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GUGLIELMO CIARDI

1842 - Venice - 1917

Barca al tramonto [Boat at Sunset]

Oil on canvas. Signed lower left *CIARDI*; executed in the 1890s.

29.9 x 39.7 cm

PROVENANCE: Carlo Zavattaro, Turin – Jean-Luc Baroni Ltd., London – Private collection, England

LITERATURE: Nico Stringa, *Guglielmo Ciardi. Catalogo ragionato dei dipinti*, Vicenza 2007, p. 246, no. 221 (repr.)

EXHIBITIONS: *An Exhibition of Master Drawings and Paintings*, Jean-Luc Baroni Ltd., London, 24 January - 5 February 2009, no. 38

Guglielmo Ciardi trained at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia, where he took up a teaching post in perspective, marine painting and landscape in 1894. He was a regular contributor to exhibitions at the Accademia, the Società Promotrice di Belle Arti and the Biennale di Venezia. In 1909, he was invited to show his work in a solo exhibition at the Biennale.

In 1868, he undertook a study trip to Florence, Rome and Naples, the capitals of artistic renewal in mid-nineteenth century Italy. His objective was to experience artistic innovation at first hand and to forge direct contacts to trailblazers such as the 'Macchiaioli',¹ a group of young painters he met and befriended in Florence. On his stay in Naples, he came into contact with the painters of the Scuola di Resina.² The study trip was to have a formative influence on his artistic development.

On Ciardi's return from Naples in 1868 and well into the first decade of the twentieth century his primary source of artistic inspiration was to be the Venetian lagoon. He had already turned to the motif in his earlier work but now addressed it with greater intensity, using it as a key vehicle for exploring the landscape genre. He drew on the experiences gathered on his study trip to develop a new kind of visual language, one that was no longer bound to traditional representations of the lagoon landscape. In a large body of paintings he tested the chromatic possibilities of the lagoon and recorded the changing effects of light on the water. The impressionistic lagoon landscapes of the 1880s and 1890s represent the peak of his artistic achievement.³

¹ 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.

² 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, some artists would gather to practise *plein-air* painting. They observed the sky, the clouds and the sea. The leading artist in the group was Giuseppe de Nittis (1846-84).

³ Nico Stringa, *Marina, Pescatori in Laguna, Venezia*, in: *Guglielmo Ciardi. Catalogo generale dei dipinti*, Venice, 2007, p. 202.

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Looking at Ciardi's lagoon paintings, an observer might think the wind responsible for driving the sailing boats out into the open sea. But at the same time, the tonal harmony of the landscapes conveys a profound sense of stillness, and barely a ripple is shown on the surface of the water [Fig.1].

With a number of other artists, Ciardi was responsible for the renewal of Venetian painting in the second half of the nineteenth century. Rather than depict *La Serenissima's* best-loved sites in the tradition of the *vedutisti* of the mid-eighteenth century, Ciardi focuses on the lagoon, its atmospheric qualities and the vibrant play of light.

Very probably datable to the 1890s, this painting is a masterly example of Ciardi's tonal virtuosity in depicting the radiance of evening sunlight over the Venetian lagoon.



Fig.1: *Tramonto* [*Setting Sun*], oil on canvas, 38.3 x 60.2 cm.
Private collection, Venice