

CANALETTO IN ENGLAND

By Giorgio Di Marzo

To Giovanni Antonio Canal, a Venetian painter son of Bernardo Canal and then nicknamed "Canaletto", is dedicated the exhibition *Canaletto in England: A Venetian Artist Abroad 1746 – 1755*, from 25th January until 15th April 2007 at the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London, directed by Ian Dejardin.

Canaletto became famous in Albion thanks to the fact that Italy was one of the main fundamental stops of the *Grand Tour*, a long journey through the continental Europe – that could last from a few months up to eight years – undertaken from 18th century by the young, rich British aristocrats aimed to improve their education. The Venetian artist sold many of his artworks to the British who stopped in Venice, among them the merchant Joseph Smith who eventually became Canaletto's agent in England.

The Austrian War of Succession led to a reduction of the flow of English visitors into Venice, and Canaletto decided then to go himself to where his main market was: he moved to London in 1746 in order to re-launch his carrier, obtaining numerous commissions especially by the nobles that had already been knowing him by his fame, such as the Duke of Northumberland, Francis Greville, Lord Brooke and many others.

In London Canaletto re-invented the local atmospheres and gave vent to his sublime compositional and descriptive skills, which could master the *vedute* with infinite horizons and render, to the tiniest detail, the complex city scenes and the castles, thanks to his mastery in the use of light.

Many of his paintings show views from a not very far past, though it looks like a different London, a city that was at that time the largest and the most important in the world; a city that, by judging from Canaletto's masterpieces, has not just lost that record but has primarily lost her charm: London depicted by Canaletto is a young woman at the top of her splendour; the real one of nowadays, by

comparison, is a decrepit old woman in the soul who keeps herself up in the body by means of technology: is it only Canaletto's skills' "fault" or it is also the plain truth?

With Ian Dejardin, Director of Dulwich, we have made a tour of the exhibition that highlights the production by Canaletto during his staying in London. This includes *vedute* – highly detailed, usually large-scale painting of a cityscape or some other vista – of London and Venice, villas of the English aristocracy, medieval castles, and a selection of *capricci* - imaginary or fantastic views. The Director of Dulwich, interviewed by us, has talked about three of the main paintings that Canaletto drew in London: the videoclip is available through a link on our homepage website.

For further information:

Dulwich Picture Gallery:
www.dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk

Encyclopaedia Britannica:
www.britannica.com/eb/article-9019928/Canaletto

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