

# LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

## KUNST



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GIUSEPPE DE NITTIS

1846 Barletta - Saint-Germain-en-Laye 1884

*Nubi sul mare*

Oil on panel. Signed lower left *De Nittis*, bearing the estate stamp on the verso *Atelier De Nittis*  
10,0 x 15,0 cm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, Italy

LITERATURE: Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis. La vita, i documenti, le opere dipinte*, catalogue raisonné, Turin 1990, no. 128

*Il me parlait un autre jour des longs temps qu'il passait à regarder les gros nuages blancs de son pays, qui ne sont pas informes comme ceux de chez nous, mais qui se modèlent dans le ciel sous d'innombrables facettes.*<sup>1</sup>

Giuseppe De Nittis is one of the most important Italian painters of the nineteenth century. He took up his studies at the Istituto di Belle Arti in Naples but early on abandoned the academic tradition of his training. He came into contact with the group of young Florentine painters known as the *Macchiaioli*.<sup>2</sup> From his early years in Barletta onwards, De Nittis showed a clear preference for landscape painting. In 1863, he founded an informal artists' group known as the School of Resina together with three other Italian painters. The group took its name from the coastal village of Resina just south of Naples. Here, and in nearby Portici, a village at the foot of Vesuvius, the four artists would gather to practise *plein-air* painting, observing the sky, the clouds and the sea.<sup>3</sup> The group began to break up in 1867 with the departure of De Nittis to Paris.

De Nittis left Paris on a visit to his native Italy in 1870 but the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and ensuing Paris Commune forced him to prolong his stay in Italy. It was almost three years before he could return to the French capital. This enforced sojourn was nonetheless to be of critical importance to his development as a landscape artist. In his Apulian home town of Barletta, in Naples and in Portici he was to create what are his most powerful and modern works. These works are small in format and almost all are on panel. He was to produce some seventy studies unmatched in Italian painting of the period. They can be seen as genuine precursors of late Impressionism.

In the years 1871-73 subjects such as harbours, seascapes and fisherfolk played an important role in De Nittis's oeuvre. These small-format studies testify to his strong attachment to the sea. His output of marine studies was extraordinarily prolific and extremely varied. His imagery included tiny seascapes

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<sup>1</sup> *On another occasion he talked of long moments spent studying the sky in his native country, a sky filled with immense white clouds which are not shapeless like our clouds but which model and remodel themselves in innumerable guises.* Edmond de Goncourt, 6 February 1883

<sup>2</sup> The *Macchiaioli* were a group of young Italian painters active in Tuscany in the second half of the nineteenth century, who, breaking with the antiquated conventions taught by the Italian academies of art, did much of their painting outdoors in order to capture natural light, shade, and colour.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Farese Sperken, *Giuseppe de Nittis, Catalogo generale*, Palazzo Della Marra, Barletta, Bari 2016, p. 23.

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dotted with sailing ships and fishing boats, highly evocative views of the Naples coast and sunsets over the sea.

This small painting is most probably a view of the coast of Naples – more precisely, of Posillipo seen from Porto Granatello in Portici [Figs.1 and 2]. In it, De Nittis places emphasis on spatial depth, and at the same time focuses his gaze on the white plume of cloud over the sea, modelled in broad strokes of rapidly applied, free-flowing paint. As Léonce Bénédite, one-time director of the Musée du Luxembourg and first director of the Musée Rodin, notes: *De Nittis's entire œuvre can be said to oscillate between three subjects, three styles or as he himself says, three skies.*<sup>4</sup>

The oil study is recorded in the archive of the Fondazione Giuseppe de Nittis, Barletta, under no. 134.

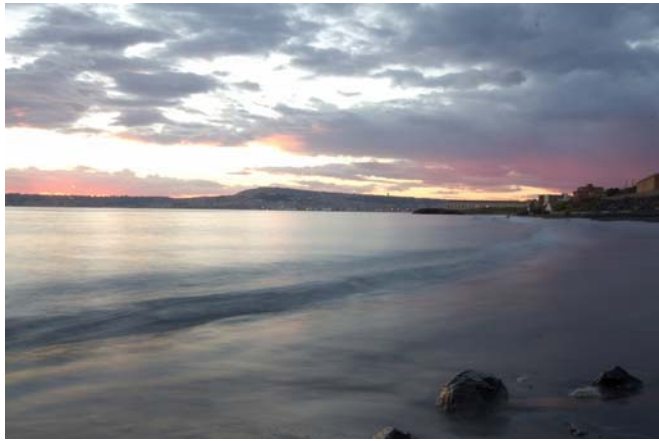


Fig.1: Porto Granatello, Portici; in the background Posillipo, Naples



Fig.2: Posillipo seen from Portici

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<sup>4</sup> Léonce Bénédite, *De Nittis*, Paris 1926.