

Dialogue on the Grand Canal

By Julien Beauhaire (translated by Lauren Hasty)

The Musée Jacquemart-André beautifully combines the work of two of the greatest *vedutistes*, Canaletto and Guardi, in an original dialogue.

The term “vedutiste” comes from the pictorial tradition of “veduta” or painting cityscapes, which was very fashionable in eighteenth century Venice. The Jacquemart-André Museum has consecrated its current exhibition to the two biggest names of the movement: Canaletto (1697-1768) and Guardi (1712-1793) from October 2, 2012 until January 14, 2013.

Dialogue

The problem with Venice is that contemporary pop culture tends to imagine *La Serenissima* as a place filled with gondolas decorated with pink plastic roses transporting honeymooners feasting on spaghetti Bolognese...Each time period having its own clichés and style.

In the eighteenth century, no art collection belonging to royal courts, Italian collectors or wealthy English or Prussians was complete without a view of the Grand Canal or the Rialto. Today, the British court still has the largest collection of paintings and drawings by Canaletto.

For the first time in France, the Musée Jacquemart-André, under the direction of general curator Dottoressa Bozena Anna Kowalczyk, presents a scenic initiation to the work of the two great masters from the city of the Doges. Views of The Campi, The Grand Canal, St. Mark's Square and numerous channels are all offered in the fifty paintings displayed.

Unique Venice

With Canaletto, one enters Venice through music. Spatial relationships are deepened, light leaks between buildings and *chiaroscuro* are linked "in a quasi musical verve" according to the curator who placed *The Entrance to the Grand Canal, with Santa Maria della Salute to the West* as the opening piece.



Canaletto (Antonio Canal), *The Entrance to the Grand Canal, with Santa Maria della Salute and Giudecca Canal to the West*, 1722, oil on canvas, 194 x 204 cm, Grenoble Museum © Museum of Grenoble in Grenoble



Canaletto (Antonio Canal), *Piazza San Marco, To the East*, 1723, oil on canvas, 141.5 x 204.5 cm, Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza
© Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

Guardi, who began his work at a time when Canaletto was already successful, gives a second life to the *veduta*. He is of course inspired by his predecessor but transforms the baroque theatricality of the atmospheric effects into rococo virtuosity. Then, the reverse is true. Canaletto focuses on minute - almost scientific details, with a camera obscura, while Guardi favors emotional, almost impressionistic sensitivity (*The Giudecca Canal* and *The Zattere*, Madrid, Collection Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza), offering two styles for a unique Venice. Some time later Michele Marieschi (1710-1743) and Bernardo Bellotto (1722-1780), the nephew and disciple of Canaletto, joined the dialogue.



Francesco Guardi, *The Giudecca Canal and Zattere*, circa 1758, oil on canvas, 72.2 x 119.3 cm, Madrid, Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, on loan at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza © Colección Carmen Thyssen-Bornemisza Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

Caprices

Along with the iconic representation of places, both painters imagine, as did Giovanni Panini before them (1691-1765), another lakeside town. Venice is modified, featuring ruins mentioned previously in Rome, adorned with wild and abundant vegetation, and harboring people and animals. These vagaries, as portrayed by spinning romantic imaginations and creative brushes, reinvent a vision of eighteenth century Venice.



Francesco Guardi, *Caprice with a Venetian Campiello* circa 1778 - 1780, gouache on paper, 55.5 x 38 cm, Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André - Institut de France Sebert © Studio Photographers



Canaletto (Antonio Canal), *Caprice with Ruins*, 1742, oil on canvas, 53 x 66,7 cm, London, Supplied by The Royal Collection Trust © HM Queen Elizabeth II 2012

A few years later, in 1819, William Turner travelled to the lagoon and made a final tribute to his predecessors. By drawing special attention to the light (San Giorgio Maggiore at dawn, at the Tate Gallery, London) he announces the coming of Watermark Impressionism.

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