Veduta [It.: ‘view’]

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Term applied to a painting, drawing or print representing a landscape or town view that is largely topographical in conception, as opposed to the fantasy view or Capriccio. Artists who produced *vedute* are known as *vedutisti*. The *veduta* or souvenir view, with its origins in pilgrimage images of Rome from the later 16th century onwards, reached its peak as a genre in Italy during the era of the Grand Tour. Benefiting from such technical aids as the Camera obscura, particularly at the hand of Canaletto in Venice, it was also to reflect an increasing concern with the specifics of the observed natural world characteristic of the Enlightenment. During the latter half of the 18th century, with the revolutionary vision of Piranesi in Rome, the *veduta* was transformed into a vehicle for emotional responses to the visible world, especially of the surviving remains of antiquity. In this respect it contributed to the emergence of Romanticism in the visual arts and was finally extinguished as a significant art form with the invention of photography.

For a discussion of the *veduta* in the context of related art forms see Architectural pictures, §2; Townscape; and Urban life.

1. Development and peak.

(i) Venice.

Venice, that most densely urban of environments, was the birthplace of the *veduta* and home of its main innovators. The city, with its intensely introspective character, had a long tradition of self-scrutiny, as manifested in topographical incidents within the religious pictures of the Bellini family and Vittore Carpaccio, as well as in the backgrounds of early Renaissance portraits. While during the 16th and 17th centuries Rome had seen the production of engraved souvenir views of the pilgrimage sites and prominent monuments by Antoine Lafrery, Alessandro Specchi and Giovanni
Battista Falda, the first important advances in the genre appeared in Venice, where there was a demand for recording state ceremonies and festivals.

Significantly, the earliest *vedutisti* in Venice came from northern Europe, with its long-standing preoccupations with observed fact in painting stretching back to 15th-century Flemish art. At a time when native Venetian painting was at a low ebb in the early 17th century, the first view painters there included Joseph Heintz (ii) from Germany and Gustav Richter (1665–1745) from Sweden. Heintz, active in Venice by 1625, concentrated on documenting festivals, such as that shown in his picture of the Patriarch’s procession to S Pietro di Castello (Venice, Correr), with its frenzied plethora of doll-like figures and accumulated incidents. An artist of far higher calibre, however, was Gaspar van Wittel (Vanvitelli), who had arrived from Rome by 1697, the date of a *veduta* of Venice, now in the Prado, Madrid. As the true founder of the school of *vedutisti* in Venice, Vanvitelli’s influence is seen in the work of the first native view painter, Luca Carlevaris. Although born in Udine, the son of an architect, he made Venice his adopted city and it provided the setting for a number of ambitious paintings recording ceremonies and state functions with a panoramic range of detail. His sizeable canvas recording the ambassadorial procession of Charles Montagu, 4th Earl of Manchester, before the Palazzo Ducale in 1707 (for illustration see Carlevaris [Carlevarijs], Luca) was painted for this patron, who took it back to his Northamptonshire seat, Kimbolton Castle. Surviving oil sketches of genre detail and a sketchbook of figure studies (London, V&A) indicate the fastidious care taken by Carlevaris to construct these elaborate anthologies of civic ritual. Other such works recorded the regatta in honour of Frederick IV of Denmark (1707) and the Imperial embassy of Count Colloredo (1727), both of which were engraved. In 1703 when Carlevaris published a book of etched views expressly, as its title page indicates, to celebrate the splendours of the Venetian Republic, he created prototypes, if rather mechanical in style, for a range of graphic *vedute*. These mass-produced works were to make the genre both attractively commercial as well as widely diffused in the growing Grand Tour market.

