

Louis BELANGER (Paris 1756 - Stockholm 1816)

The Cascades at Tivoli, with Tourists and Fishermen

Watercolour and gouache.
Signed and dated Belanger / 1783 at the lower left.
522 x 393 mm. (20 1/2 x 15 1/2 in.)

Waterfalls, cascades and rapids were a favourite subject of Louis Bélanger throughout his career. A later watercolour and gouache view by the artist of the falls at Tivoli, dated 1792 and seen from a slightly different viewpoint, was acquired by the Government Art Collection in 1968, and is today in the British Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Another large view of the cascades at Tivoli, dated 1795, appeared at auction in Switzerland in 2007.

The famous falls at Tivoli, twenty miles from Rome, where the river Aniene drops some 330 feet, had long been a popular site for artists. As the English traveller Charlotte Waldie, writing in the early years of the 19th century, noted, 'The beauty of Tivoli consists in its rocks and waterfalls...Amidst the dreary wilds of the Campagna you would never dream that a spot so romantic was at hand...what a prospect of unspeakable beauty bursts upon your view! Tremendous precipices of rock, down which roars a headlong torrent, - trees and bushy plants shading its foaming course, - cliffs crowned with the most picturesque ruins, and painted in tints whose beauty art can never imitate, - hills, and woods, and hanging vineyards; and Tivoli itself, which, peeping out amidst the dark cypresses at the top of these sunny banks, looks like an earthly paradise...The pencil only can describe Tivoli; and though unlike other scenes, the beauty of which is generally exaggerated in picture, no representation has done justice to it, it is yet impossible that some part of its peculiar charms should not be transferred upon the canvas. It almost seems as if nature herself had turned painter when she formed this beautiful and perfect composition.'

Provenance:

Wildenstein, New York, in 1943
Denys Sutton, London
Thence by descent until 2013.

Artist description:

The younger brother of the architect and draughtsman François-Joseph Bélanger, Louis Bélanger (sometimes Bellangé) was a landscape painter and draughtsman, with a particular speciality of gouache views of sites in France, Italy and Switzerland. A pupil of Francesco Casanova and Louis-Gabriel Moreau the Elder, he worked primarily in watercolour and gouache. His earliest dated works were executed in 1779, and in the 1780's he travelled throughout France, as well as to Switzerland, Italy and England. With the advent of the French Revolution, he fled France and in 1790 settled in England, where he lived for eight years and provided drawings for the print market in Paris. (Six watercolour views of London by Bélanger, each dated 1790 and possibly intended as designs for prints, are in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.) Bélanger exhibited landscapes at the Royal Academy in 1790 (when the catalogue described him as 'Painter to the Duke of Orléans') and 1797, and enjoyed the patronage of a number of English connoisseurs, some of whose London homes he decorated.

After a brief visit to Switzerland in 1798, Bélanger moved to Sweden, where in 1799 he was elected to the Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm and appointed Painter to King Gustav IV. He lived and worked in Sweden for the last eighteen years of his career, and in 1803 published a series of prints entitled Voyage pittoresque de la Suède. A number of paintings, watercolours and gouaches by the artist are today in the collection of the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm.