

BELLOTTO E CANALETTO Wonder and light

Gallerie d'Italia – Piazza Scala
Intesa Sanpaolo Museum, Milan
25 November 2016 – 5 March 2017

Exhibition curated by Bożena Anna Kowalczyk

1. Canaletto, Bellotto's Teacher

When the young Bellotto entered his uncle Canaletto's atelier in around 1736, the master was at the height of his fame and success, under the aegis of his friend and dealer, Joseph Smith, a passionate collector of his works. In Canaletto's paintings from that time – views of Venice, Saint Mark's, the Grand Canal, public squares and churches – Bellotto discovered a perfect balance between precision and pictorial quality and between rationality and poetry, resulting from more than a decade of study of technique and perspective composition.

In order to cope with the commissions coming in one after the other at a frenetic rate, Canaletto had developed a rational, effective way of using the *camera obscura* and the sketches he obtained, using them on multiple occasions. *Campo Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice*, painted between 1738 and 1739 for Joseph Smith, is a perfect example of a composition created using the preparatory sketches preserved in the album now at the Accademia in Venice, and stands as a compendium of the technical methods that Bellotto, too, soon mastered: the precise drawing of architecture using a straight edge and compass, expert use of the technique of making incisions in the fresh paint in order to emphasise architectural details and enrich the painting's lighting, marking figures with touches of light and using dots for noses and eyes. Between 1736 and 1740, Bellotto, the only student of Canaletto who grasped and adopted his methods, used documentary sketches with more precision than the master himself, prepared the compositions for paintings and new drawings, and even sketched from life the figures that Canaletto then used in his own paintings.

In 1738-1739, he contributed fifteen paintings to the series of views of Venice commissioned by Henry Howard, 4th Earl of Carlisle, a commission mediated by Anton Maria Zanetti di Gerolamo. *The Grand Canal Looking South, from the Palazzo Foscari and Palazzo Moro Lin up to Santa Maria della Carità, Venice*, one of the first sent to Castle Howard, in Yorkshire, best exemplifies his abilities at his debut. Also for Castle Howard, the young painter made a copy of *Venice, the Library Looking North*, part of the series of four

Con il patrocinio di



In collaborazione con

STAATLICHE
KUNSTSAMMLUNGEN
DRESDEN



commissioned from Canaletto in 1738–1739 by Thomas Brand of Hoo, one of the noble English Whigs in contact with Smith during their stay in Venice, who were Canaletto's main clients.

The *Molo Looking West, with the Column of Saint Theodore to the Right, Venice* reveals the artist's achievement of full independence in the treatment of light and more precise rendering of details with respect to the 'model' provided by his uncle, who was by then at the Sforza Castle in Milan.

2. Bellotto, Canaletto's *Alter Ego*

In 1738, Bellotto joined the guild of Venetian painters and, in 1741, just before getting married, he could proudly state that he was able to support his family 'with his own hard work and profession'.

Although his views of Venice, similar in composition to those of Canaletto, differ in their silvery-grey tonalities, strong contrasting light, caricatured figures, unusual tendency towards realism and marked perspectival rigour, his first biographer, his friend Pietro Guarienti, inspector of the Royal Gallery of Dresden, stated that 'distinguishing them from those of his uncle would require a powerful intelligence'. In the early 1740s, Bellotto produced a few views, in complete compositional independence, of corners of Venice that had never before been portrayed by view painters. *Santa Maria dei Miracoli and the Apse of Santa Maria Nova, Venice* is the most outstanding example of the realism and cold light that characterise his painting.

During those same years, Canaletto continued to paint for the English nobility, with Joseph Smith as mediator. Smith also commissioned a series of paintings for his own residence in Venice. Among them, thirteen overdoor *capricci*, two of which were inspired by magnificent paintings of Saint Mark's commissioned by Sir Hugh Smithson, who later became the Earl of Northumberland.

Bellotto contributed to the workshop's production for the English market. The two large canvases *The Grand Canal with Santa Maria della Salute from Campo Santa Maria del Giglio, Venice* and *Saint Mark's Square Looking South-West, Venice* marked by a perfected, mature technique and figures resembling those of Canaletto but with more characterisation, are from the collection of the Earls of Craven in Coombe Abbey, Warwickshire. Reunited here for the first time since their sale in 1961, they are only two of the many paintings by Bellotto preserved in English collections that were attributed to Canaletto until recently. The discoveries continue, as we see in the case of *The Grand Canal Looking East, from the Palazzo Loredan Cini in Campo San Vio, Venice*, the attribution of which was only very recently changed from Canaletto to Bellotto.

3. Bellotto's First Trip far from Venice

On 22 April 1740, Bernardo Bellotto received thirty-six 'Filippi' silver coins, just over the price of a small painting by Canaletto, from Anton Maria Zanetti di Girolamo on behalf of the marchese Andrea Gerini, who invited him to Florence. This is the earliest document of Zanetti's patronage, who organized the young view painter's trip to Florence, where he painted views for the marchese Andrea Gerini and Vincenzo Riccardi – two of the most important Florentine collectors of the eighteenth century – already signing himself 'Bernardo B. detto il Canaletto'.

During his stay in Florence, which lasted from the end of April to 30 September 1740, Bellotto met Giuseppe Zocchi, a painter for the Gerini family, who was entrusted with introducing view painting in Florence, in the wake of Venice, Rome and Naples. Bellotto taught Zocchi what he had learned from Canaletto about technique and perspective composition. Two sketches by Bellotto, one from the Museo Correr and the other in a private collection, are evidence of the importance of their relationship: Zocchi used them for his own paintings, from which Fabio Berardi in turn drew his own fine engravings. This is how we know that on Bellotto's subsequent trip to Rome he passed through Rota, a small village built on a tufaceous rock near Tolfa, recognisable in this group of works by Bellotto, Zocchi and Berardi.

The sketch of the porta della Carta del palazzo Ducale, traditionally attributed to Canaletto, is paired for comparison with the perspective drawings of the south facade of Saint Mark's Basilica, perhaps contemporary, on the versos of Bellotto's two drawings of Rota.

The relationship between Gerini and Bellotto seems to have been satisfactory to both parties: the marchese sent the artist a gift of two volumes of prints by Zocchi, *Scelta di XXIV vedute delle principali contrade, piazze, chiese e palazzi della città di Firenze* and *Vedute delle ville e d'altri luoghi della Toscana*, published in Florence in 1744–45, and in exchange, Canaletto's nephew sent him 'two little pictures' which we think might have been the *Capriccio with a bridge on the river* and its lost *pendant*, of which Zocchi made copies.

The Archbishop of Milan, Giuseppe Pozzobonelli, also became one of Bellotto's patrons, commissioning in 1744 *The Churches of Sant'Eufemia and San Paolo Converso, Milan* and a view of Vaprio. In 1754, the archbishop received two landscapes by Zocchi, one of which designed by the Venetian, as a gift from the marchese Gerini.

4. The *Capriccio*

As in the case of their views of real places, Canaletto and Bellotto exchanged motifs and subjects in their *capricci*, but they differed in their conception of the artistic genre, which reached the height of its expression in eighteenth-century Venetian art, as in theatre and music.

In Canaletto, the *capriccio* has a dimension of pure fantasy: evidence of this is found in the drawings that he made for Joseph Smith and the prints in the series *Views, Some taken from places, others invented*, which he began engraving in around 1740 and that were published after Smith's appointment to the post of British Consul in Venice on 9 May 1744. Whereas for Bellotto, this expressive genre was nourished by real subjects, recorded in Venice and during his travels, but then put together 'a *capriccio*' (at whim).

In the *Capriccio with a Ruined Triumphal Arch on the Shore of the Lagoon* in the Museo di Asolo, Bellotto combined Roman and Venetian motifs according to his own taste. The drawing that Canaletto made for Smith with a similar composition, exquisite for its delicate use of grey-blue watercolour, follows a preparatory drawing by Bellotto for the painted *Capriccio*, perfecting its line. Bellotto's drawing *Capriccio with the Ruins of a Roman Temple and a Solitary Column*, an early idea for the second *pendant* in Asolo, departs from Canaletto's style through the use of pure contour and a short, nervous line. It was, however, used as a model for another sheet by Canaletto, with hatched shading, in the British Royal Collection. Later, in the 1740s, Bellotto drew the superb *Capriccio with a Classical Gate and Motifs from Padua and Verona* for Joseph Smith, demonstrating his full mastery of the brown watercolour subjected to his dramatic expressiveness.

In their etchings, the compositional elements shared by the two artists are just as frequent and clear. The motifs found in some of Canaletto's beautiful prints, including *The Portico with a Lantern* and *Capriccio with a Cart on a Bridge*, appear in Bellotto's youthful engravings, in his drawings and in his paintings, up to his late period. In *Capriccio with a Veneto Villa*, made by Bellotto in around 1760, not only do we find the cart with the bulls on the bridge, but we can also recognise elements from the drawings made in the 1740s: in the foreground, there is a Paduan Renaissance villa, the subject of another splendid sheet by Canaletto.

5. Towards Rome

'Bei soggetti ei trovò quivi nel genere specialmente dell'antichità' (he found beautiful subjects there, particularly in the genre of Roman antiquity), we read in the famous passage by Anton Maria Zanetti di Alessandro, Canaletto's biographer, writing about the artist's sojourn in Rome between 1719 and 1720,

when he transformed from a stage designer into a painter of views and *capricci*. The twenty-three small sheets that he made during that trip (now at the British Museum and the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt) served as a valuable repertory that Canaletto used on various occasions. Some of them also guided Bellotto's choice of subjects when he made his own trip to Rome, a journey documented solely by his works and imagined to have taken place between late spring and early summer 1742. On the basis of those drawings, Canaletto painted *The Temple of Antoninus and Faustina in the Roman Forum, Rome* and *The Roman Forum Looking towards the Campidoglio, with the Temple of Castor and Pollux, Rome*, which Bellotto, prior to going to Rome, made faithful copies of for Smith (now in a private collection). On his return from Rome, the nephew, in the larger version of *The Roman Forum Looking North-West, in the Direction of the Campidoglio, Rome*, corrected a series of architectural details – the shape of chimneys, now Roman, the height of the columns of the temple of the Castor and Pollux, the distances between the windows of the Palazzo Senatorio – while keeping the same perspective composition, a synthesis of the site that would be impossible to take in from a single point of view.

'In his Roman paintings and drawings, architecture was given a degree of prominence that Bellotto had only exceptionally granted previously and would only exceptionally grant subsequently' (Kozakiewicz 1972). *Piazza Navona Looking North, Rome* and *The Santo Spirito gate Looking North-West, Rome – the pendant to the Arch of Titus, Rome* – clearly exemplify Bellotto's authentic and independent interest in the modern works by Borromini and Sangallo the Younger, in addition to those of antiquity. Roman motifs were from that point forward an important element of his *capricci*.

The River Arno Looking North-West, in the Direction of the Ponte alla Carraia, Florence and *The River Arno Looking South-West, in the Direction of the Ponte Vecchio, Florence* show such a maturity of technique and such a rendering of light studied at different times of day as to suggest that Bellotto made a second trip to the Tuscan capital, certainly after the one in the summer of 1740 – documented by a sketch of the view looking towards the ponte alla Carraia, now at the Uffizi – perhaps, therefore, on the occasion of his possible trip to Rome.