The career and prolific output of Canaletto over some four decades of activity, however much according to legend it eclipsed the work of Carlevaris, are part of a far larger phenomenon as the Grand Tour reached its peak of demand for ‘ricordi’ during the middle decades of the 18th century. Patronage by the ‘milordi inglesi’ was to make the *veduta* the most popular contemporary art form next to the commemorative portrait, while the genre spread to other key centres such as Rome, Florence and Naples. Canaletto met the demand with skills of an exceptional order, grounded in his early training in stage design, and an entrepreneurial capacity to use formula compositions (assisted by annotated record drawings on site) and an increasing studio assistance.
A key factor in the success of Canaletto and the *veduta* market in Venice was the patronage of the businessman and later British Consul Joseph Smith. During the 1720s and 1730s Smith not only acted as an intermediary but himself commissioned works, including 12 outstanding paintings of the Grand Canal. These works, including the *Grand Canal from the Salute towards the Carità*, were to enter the British royal collection when Smith sold his pick of Canalettos to George III in 1762. Such masterpieces of precise observation were highly contrived to include the maximum of information. Canaletto exploited the devices of theatrical perspective and the services of the camera obscura to compress a formidable quantity of topographical detail into a setting that was also filled with enlivening genre detail and acutely perceived effects of light on a range of building materials. Perhaps never before had specific architecture been so accurately depicted, so much so that historians of Venice can still date the minutiae of urban change from these visual documents. The scale of Canaletto’s production for a single client is demonstrated by an entire room of 22 companion views of Venice at Woburn Abbey, Beds, produced for John Russell, 4th Duke of Bedford (1710–71), sometime after 1732. This fashion of devoting a room arrangement to displaying *vedute* from the Grand Tour is paralleled on a more modest level in the Cabinet at Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk, with its original hang of 26 gouache views by Giovanni Battista Busiri, bought in Rome around 1739–40 by William Windham (1717–61).

In 1735, with Smith’s encouragement, Canaletto published a collection of his 12 views of the Grand Canal, as well as two festival compositions, engraved by Antonio Visentini, as *Prospectos magni canalis venetiarum* (a second edition with 24 additional *vedute* appeared in 1742). These works exercised a considerable influence on the demand for and standards of engraved *vedute* elsewhere. Around 1744 Canaletto issued a sequence of his own etchings, dedicated in homage to Smith, not only incorporating subjects on the River Brenta but also fantasy views, or ‘*vedute ideate*’, which served to raise the *veduta* formula to a higher imaginative level (*see Capriccio*). Owing to a decline in the tourist market during the War of the Austrian Succession, from 1746 Canaletto spent some ten years in England, based mainly in London. There his topographical paintings included a pair of superlative *vedute* of the Thames and of Whitehall respectively, as seen from Richmond House, commissioned in 1747 for Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond (now at Goodwood House, W. Sussex). These and a selection of views of London and such stately homes as Badminton House, Glos, and Alnwick Castle, Northumb., exercised an important influence on English topographical art, as exemplified by such artists as Samuel Scott (*e.g. An Arch of Westminster Bridge*, c. 1750, London, Tate; *for illustration see* Scott, Samuel) and William Marlow (*e.g. Capriccio: St Paul’s and a Venetian Canal*, c. 1795–7, London, Tate).
While Canaletto's ambitious commemorative vedute, epitomized by the 'Bucintoro' Returning to the Molo on Ascension Day (versions, Milan, Crespi Col. (see fig.), and Windsor Castle, Berks, Royal Col.) were never surpassed, recognition of the veduta as a genre in the academic hierarchy was slow. It was not until 1763 that Canaletto was admitted to the Venetian Accademia, and even then his reception piece was an architectural capriccio (Venice, Accademia). By that time the veduta in Venice had such outstanding exponents as the tragically short-lived Michele Giovanni Marieschi (who published a series of 21 etched vedute of Venice in 1741) and Canaletto's nephew Bernardo Bellotto. The latter left Venice at the age of 27, carrying the art form to northern Europe. He was based at Dresden from 1747 as painter to Frederick Augustus II. There he painted such vedute as Dresden from the Right Bank of the Elbe (1748). From Dresden he visited and recorded Vienna and Munich before settling in Poland in 1767, where he worked for the remainder of his life in Warsaw for King Stanislas II Augustus Poniatowski.

The career and output as a vedutista of Francesco Guardi, in marked contrast to Bellotto's stylistic dependence on his uncle, was from the early 1760s to invest the veduta with a greater interpretative range of expression. Never as popular as Canaletto with visitors to Venice, his name was rarely mentioned in contemporary accounts despite 30 years as a vedutista. For him topography in terms of record took second place to the aim of evoking atmosphere, so that the frenetic and animated figurative detail in, for example, his view of the Piazza S Marco virtually takes priority over the architecture as subject-matter. Significantly, it was the later 19th-century collectors who
relished the vibrancy of brushstroke and vivacity of subject-matter in Guardi’s canvases (understandably, the capriccio became his ideal outlet for expression). This belated recognition of his genius is demonstrated by four major works in the Wallace Collection, London, and two complementary views of the Basin of S Marco on an exceptionally large scale in the Rothschild Bequest at Waddesdon Manor, Bucks.

(ii) Rome.

