

## **RCEWA – View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi by Bernardo Bellotto**

### **Applicant's statement**

*III Statement in relation to the Waverley criteria*

*The Committee's function is to consider whether an item referred to it is of national importance under any of the following criteria.*

- a) Is it so closely connected with our history and national life that its departure would be a misfortune?*
- b) Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance?*
- c) Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?*

*To assist the Committee, you may submit a written statement in support of your application, with particular reference to the three criteria set out above. You may use the space below (box 21) or attach a separate document for these purposes*

### **Further information**

The 'Expert Adviser's statement' and the 'Note of Case History' are available on the Arts Council Website: [www.artscouncil.org.uk/reviewing-committee-case-hearings](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/reviewing-committee-case-hearings)

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**Is it closely connected with our history and national life?**

a) Although this picture has been in the UK for much of its life, we do not consider this work to be closely connected with our British history and national life. The scene depicted is Verona and the artist, unlike his more famous uncle Canaletto, did not visit Britain and his patronage was predominantly Prussian/central European.

**Is it of outstanding aesthetic importance?**

b) Whilst an attractive Italian cityscape, this view of Verona should not be considered alongside the very best *vedute* of the eighteenth century as it neither depicts Venice nor one of the Prussian subjects for which Bellotto is best known.

**Is it of outstanding significance for the study of some particular branch of art, learning or history?**

c) Bellotto is generally considered inferior to his uncle Canaletto when it comes to Italian view paintings, of which there are an enormous number in British collections. His great contribution to art history would be his views of Northern European cities such as the views of Königstein, four of which are in UK collections (The National Gallery, London; Manchester Art Gallery x 2, and Knowsley Hall, The Earl of Derby). Moreover, a complimentary view of Verona on the same scale as the present work is on public view, at Powis Castle, Wales (The National Trust).

**RCEWA – View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi by Bernardo Bellotto**

**Statement of the Expert Adviser to the Secretary of State that the portrait meets Waverley criteria two and three.**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Brief Description of item(s)

Bernardo Bellotto, called il Canaletto (Venice 1721–1780 Warsaw)

*A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi*, about 1745–47

Oil on canvas, 133.3 x 234.8 cm

On the whole the condition is very good. There is a marked degree of drying cracking across much of the surface, exposing the lighter underlayers; this is a little distracting in the darker areas of foreground water and boats, but could easily be addressed in a campaign of restoration. There are also scattered local retouchings in the sky, which have significantly discoloured. A pronounced pattern of more widely spaced vertical cracks across the surface may be the result of the painting having been rolled some time well after its execution.

### Context

#### *Provenance:*

Anonymous sale, Christie's, London, 30 March 1771, lot 55, as 'Canaletti', sold for 250 gns. to

'Fleming'; Gilbert Fane Fleming (1724–1776), Marylebone; his sale, Christie's, London, 22 May 1777, as 'Canaletti. A view of the city of Verona, esteemed the chef d'oeuvre of the master', sold for 205 gns. to 'Ld Cadogan'; Charles Sloane Cadogan, 3rd Baron, from 1800 1st Earl, Cadogan (1728–1807), and presumably by inheritance to his son, Charles Henry Sloane, 2nd Earl Cadogan (1749–1832); (probably) acquired by the Hon. George James Welbore Agar Ellis, from 1831 1st Baron Dover (1797–1833), Dover House, Whitehall, and thence by inheritance to his daughter-in-law Eliza Horatia Frederica (1833–1896), widow of Henry George, 2nd Baron Dover and 3rd Viscount Clifden (1825–

1866); by descent to their son Henry George, 4th Viscount Clifden and 2nd Baron Dover (1863–

1895); his posthumous sale, Robinson and Foster, 25 May 1895, lot 784, as 'Canaletto', for 2,000 gns to Agnew's; acquired by Agnew's on behalf of Walter Hays Burns (1838–1897), North Mymms Park, Hertfordshire; thence by descent to his grandson Major-General Sir George Burns (1911–1997), North Mymms Park, Hertfordshire; his sale, Christie's, London, 26 November 1971, lot 30, sold for

£300,000 to Cyril Humphris, London; by whom sold to a private collector, thence by descent to the previous owner until sold ('Property from a Distinguished Private Collection'), Christie's, London, 8

July 2021, lot 9, for £10,575,000 (including buyer's premium).

#### *Exhibitions:*

London, British Institution, *Pictures of the Italian, Spanish, Flemish, Dutch and French Masters*, June 1838, no. 141, as 'Canaletto'; London, Royal Academy, *The Winter Exhibition*, 1877, no. 239, as 'Canaletto'; London, The Magnasco Society, at Agnew's, *Loan Exhibition of Pictures of the XVII & XVIII Centuries*, October 1926, no. 17; Edinburgh, National Galleries of Scotland, on long-term loan, 1973–2021.

#### *Selected Literature:*

M. Chamot, 'Baroque Paintings', *Country Life*, LX, 6 November 1926, p. 708; A. Oswald, 'North Mymms Park, II', *Country Life*, LXXV, 20 January 1934, pp. 70–1, fig. 13; S. Kozakiewicz, *Bernardo Bellotto* (Recklinghausen 1972), vol. I, pp. 44–5, vol. II, pp. 80–83, no. 101; E. Camesasca, *L'opera completa del Bellotto* (Milan 1974), p. 95, no. 67; D. Sutton, ed., *Souvenirs of the Grand Tour: A Loan Exhibition from National Trust Collections in Aid of the Trust's Conservation Fund*, exh. cat. London 1982, p. 22, under no. 6; G. Jackson-Stops, ed., *The Treasure Houses of Britain: Five Hundred Years of Private Patronage and Art Collecting*, exh. cat. Washington D.C. 1985–6, pp. 272–3, under no. 193; A. Laing, *In Trust for the Nation: Paintings from National Trust Houses*, exh. cat. London 1996, pp. 86–7, under no. 30, fig. 13; E.P. Bowron in *Bernardo Bellotto and the Capitals of Europe*, exh. cat. Venice and Houston 2001, pp. 142–5, under nos 37 and 38; K. Zaleski in *Bernardo Bellotto genannt Canaletto, Europäische Veduten*, exh. cat. Vienna 2005, pp. 219–20, under no. 56, fig. 56.1; S. Lloyd in *Bellotto: The Königstein Views Reunited*, exh. cat. London 2021, pp. 42–3, fig. 22.

#### **Waverley Criteria**

The painting meets **Waverley criterion 2** due its outstanding aesthetic importance as an early masterpiece by the eighteenth-century view painter Bernardo Bellotto. With its innovative composition and status as the first Bellotto recorded in Britain together with its pendant now at Powis Castle, it plays a significant role in the study of view painting in this country, thus also meeting **Waverley criterion 3**.

#### **DETAILED CASE**

##### **1. Detailed description of item(s) if more than in Executive Summary, and any comments.**

In this expansive view of the north Italian city of Verona, Bellotto takes his viewpoint from the banks of the River Adige, looking south. It is late afternoon: the sun falls from the right, imbuing the sky with a pinkish hue, and the bridge and buildings cast long shadows. In this and its

companion picture at Powis Castle, Bellotto draws on features that were familiar to him from Venice: bridges, waterways lined with palaces, scattered boats and figures going about their daily business. He brilliantly describes the varying textures of the buildings, from the stained, crumbling brick- and plasterwork of the Ponte delle Navi bridge to the elegant whitewashed and rusticated facades of the palaces along the waterfront. He is equally attentive to conveying the poetic effects of light and atmosphere, particularly evocative in the reflections on the water and the River Adige's moving currents. Bellotto's composition is highly original, with the bridge's perpendicular tower slicing the picture audaciously in half, a compositional motif that he would adopt again (e.g. *The Entry of the Polish Ambassador Count Jerzy Ossoliński to Rome in 1633* of 1779; National Museum, Wrocław).

Bellotto trained in the studio of his uncle, the celebrated Venetian view painter Canaletto (1697–1768). Alongside Canaletto and Francesco Guardi (1712–1793), he is one of the three great Venetian view painters of the eighteenth century. But where Canaletto and Guardi remain synonymous with their native Venice, Bellotto's life and work were defined by the journeys he made outside the Veneto. Today, he is best-known for his monumental yet meticulous depictions of the central European cities of Dresden, Vienna, Munich and Warsaw, pictures so detailed that they were used in the reconstruction of certain landmarks after the Second World War. Before *A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi*, there is nothing in his oeuvre of this scale and ambition.

## **2. Detailed explanation of the outstanding significance of the item(s).**

This spectacular view is one of Bellotto's rare, early masterpieces. Painted in about 1745–7, it marks an important turning point in the young artist's career. From about 1740, Bellotto – then just eighteen years old – had begun to undertake a series of journeys around Italy, driven by a desire to expand his client base and search for subject matter outside of his native Venice. In 1745, two years after his reception at the Venetian painters' guild, the *Fraglia dei Pittori*, he received his first royal commission: a pair of views of Turin for Charles Emmanuel III (1701–1773), King of Sardinia and Duke of Savoy (now in the Galleria Sabauda, Turin). He travelled to Verona that same year.

Measuring well over two metres in width, the format of *A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi* and its pendant at Powis Castle set the bar for Bellotto's great cityscapes. As noted by J.G. Links (cited by Alastair Laing), he was happiest on a large scale: 'From now on, seven feet was to be Bellotto's minimum width for his important townscapes; in itself, surely a mark of self-confidence in a man not yet thirty years old.'<sup>1</sup> The fact that Bellotto took full-size replicas of this and the Powis Castle composition with him to Dresden in 1747<sup>2</sup>, selling them to Augustus, Elector of Saxony, who would become his most important patron, underlines the pivotal role this painting played in launching his international career.

Although we do not know for whom *A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi* and its pendant were painted, they entered Britain early: a note on a related drawing in Darmstadt suggests that the painting was 'per ingiltera' ('for England'), and both pictures appeared at auction in London in 1771. It is hardly surprising that Bellotto would have sought out a British patron. Grand Tourists comprised the vast majority of his uncle's clientele, and it is worth remembering that, with the War of Austrian Succession limiting the number of travellers able to reach Venice, Canaletto had removed to London in 1746 in search of work.

Although there are today fourteen paintings by Bernardo Bellotto in British public collections, none represents the artist's early career so dramatically or beautifully as *A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi*. The National Gallery's recently acquired *The Fortress of Königstein from the North* and the two pictures from the same series at the Manchester Art Gallery (ca. 1756–58) are works of the artist's maturity and, more importantly, from after his appointment as court painter in Dresden. While the Fitzwilliam Museum's pendant depictions of the river Arno in Florence are testament to a similar early journey (ca. 1745), at 74 x 106 cm they are on a far more modest scale. Without the dominance of the bridge in the foreground and the striking division of space it provides, the pendant picture at Powis Castle, *A View of Verona from the Ponte Nuovo*, is less innovative in its composition. It has none of the intimate, day-to-day interactions seen in *A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi* – the Franciscan friars stopping for a natter; the carter driving oxen and bales of hay; the woman holding a child's hand as they prepare to step onto the bridge – that would come to characterise Bellotto's pictures.

If Bellotto was once overshadowed by his uncle, his central role in and unique contribution to the history of view painting in eighteenth-century Europe is now undisputed. The importance of view painting to British art and collecting cannot be overstated, yet it would be a mistake to assume that all eighteenth-century view paintings perform the same function. *A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi* is a remarkable early canvas by an artist whose pictures have played a substantial role in the teaching and appreciation of view painting over the last 70 years. For the last half-century, this painting has hung on the walls of one of our national galleries, during which time academic interest in and appreciation of Bellotto's work has grown exponentially, as evidenced by the National Gallery's acquisition of a major work in 2017 and subsequent exhibition in 2021. Its export, definitively splitting this highly significant pair of paintings, would be an unfortunate loss for this country.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Laing, *In Trust for the Nation: Paintings from National Trust Houses*, exh. cat., National Gallery, London, 1995, p. 86, under cat 30.

<sup>2</sup> Today in the Gemäldegalerie, Dresd

**Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, note of case hearing on 2 March 2022: *View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi* by Bernardo Bellotto (Case 11, 2021-22)**

**Application**

1. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA) met on 2 March 2022 to consider an application to export the painting *View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi* by Bernardo Bellotto. The value shown on the export licence application was £10,885,000 which represented the hammer price at auction plus the buyer's premium and agent's commission. The value also included £15,000 for a post-acquisition Art Discovery report which could not be taken into account by the Committee in arriving at a recommended fair market price as it was not a cost incurred by the new owner as being necessary to stabilise the condition of the painting (see paragraph 48 of the Arts Council's *Guidance for exporters*). The expert adviser had objected to the export of the painting under the second and third Waverley criteria on the grounds that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune because (ii) it was of outstanding aesthetic importance and (iii) it was of outstanding significance for the study of view painting in this country.

2. All of the regular eight RCEWA members were present and were joined by three independent assessors, acting as temporary members of the Reviewing Committee. The Chairman explained that the binding offers mechanism was applicable for this case.

3. The applicant was consulted about the hybrid virtual/in person process of the meeting and confirmed they were content to proceed in this manner. The applicant confirmed that the value did not include VAT and that VAT on the buyer's premium and agent's commission would be payable in the event of a UK sale. The applicant also confirmed that the owner understood the circumstances under which an export licence might be refused.

**Expert's submission**

4. The expert adviser had provided a written submission stating that this spectacular view was one of Bellotto's rare, early masterpieces. Painted in about 1745–7, it marked an important turning point in the young artist's career. From about 1740, Bellotto – then just eighteen years old – had begun to undertake a series of journeys around Italy, driven by a desire to expand his client base and search for subject matter outside of his native Venice. In 1745, seven years after his reception into the Venetian painters' guild, the *Fraglia dei Pittori*, he received his first royal commission for Charles Emmanuel III (1701–1773), King of Sardinia and Duke of Savoy.

5. Measuring well over two metres in width, the format of *A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi* and its pendant, now at Powis Castle, set the bar for



Bellotto's great cityscapes. The fact that Bellotto took full-size replicas of this and the Powis Castle composition with him to Dresden in 1747, selling them to Augustus, Elector of Saxony (who would become his most important patron), underlines the pivotal role this painting played in launching his international career.

6. Although we do not know for whom *A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi* and its pendant were painted, they entered Britain early: a note on a related drawing in Darmstadt suggests that the painting was 'per ingiltera' ('for England'), and both pictures appeared at auction in London in 1771.

7. Although there were today 14 paintings by Bernardo Bellotto in British public collections, none represented the artist's early career so dramatically or beautifully as *A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi*. The importance of view painting to British art and collecting could not be overstated, yet it would be a mistake to assume that all 18th century view paintings performed the same function. *A View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi* was a remarkable early canvas by an artist whose pictures have featured substantially in the teaching and appreciation of view painting over the last 70 years.

### **Applicant's submission**

8. The applicant had stated in a written submission that they did not consider the painting met any of the three Waverley criteria. Regarding the first Waverley criterion, the applicant stated that they did not consider this work to be closely connected with British history and national life. The scene depicted was Verona and the artist, unlike his more famous uncle Canaletto, did not visit Britain and his patronage was predominantly Prussian/central European.

9. Regarding the second Waverley criterion, the applicant stated that this view of Verona should not be considered alongside the very best *vedute* of the 18th century as it neither depicted Venice nor one of the Prussian subjects for which Bellotto was best known.

10. Regarding the third Waverley criterion, the applicant stated that Bellotto was generally considered inferior to his uncle Canaletto when it came to Italian view paintings. His great contribution to art history was his views of Northern European cities such as the views of Königstein.

### **Discussion by the Committee**

11. The expert adviser and applicant retired and the Committee discussed the case. They agreed that this was a stunningly beautiful and innovative painting and represented a turning point in Bellotto's career. It was the first, along with its pendant at Powis Castle, that was painted on a large scale, and the last work he produced before leaving Italy. They noted the striking and unexpected composition, particularly the contrast of the vertical tower with the horizontal bridge, and considered the modulations of light and rhythmic application of paint outstanding. They agreed this was one of the most beautiful paintings

produced by Bellotto, and that it represented a stylistically important moment in his artistic development.

12. The Committee then discussed the opportunity for further study that this painting presented, as this was potentially Bellotto's most important Italian view painting in private hands. They were intrigued by the use of perspective and detail, especially the figures, and noted that the composition developed here was similar to that used in later work. In addition, the Committee felt that the potential to reunite this painting with its pendant could be extremely beneficial in studying this category of view painting. The Committee concluded that this painting could provide significant insight into the development of Bellotto's style in particular as well as 18th century view painting in general.

### **Waverley Criteria**

13. The Committee voted on whether the painting met the Waverley criteria. Of the 11 members, all voted that it met the second Waverley criterion. All members voted that it met the third Waverley criterion. The painting was therefore found to meet the second and third Waverley criteria for its outstanding significance for the study of Bellotto's stylistic development and 18th century view painting in Britain.

### **Matching offer**

14. The Committee recommended the sum of £11,244,000 (including VAT) as a fair matching price.

### **Deferral period**

15. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Secretary of State that the decision on the export licence should be deferred for an initial period of four months. At the end of the first deferral period, if the Arts Council received notification of a serious intention to raise funds with a view to making an offer to purchase the painting, the owner will have a consideration period of 15 Business Days to consider any offer(s). The Committee recommended that there should be a further deferral period of six months that would commence following the signing of an Option Agreement.

### **Communication of findings**

16. The expert adviser and the applicant returned. The Chairman notified them of the Committee's decision on its recommendations to the Secretary of State.

17. The expert adviser agreed to act as champion if a decision on the licence was deferred by the Secretary of State.

**Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest: Note of outcome: *View of Verona with the Ponte delle Navi* by Bernardo Bellotto (Case 11, 2021-22)**

At the end of the initial deferral period, no offer to purchase the painting had been made and we were not aware of any serious intention to raise funds. An export licence was therefore issued.