6. Bellotto: Bold Perspectives

After Rome and Florence, in the mid-1740s Bellotto confirmed his compositional independence in his views of Milan, Turin and Verona. 'The more substantial views' of these cities, depicted from carefully considered points of view and documenting aspects that are now changed, are valuable documents for the cities they portray.

In the beautiful *Sforza Castle, Milan*, the castle, with its towers and fortifications, spreads out to the horizon, serving as the backdrop for a field furrowed by strips of beaten earth, in a composition that recalls the Paduan houses and churches in Canaletto's print *The valley field*. But the idea to depict the castle from the less-representative side, the piazza d'Armi, projecting it against the city, was a wholly original, intentional choice. The perspective chosen for *The Palazzo dei Giureconsulti and the Broletto Nuovo, Milan*, with the cathedral far off in the distance, cramped in the background, is stunning. Even if the canvas was cut, as some believe, its view of the palazzo dei Giureconsulti, with the corner of the palazzo della Ragione in the foreground, is a demonstration of virtuosity and beyond comparison. The telescope perspective of *The Churches of Sant'Eufemia and San Paolo Converso, Milan* recalls that of *Piazza San Martino with the Cathedral, Lucca* which Bellotto painted in 1740. But the emphasis on the facade of San Paolo crowned by statues of angels is an element of new, exuberant creativity.

In *The Old Bridge on the River Po, Turin* the choice of perspective is the most brilliant of Bellotto's entire repertoire up to that point. It was his most carefully considered and prepared painting to date, the work of an Enlightenment painter and historian who wanted to reveal a city, even at the cost of forcing the perspective. With this work and its almost equally brilliant *pendant*, *The Royal Palace, from the Garden Side*, followed shortly after by the *Castelvecchio and the Ponte Scaligero, Verona* depicted from an ideal

spot on the Regaste di San Zeno in order to capture the two military structures in their full extension and beauty, Bellotto demonstrated his readiness to take on the great cities of Europe, in his role as a fully independent view painter.

7. Landscape

During his sojourn in England (1746–ca. 1755), Canaletto showed himself to be sensitive to the beauty of the landscape around the castles, along the Thames, in Windsor and in Eton, giving it a stylised appearance that complements the sophisticated look of the architecture.

For Bellotto, the commissions for views of Lombardy in 1744 were his first opportunity to live in close contact with nature. Fascinated by the natural beauty of the places, he studied their forms and reaction to light. He was keenly interested in the tall cypresses and bushes along the Adda, and in Gazzada he recorded the varied shades of green around the villa and village and on the hills in the distance and reproduced the rows of trees against the light profile of the hills and the ones standing out on the hilltops.

Throughout his travels in Europe, he continued his close observation of the landscape, which became an unavoidable backdrop for his rendering of the panoramas of cities and castles, in Dresden, Vienna and Nymphenburg, almost like a lyrical escape from the foregrounds. In Pirna, a Saxon city south-east of Dresden, he searched for points of view and compositional solutions that gave the landscape an importance equal to that of the architecture. He depicted the real shapes of the trees, studied the reflections on the water and also introduced cows and flocks of sheep, borrowing the motif from the prints of Nicolaes Berchem. His compositions were unprecedented, but his depiction of boundless panoramas and the play of light and shadows projected by the high clouds suggests that he must have studied paintings by the seventeenth-century Dutch painters Jan van den Goyen, Philipps Koninck and Jacob van Ruisdael, all of whom were represented in collections in Saxony.

In his final years, in Warsaw, landscape was the subject of two large views – *View of the Wilanów Meadows, Warsaw* and its *pendant*, *View of Ujazdów, Warsaw* – and four paintings of the castle of Wilanów, in which the garden is the main focus, a symphony of green. Green was his favourite colour, a preference that emerges in his descriptions of his flat in Dresden (*Catalogo de Danni*). Comparing these final masterpieces with the early Gazzada landscapes, we see that Bellotto had developed a deep feeling of participation in nature and achieved the faithful rendering of its true forms.

8. Canaletto in London, Bellotto in Dresden

Canaletto's departure for London in 1746 and Bellotto's for Dresden in April 1747, also marked the definitive separation of their figurative worlds.

In London, Canaletto was able to devote himself to the increasingly sophisticated stylisation of his painting, aided by the delicate English light and the shapes and colours of the architecture and landscape, whereas Bellotto's task in Dresden was instead to concretely depict the splendour of the city and its Baroque buildings. Both Canaletto and Bellotto proved to have an admirable ability to understand the nature of their new surroundings, and their artistic training and Enlightenment perspective led them to share the same mental outlook in dealing with the cultures they were portraying.

The sophisticated *Northumberland House, London*, in which Canaletto recreates myriad of details with his light touch (this is the most 'Venetian' of the views from Canaletto's time in England, for the lively street life, workshops and inns, and the perspective of the public square), reveals the quintessence of English civilisation, just as Bellotto's *The Neumarkt from the Jüdenhof, Dresden* reveals that of Saxony. Both are works that fully met their patrons' expectations.

With the fourteen views of the city of Dresden, painted for August III between 1747 and 1752, Bellotto created his first major cycle, a masterpiece. The views of the river Elba, the fortifications, the court of the Zwinger, the public squares and the churches were painted in pairs of *pendants*. And while painting the versions for the court, Bellotto also created replicas for the Prime Minister, Count Heinrich Brühl. Identical in size, the replicas differ in the tonality of the sky, water and architecture and in the small details, particularly the figures. The two versions of the view of *Dresden from the Left Bank of the River Elba, the Castle to the Left, the Hofkirche Opposite*, compared here for the first time and united with the pendant in the Royal Collection, *Dresden from the Left Bank of the River Elba, down from the Ramparts*, are the sole exception, due to their different depictions of the Hofkirche, which was being built at the time: in the version for the king, the tower is already in place, in accordance with the architect Gaetano Chiaveri's plans, whereas the version for Brühl mirrors the actual situation at the time when the painting was made.

While producing his first paintings in Dresden, Bellotto also created etchings of them, admirably recreating their details and light. The only surviving autograph drawings are from his period in Pirna, based on the paintings and used for the replicas and engravings. Presented here with the paintings, and also, in the case of *The Kreuzkirche, Dresden*, with a magnificent print, they clearly illustrate Bellotto's rigorous working methods.

9. Private Passions

The inventory of Bellotto's personal library, part of the important, recently discovered *Catalogo de Danni* lists 1,078 works, distinguished for their incredible variety. The twenty-eight titles selected for display in the exhibition, in the same editions as those owned by Bellotto, were chosen to reveal the artist's interests, which are even more surprising.

Some of the texts are 'predictable', but useful for confirming his seriousness, like the volumes by Andrea Pozzo, Ferdinando Bibiena and Cesare Vecellio (displayed with studies of Polish and Balkan costumes, in poses and in perspective styles inspired by the figures in the book), and the unexpected Francesco Borromini, whom Bellotto also studied first-hand, as evidenced by *Piazza Navona Looking North, Rome* and a drawing in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw, but also the refined George Berkeley, explaining the theory of perception.

The substantial collection of classical authors is represented here by the French edition of Horace (freely cited in Latin in the *Architectural Capriccio with Self-Portrait* which dominates the room), alongside the collection that we might consider the most striking of all for its breadth and quality, that of philosophical texts, which included such authors as Voltaire, Montesquieu and Hume.

