LOT 114
PROPERTY OF A GENTLEMAN
FRANCESCO GUARDI
VENICE 1712 - 1793
VIEW OF THE VILLA LOREDAN AT PAESE
oil on canvas
18 1/4 by 30 1/8 in.; 46.5 by 76.4 cm.
ESTIMATE 8,000,000-12,000,000 USD
Lot Sold: 8,216,000 USD

PROVENANCE
Commissioned from the artist by John Strange (1732 – 1799), British Resident in Venice, by 1778/86;
Offered London, European Museum, May 1799, lot 187 ‘A view near Padua [sic], Mr. Strange’s country seat, Guardi’, or lot 200 ‘A view near Padua, Mr. Strange’s country house, Guardi’, both apparently unsold;
Strange’s deceased sale, London, Christie’s, March 15, 1800 (1st day), part of lot 97 as ‘Guardi – A pair of views near Padua, Mr. Strange’s country house’, for 7 Guineas;
Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Milligan (1832 – 1902), Caldwell Hall, Burton-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire;
His sale, London, Christie’s, March 13, 1883, part of lot 35 ‘A pair of views of country seats near Venice, with figures’, or 36 ‘A pair of views of ditto’ (sold together for 500 Guineas to Davis [sic])
With Charles Davies, London;
Harold Sidney Harmondsworth, 1st Viscount Rothermere (1868 – 1940), by the 1920’s;
By whose Estate sold, May 1941, to Herbert Bier, Torquay;
Anonymous sale (“The Property of a Trust”), London, Christie’s, December 8, 1989, lot 114, where sold for £3,080,000 to the present owner.

EXHIBITED
Zurich, Kunsthau, Schönheit des 18. Jahrhunderts, 1955, no. 134;
London, Royal Academy, Italian Art and Britain, 1960, no. 446;
Sydney, The Art Gallery of New South Wales, The James Fairfax collection of old masters, 1992, (unnumbered);

LITERATURE
J. Byam Shaw, The Drawings of Francesco Guardi, 1951, p. 65, under no. 30;
Exhibition Catalogue, Zurich, 1955, p. 33, no. 134;
Exhibition Catalogue, Photographs of Venetian Villas, circulated by the Smithsonian Insitution, 1955 – 57, illustrated on the front cover (detail);
K.T. Parker, Catalogue of the Collection of Drawings in the Ashmolean Museum II, Italian Schools, 1956, pp. 510 and 511, under nos. 1015 and 1016;
no. 115;
R. Pallucchini, La Pittura Veneziana del Settecento, 1960, p. 248 and fig. 651;
F. Haskell, “Francesco Guardi as Vedutista and Some of his Patrons,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, vol. XXIII, 1960, p. 270 and note 64, pl. 35b;
J. Bean, 100 European Drawings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1964, n.p., under no. 46;
P. Zampetti, Guardi, exhibition catalogue, Palazzo Grassi, Venice, 1965, p. 266, under no. 139, p. 319, under drawing no. 59;
A. Massari, Giorgio Massari: architetto Veneziano del settecento, Venice, 1971, p. 34;
A. Morassi, in Mercedes Precerutti-Garberi, Frescoes from Venetian Villas, New York, 1971, p.1;
A. Morassi, Guardi: Tutti i Disegni, Venice 1975, p. 154, under nos. 421, 422, 423;
B. Koevoets, Oude tekeningen in het bezit van de Gemeentemusea van Amsterdam waaronder de collectie Fodor, vol. 1, Amsterdam 1976, p. 33;
J.G. Links, Canaletto, 1982, p. 240;
D. Succi, Francesco Guardi: itinerario dell’avventura artistica, Milan 1993, pp. 98 – 99, illus. p. 100;
Fisher, 1994, p. 8, fig. 7;
M.A. Visentini, ‘Ville e giardini nell’opera di Francesco Guardi’ in Alessandro Bettagno (ed.), I Guardi: vedute, capricci,
CATALOGUE NOTE
This View of the Villa Loredan at Paese is one of a series of four canvases which are unique in Guardi’s considerable oeuvre. It depicts the principal façade of the villa as seen from the road running from Treviso to Castelfranco Veneto, along with its barchessa, and other dependencies. The other canvases in the series depict the Villa Loredan from the Garden Side (private collection, New York, fig. 1), the Villa Pisani Sagredo (sometimes called the Villa del Timpano Arcuato), at Paese (private collection, fig. 2), and the Garden of the Palazzo Contarini del Zaffo, Venice (Art Institute of Chicago, fig. 3).
Guardi’s mastery of the genre of vedute is nowhere better exemplified than in the View of the Villa Loredan. It represents a departure from the artist’s usual production of Venetian scenes and fantastical capricci, and rather is a portrait of a country house, much in the English fashion. This is hardly surprising given Guardi’s clientele, which was often British. However, while not his typical subject, the Villa Loredan allowed Guardi ample scope in which to create the beautiful effects of light and color, the so-called “magia d’effetto” which are the hallmark of his style. Guardi has painted the north-facing front of the villa at a slight angle, and the light and shadows cast across the road and lawn by the afternoon sun help to create a sense of depth and movement.
Although the identity of most of Guardi’s original clientele remains relatively obscure, this series of four canvases is unusual in that the patron who commissioned the works and their early provenance are well documented. John Strange (1732-1799) was the British resident at Venice from 1774-1789. A man of varied interests in an enlightened age, Strange was a published geologist and antiquarian as well as a diplomat. However, it was as a connoisseur and collector where he made his greatest mark. He was voracious in his habits, acquiring large numbers of specimens for his natural history collections, antiquities, prints, drawings, and a vast library (which took Sotheby’s some 29 days to disperse in his posthumous sale).
Most significant, however, was his collection of paintings, mostly focused on the Venetian schools. Strange amassed a fairly representative collection of Venetian art, from the 16th to the 18th Century, including works by Titian, Giorgione, Tintoretto, Veronese, Tiepolo, Carriera and Canaletto. He was, however, a particular patron and supporter of Guardi (much as, it is tempting to say, though perhaps on a more modest scale, Joseph Smith, the British Consul at Venice had been for Canaletto), and was even responsible for selling some of his works back home in
Britain. The four vedute of the Strange series, therefore, take on a particular significance. This importance is further underscored by the patron’s choice of subject. The Villa Loredan was the country retreat of Strange and his wife, and was occupied by them during their sojourn in Venice, probably from as early as 1777, when Strange mentions his country villa near Treviso which he “renamed” Gloucester Lodge for the two day royal visit of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. As the name suggests, the mansion was originally the property of the Loredan, one of the great aristocratic families of the Venetian republic, and was commissioned circa 1719 from the architect Giorgio Massari (1687-1766). The villa was sold before 1779 by Count Gerolamo Antonio Loredan to Marchese Giuseppe de Canonicis, who presumably rented it to the British diplomat. The villa was pulled down in the early decades of the 19th Century (it is mentioned as destroyed before 1833), and the views of Guardi (both paintings, and related drawings, see below) are the only extant representations of what the building would have looked like.

The extreme care that Guardi took in the painting of the series, and the present canvas in particular, reflects the importance with which the artist regarded the commission and his patron John Strange. Part of this must have been what Strange expected from the artist. Accounts of his meticulous, punctilious and at times vinegary personality suggest that such diligence on the artist’s part was well warranted; in fact in a letter written by Strange in 1785 (sometime after the present series was painted) to his agent and friend Giovanni Maria Sasso, he requests that a commission for two drawings be given to Guardi, that should be “non solo netti, bene finiti, e compagni ma anche coloriti esattamente [not only clear, well finished and pendants, but also precisely colored].”

The number of preparatory drawings that Guardi made for the series, and particularly for the View of Villa Loredan demonstrate the particular care that he took in the composition of the painting. A drawing in the Rhode Island School of Design (fig. 4) is undoubtedly the first of the extant studies for the painting. The sheet is executed freely in brown ink and wash, and the artist has already worked out the main tenets of the composition fully, save for the staffage which he apparently considered at a much later stage. More finely finished, and very close to the final painting, however, is the larger and impressive drawing in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (fig. 5). In that drawing the final details of the composition were worked (again, except for the figures), the perspective of the buildings refined, and the elaborate gates (most likely a slight elaboration of the artist). A further drawing exists, in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, executed in pen and grey wash over black chalk (fig. 6). This is the most precisely and fully finished of the three, certainly the most “netto e ben finito” to paraphrase Strange, and is certainly a ricordo of the final painting, and meant to be presented to the patron himself. The figures are accurately represented, and an English inscription across the bottom of the sheet, presumably in Strange’s own hand, reads: “View of the Seat of S.E. Loredano at Paese near Treviso at present in the possession of John Strange Esqr. N.B. grass ground within the Fence, without the post road from Treviso to Bassan.” This inscription, although apparently incorrect in identifying the villa’s current owner, is the only document which precisely identifies the view depicted.

The View of the Villa Loredan and its companion canvases have been convincingly dated to the very late 1770’s or early 1780’s. This is not based on stylistic observations alone, although certainly the confidence of the brushwork and composition, the exquisite coloration, and the richness of the effects of light and form in all the paintings are clearly the work of a mature artist and correspond to precisely dateable works of these years. Other details, however, confirm a dating from about this time. It is known that Guardi himself visited the Val di Sole in the Trentino in both 1778 and 1782, years which easily bracket the presumed dates of the paintings’ execution. The artist could have—and probably would have—stopped at his patron’s country house on his journey to the deep terra firma at these times. However, the relative ease with which Paese could be reached from Venice itself suggests that Guardi could have made the trip at any time during this period. Certainly, it seems that he must have spent a bit of time in the villa. Not only are there two preparatory drawings for the present canvas, but there are also two of the neighboring Villa Pisani Segredo. More interesting, however, and perhaps more compelling to our modern sensibilities, are two drawings of the countryside surrounding the Villa Loredan, one in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, showing the view out over the garden side, and another in the Amsterdams Historisch Museum (fig.7), looking north, out over the front lawn of the villa, towards the gates (more simplified in this drawing, and as done by Guardi on site, probably more representative of the real configuration) and out over the countryside up to the Dolomites in the distance. Given the
high viewpoint of both drawings, they would appear to have been made from windows in the upper story of the Villa Loredan. As they serve no real purpose in the composition of the final paintings, it seems likely that they were done for Guardi’s and his patron’s own delectation.

More physical clues also exist as to the dating of the Strange series of the paintings. Francis Watson, for example, noted that the piled-high hairstyles of the women in the paintings, decorated with feathers, were made fashionable in 1774 in Paris, and then migrated to Venice only by 1776, where it lingered on for a few years. More compelling, however, is the depiction in both of the views of the Villa Loredan of the Villa Pellegrini nearby. The construction of the Villa Pellegrini was begun in 1778, and was fully completed by 1783. The costume evidence, therefore, suggesting the very late 1770’s, and the architectural clues in the paintings suggesting something closer to 1780 (presumably Guardi could have shown the Villa Pellegrini as an incidental structure, while it was still not fully finished in the details) and the fact that Strange had left Venice by 1786, narrow the likely date of the series to within a very few years.

1 Barchesse are large and sometimes elegant outbuildings, usually for use as granaries or barns, that are particular to the Veneto.

2 For a discussion of Strange’s patronage of Guardi, please see Haskell, op. cit., 1960, pp. 256-276.

3 see Haskell, op. cit., 1963, pp. 373-374.

4 In a letter dated 29 July, 1777, from Strange to Sir Robert Newdigate (see J. Ingamells, A Dictionary of British and Irish Travellers in Italy, New Haven, CT, 1997, p. 903).

5 In a letter dated 12th November, 1719, the architect Massari writes that he is the guest at Paese of “Ecc.mo Loredan” (see Massari, op. cit., p. 34).

6 Fahy dates the series to the early 1780s; Merling to most probably circa 1782; Morassi dates them to a bit before 1780 (although confusingly dates them to 1773-78 in his catalogue description); Succi dates them to circa 1780.

7 see Watson, op. cit., 1967, p. 98.

8 see S. Chiovaro, Ville venete : la provincia di Treviso, Marsilio, 2001, p. 397