

BELLOTTO

The Königstein Views reunited



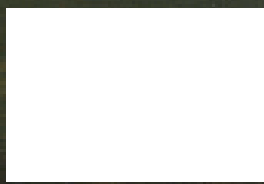
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LETIZIA TREVES

with contributions by Lucy Chiswell, Stephen Lloyd and Hannah Williamson

BELLOTTO

The Königstein Views reunited

NATIONAL GALLERY COMPANY, LONDON
DISTRIBUTED BY YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS



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THE CITY AS A WORK OF ART

Letizia Treves

In mid-July 1760, in the prime of his life and at the pinnacle of his career, the 38-year-old painter Bernardo Bellotto (1722–1780) suffered irreparable damages that left him and his family homeless and desperate, causing him to 'lose all hope'.¹ The onset of the Seven Years' War (1756–63), the ensuing Prussian occupation of Dresden and the devastating impact of a week-long bombardment of the city brought about a dramatic reversal in Bellotto's fortunes: from his position as the highest-paid artist at the Saxon court, he now faced a life of hardship, without home or employment, and almost all his worldly possessions destroyed.

The vicissitudes of Bellotto's life are perfectly epitomised by his two views of the Kreuzkirche, one of Dresden's most recognisable churches, painted about fifteen years apart.² The first dates from around 1751–2 (fig. 1, s01). The imposing structure of the late Gothic-Renaissance church dominates the Altmarkt square, and the elegant townhouses flanking it on either side are evocative of Dresden's prosperity and baroque splendour. The scene is dotted with people going about their daily business, from the simply dressed women in the foreground, pausing to rest on their errands, to the fashionable figures promenading. The sharply foreshortened buildings on the left, leading our eye eastwards up the Kreuzstrasse, display Bellotto's keen interest in perspective. This, together with the astonishingly detailed rendition of the Kreuzkirche's stone- and brickwork, with particular attention given to the facade's weathering by the elements, implies topographical accuracy and authenticity. Bellotto gives us a clear vantage point in the corner of the square, in the shade of a building outside our field of vision which also casts a shadow across the immediate foreground of the picture – a framing device frequently used by Bellotto in his compositions. We are made to believe that we are physically present, at a specific moment in time: the clock on the church tower strikes two as figures emerge from the portal, filing out after mass into the midday sun. And yet, despite the view's apparent precision, there is a certain degree of artistic licence: by arranging his composition in an almost square format and introducing more space around the Kreuzkirche, Bellotto has achieved the desired

S01 Bernardo Bellotto (1722–1780). *The Kreuzkirche in Dresden*, about 1751–2. Oil on canvas. 196 x 186 cm. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister. Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden





S02 Bernardo Bellotto (1722-1780). *The Ruins of the Kreuzkirche in Dresden*. 1765. Oil on canvas, 80 x 110 cm. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

effect of enhancing the prospect of the church and giving solidity and monumentality to his chosen landmark. It was precisely this ability to skilfully compose views of a city's sites, while successfully capturing the character and atmosphere of a place, that led to Bellotto's appointment as official 'view painter' at the Saxon court in 1748.

How different is the smaller but more expansive view of the same square, seen from the opposite side, painted by Bellotto in 1765 (fig. 2, s02). Five years have passed since Dresden was blasted by the army of Frederick the Great (1712–1786), King of Prussia, but the Kreuzkirche still lies in ruins – only a section of its 90-metre tower remains standing. Workmen scatter across the heaped rubble of bricks and stone fragments, as a crowd of onlookers gathers nearby. Following the partial collapse of the Kreuzkirche's tower on 22 June 1765, men set to work dismantling the tower's remaining wall brick by brick. Once again Bellotto transports us to a real place and, positioned as we are just east of where the church's

nave would have been, we become eyewitnesses to this historical event.³ An exceptionally tall ladder runs the height of the dilapidated structure and workmen perch precariously on the upper register of the ruined tower. The seemingly intact facades of the surrounding townhouses remind us of the city's former grandeur. Just as the Kreuzkirche lay in ruins, so too Bellotto's own life was in tatters: the once prosperous artist had lost his home and belongings, including an extensive library, his collection of paintings, hundreds of engravings and drawings, and countless other assets. With the sudden death of Frederick Augustus II (1696–1763), Elector of Saxony and King of Poland (as Augustus III), in 1763, Bellotto found himself without formal employment. The following year, when he took up a limited-tenure teaching post at the

recently founded Dresden Academy of Fine Arts, he was obliged to accept an annual salary of 600 thalers: a third of the generous stipend he had received from the elector when he was first appointed court painter.