And then there was his interest in 'current affairs publishing', including volumes added to the Index and censored, with works by Paolo Sarpi, Gregorio Leti and Giovan Francesco Loredan; his passion for reading, with texts by Marino (*Adone*) and Cervantes but also *Tom Jones* by Fielding, *Paméla* by Richardson, and the scandalous *Papesse Jeanne* by Spanheim, still fresh from the printer; licentious works, which Bellotto did not disdain (Pietro Aretino) and the ultra-current Goudar and his description of the Lisbon earthquake. And then there were the proponents of the Enlightenment, Muratori and Maffei, which demonstrate his deep background, the fruit of keeping himself current and study.

The idea that Bellotto was passionate about theatre and had contacts in that sphere in Vienna and Dresden was already suggested by the print made in Vienna, dedicated to Count Durazzo, *Le Turc généreux*, the two *Architectural Capricci* of 1764, in the style of Giuseppe Galli Bibiena, and a whole series of architectural fantasies from his second period in Dresden, the quality of which is represented in the exhibition by the first version of his celebrated *Architectural Capriccio with Self-Portrait*. But the book inventory allows us to clarify the breadth of his interest in the theatre, with volumes of the classics and the moderns, in complete editions, represented in the exhibition by Molière, Goldoni and Metastasio and one special volume, the

Opere of Giovanni Claudio Pasquini, published by Bernardo's brother Michele Bellotti in Arezzo. It has also been a pleasure to show that while in London Canaletto was also in some way linked to the theatre, considering his exquisite *Stage Set*, which has been interpreted here and correctly dated.

Linked to the manuscript of the inventory is a fragment of a draft of a letter discovered on the back of a figure sketch in the National Museum in Warsaw, which Bellotto was probably writing to King August III and is dated 26 February 1762. Here we find a request for compensation for the damage caused by the Prussian bombardment in July 1760 that destroyed his home in the centre of Dresden, on the Salzgasse, along with his library and art collection.

10. An Avant-Garde Chronicler

Bellotto was not a photographer but rather a meticulous, passionate and sensitive chronicler of European civilisation. His attention to realism intensified in his final years, during which he produced images with immense historical value: in Dresden, a city gravely tested by the Seven Years' War, and in the Warsaw of the last king of Poland, Stanisław II August Poniatowski, marked by profound social conflict, where extreme wealth and desperate poverty coexisted, the capital of a country in serious political decline but pulsing with life.

The reassuring image presented in the print of *The Fortress of Koenigstein, with Lilienstein* came nearly ten years after the dramatic, icily lit painting commissioned by August III and produced shortly after the invasion of Saxony by the troops of Frederick II of Prussia. It was there, in that impenetrable fortress, that August III brought his art collections to keep them safe. Other works offer a raw vision of the city's suffering during those years of war (*The Ruins of the Kreuzkirche, Dresden* and *The Ruins of the Outskirts of Pirna, Dresden*). We do not know whether these images were the result of specific commissions or, as is more probable, the fruit of the choices of an Enlightened artist, serving for the first time as a chronicler and shocked witness of the disasters brought by war.

The images of Warsaw in the excitement of the new Baroque buildings, depicting ornate magnates' palazzos and votive churches, lively markets and bustling street life, are even more striking when one thinks of the future destruction wrought by World War II, which seems to have been sadly prefigured in the views of the ruins of Dresden.

Bellotto did not shun new interests and brought the ones he had cultivated from the beginning to their full expression, interests surprisingly in line with the latest trends in English painting: the study of horses and equestrian portraits, and landscape. *Colonel Königsfels Teaching Horsemanship to Prince Józef Poniatowski* is an extraordinarily innovative painting, as with the others in the same series. Delivered to the court of the King of Poland in 1773, they were to decorate an annex of the Belvedere Palace, the apartment of 'Madame Byszewska', where they were recorded in 1795. Of the two stunning landscapes, *View of the Wilanó Meadows, Warsaw* and *View of the Castle of Ujazdów, Warsaw* with nobles and peasants, depicted in the foreground next to thatched-roof houses and livestock, clearly alluding to the uniqueness of Polish society, only the former satisfied the patron, whereas the latter was immediately given to an unknown individual.