LOT 41
PROPERTY OF THE VISCOUNT FITZHARRIS
MICHELE MARIESCHI
VENICE 1710 - 1743
VENICE, A VIEW OF THE PIAZZA SAN MARCO WITH THE USCITA IN POZZETTA OF DOGE PIETRO GRIMANI ON 30 JUNE 1741
oil on canvas
56.5 by 113 cm.; 22 1/4 by 44 1/2 in.

ESTIMATE 1,000,000-1,500,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 1,202,500 GBP

PROVENANCE
Acquired by James Harris, M.P. (1709-1780) in Venice for 20 guineas, and imported for him from Venice by the dealer William Hayter of London in March 1743, and thereafter at The Close, Salisbury, Wiltshire and The Manor House, Great Durnford, Wiltshire;
His son Sir James Harris, GCB, PC (1746-1820) created Baron Malmesbury in 1788 and Viscount Fitzharris and 1st Earl of Malmesbury in 1800;
Thence by direct descent.

LITERATURE
James Harris, An Account of my Pictures, private Ms. begun 1739, p. 7;
G. Delogu, Pittori veneti minori del Settecento, Venice 1930, p. 111;
R. Toledano, Michele Marieschi, l'opera completa, Milan 1988, p. 64. no. V.3.1;
D. Succi, Marieschi tra Canaletto e Guardi, exhibition catalogue, Turin 1989, p. 149, reproduced p. 150, figs. 170-71;
CATALOGUE NOTE

It is rare indeed that even the greatest of Venetian view paintings can be traced back to the moment of its original purchase in the mid 18th century, and rarer still that such a work can show an unbroken provenance from that day to this, but this magnificent veduta by Michele Marieschi can boast both. A late work by the artist, painted in 1741, just two years before his early death, it was one of two paintings by Marieschi bought in Venice in January 1743 by the Englishman James Harris (1709-1780). The painting thus has the rare distinction of having its attribution confirmed by a contemporary document, as well as being one of the relatively few paintings by Marieschi which can be linked through a documented purchase to a specific collector or patron.

Harris himself records the purchase of the two Marieschis and two other works by Bernardo Bellotto in his Account of My Pictures compiled from 1739 onwards (fig. 1):

'Four Views of Venice - the two larger by Marieschi, representing, one of them, St. Mark's place on a public day; the other, the entrance of the great Canal - the two ...by Antonio Bellotti, one representing the Custom House; the other the Rialto. The two first cost 20 Guineas, and two last ten. They were painted all at Venice, & imported at my Request by Mr. Wm. Hayter of London Merch. 1743'.

Harris acquired this picture and its pendant directly from Marieschi's own house, following the painter's early death on the 18 January that same year due (according to his biographers) to his 'excessive application to work and study'. As the painting itself can be dated by the events depicted in it to 1741 or later, Harris was almost certainly its first owner. Although the inventory of Marieschi's possessions at his death is too summary to permit the precise identification of either painting, it is interesting to note that the 'bottega da quadri' organised by Marieschi's brother-in-law on behalf of his widow clearly did not scruple to use the more commercially valuable name of Canaletto for some of Marieschi's own works, but Harris's own notes makes it clear that he knew what he had acquired.

Such a documented provenance at this date is rare indeed for a work by Marieschi. The only other comparable record for an English patron of Marieschi's work is that for Henry Howard, 4th Earl of Carlisle (1696-1758), who commissioned a series of no less than eighteen venetian vedute from Marieschi in 1738 for his seat at Castle Howard in Yorkshire. James Harris bought two other works by Marieschi. At the same time as the purchase of the present work he acquired a view of the Grand Canal with the entrance to the Cannareggio, which is often described as a pendant to this painting, but is in fact of slightly different dimensions and painted from a quite different viewpoint. Slightly later he acquired from William Hayter the panoramic view of The Bacino di San Marco, another late work of around 1739-40 which is generally acknowledged to be one of Marieschi's greatest masterpieces, though at the time it is not clear whether Harris believed it to be by Marieschi or Canaletto (fig. 2). At the same time that he bought the present work, Harris also bought two paintings by Bernardo Bellotto: a view of The Entrance to the Grand Canal looking west from the Dogana, and its pendant The Rialto Bridge from the North. Harris also owned Canaletto's View of the Old Horse Guards Parade, which was bequeathed to him by the Earl of Radnor in 1757 and is now in the collection of the Lord Lloyd-Webber Art Foundation. A Fellow of the Royal Society and a Trustee of the British Museum, Harris's great-grandson, the 3rd Earl of Malmesbury described him as 'passionately fond of music and art.' and recorded how he 'patronised the best painters of the day'. Upon his death in 1780, his collection passed
to his son James, later first Earl of Malmesbury (1746-1820). It is interesting to note in passing that in the inventory drawn up at Harris's death the painting had already acquired the more fashionable name of Canaletto, less than forty years after its purchase. Lord Malmesbury himself was a diplomat of some considerable distinction. Regardless of the political hue of the government, he served continuously at foreign Courts from 1768 to 1789, including those of Frederick the Great of Prussia in Berlin between 1772 and 1776 and the Empress Catherine the Great of Russia in Saint Petersburg between 1776-83. For his services he was awarded the order of the Bath by George III in December 1778, and presented with the order by Catherine the Great herself in March 1779. The Empress also gave him a fine snuff box as a token of her personal esteem (fig 3).

