

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



**GASPAR VAN WITTEL,
CALLED VANVITELLI**

(Amersfoot 1652/3 – Rome 1736)

***THE ISLAND OF SAN
GIORGIO MAGGIORE, VENICE,
VIEWED FROM BACINO***

Dated '1701' at lower right, on the ship

Oil on canvas

42.5 x 73.9 cm. (16 ¾ x 29 in.)

Provenance

Commissioned by Don Luís Francisco de la Cerda Fernández de Córdoba Folch de Cardona y Aragón (1660-1711), 9th Duke of Medinaceli;
Thence by descent to Don Nicolás María Fernández de Córdoba y Figueroa de la Cerda (1682-1739), 10th Duke of Medinaceli, listed in his palace in Priego, Cordoba, by 1711;
Thence by descent to the present owners.

Literature

Inventario general de todos los trastos y vienes muebles pertenecientes a la Cassa del Exmo. Sr. Marques Duque de Medinaceli, mi señor, Ms. in the Archivo Ducal de Medinaceli, Seville, 1711;
V. Lléo Cañal, 'The art collection of the ninth Duke of Medinaceli' in *The Burlington Magazine*, CXXXI, 1031, February 1989, pp. 109-10 and 115.

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This newly discovered picture can be added to the select group of views of San Giorgio by Vanvitelli, one of the pioneers of view painting. Briganti lists five other examples of comparable dimensions to this canvas that show the island across the water from the Bacino di San Marco, each one marginally different in viewpoint and in the arrangement and number of boats.¹ This picture, however, distinguishes itself by being not only the sole dated painting of this view, but also with the extension at the right, showing as it does the island of Giudecca and the now demolished campanile of San Giovanni Battista. Vanvitelli creates a sense of movement and depth by depicting the gondola being steered towards the viewer, with the buildings reflected in the water.

The present painting was one of a remarkable thirty-six Vanvitellis listed in the inventory of the Spanish Viceroy Don Luís Francisco de la Cerda Fernández de Córdoba Folch de Cardona y Aragón, 9th Duke of Medinaceli (1660-1711), shortly after his death (Fig. 1). They made up a significant part of what was one of the most extraordinary collections of the time; it included masterpieces such as *Las Hilanderas* by Velázquez and *The Wine of Saint Martin's Day* by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, both of which are now in the Prado, Madrid.

The Duke had encountered Vanvitelli and his work in Rome when he was serving as Spanish Ambassador to Pope Innocent XII, a post he took up in 1687. There, he lived an extravagant lifestyle and had a notorious affair with the singer Angela Voglia, called *La Giorgina*. When he moved to Naples, on being appointed Viceroy in 1696, he took Giorgina with him, together with her sister and father. Vanvitelli himself also moved to Naples in 1699, where he worked under the Duke for two years. The dating of this picture – 1701 – coincides with the latter part of his stay in the city. The story of the Duke and Giorgina was the inspiration for Alessandro Scarlatti's opera *La caduta de' Decemviri*, the libretto for which was written by Silvio Stampiglia, a close friend of the Duke. After he returned to Spain, where he was appointed Prime Minister in 1709 by Philip V, he fell into disgrace when he was discovered to have leaked secret documents. He was imprisoned for treason and died in 1711.

¹ G. Briganti, *Gaspar van Wittel*, eds. L. Laureati & L. Trezzani, Milan 1996, pp. 248-50, nos. 314-18.

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Figure 1. Jakob Ferdinand Voet, *Luis Francisco de la Cera, 9th Duke of Medinaceli*, oil on canvas, 231 x 173 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid