Stephen Ongpin Fine Art



Giacinto Gigante (Naples 1806 - Naples 1876)

Casarlano, near Sorrento

Watercolour, heightened with touches of gouache, on buff paper.
Signed and dated Gia Gigante 1850 at the lower left.
276 x 379 mm. (10 7/8 x 14 7/8 in.)

This watercolour depicts a view near the forested mountain village of Casarlano, above the town of Sorrento, overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea. Gigante spent much of 1848 and 1849 living and working in Sorrento, and the view from Casarlano and the woods surrounding it was one that he seems to have been particularly fond of, as it appears in a number of drawings and watercolours of this period. A larger variant of this composition, also dated 1850 but with different staffage, was on the art market in 2001 and is today in a private Neapolitan collection. Another, smaller gouache of the same view by Gigante, again dated 1850, was in the Statella collection in Naples in 1930. A watercolour showing a different view of the trees at Casarlano is in the Astarita collection at the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples.

Artist description:

The son of a minor landscape painter, Giacinto Gigante worked as an engraver early in his career. He completed his artistic training in the Neapolitan studio of the Dutch painter Antoon Sminck Pitloo, who encouraged his students to paint 'all'aperto', or out of doors. Gigante exhibited for the first time in 1826, showing four watercolours at the annual exhibition at the Museo Borbonico. He contributed illustrations for the books 'Viaggio pittorico nel regno delle due Sicilie', published between 1829 and 1832, and the 'Esquisses pittoresques et descriptives de la ville et environs de Naples', published in 1832.

Gigante was soon established as a successful landscape painter and draughtsman, with a particular emphasis for views of Naples and the surrounding region, and the acknowledged leader of a group of Neapolitan landscape artists later known as the Scuola di Posillipo. Writing in 1853, one contemporary English critic noted of Gigante that, 'There is no portion of the Neapolitan scenery, to which he has not been a frequent, patient, enthusiastic visitant…In this tempered region, where fertility and wildness meet,…where at every turn some feature, soft or savage, forms a seductive or striking frame to the distant landscape, Sig. Gigante finds the subjects of those studies, which, for freedom of handling, fidelity of colour, transparency, perspective, and effect, have no parallel on his own more ambitious canvass, or on the canvass of any living painter of his country.'

Gigante's patrons included a number of Russian aristocrats living in Naples, and in 1846 he accompanied the Czarina of Russia on a tour of Sicily, making landscape drawings for an album of

views of the island. In 1850 he received his first Bourbon commission, for a set of views of Gaeta intended as an official present to the Archduchess Maria Theresa in Vienna. Gigante's association with the Neapolitan court continued for several years, with the artist accompanying the Royal family on visits to their palaces at Gaeta, Caserta and Ischia. Among other important patrons was the King of Italy, Vittorio Emmanuele II, for whom he painted the interior of the Duomo in Naples, completed in 1863 and exhibited at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1867.

Significant groups of drawings and watercolours by Gigante are today in the Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte and the Museo Nazionale di San Martino, both in Naples.