It is not hard to see what attracted Harris to this magnificent view of the Piazza San Marco, for it is surely the finest of all Marieschi's views of this famous square. The painting bustles with energy and colour, and the paint is thickly applied with a fluency and panache that raises it far above much of his output. The great Venetian scholar Antonio Morassi described it as 'Splendido...tra le più belle mai da lui dipinte' ('splendid - among the most beautiful he ever painted'). Toledano, writing much later, observed how Marieschi's choice of a viewpoint slightly to the left of the central line of the piazza results in 'una visione spigolata d'una spazialità molto dinamica' (a sparkling vision of particularly dynamic spaciousness').

Although Harris did not know it, the painting is also one of Marieschi's relatively rare depictions of an actual historical event in the piazza. As Succi was the first to observe, the painting depicts the festival organised upon the occasion of the election of Pietro Grimani as Doge on the 30 June 1741. In the centre background of the painting we can make out the cortège of arsenalotti6 carrying the pozzetto (a small litter or sedan in the shape of a small well) in which the new Doge is carried out of the Basilica di San Marco following his Inauguration rite. In accordance with custom, as he proceeds, the newly elected Doge throws money to the assembled crowds, who are kept in order by more arsenalotti wielding large sticks. Venetian custom decreed a minimum of 150 ducats and a maximum of 500 ducats for these gifts, to encourage the new Doge to exercise a careful balance between frugality and waste. In the foreground more aristocratic spectators are watching proceedings from platforms constructed from planks raised upon trestles and barrels. After the procession, the rite of Coronation took place in the courtyard of the Doges' Palace, at the base of the Scala dei Giganti.

Such a record of a contemporary event is very rare in Marieschi's oeuvre. Another such is the View of the Rialto bridge with the arrival of the new Patriarch Francesco Antonio Correr, today in Claydon House, Buckinghamshire (National Trust), which depicts the events of the 7 February 1735, but this level of historical detail seems to have been a rare concern to Marieschi. Given Marieschi's very short and productive working career, cut short by his death at only thirty two, such dates are nevertheless very valuable in trying to establish a viable chronology for his oeuvre. The present canvas is an outstanding example of the more sparkling touch of this, his final phase. A prolific artist given his short career, Marieschi often preferred to delegate the staffage in his views to specialist figure painters. As Toledano, Degli Erri and Pedrocco all observe, the figures here are the work of his frequent collaborator Giovanni Antonio Guardi (1699-1760), who had, for example, also worked with him on the Correr painting of 1735, and continued to contribute to his paintings on a regular basis, most notably the series of forty-three turcherie commissioned by Count Johannes Matthias von der Schulenberg in 1741-3.

2. The set is now dispersed, but included for example, the View of the Molo, sold in these Rooms on 3 July 2013, lot 41, for £914,500.
4. For which see, for example, D. Succi, in the catalogue of the exhibition, La Venecia del otro 'Canaletto': el joven Bernardo Bellotto', Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 29 May - 2 September 2001, p. 69.
6. Ms. annotation of July 1958 kept at the Biblioteca d'Arte in the University of Venice, cited by Toledano, op. cit.,
8. These were the workers and garrison of the Arsenale or military nerve centre of Venice, who performed various ceremonial functions during the city's festivals.

Fig. 1

James Harris, _An Account of my Pictures_, autograph ms, begun 1739, fol. 7.

Fig. 2

Michele Marieschi, _The Bacino di San Marco_, about 1739-40

Fig. 3

An oval Louis XV enamelled gold snuff-box presented by Catherine the Great to Sir James Harris Private collection, on loan to the Victoria and Albert Museum; image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum