

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Carl ROTTMANN (Handschuhsheim 1797 - Munich 1850)

Landscape with the Bay of Genoa and the Mouth of the Polcevera River

Watercolour, over an underdrawing in pencil.

Inscribed von. G Regel [?] STm and (Gwinner? [?]) on the backing sheet.

151 x 315 mm. (5 7/8 x 12 3/8 in.)

This watercolour by Carl Rottmann depicts a view of the Ligurian coast at Genoa, looking west and showing the mouth of the Polcevera river where it empties into the Ligurian Sea, between the modern Genoese quarter of Sampierdarena and Cornigliano. The area shown here is now heavily industrialized and contains the Port of Genoa. (In August 2018 the Ponte Morandi, a road bridge over the Polcevera built in the 1960s, collapsed during a severe rainstorm and was later demolished.)

Rottmann left Munich for Italy in April 1826 and arrived in Genoa at the end of the month, remaining there, with a side trip to Nice, for several months. The present sheet is closely related to one of the first works that the artist painted in Italy; a large view of the bay of Genoa that was formerly in the Passavant, Nathan and Bührle collections and was recently on the art market in Germany. The painting is in fact the second version of the subject by Rottmann, after the artist had decided that his first attempt was too small. The high view of the bay follows the coastline to the mountains in the middle and far distance. As the artist described the view, in a letter to his wife Friederike, 'The mountain range is the western shore of the Mediterranean Sea...At the end of the chain lies Monaco and 4 hours away on the right in a bay is Nice. The place in the foreground near the base is Cornigliano, where the Bolcevera [sic] flows into the sea.'

Rottmann was fairly pleased with the composition, writing about the first version of the painting in the same letter to his wife, 'The other picture with the blue mountains is quite good in colour, the landscape is so charming precisely because of these blue mountains, as are the blue distances in general. And when I resolved to paint this landscape, I just wanted to paint a blue distance, but as I drew it, I saw more and more that I could hardly hold on to anything; there were no forms that I liked or were good enough, and going into a blue distance, and not being able to stick to anything, is nonsense or dreaming, and yet I wanted to have the picture, and here it is; what you see in it is also in this nature, and much more that you do not see.'

Typical of Rottmann's technique are the areas of the sheet where the watercolour has not yet been applied, revealing the underlying pencil drawing. Three other preparatory watercolour drawings for the painting are known, all in private German collections, each of which leaves much of the foreground and middle ground of the composition blank. As such, the present sheet is arguably the most complete and refined of the four extant studies for the final painting.

This watercolour was previously in the collection of drawings and prints assembled by the 19th century German art historian Wilhelm Seibt (1823-1901).

Artist description:

Born near Heidelberg, the landscape painter and draughtsman Carl Rottmann received his initial artistic training from his father, Friedrich Rottmann, a professor of drawing at the University of Heidelberg. He settled in Munich in 1822, and there established his career, eventually coming to the attention of King Ludwig I of Bavaria. The King sponsored a study trip to Italy in 1826-1827, and Rottmann, who up to this point had only painted Bavarian views, was greatly inspired by his experience of the Italian countryside. On his return to Germany he painted twenty-eight frescoes of Italianate landscapes for the arcades of the Hofgarten, or Garden Court, in Munich, which were completed in 1833. (This cycle of landscape frescoes, which has suffered from exposure to the elements, is now in the Residenz in Munich, while Rottmann's large preparatory cartoons for them are in the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt.)

Between 1834 and 1835 Rottmann travelled throughout Greece, again at the behest of his patron Ludwig, who had commissioned the artist to paint scenes of Hellenic landscapes for the Hofgarten.

Rottmann's series of twenty-three Greek views, painted between 1838 and 1850, are today in the collection of the Neue Pinakothek in Munich, although several were damaged during the Second World War. Rottmann died in 1850, at the age of fifty-three.