

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Felix ZIEM (Beaune 1821 - Paris 1911)

Boats and a Gondola in the Bacino di San Marco, Venice

Watercolour, with touches of gouache and white heightening, on Whatman paper.

Signed Ziem at the lower left.

126 x 215 mm. (5 x 8 1/2 in.)

Watermark: J. WH[ATMAN] / TURK[EY MILL].

Following his first visit to Venice in 1842, Félix Ziem returned there many times over the next five decades, sometimes annually, and came to be closely associated with the city. Indeed, he became known as the 'painter of Venice', a city that he seems to have regarded as his second home. The present sheet, which may probably be dated to the first half of the 1870s, depicts the Bacino di San Marco seen from the entrance to the lagoon, with the Campanile and the Doge's Palace in the centre distance, and the church of Santa Maria della Salute with the entrance to the Grand Canal at the left of the composition.

Artist description:

Félix François Georges Ziem studied at the École d'Architecture et des Beaux-Arts in Dijon, where he won a prize for landscape drawing, before settling in Marseille in 1839. Early in his career, his skill as a watercolourist gained him the patronage of Ferdinand Philippe, Duc de Orléans. He soon achieved a fair degree of success as a painter, and began to travel – first around the South of France, where he was particularly taken by the landscape around the Provençal port town of Martigues – and later further afield. Indeed, Ziem was one of the most well-travelled artists of his day. He made the first of many trips to Italy in 1842, visiting Rome and Venice and returning to France via Germany and Austria. He met and befriended Prince Grigori Gagarin, and with him travelled to Russia between 1843 and 1844, visiting Odessa, Kiev, Moscow and St. Petersburg. He made his debut at the Salon in 1849, and continued to exhibit regularly until 1868. Ziem made countless trips throughout Europe, including a stay in England in 1852, and between 1856 and 1859 visited the Near East, working in Turkey, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia. Ziem always remained particularly fond of Venice, which he visited some twenty times, and it is as a painter of Venetian views that he is best known today.

From around 1861 he settled in Martigues, though he continued to spend time in Nice, Paris and Venice. He enjoyed great success throughout the remainder of his career, selling his paintings for huge sums. His patrons included Princesse Mathilde, Baron de Rothschild and the Duke of Devonshire, and many of his paintings also found their way into important American collections in the late 19th century. A large group of paintings, watercolours and drawings by Ziem, presented by the artist in 1905, is today in the Musée du Petit Palais in Paris, while another substantial collection of his work is in the Musée Ziem in Martigues.

Félix Ziem was a prolific and gifted draughtsman and watercolourist, and from early in his career enjoyed an enthusiastic market for his watercolours among French collectors. Writing in the preface to a catalogue of a sale of thirty-four of Ziem's watercolours in 1868, the critic Théophile Gautier compared him favourably to such English masters of the medium as J. M. W. Turner and Richard Parkes Bonington, further noting that one could experience the pleasures of visiting Venice, Marseille, the Mediterranean, Barbizon, Holland or Egypt by simply studying a portfolio of the artist's watercolours.