



**NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPEAN PAINTINGS  
AT THE STERLING AND FRANCINE CLARK ART INSTITUTE**

**VOLUME TWO**

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With an essay by Richard Rand  
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With contributions by Katharine J. Albert, Philippe Bordes, Dan Cohen,  
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James Rosenow, Zoë Samels, and Fronia E. Wissman

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Details:

TITLE PAGE: Camille Pissarro, *The Louvre from the Pont Neuf* (cat. 253)

OPPOSITE COPYRIGHT PAGE: Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Jane Avril* (cat. 331)

PRECEDING PAGE 474: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Onions* (cat. 280)

PAGES 890–91: Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Women of Amphisa* (cat. 3)



354

## Félix Ziem

French, 1821–1911

### 354 | The Grand Canal, Venice (Frigate and Gondola, Basin of San Marco) c. 1852

Oil on canvas, 55.4 x 81 cm

Lower right: Ziem

1955.902

It seems fitting for an artist who garnered considerable interest and patronage from the aristocracy that Félix Ziem devoted a significant portion of his career to painting royal architecture in Venice, as he did in *The Grand Canal, Venice*. Ziem studied architecture as a young man before turning to painting full time, and he painted numerous views of Venice for much of his career. The most highly detailed of the Clark's Ziem paintings, *The Grand Canal, Venice* has all the elements typical of the artist's Venetian scenes: an expanse of water, large rigged boats, gondolas with their red-capped gondoliers transporting passengers, all framed by landmark buildings at the sides of the composition and on the horizon. In this case, the view

is looking west down the Grand Canal, with the campanile of San Marco at right and the church of Santa Maria della Salute at left in the distance. Although it is placed prominently at the right center of the composition, the Doge's palace is not the focus of Ziem's view. John Ruskin called it the "central building of the world,"<sup>1</sup> its pink marble Gothic façade housing the Doge, the head of the Venetian state until the time of Napoleon, and it served as a subject for numerous artists. In Ziem's Venetian scenes, however, boats and gondolas often take center stage rather than architecture. Here a masted frigate is anchored to the left of center, while a gondola filled with people sits in the foreground at right. Ziem often depicted well-known boats, and this may be a specific frigate, identifiable by its red and blue striped flag.

The many waterways of Venice and its particular light were inspirational to Ziem. In *The Grand Canal, Venice*, as in most of his Venetian views, Ziem places the viewer directly at water level. Ziem had a studio installed on a *topo*, or flat-bottomed boat, and later acquired a larger, gondola-shaped *traghetto*, which he converted into a live-in studio. Here he presents a fairly dark foreground, despite the bright blue, nearly cloudless sky, in order to heighten the contrast with

the brilliantly sunlit buildings and the ship's sails, and to enhance the sense of distance to the hazily rendered structures in the background. An accomplished draftsman, he regularly sketched in graphite, watercolor, and oil and took his drawings back home to Paris to be worked up into larger compositions. In *The Grand Canal, Venice*, several changes he made during the course of work are detectable beneath the surface using infrared light, such as the position of the dome of Santa Maria della Salute in the left background.<sup>2</sup> This suggests the care the artist took to establish correct perspective in this painting.

Ziem produced another painting titled *Galleons and Gondolas, Basin of San Marco* (private collection),<sup>3</sup> signed and dated 1852, that is compositionally quite similar to *The Grand Canal, Venice* and is nearly the same size. In *Galleons and Gondolas* the viewer is again situated on the Grand Canal looking west, with the campanile of San Marco at the right and the Church of Santa Maria della Salute at the left. The perspective is slightly different, however, as the monuments are somewhat closer, and the large ship, which may be the same vessel as that in the Clark painting, is more centrally and prominently located. Numerous other views use approximately the same architectural backdrop but introduce greater variations in the type and distribution of boats in the foreground. *The Grand Canal, Venice* has been dated to about 1842, when Ziem made his first trip to Venice. On 3 May of that year, he left Paris for Italy, making a brief stop in the canaled city on a tour of other cities that included Genoa and Florence. Since this first visit was so brief, it is unlikely that he executed this painting at that time. Ziem returned to Venice in 1847 for several months, and went back in 1848 and 1851, but did not return again until 1859, after which he traveled to Venice every few years for the rest of his life. It can therefore be difficult to pinpoint the execution of undated works, but given the parallels with the painting dated 1852, it could be that the Clark picture dates to the same period.

