

- (*story) The Rialto Bridge is the oldest bridge across the Grand Canal, built in 1255 as a wooden bridge to replace the original “pontoon bridge” or floating bridge built in 1181, due to an increase in foot traffic because of the expanding Rialto market on the eastern bank. The bridge had moving pieces to allow for tall ships to pass through the middle, in addition to shops built along the sides of the bridge. Rent from the income helped maintain the bridge. In 1551 authorities requested proposals for the renewal of the Rialto Bridge. Plans were offered by many famous architects, including Michelangelo. The present marble bridge was designed by Antonio da Ponte (completed in 1591). It is similar to its wooden predecessor. Two inclined ramps lead up to a central portico (rows of covered shops are on either side). The bridge design was predicted to fail, but it has held the test of time. The Rialto Bridge is considered one of the architectural icons of Venice. (Wikipedia)

This type of vedute painting was a precursor to Impressionism: “Although the 18th-century Italian landscapes were studio works, they were based on accurate on-the-spot drawings and oil sketches. In effect, these artists became the precursors of what was to develop as one of the most popular aspects of Western culture, which came to a heightened peak with Impressionism. This trend of painting landscapes that were not structured, classical, balanced and theoretical originated with the vedette or “view” paintings that were a type of naturalistic landscape and cityscape painting made popular in the 18th century.” (Oglethorpe Museum)

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

This is exactly the kind of painting a British aristocrat would purchase as a memento of his Grand Tour of the major cities of Italy. In the 1700s, the Grand Tour was a way for elite young men to learn about art and history and improve their taste. The Grand Canal, the principal waterway of Venice, winds through the city from the railway station to the Piazza San Marco, where it meets the Adriatic Sea. In this late afternoon view, Francesco Guardi portrayed a section of the canal from a vantage point looking northeast toward the Rialto bridge.

Many of the buildings seen here still exist and are identifiable due to Guardi’s exacting detail. The first two palaces at the far right, the Ca’ Farsetti and the adjacent Palazzo Loredan, today function together as the city hall.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Wikipedia article: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francesco_Guardi

Biography from National Gallery of Art: <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/artist-info.1363.html>

Wikipedia article on the Grand Tour: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Tour

Wikipedia on Veduta: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veduta>

Wikipedia on Grand Canal and Rialto Bridge: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Canal_\(Venice\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Canal_(Venice)) and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rialto_Bridge

Met Museum essay on the Grand Tour: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grtr/hd_grtr.htm

Exhibition, “The Grand Tour: Landscape & Veduta Paintings Venice & Rome in the 18th Century”, Oglethorpe University Museum of Art: <http://museum.oglethorpe.edu/exhibitions/grand-tour-landscape-veduta-paintings-venice-rome-18th-century/>

A Day in the Life, Venice, at the Seattle Art Museum:

<http://www1.seattleartmuseum.org/eMuseum/code/emuseum.asp?style=browse¤trecord=1&page=search&profile=objects&searchdesc=50.70&quicksearch=50.70&newvalues=1&newstyle=single&newcurrentrecord=1>

Photo props:



