



Venice: Piazza San Marco

Date

1875-1900

Primary Maker

Unknown artist

Medium

Gelatin silver print

Description

Photograph of the painting, "Venice: Piazza San Marco" by Canaletto, located in the the National Gallery in London. The painting depicts the Piazza San Marco, the most famous square in Venice. We look through an archway, in the shadows just behind a group of figures; it is as if we are walking past them along the colonnade. A vendor surrounded by baskets shows his wares to two gentlemen. A man perched on a barrel turns his head towards us, while another peeps out from behind a pillar. The archway focuses attention on the buildings beyond: the Basilica di San Marco, the city's most sacred church, and to the right, its campanile (bell tower). The paving stones and buildings that line the square recede at a sharp angle, which Canaletto exaggerated, leading our eye deeper into the scene. Dots and swirls of paint

pick out people in the distance, creating the impression that we are looking on from afar. Another painting in the series is "Venice: Piazza San Marco and the Colonnade of the Procuratie Nuove" which depicted Piazza San Marco from another angle. Canaletto painted these works during the late 1750s, shortly after his return to Venice from England. Because of their small scale and upright format they are somewhat unusual when compared to the artist's earlier panoramic views, but his choice of composition was still innovative. In most of his paintings, we look across the Grand Canal or the lagoon that surrounds Venice. Here, Canaletto has experimented with viewpoints taken from within an architectural structure, for example an archway within a colonnade. His mature phase prompted certain stylistic changes: he moved towards sombre colouring and darker tonality, and he tended to paint small canvases. This appealed to Venetian collectors and foreign tourists – smaller paintings would have been more affordable and easier to transport. (Source: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/canaletto-venice-the-piazza-san-marco#painting-group-info>, accessed 6/19/2023)

Dimensions

Overall: 11 1/8 x 9 in. (28.3 x 22.9 cm)