



Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal) (1697–1768)

A view of the lower reaches of the Grand Canal, c.1730
Pen and ink over traces of pencil

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This work is one of a set of eight views of the Grand Canal none of which were made on the spot. Rather, they were carefully constructed in the studio from a number of open air sketches taken from many different vantage points, and are all independent works of art.

This view looks north-west along the lower reach of the Canal. Stylistically all eight views of the canal are very similar, showing splendid technique in pen work with precise diagonal hatching and well placed squiggles to suggest texture. The only stylistic difference between the eight works is Canaletto's treatment of the sky in each one.

The diagonal hatching seen here is typical of Canaletto's interest in rendering light and its effects – the sunlight as it falls from the upper right hand corner of the work is followed with mathematical precision by Canaletto's hatching.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born in Venice, Canaletto was a painter, etcher, and draughtsman whose fame rests on his painted views of Venice. Earliest sources of Canaletto report him working with his uncle on stage sets for operas by Antonio Vivaldi. Having, in his own words, solemnly excommunicated himself from the theatre, it appears that Canaletto next tried his hand at fantasy views and landscape.

Canaletto's most productive period was during the 1730s when his views of Venice were highly sort after by English nobility on the Grand Tour (the Grand Tour was a journey taken by well educated, high-born males from Northern Europe to complete their education).

STUDENT FOCUS QUESTIONS

- Canaletto was more famous in England than in his native Venice – why might this have been the case?
- Compare this drawing with the work by Guercino – how has Canaletto achieved light qualities on the water surfaces in this artwork?
- To what purpose has Canaletto used the river traffic in this drawing?

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

<http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/canaletto/>

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/C/canaletto.html>

<http://www.artcyclopedia.com/artists/canaletto.html>