RICHARD GREEN

ENGLISH FOLLOWER OF CANALETTO

Fl. mid-nineteenth century

Ref: CE 125

Venice, the entrance to the Grand Canal looking east, with Santa Maria della Salute

Oil on canvas: 30 ¼ x 50 ¼ in / 76.8 x 127.6 cm
Frame size: 36 ½ x 56 ½ in / 92.7 x 143.5 cm

Painted mid-nineteenth century

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Provenance:
Private collection, UK, since the 1970s

Canaletto lived in London from 1746 to 1755, after the War of the Austrian Succession disrupted the flow of Grand Tourists to Venice. While he was in London artists were inspired both by his English views and the Venetian subjects which he continued to produce for an eager aristocratic clientèle. English followers of Canaletto produced variants on his Venetian themes throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the prestige of these originals spurring a ready market for high-quality paintings based on Canaletto's compositions.

This painting is an outstanding example of a work inspired by Canaletto. It is close to Canaletto's *The Grand Canal looking towards the Riva degli Schiavoni*, c.1729-30 (Royal Collection, London), one of a group of paintings by the artist commissioned by the British Consul in Venice Joseph Smith and sold by him to George III in 1762. The composition was engraved by Antonio Visentini as part of the series *Urbis Venetiarum Prospectus Celebriores ex Antonii Canal*, published in 1735. This is the medium by which most artists would have encountered Canaletto's work, although the feeling for Venetian light and nuances of architecture in this painting show that the artist must have known Canaletto's oils directly.

The painting is dominated by the baroque exuberance of Santa Maria della Salute, designed by Baldassare Longhena and built 1631-81 in thanksgiving for the deliverance of Venice from the plague of 1630-1. A procession of brightly-dressed officials and priests proceeds towards the doorway of the church, with the Doge dressed in gold under the golden umbrella which was a symbol of his authority. The artist is evoking the Feast of the Presentation of the Virgin held each 21st November, when the Doge walked across a pontoon bridge to give thanks for the Virgin's protection of the city. Brilliantly decorated and gilded gondolas of the nobles are moored nearby. On the opposite side of the Grand Canal, by the Doge's Palace, can be seen the striped covering of the Fusta, the Doge's galleon (a detail present in Canaletto's view) and beside it the Bucintoro, the red and gold state barge on which the Doge would sail on Ascension Day for the ceremony of Marriage of the Sea (Sposalizio del Mare). Our artist emphasizes the fascination with Venice as a city of glamour and ceremonial.

To the left, the most celebrated buildings and monuments of Venice stretch away to the east down the Riva degli Schiavoni. From left to right, they are the Zecca (Mint), the Libreria Sansoviniana, Campanile, Column of St Mark, Palazzo Ducale and the Prigioni. Beyond these can be seen the dome of San Zaccaria and the façade of Santa Maria della Visitazione (Vivaldi's Pièta, where he wrote music for the girls of the associated orphanage). On the distant horizon are the campanile and dome of San Pietro di Castello, the city's first cathedral, until superseded by San Marco. The view is largely unchanged today; Venice still exerts its magic on travellers.