

RCEWA – *The Rialto Bridge with the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi*, Francesco Guardi

Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the painting meets Waverley criteria two and three.

Further Information

The 'Note of Case' is available on the Arts Council Website:

www.artscouncil.org.uk/reviewing-committee-case-hearings

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Brief Description of item(s)

Francesco Guardi (Venice, 1712–1793)

The Rialto Bridge with the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi, mid- to late-1760s

Oil on canvas, 119.7 x 204.3 cm

Signed 'GUARDI' (lower left)

The painting is in very good condition.

2. Context

Provenance:

Probably acquired in Venice in 1768 by Chaloner Arcedeckne, M.P. (1741–1804) of Glevering Hall, Suffolk and 1 Grosvenor Square, London; by descent through his son, Andrew Arcedeckne (1780–1849), of Glevering Hall, and his daughter Louisa (d. 1898), wife of Charles Andrew Vanneck, 3rd Lord Huntingfield (1818–1897); by whom sold privately through Christie's and Agnew's to Sir Edward Cecil Guinness, 1st Bt., later 1st Lord, and 1st Earl of, Iveagh (1847–1927), 24 July 1891, for £3,850; by descent through Rupert, 2nd Earl of Iveagh (1874–1966) at Pyrford Court and his daughter Lady Honor Channon (1909–1976), to her son Paul Channon, Lord Kelvedon of Ongar (1935–2007); thence by inheritance; sold, Christie's, London, 6 July 2017, lot 25.

Exhibitions:

London, British Institution, 1831, no. 14 or 20.

London, Royal Academy, European Masters of the XVIII Century, 1954–55, no. 52.

London, Royal Academy, Italian Art and Britain, 1960, no. 555.

London, Royal Academy, and Washington, National Gallery of Art, The Glory of Venice: Art in the Eighteenth Century, 1994–95, no. 210.

London, Kenwood House, Iveagh Bequest, on loan, 2008–10.

London, National Gallery, and Washington, National Gallery of Art, Canaletto and His Rivals, 2010–11, no. 56.

London, Somerset House, Courtauld Institute, on loan, 2011–15.

Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire, on loan, 2015–16.

Selected Literature:

A. Morassi, *Guardi, I Dipinti* (Venice, 1971), I, pp. 234, 407–8, nos. 524, 555 and 413; II, pls. 510 and 529; L. Rossi Bortolatto, *L'opera completa di Francesco Guardi* (Milan, 1974), p. 104, nos. 108, 234 and 318; D. Succi, *Francesco Guardi, Itinerario dell'Avventura Artistica* (Milan, 1993), pp. 47–8 and 52, fig. 42; M. Merling, in *The Glory of Venice: Art in the Eighteenth Century*, exh. cat. London and Washington, 1994, p. 311; F. Russell, 'Guardi and the English tourist', *The Burlington Magazine*, CXXXVIII, 1996, p. 10; C. Beddington, 'Francesco Guardi', *Venice, Canaletto and his Rivals*, exh. cat. London and Washington, 2010, pp. 134, 139.

3. Waverley Criteria

This painting meets Waverley criterion 2 due its outstanding aesthetic importance as one of Francesco Guardi's largest, liveliest and most ambitious depictions of Venice. It also meets Waverley

criterion 3 due to its importance to the study of Guardi's work, Venetian view painting, and the study of Grand Tour patronage and taste.

DETAILED CASE

1. Detailed description of item(s) if more than in Executive Summary, and any comments.

This picture presents a sweeping view of the Grand Canal looking south towards the Rialto Bridge. The Rialto lies at the heart of commercial Venice: by the eighteenth century it had long been a bustling centre of trade and commerce, and Guardi depicts the bridge (completed to the designs of Antonio da Ponte in 1591) on a typically busy day. Tiny figures line both the fondamenta and the steps of the bridge itself, while gondolas cluster at its base. Guardi's composition encourages the viewer to take in a sweep of grand and historic buildings: on the left, the Fondaco dei Tedeschi (rebuilt 1505–1508) with its distinctive chimneys; to the right of the bridge the pale Palazzo dei Camerlenghi (enlarged 1525–1528); and at the right of the picture the arcaded Fabbriche Vecchie (built 1520–1522), beneath whose arches the stalls of a fruit and vegetable market can be seen. Perhaps most striking, however, is the utterly unimportant building at left, whose sharp lines and pale stone form a striking repoussoir, guiding the eye into the picture. That Guardi signed his name on a modest plank of wood in this corner of his vast canvas highlights not only the importance he placed on the picture, but also that of this anchoring pictorial device.

