

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Carlo BOSSOLI (Davesco 1815 - Turin 1884)

A Nocturnal View of St. Petersburg, with the Smolny Cathedral from the River Neva

Watercolour and gouache.

Pencil studies of boats on London on the verso.

Signed *C. Bossoli* in white chalk at the lower left.

Inscribed and dated *London 1857* in pencil on the verso.

266 x 457 mm. (10 1/2 x 18 in.)

Carlo Bossoli's youth in Odessa had instilled in him a longstanding interest in the landscape and buildings of the Russian Empire, which he drew on his extensive travels around Russia, the Crimean peninsula and the Black Sea region. Such works were popular with travellers, diplomats and aristocrats throughout Europe, and helped to shape the public view of Imperial Russia on the rest of the continent.

Nighttime subjects such as this lyrical moonlit view of the capital of the Tsardom of Russia and the Russian Empire are, however, relatively rare in Bossoli's oeuvre.

In remarkable condition, this refined gouache – aptly described by Ada Peyrot, the author of the Bossoli catalogue raisonné, as ‘enchanting’ – is one of a handful of drawings and sketches of St. Petersburg made during Bossoli's visit to the Imperial capital city in 1857. The artist here displays his skill in capturing the atmosphere of this nocturnal landscape, suffused with a silvery glow, with the moon partially veiled by clouds and subtly reflected in the water of the river. The evocative composition is dominated by the dramatic motif of the gilded onion domes of the Russian Orthodox cathedral, silhouetted against the night sky. The Smolny Convent of the Resurrection, a large architectural complex on the left bank of the River Neva, consists of a five-domed cathedral surrounded by a large square courtyard originally intended to contain two stories of monastic cells. One of the most beautiful churches in St. Petersburg, the Smolny cathedral and convent was commissioned by Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great and Empress of Russia. Designed by the Italian architect Bartolomeo Francesco Rastrelli, the cathedral was largely built between 1748 and 1764. The interior remained unfinished, however, and by the beginning of the 19th century the building had fallen into disrepair. Work was eventually completed in 1835, when the cathedral was finally consecrated.

Bossoli's account books record a large painting of the Smolny monastery that was sold on the art market in London in the late 1850, as well as a panoramic view of St. Petersburg acquired for 820

Swiss francs by the Marchese Alfieri in Turin in 1858.

The verso of the present sheet is inscribed and dated 'London 1857' and depicts a small pencil sketch of boats on the Thames.

Literature:

Ada Peyrot, *Carlo Bossoli: luoghi, personaggi, costumi, avvenimenti nell'Europa dell'Ottocento, visti dal pittore ticinese*, Turin, 1974, p.403, no.781, illustrated p.405; Paris, Jean-Luc Baroni & Marty de Cambiare, *Oeuvres sur papier*, 2019, pp.94-97, no.29.

Artist description:

Perhaps the foremost topographical artist in Europe in the second half of the 19th century, Carlo Bossoli was born near Lugano in Switzerland and as a child emigrated with his family to in Odessa in southern Ukraine. He was recognized as a young artist of considerable ability, and soon came to the attention of the Countess Elizabeth Vorontsov, wife of the governor of the province, who encouraged him to train with the Italian decorative artist Rinaldo Nannini, a pupil of the Milanese architect and stage designer Alessandro Sanquirico, who was working in Odessa. Bossoli began his career as an apprentice stage designer at the Odessa Opera, and by the age of eighteen was selling his drawings of views of Odessa and the surrounding landscape. With the support of the Vorontsov, he was able to study in Rome in 1839-1840. On his return to Ukraine in the early 1840s he travelled extensively around the Crimea, producing a large number of drawings, watercolours and gouaches of everyday life, local costumes and views of the main sites and cities there. Bossoli and his family returned to Europe in 1843, eventually settling in Milan. In 1850 he made his first visit to England and Scotland, and the following year visited Spain and Morocco. By 1853 Bossoli had settled in Turin, where he lived for the remainder of his career. He began producing panoramic landscapes and city views that were often published as lithographs in albums for the commercial market, such as *Vedute della città di Torino*, which appeared in 1851, and *Galleria sulla linea ferroviaria Torino-Genova*, published two years later.

With the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854, Bossoli decided to travel to London, where his knowledge of the Crimea stood him in very good stead. The immense interest on the part of the British public for views of Sebastopol, Balaklava, Inkermann and the other battlegrounds mentioned in news reports encouraged Bossoli to produce a series of fifty-two Crimean views that were reproduced as lithographs for a lavish volume entitled *The Beautiful Scenery and Chief Places of Interest Throughout the Crimea from Paintings by Carlo Bossoli*, published in London in 1856. These views were considered some of his finest works as a topographical artist, and among the many avid collectors of Bossoli's watercolours of Crimean landscapes were Queen Victoria and the Duke of Wellington. Bossoli exhibited his works at the Royal Academy between 1855 and 1859, and in 1857 undertook his longest journey yet, travelling through France, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia, Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Germany and Switzerland. Each of his travels resulted in drawings and watercolours of the cities and sites that he visited. Between 1859 and 1861 he was attached to the Piedmontese (Royal Sardinian) army and produced a splendid series of well over a hundred gouaches illustrating the military campaign for the independence of Italy, commissioned by Prince Eugenio di Savoia-Carignano; all but ten of these are now in the collection of the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento in Turin. Bossoli died of a heart attack in Turin in 1884.