

# CHRISTIE'S

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## FRANCESCO GUARDI MASTERPIECE

*VENICE, THE BACINO DI SAN MARCO WITH THE PIAZZETTA  
AND THE DOGE'S PALACE*

**TO BE OFFERED FOR THE FIRST TIME  
IN OVER A CENTURY**

***FROM THE BARON HENRI DE ROTHSCHILD COLLECTION***

**AT CHRISTIE'S IN LONDON, JULY 2014**



Francesco Guardi (1712-1793)  
*Venice, the Bacino di San Marco with the Piazzetta and the Doge's Palace*  
Oil on canvas  
27 3/8 x 40 1/8 in. (69.5 x 102 cm.)  
Estimate: £8-10 million / \$13-16.5 million / €9.5-12 million

**London** – Christie's is proud to announce that *Venice, the Bacino di San Marco with the Piazzetta and the Doge's Palace* by Francesco Guardi (1712-1793) *From The Baron Henri de Rothschild Collection* will be offered for the first time in over a century, in the London *Old Master & British Paintings Evening Sale*, on Tuesday 8 July (estimate: £8-10 million / \$13-16.5 million / €9.5-12 million). Executed at the height of Guardi's maturity and depicting one of the most celebrated prospects of Venice, centering on the Doge's Palace, the caliber of this work is matched by its exceptional provenance. Originally in the collection of The Earls of Shaftesbury; it was acquired by Baron James-Edouard de Rothschild (1844-1881) and was in turn owned by his daughter Jeanne-Sophie-Henriette, Baronne Léonino (1875-1929) and then by her brother Baron Henri-James-Charles-Nathan de Rothschild (1872-1947), from whom it was inherited by the present owners. Not seen in public since 1954 (Brussels, Palais des Beaux-Arts, La Peinture Vénitienne), this work will go on a global tour starting with a public view at Christie's in Paris on 3 and 4 March; Moscow on 12 and 13 April (Guardi's work has long been

appreciated in Russia, through works held in the Hermitage collection and in other pre-revolutionary collections, as well as in the Pushkin Museum today); New York from 2 to 6 May; Hong Kong from 22 to 26 May; and London 5 to 8 July. The sale of this canvas provides international private collectors and institutions with a rare opportunity to acquire a work which is considered to be a masterpiece within Guardi's oeuvre. It is set to become one of the most valuable works by the artist sold at auction.

**Georgina Wilsenach, Head of Old Master & British Paintings at Christie's London:** *"We are honoured to present this exquisite view by Francesco Guardi at a moment when appreciation of his art is at an all-time high. Landmark exhibitions of his work in 2012-2013 marked the third centenary of the artist's birth, including the highly acclaimed exhibitions at the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris and the Museo Correr in Venice. The impressive result Christie's achieved for Canaletto's view of The Molo, Venice from The Bacino di San Marco in July 2013 (£8,461,875 estimate £4-6million), and the interest that painting garnered from international collectors across all categories, is an indication of the enduring appeal of important vedute. Venice, the Bacino di San Marco with the Piazzetta and the Doge's Palace from the Collection of Baron Henri de Rothschild is a testament to Guardi's evocative and poetic description of Venice."*

### THE VIEWPOINT AND TIME OF DAY

The viewpoint is in the Bacino di San Marco, roughly midway to the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore. From the left, with the eastern bays of the Zecca, Guardi shows the Libreria, designed by Sansovino, with towering behind this the Campanile, the Piazzetta, with the columns of Saint Mark and Saint Theodore, and behind the Torre dell'Orologio and the Basilica of Saint Mark's, the Doge's Palace which in Guardi's time remained the centre of the government of the Venetian Republic, the Ponte della Paglia, and the Carceri, with to the right of this smaller buildings and two palazzo fronting the Riva degli Schiavoni. As the shadows cast by the buildings indicate, the time is late morning.

Guardi was not the first to paint Venice from the Bacino; one might point to the background of the Tallard *Madonna* of Giorgione in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford as an early instance. He must have been aware of views by his predecessors, including Vanvitelli, Canaletto and Marieschi. Canaletto, except for views from across the Bacino, preferred to survey the buildings from more oblique angles, as indeed Guardi himself did on other occasions. Guardi, from the outset of his career as a *vedutista*, understood the potential of experimenting with more frontal viewpoints. He seems first to have painted the subject in a signed canvas in a New York private collection, associable with the group of pictures now known to have been supplied to English visitors in the late 1750s. The New York picture was followed in the 1760s by the great canvas at Waddesdon, in which the composition is extended on the left and more considerably on the right, and taken from a viewpoint across the Bacino.

Guardi returned to the theme in a sequence of pictures, datable after 1770 that are among the most characteristic productions of his mature phase. These include the masterpiece in the Musée Camondo, Paris, a picture at Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and three of varying scale in the Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, the lighting in which follows that of the New York picture, as is the case with several other smaller variants. In addition to the present painting, only one other smaller canvas at Philadelphia shows the buildings by morning light. In other respects the work to be offered may be seen as a direct development from the design of the New York picture, changing the field of the composition to show only three bays of the Zecca, but adding an additional building on the right.

### THE DATE OF THE WORK

Antonio Morassi, author of the comprehensive catalogue raisonné of Guardi's work, understood the poetry

of the picture, writing of its 'luce incandescente tinta di rosa e di azzurro e di verde, in una fantasmagoria di colori quasi stravagante' (*Incandescent light tinted with pink, green and blue, in an extravagant array of colors*). His dating of this work to about 1780 on stylistic grounds derives some circumstantial support from the reference to the Earl of Shaftesbury on a label attached to the stretcher. Anthony Ashley Cooper, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury (1761-1811) is known to have been in Rome in 1782, the date that appears on Batoni's whole-length portrait formerly at St. Giles's, and in 1784, when he is recorded at Naples. It seems very probable that he made an extended Grand Tour at this time, and it is highly likely that he visited Venice. *Venice, the Bacino di San Marco with the Piazzetta and the Doge's Palace* by Guardi is not among the 57 lots of pictures sold at Christie's, 15 May 1852, after the death of his brother and successor, Cropley, 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury, father of the celebrated reformer, in the previous year.

## PROVENANCE

Baron James-Edouard de Rothschild (1844-1881) was, like so many members of his family, a distinguished collector. This painting was inherited by his daughter, Jeanne-Sophie-Henriette, Baronne Léonino (1875-1929) and then by her brother, Baron Henri-James-Charles-Nathan de Rothschild (1872-1947), from whom it was inherited by the present owners.

The 'gout Rothschild' was expressed in many fields: where pictures were concerned, the Dutch masters of the 'Golden Age' and British portraits, as well inevitably as works by the great French masters of the eighteenth century, were seen as appropriate counterparts to French furniture. Guardi appealed to several members of the family, Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild buying the great pair of views now at Waddesdon, in about 1876.

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### About Christie's

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*\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.*

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*Images available on request  
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