Alongside Canaletto and his nephew Bellotto, Guardi forms part of the triumvirate of great Venetian view painters of the eighteenth century. Born into a family of artists, Guardi spent the first three decades of his career producing figure paintings and copies, only turning to view painting in the early 1750s when Canaletto was in England. Although he absorbed some of Canaletto's compositional methods, Guardi soon developed his own style, based on a freer handling of paint. He took particular pleasure in rendering the vibrant atmosphere of Venetian light and its dazzling effect on water. With its gentle fall of afternoon light, masterful colouring, and dynamic composition in which a series of gondolas bisect the canal, *The Rialto Bridge with the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi* epitomises Guardi's preference for atmosphere before topographical accuracy. Never quite as popular in his own day as Canaletto, Guardi was much admired in the nineteenth century for his impressionistic depictions of Venice and the Lagoon, which inspired many generations of artists visiting the city, most especially Turner.

Although there are significant paintings by Guardi in British public and private collections, the ambition, grandeur and magnificence of this rendering of Venice are unsurpassed. This is most especially true following the export of the picture's pendant, *A View of the Rialto Bridge, Looking North, from the Fondamenta del Carbon*, in 2011.

2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item(s).

This monumental canvas is one of Guardi's most ambitious and elegant paintings. The view of the Rialto from the north was a popular subject for pictures: most visitors arriving in the city first saw the Rialto Bridge from this viewpoint, and it had been the subject of several paintings by Canaletto (the earliest dated to 1725) as well as at least one engraving by Michele Marieschi. Guardi, however, chose a higher viewpoint than these other pictures; the width of his canvas enabled him to paint a

much grander panorama of the scene. With its unique perspective, its flickering light, and the prominence given to the everyday activity of merchants and boatmen, Guardi's picture is startlingly innovative.

We know from two sheets preserved in the Musée Bonnat, Bayonne, and Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, that Guardi made preparatory drawings for this painting on site. It seems probable that these two drawings were originally made on a single panoramic sheet, as can be seen in a preparatory drawing at the Louvre for this picture's pendant. We know, too, that although Guardi used the same composition in later works (see for example *The Grand Canal above the Rialto*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 53.3 x 85.7 cm), his autograph copies never achieved the same verve, and were on a much reduced scale. The soaring buildings at the left of the present picture and the extraordinary breadth of the canvas showing 13 of the bays of the Fabbriche Vecchie remained unparalleled.

The ArtUK website lists 77 paintings by Guardi in British public collections. Almost without exception, these paintings are on much smaller scale and of a far lesser ambition. Some, indeed, are early figure paintings before the artist began his great view paintings (for example, the paintings of *Abundance and Merit* in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, dated ca. 1740–50); others are capricci, many of which have beautiful impressionistic technique but lack the monumental drama of the present work.

The Rialto Bridge with the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi is one of only six large-scale canvases ever painted by Guardi: all six were conceived as pairs. The pendant to the present picture, *A View of the Rialto Bridge, Looking North, from the Fondamenta del Carbon*, was granted an export licence in 2011. The only pair of these large-scale canvases that remains together is at Waddesdon Manor, but the enormous Waddesdon canvases are early works, dark in tone, lacking the soaring elegance of the present picture.

The Rialto Bridge with the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi was probably acquired in Venice in 1768 by Chaloner Arcedeckne, in whose family it remained for the next 123 years, when it was acquired by Sir Edward Cecil Guinness. The picture has an unbroken British provenance stretching back almost 250 years. It is not only its remarkable composition that holds value for students and scholars, but also this early provenance, which provides key insights into British collecting practices and Grand Tour taste during the eighteenth century. Quite simply, no other work by Guardi in Britain enables the study and appreciation of this artist at his most successful and ambitious. No other painting in a UK collection – either public or private – encapsulates Guardi's contribution to the tradition of view painting in the same way as the present picture. Its permanent export from this country would be a sad loss.

¹ See www.artuk.org. The 122 paintings that come up in an initial search for Guardi include collaborations, copies and works 'in the style' of Guardi.