Sterling and Francine Clark purchased two Venetian Ziems, *The Grand Canal, Venice (Gondola before San Giorgio)* in 1930 (cat. 356), and this work in 1934. The Clarks were clearly fond of Venetian subjects, as the images of the city they acquired included two by Francesco Guardi, two by John Singer Sargent,<sup>4</sup> and another by Martín Rico y Ortega (cat. 293). They also purchased Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Venice, the Doge's Palace* (cat. 278) in 1933, which can be compared to Ziem's work, though it shows the palace from the more commonly

seen frontal view. Ziem painted the Doge's Palace himself from this perspective in several other works.

Ziem's Venetian views were sought by wealthy patrons in the nineteenth century, and his pictures were owned by some of the most important art collectors of his day. *The Grand Canal, Venice* has a significant history of ownership, as one of its earliest owners was Étienne Moreau-Nélaton (1859–1927), a collector, painter, and author of books on Camille Corot, Jean-François Millet, Charles-François Daubigny, and Édouard Manet, among others. His grandfather Adolphe Moreau (1800–1859) had been a collector of modern paintings, and Étienne followed in his footsteps, owning some of the greatest works of his era, including Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1862; Musée d'Orsay, Paris) and Henri Fantin-Latour's *Homage to Eugène Delacroix* (1864; Musée d'Orsay, Paris). He gave the majority of his collection to the Louvre in 1906, and bequeathed more works upon his death. It is noteworthy, then, that as Moreau-Nélaton was buying Corots and Delacroix along with Impressionists like Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro, he was also buying works by Ziem. Among them was the *Galleons and Gondolas, Basin of San Marco* discussed above, a fact that may further support the idea that it and the Clark work are related.<sup>5</sup>

*The Grand Canal, Venice* may also have been in the hands of another owner of significance, Henry Le Roy et Fils, a dealer in modern pictures located in Brussels. The only evidence for this is the Galerie Georges Petit sale catalogue, where a notation next to the picture gives the price and notes the purchaser as "Le Roy." This is perhaps the same Henry Le Roy who worked with Arthur Warocqué to commission the paintings of the four seasons from Alfred Stevens in 1877, works later owned by Sterling Clark (cats. 319–22). KAP

**PROVENANCE** Étienne Moreau-Nélaton, Paris (until 1900, his sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris, 11 May 1900, no. 81, as *Le Grand Canal, à Venise*, sold to Le Roy); Le Roy (from 1900); Daniel Gray Reid, New York (d. 1925, sale, American Art Association, New York, 5–6 Jan. 1927, no. 160, as *Venice*);<sup>6</sup> [Scott & Fowles, New York, sold to Clark, 3 Feb. 1934, as *The Grand Canal, Venice*]; Robert Sterling Clark (1934–55); Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 1955.

**EXHIBITIONS** Williamstown 1959b, ill.; Williamstown 1982c, p. 29, no. 38.

**REFERENCES** Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute 1963, no. 156, ill.; Miquel 1978, vol. 2, p. 160, no. 1055, ill., as *Venise, le Palais des Doges*;<sup>7</sup> Burdin-Hellebranth 1998, vol. 1, p. 56, no. 144, ill., as *Frégate et gondole, bassin*.

**TECHNICAL REPORT** The support is a coarsely woven linen (approximately 13 threads/cm). In 1983, an old glue lining was removed and replaced with a transparent wax-resin lining onto a three-layer composite of fiberglass fabric. A transparent lining was chosen to reveal paint on the reverse, which may be part of a sketch. There remains a weave impression from the earlier lining, caused by the original fabric. The old seven-member stretcher was also replaced with a four-member redwood ICA spring tension design. The 1983 report noted traction crackle in the foreground water, flattened impastos, overcleaning, and solvent sensitivity in the bright reds. The picture may have been treated by Madame Coince in 1935. Thick layers of discolored and locally toned varnish were removed along with a moderate grime layer in 1983. There are large dark vertical cracks in a band through the center, possibly due to the weight of the thick white lead paint on the surface. Some of these cracks have older yellowed retouchings. The brown rigging lines, possibly ink, and the transparent brown signature are abraded. The appearance of the surface in ultraviolet light is unusual, with large old repainted areas between the left edge and the ship and several vertical areas in the center of the sky. There are patches of old varnish in the gondola, water, buildings, and the ship. The present varnish has a low gloss, partly due to the painting technique.

The ground is a cream-colored layer. There was no underdrawing detected, but there may be a thin painted sketch. In infrared viewing and in raking light, artist's changes are visible in the sky as pentimenti, which previous restorers, and possibly the artist, had glazed out. The banner flying off the stern of the center ship was originally longer, passing diagonally in front of the buildings. The small domed church at the far left was initially placed higher above the horizon, visible now in infrared as a faint ghost in the sky at the level of the taller ship's topmasts. Daubs of wet-into-wet paint, rather than drawn outlines, create the forms. After the sky was completed, the campanile was painted, and scattered thin glazes were applied throughout the image.

1. Ruskin 1903–12, vol. 11, p. 38.
2. See Technical Report.
3. B-H 145.
4. Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, 1955.75–5 and 1955.580.
5. *Galleons and Gondolas, Basin of San Marco* was no. 80 in Moreau-Nélaton's 1900 sale.
6. The information regarding Reid owning the picture comes from the Scott & Fowles invoice dated 3 Feb. 1934. See the Clark's curatorial file.
7. Miquel 1978 erroneously listed this work twice; it also appears as vol. 2, p. 157, no. 1024, as *Le Grand Canal, à Venise*, with some correct provenance information given, and some belonging to a different painting.

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### 355 | Le Pont Royal, Paris c. 1859

Oil on panel, 24.6 x 37.7 cm

Lower right: Ziem

1955.904

Best known for his Venetian scenes, Félix Ziem painted in many other locations throughout Italy, France, North Africa, and Turkey. Ziem was a prolific artist who studied architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts in Dijon. Despite being expelled for bad behavior, Ziem developed into a master draftsman and incorporated architecture of all sorts—buildings, bridges, and complicated rigged ships—into his pictures throughout his career. He exhibited for the first time at the Salon in 1849 and continued to exhibit there regularly until 1868. In 1853, Ziem started making visits to the forest of Fontainebleau near Barbizon, outside Paris, and became friendly with Jean-François Millet, Narcisse Diaz de la Peña, Théodore Rousseau, and Charles-Émile Jacque.

*Le Pont Royal, Paris* depicts a very informal view of the bridge of the title, seen from approximately water level, as if the artist were painting from the type of boat he shows in the foreground. The heart of the capital here looks distinctly unglamorous, although in addition to the bridge, built in 1685, a number of important landmarks do appear along the horizon, from the Louvre at the left, to the two towers of Notre-Dame in the center distance, to the dome of the Institut de France near the right of center. The painting's sketchiness and informality point to Ziem's affinities with the Barbizon painters, who were more interested in the organic life and visual details of a landscape site than its picturesque qualities. Ziem worked in layers of different colors, especially visible in the water, which reflects the blue sky above, and he used a rough, sponge-like application of green paint for the trees in the center right of the picture.

The palette of *Le Pont Royal* is an unusual one for Ziem, its muted grays and blues suited to the northern climate of the location, in contrast to his warmer Mediterranean color scheme. Anne Burdin-Hellebranth catalogues only twenty-six paintings of Paris by Ziem, which seems clearly to indicate his preference for more southerly climes. His Paris scenes include the windmill of Montmartre, the Eiffel Tower, the Arc de Triomphe, the Champs-Élysées, the Bois de Boulogne, the Tuileries, and one other bridge, the Pont