In Rome during the 18th century an equally avid need for *vedute* as that in Venice had developed from a long-standing tradition of pilgrimage souvenirs and topographical works, from Lafrery and Etienne Dupérac in the 16th century to Falda in the 17th and Specchi in the early 18th. As with Venice, the presence in Rome towards the end of the 17th century of such northern artists as Jacob de Heusch (1656–1701), Hendrik Frans van Lint (1684–1763), Jan Frans van Bloemen and, above all, Gaspar van Wittel (Vanvitelli), laid the foundations of a local school of *vedutisti*. Van Wittel, born and trained in Holland, was working in Rome by the Jubilee of 1675 and produced dated *vedute* in 1681 (e.g. Rome, Pal. Barberini and Pal. Colonna; see Wittel, Gaspar [Caspar] (Adriaansz.) van). Apart from his influential visit to Venice in or just before 1697 and one to Naples in 1700, he was active in Rome until c. 1730. Thomas Coke, the future 1st Earl of Leicester and builder of Holkham Hall, Norfolk, acquired at least seven views from van Wittel during his Grand Tour in 1715/16 (including one of *Venice from the Bacino*), still in the Holkham collection.

The most important Italian artist to take these developments further in Rome and to dominate the Grand Tour market for the painted *veduta* was the Emilian decorative painter Giovanni Paolo Panini. Apart from a considerable quantity of views commissioned by foreign visitors, including *Interior of St Peter’s* (London, N.G.), Panini showed outstanding ability to record ceremonial events incorporating portraits and lively genre incidents. Major commissions were received from the French ambassador to the Holy See, Cardinal Melchior de Polignac, in 1729–30, representing the festival in Piazza Navona commemorating the birth of the Dauphin, son of Louis XV, and the Cardinal’s visit to St Peter’s (both Paris, Louvre). Panini’s early training in stage design furnished him, like Canaletto, with advanced skills in perspective that made his panoramic views particularly attractive to patrons who required their Roman experiences to be compressed into a single canvas, often incorporated, back in England, into a decorative setting such as an overmantel. Not surprisingly, Panini’s greatest achievements were to be spectacular *vedute ideate*, cappricci rather than *vedute*, in which individual works of architecture (and sculpture) were accurately delineated within an imaginary setting. Paralleling Panini’s pictorial output in the field of engraved views was the work of the Sicilian Giuseppe Vasi, who between 1747 and 1760 published
Almost certainly assisting Vasi in the early stages of his panoramic veduta was Giovanni Battista Piranesi, the artist who was to transform the engraved view from a tourist souvenir into a sophisticated vehicle for scholarly communication and highly charged emotional responses. Piranesi’s collection of early vedute, produced as small illustrations for guidebooks shortly after his arrival from Venice in the 1740s, proved a test-bed for daring experiments with the genre. Apart from his training in architecture, engineering and stage design, he pushed the medium of topographical etching to a pitch whereby effects of light and atmosphere invested the engraved view with new levels of meaning. By 1747 he was ready to adapt these ideas to a far larger format of plate in his celebrated series the Vedute di Roma. Over the next 30 years until his death in 1778, he produced individually or in groups some 135 plates (including two frontispieces) surveying the main ancient and modern monuments of Rome and its environs. Since these images reflected Piranesi’s current preoccupations, the plates produced during the heat of the Greco-Roman quarrel in the 1760s, such as that of the Basilica of Maxentius, use the full rhetoric of exaggerated scale and histrionic lighting to defend the engineering prowess of imperial Rome against its Philhellene detractors. Owing to Piranesi’s acute business sense and his organization of an efficient printmaking establishment, the rapid diffusion of these powerful images acquired by visitors to Rome spread an indelible impression of ‘Romanità’ that has not diminished with time. The powerful impact of these plates still stands out on the walls of surviving 18th-century print rooms devised in country houses to accommodate the graphic souvenirs of the Grand Tour, such as those at Woodhall Park, Herts, and Blickling Hall, Norfolk.

2. Decline.

The legacy of Canaletto, Panini and Piranesi as outstanding exponents of the veduta continued into the early 19th century—in Venice with such painters as Giovanni Migliara, in Rome with the topographical engraver Luigi Rossini (1790–1857) and in Naples with the German painter Philipp Hackert. By then the decline of the Grand Tour and the rise of Romanticism, when interpretation rather than depiction began to transform topography into a more personal vision, gradually rendered the veduta obsolescent. Such was the mood expressed by the Swiss painter Henry Fuseli in a lecture to students of the Royal Academy in London, when he referred to the genre as ‘that last branch of uninteresting subjects, that kind of landscape which is entirely occupied with the tame delineation of a
given spot’ (*Lecture IV on Painting*, London, 1805, p. 217). It remained for the invention of the camera to deliver the coup de grâce to the *veduta*.

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