This moment undoubtedly marks a low point for Bellotto but, like the city of Dresden, he would rise from the ashes. In 1767, just two years after he painted the second of these pictures, he travelled to Warsaw and entered the service of one of the greatest art patrons of the age, Stanislaw II August Poniatowski (1732–1798), King of Poland.⁴ Bellotto was once again able to live comfortably and enjoy the social standing to which he had grown accustomed in Dresden, Vienna and Munich at the Saxon and Bavarian courts. By the time Bellotto's career ended, aged 58, he had practised his art internationally over a 40-year period marked by global conflict and political upheaval. Notwithstanding his reputation in his own lifetime among the leading European rulers of his age, Bellotto was overlooked in the ensuing centuries in favour of his more famous uncle, the great Venetian view painter Giovanni Antonio Canal (1697–1768) – better known today as 'Canaletto' (the pseudonym by which Bellotto was widely known in the eighteenth century) – under whom he trained. Bellotto's extraordinary journey from Canaletto's Venice to the courts of northern Europe was driven by his desire for professional independence, stability and widespread recognition.

VENETIAN BEGINNINGS

Bernardo Bellotto was born in Venice on 20 May 1722, third child of Lorenzo Antonio Bellotto and Fiorenza Domenica Canal, the eldest of Canaletto's three sisters. Bellotto did not pursue an administrative career like his father, presumably because Lorenzo abandoned his wife and children early on.⁵ Bellotto must have demonstrated considerable artistic talent and was apprenticed to his uncle: not an unusual practice at the time, particularly within the context of an extended family of painters. Bellotto's grandfather Bernardo Canal (1674–1744), after whom he was named, and his uncle Cristoforo were respected stage-set designers (*pittori da teatro*), as indeed was Canaletto himself in the earliest stages of his career.⁶ By 1736 Bellotto was already an accomplished draughtsman and had probably been a pupil in Canaletto's studio for some time.⁷ Two years later, when he was just 16, Bellotto became a member of the 'Fraglia

dei pittori' (the Venetian painters' guild), presumably with his uncle's support. As Canaletto struggled to meet the growing demand for his work, it would have been advantageous to have his nephew's artistic talents officially recognised.⁸ Bellotto, in turn, benefited greatly from being under his uncle's aegis, particularly in Venice where there was a burgeoning market for view paintings – a genre in which Canaletto truly excelled.

The Dutchman Gaspere Vanvitelli (1652/3–1736) was largely responsible for introducing view painting to Italy and, although it was Luca Carlevarijs (1663–1730) who established the genre in Venice at the turn of the century, the visual poetry Canaletto brought to his views was unparalleled by his predecessors and contemporaries.⁹ It was from Canaletto that Bellotto learnt how to evoke light and shade, describe different surface textures of buildings and the effect of reflections or delicate ripples on water. Most importantly of all Canaletto taught Bellotto how to draw – from large compositional drawings to detailed studies of individual buildings and people – and this remained a vital part of the artist's working method.¹⁰ Bellotto grasped single- and multiple-point perspective and mastered the use of the camera obscura (pinhole camera), which both Canaletto and Bellotto employed extensively to compose their views.¹¹ They used such cameras first to capture the entire panorama before them, marking the exact positions of significant buildings in a perspectival drawing, and then again to record partial, detailed views, which could be convincingly assembled to create a larger whole.¹² Many eighteenth-century landscape and architectural painters utilised the camera obscura, but Canaletto and Bellotto were exceptional in 'correcting' the distortions of the projected image to ensure that their compositions aligned more closely with what the eye perceived: something for which the eighteenth-century art historian Anton Maria Zanetti the Younger (1706–1778) particularly praised Canaletto.¹³

The scarce documentation and absence of signed works from this early period in Bellotto's apprenticeship have made it difficult to distinguish his hand from that of his master. This was the purpose, after all, of a successful artist's studio: to satisfy demand with assistance from the studio and for pupils to closely emulate their master's style. Since the landmark publication of the catalogue raisonnés of Canaletto and Bellotto's works – the former by W.G. Constable (1976) and the latter by Stefan Kozakiewicz (1972) – significant progress has been made in establishing Bellotto's early artistic development and

defining his production within Canaletto's studio.¹⁴ On the basis of the drawings, paintings and engravings that have come down to us, the two artists evidently worked together very closely. Many of their works are compositionally related, but the sequencing and interdependence of these works have been the cause of much debate.¹⁵ A number of surviving examples seem to suggest the following practice: Bellotto would execute a linear pen-and-ink sketch of a particular site which Canaletto would replicate and then work up, vigorously blocking out shadows and selected details frequently obliterated. This more 'developed' drawing would often form the basis upon which various painted compositions were produced within Canaletto's studio, some by the master himself, others (of varying quality) by assistants and, on occasion, by Bellotto.

One such painting is *Bellotto's Venice: Upper Reaches of the Grand Canal facing Santa Croce* (fig. 3, s03), which, until relatively recently, was considered to be by an anonymous follower of Canaletto because of its correspondence with a drawing by Canaletto and a closely related engraving by Antonio Visentini (1688–1782).¹⁶ It has been convincingly argued that the existence of a sketch by Bellotto of the same view (about 1738; Darmstadt, Hessisches Landesmuseum) points

to Canaletto having had recourse to his pupil's drawing to develop his own composition – and numerous other instances of this exist.¹⁷ The youthful Bellotto may not yet have fully mastered the quality and subtlety of Canaletto's technique in this painting, as is particularly evident in the schematically drawn water ripples and spindly figures, but he does apply the rigorous precision he has been taught – a ruled line, corresponding to the horizon line, cuts into the wet paint on the right.¹⁸ Bellotto already demonstrates a great sensitivity to atmospheric effects and the changing weather, in his use of bold diagonal brushstrokes for the clouds upper centre and a streaky haze on the distant horizon painted wet-on-wet. The picture's richly textured surface, achieved through thickly applied paint, was to become a characteristic of Bellotto's mature work.

It seems logical that, while still apprenticed in Canaletto's studio, Bellotto would have encountered his uncle's clients. Indeed, like Canaletto, some of the earliest buyers of Bellotto's views were British aristocrats who had travelled to Venice on the Grand Tour.¹⁹ Among these

S03_NG2514 Bernardo Bellotto (1722–1780). *Venice: Upper Reaches of the Grand Canal facing Santa Croce*, about 1738. Oil on canvas, 59.7 x 92.1 cm. The National Gallery, London



S04 Bernardo Bellotto (1722–1780). *The Arno with the Ponte Vecchio, Florence*, about 1742–3. Oil on canvas, 74.2 x 106.8 cm. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (or Lent by the Syndics of the)

was Henry Howard (1694–1758), 4th Earl of Carlisle, who, following a trip to Venice in 1738–9, commissioned more than 40 Venetian views by different artists (including 15 by Bellotto) through his art agent Antonio Maria Zanetti the Elder (1697–1757).²⁰ Zanetti seems to have assumed the role of intermediary for Bellotto at this time, rather as the Venice-based merchant and British consul Joseph Smith (about 1674–1770) became Canaletto's principal agent in Venice.²¹ In June 1740 Zanetti wrote to Carlisle, inviting him to encourage friends to commission view paintings from Bellotto, describing him as 'the best there is, and who is as skilful as Canaletto'.²² This was an opinion only partially endorsed by the art critic, agent and diplomat Francesco Algarotti (1712–1764). Impressed by the quality of the works Zanetti had sold, Algarotti was keen to uncover the identity of the artist whom he considered 'a painter who imitates extremely well the manner of Canaletto, perhaps does water much better than him, but is not quite as polished'.²³

Bellotto's association with Zanetti was crucial in laying the foundations for the artist's future prospects, both within Venice and beyond. When Augustus III's son,

Prince Frederick Christian (1722–1763), visited Venice in 1739–40, Bellotto painted a large view of the Grand Canal (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm) which, with Zanetti's position of influence with Augustus III, must have helped secure Bellotto's appointment as court painter in Dresden some years later.²⁴ It may also have been through Zanetti's agency that Joseph Wenzel (1696–1772), Prince of Liechtenstein, acquired four large views from Canaletto in the 1720s.²⁵ The same prince would commission a pair of pictures of his suburban palace in the Rossau, Vienna, from Bellotto many years later (1759–60; Liechtenstein Princely Collections, Vienna).²⁶ And it was certainly through Zanetti's active promotion of Bellotto's talents that in 1740 the 18-year-old painter was invited to Florence by Marchese Andrea Gerini (1691–1766), for whom he was to paint four prospects of the city (fig. 4, s04).²⁷

The views Bellotto painted of Florence mark a significant point of departure: Canaletto had never

reflections on still water and suggest moving currents is remarkably sophisticated: as Algarotti had remarked, Bellotto proves himself to be more accomplished than Canaletto in rendering these water effects. His two views of Verona looking up- and downstream the river Adige, painted around the same time, are intensely poetic and even larger in format (approximately 130 x 230 cm each).³⁹ This grand scale suited these expansive vistas and was favoured by Bellotto, particularly in Dresden where he produced dozens of views for the elector.

The mid-1740s mark a turning point for Bellotto. In May 1746 Canaletto left Venice for England, where he sought to satisfy the considerable demand for his pictures and adopted an increasingly stylised manner of painting.⁴⁰ By then the 24-year-old Bellotto had fulfilled his first royal commission and, like his uncle, was preparing to leave Italy. In spring 1747 he made his way to Dresden, hoping to find permanent employment there. Within a year of his arrival, he had entered the service of the elector, becoming the highest-paid artist at the Saxon court, and embarked on the most productive decade of his career.⁴¹

S07 Bernardo Bellotto (1722–1780). *The Neumarkt from the Judenhof, Dresden*, about 1748–9. Oil on canvas, 136 x 236 cm. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden



PAINTER AT THE ROYAL COURTS IN DRESDEN, VIENNA AND MUNICH

The city of Dresden – together with the idyllic village of Pirna and fortress of Königstein on the outskirts of the city – provided Bellotto with a whole new range of urban and rural panoramas. The painter varied his subject matter, as Canaletto had done previously in Venice, and turned equal attention to Dresden's familiar landmarks and the city's lesser-known spots. Imposing church buildings (the Frauenkirche, Kreuzkirche and Hofkirche) break through skylines and rise above squares and marketplaces; the city's royal complex (the Zwinger) is laid out for us to appreciate, though we are also given a 'backstreet' view from the adjacent moat; and Dresden's magnificent waterfronts are captured from either bank of the river Elbe, populated with fishermen, cattle-drivers and people hanging their washing out to dry. Bellotto's city is rooted in history, but such anecdotal details paint the picture of a budding metropolis.

For the elector Bellotto produced a series of views comprising 30 different prospects; 14 of Dresden (organised as 7 pairs), 11 of Pirna and 5 of Königstein.⁴² These dramatic vistas served a clear political purpose: they were visual statements of Dresden's magnificence in



the 'Augustan age' and proclaimed the city's status as one of the principal capitals of Europe. In *The Neumarkt from the Judenhof, Dresden* (fig. 7, s07) Augustus III is present, seated in a tilting horse-drawn carriage.⁴³ A man bows respectfully as the king crosses the Neumarkt and heads towards the royal picture gallery, the royal guard lining up neatly on the other side of the square. Bellotto's views of Dresden were highly politicised – through them Augustus III hoped to immortalise the city and his power. The artist even produced a second series, in which many of the compositions from the royal cycle are repeated, for the prime minister, Count Heinrich Brühl (1700–1763).⁴⁴ Bellotto knew to flatter his prospective high-ranking clients and in *Dresden from the Right Bank of the Elbe above Augustus Bridge* (fig. 8, s38) he gives prominence to the Brühl Terrace – the count's palace and picture gallery, bright in the sunshine, dominate the left bank.⁴⁵ Moreover Bellotto used the series, and this view in particular, as a vehicle for self-promotion: he appears in the form of an artist drawing in the foreground and signs the painting conspicuously on a stone fragment, to which he added the title 'Peiñ: Rle.' (Royal Painter) to the second state of the related engraving.⁴⁶ Bellotto depicts himself seated between the established court painters Johann

S38 Bernardo Bellotto (1722–1780). *Dresden from the Right Bank of the Elbe above Augustus Bridge*, 1747. Oil on canvas, 132 x 236 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Dresden

Alexander Thiele (1685–1752) and Christian Wilhelm Ernst Dietrich (1712–1774), with other court figures conversing nearby – the royal physician, an opera singer, Turkish chamberlain and court jester.⁴⁷ Painted a year before his official appointment, Bellotto shows himself already deeply ensconced in court life. We know he was well versed in the art of diplomacy from the contents of his library in his Dresden apartment, and the fact that he displayed portraits of the king and queen in his dining room (a privilege normally reserved for senior court officials and ambassadors) implies a particularly close relationship with his royal patron.⁴⁸ In addition, Augustus III and Count Brühl, and their respective wives, together with Augustus's sons, all stood as godparents to four of Bellotto's five daughters born in Dresden.⁴⁹

It is no surprise that Bellotto shows himself here, as in other paintings, in the act of drawing 'on location'. This had always been vital to Bellotto's working practice: among the hundreds of sheets lost when his Dresden apartment was destroyed by the Prussian army in 1760 were numerous drawings of figures and sites taken



On returning to Dresden towards the end of 1761 and discovering that his house had been completely devastated, Bellotto found himself in serious financial difficulty: in addition to losses amounting to 50,000 thalers, he had run up significant debts before the war broke out.⁶⁷ Bellotto's situation became even more precarious when, two years later, his two most enthusiastic patrons died in quick succession. Augustus III, who had returned to Dresden ill and considerably weakened after signing a peace treaty between Prussia and Austria in February 1763, died on 5 October. Count Brühl passed away just three weeks later. Bellotto's melancholic views of the ruined Kreuzkirche (fig. 2) and destroyed suburb of Pirna'sche Vorstadt (1763–6; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Troyes),⁶⁸ which date from around this time, resonate with what must have been his mood. But he soon turned away from such subjects, as if deliberately reacting against the depressing effect of the scenes around him. In response to the contemporary revival of interest in classical antiquity, Bellotto turned to painting idealised views featuring architectural motifs that he had drawn in Venice and Rome many years previously. The foundation of Dresden's Academy of Fine Arts in 1764 coincided with the publication of *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (*History of Ancient Art*) by the influential German scholar Johann Winckelmann (1717–1768) who, along with the Saxon painter Anton Raphael Mengs (1728–1779), championed the neoclassical movement in the arts. The renewed emphasis on the didactic function of art – which lay at the heart of neoclassical ideals – was clearly at odds with Bellotto's output to date, and so he was forced to reposition himself as a painter of classical architectural fantasies. Bellotto demonstrated considerable business acumen in this, even though his chosen path cannot have been easy. He was actively disliked by the academy's new director Christian Ludwig Hagedorn (1712–1780), who deliberately overlooked Bellotto and appointed exclusively Saxons as professors.⁶⁹ It was only after the intervention of Prince Franz Xavier (1730–1806) and Maria Antonia, joint regents following the death of Frederick Christian, that Bellotto was admitted to the Academy.⁷⁰ He was granted a three-year teaching post as 'associate member for perspective' and, even though his annual salary of 600

thalers was equivalent to that of a full professor, it was a fraction of what he had earned as court artist.⁷¹

Bellotto's Academy reception piece, a view of Dresden from the Neustädter bridgehead (1765; Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe), advertised the painter's talents in producing topographically accurate views, and its rigorously drawn perspective served as a reminder of the discipline Bellotto had been appointed to teach.⁷² At the Academy's first exhibition, on 5 March 1765, Bellotto submitted four paintings: a pair of allegories showing the Temples of Venus and Love (now lost) and two pendant architectural capricci, one with a Venetian nobleman (probably a self portrait) and the other with Christ driving the Traders from the Temple.⁷³ In spite of being known primarily as an architectural painter and having been hired by the Academy as a master in perspective, through his deliberate choice of varied subject matter (two allegories, one religious scene and a portrait) Bellotto was determined to demonstrate the full breadth and range of his art.

The *Architectural Capriccio with a Self Portrait in the Costume of a Venetian Nobleman*, known in three (almost identical) versions, is a particularly ambitious work (fig. 10, x11203).⁷⁴ Bellotto displays his command of perspective and underlines his Venetian origins: the architecture is a hybrid of recognisable buildings in Venice including the Marciana Library, Procuratie Nuove and a corner of Piazza San Marco reimagined as curved.⁷⁵ The man in the foreground, dressed in the red robes of a Venetian procurator and wearing a heavily embroidered sash on his left shoulder, has been identified as Bellotto himself (though not all scholars agree).⁷⁶ This theory is supported by the fact that the composition was repeated and the Warsaw variant – the only one to be signed – is described in an inventory of 1795, just 15 years after Bellotto's death, as 'Architectural fantasy, where the author has painted himself in the clothes of a Venetian nobleman'.⁷⁷ Behind him, fly-posted to a column, is a quotation from the Roman poet Horace (65–8 BC), proclaiming that painters can dare to do anything they please: 'Pictoribus atque poetis / Quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas' ('Painters and poets have always shared an equal right to dare to do whatever they wanted').⁷⁸ With this in mind, it seems likely that Bellotto chose to represent himself as a Venetian nobleman and that the painting should be read as an affirmation of what is possible. Rather than being a plea for artistic freedom, this picture is an assertion of it,

fig. 10 [x11203] Bernardo Bellotto. *Architectural Capriccio with a Self Portrait in the Costume of a Venetian Nobleman*, about 1765. Oil on canvas. 153 x 114 cm. Royal Castle, Warsaw



S09 Interior of the Canaletto Room, Royal Castle, Warsaw (north wall, incorporating S10). Royal Castle, Warsaw.

particularly when viewed in the context of the other three works that accompanied it in the Academy's exhibition. Perhaps Bellotto's self-promotion was too much for Hagedorn and his presence at the Academy became intolerable. In December 1766, less than halfway through his three-year tenure, Bellotto requested a leave of absence to go to St Petersburg, where the new Empress of Russia, Catherine the Great (1729–1796) – known for her enthusiastic patronage of foreign artists – resided. He left Dresden shortly thereafter, never to return.

PRESTIGE REGAINED

On his way to St Petersburg, Bellotto stopped over in Warsaw. It was here that the artist would regain his standing as court painter and live out the remaining 13 years of his career.⁷⁹ Perhaps introduced by the court painter Marcello Bacciarelli (1731–1818), who had also been employed by Augustus III in Dresden, Bellotto immediately entered the service of Stanislaw II August Poniatowski, King of Poland. An avid collector and patron of the arts, Poniatowski had already amassed an impressive collection, to which he intended to add hundreds more paintings,⁸⁰ and two major projects were already underway when Bellotto arrived in Warsaw. The first was the refurbishment of the king's official residence,



S10 Bernardo Bellotto (1722–1780). *The Election of Stanislaw II August Poniatowski as King of Poland*, 1778. Oil on canvas, 177 x 250 cm. Royal Castle, Warsaw.

the Royal Castle, and the other was the reconstruction of his private property, Ujazdów Castle, located just outside the city. Once Bellotto had obtained an extension to his leave of absence, he assumed the post of court painter and summoned his wife and daughters to Warsaw.⁸¹ With an annual salary of 400 ducats and additional benefits, including a generous pension, the 46-year-old Bellotto had managed to reclaim his former status.⁸²

He immediately set to work on a cycle of paintings intended for a large room on the ground floor of Ujazdów Castle. The series was to include views of historic sites, palaces, squares and churches in Warsaw and Rome, in a bid to present the city of Warsaw as the 'new Rome'. The scheme was close to Poniatowski's heart and he took special interest in Bellotto's progress: in 1767 the king is

recorded as having visited the artist daily.⁸³ Bellotto's 16 views of Rome were based on engravings by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778) and (judging from those that survive) they were of variable quality, suggesting that they were painted at speed and with the assistance of his son Lorenzo – indeed some canvases are jointly signed 'Canaletti Fecerunt'.⁸⁴ The derivative nature of these Roman views did not play to Bellotto's strengths: he was at his best producing grand-scale topographical views of his own invention, in which he could inject his sensitivity for





CATALOGUE ENTRIES

THE FORTRESS OF KÖNIGSTEIN FROM THE NORTH

1756–8
Oil on canvas, 132.1 x 236.2 cm (unframed)
195.5 x 263.4 x 11 cm (framed)
The National Gallery, London, NG6668

Bought with the support of the American Friends of the National Gallery, the National Gallery Trust, the Estate of Mrs Madeline Swallow, Art Fund (with a contribution from The Wolfson Foundation), Howard and Roberta Ahmanson, The Deborah Loeb Brice Foundation, Mrs Mollie W. Vickers, The Manny and Brigitta Davidson Charitable Foundation and The Sackler Trust with additional support from Mrs Charles Wrightsman, Jean-Luc Baroni, The Linbury Trust, The Monument Trust, Mr Fabrizio Moretti, Sir Hugh and Lady Stevenson, The John S. Cohen Foundation, Mr Jonathan Green, Christoph and Katrin Henkel, Ernst Nissl, Mr Peter Scott CBE QC, Mr and Mrs Ugo Pierucci, Sir Michael and Lady Heller, Mr Adrian Sassoon, Mr Mark Storey, Mr Neil Westreich, Nicholas and Judith Goodison, John and Flavia Ormond and other donors including those who wish to remain anonymous, 2017.

Bellotto's view is taken from below the fortress, from the outer edge of a sandy track that winds through the Elbe valley. Königstein rises above its surroundings like a bejewelled crown, the jagged profile of the fortress sharply silhouetted against the pale blue sky. Warm evening light illuminates the mottled facades of the battlements and buildings, dancing over the craggy exterior, casting shadows between the natural breaks in the rock and across the sharp, angular walls. A shepherd on the brow of the hill on the right leans wearily on a cow, perhaps resting at the end of a long day working in the sun. Above him, the light catches the clouds, which are loosely rendered in expressive strokes of creamy paint. A dense thicket of trees, painted in different shades of light and dark green, surrounds the base of the fortress while small groups of figures and animals enliven the grassy glades below. Bellotto characteristically places the immediate foreground in shadow, using loose flicks of the brush to silhouette the stretch of turf on which we sit. He places us within the composition, integrated into the peaceful, bucolic life that exists beyond the forbidding walls of the fortress.

The white building on the far left of the rocky outcrop, radiant in the sunshine, is the Friedrichsburg, or Frederick's Castle, recognisable by this date for its mansard roof. Formerly known as the Christiansburg, after Elector Christian I, it had been built in 1589 as a watchtower for the original fortress; its ground floor was used to store cannons and its upper storey was a venue for small courtly festivities. By the late 1750s, when Bellotto was drawing his Königstein views, it had come to be known as the Friedrichsburg, in honour of Elector Frederick Augustus I (1670–1733), and had been converted into an octagonal Baroque pavilion by the architect Matthäus Daniel Pöppelmann. However, the newly renovated building was destroyed by a bolt of lightning in 1744; its redundant status is faithfully recorded by Bellotto, who paints the boarded-up window on the north side. Above and to the right is the Rösschen: a tall, narrow observation tower with a pitched roof that had originally formed part of the medieval complex. Sunken into the

PROVENANCE

Commissioned from the artist by Frederick Augustus II (1696–1763), Elector of Saxony and King of Poland (as Augustus III), in Dresden, by the spring of 1756. Probably Henry Temple, second Viscount Palmerston (1739–1802), London, and by descent to his son Henry John Temple, third Viscount Palmerston (1784–1865), who served as prime minister 1855–8 and 1859–65, with two other pictures from the Königstein series: sold with its pendant by 'Palmerston' for £200 to the Earls of Derby, probably to Edward Smith-Stanley, thirteenth Earl of Derby (1775–1851), first at Grosvenor Square, London, and by 1850 at Knowsley Hall, Lancashire; thence by descent until 2016, when acquired by a private collector and stopped at export by the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art.







S17 Bernardo Bellotto. *The Ruined Castle of Theben*, 1759–60. Oil on canvas, 136 x 214 cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

rock, its distinct profile emerges from the impressionistic brushwork of the natural foundations below. The tower is set away from the edge of the plateau, connected only by a small bridge, whose shadow is defined in dark brown paint on the rocks beyond. Occupying the apex of this mound of rocks and trees is the Georgenburg, the medieval site that was transformed into a Renaissance-style hunting lodge by Elector John George I (1585–1656) in 1619. Standing proud and in three-quarter view, the building is rendered by Bellotto with geometric precision. The dark roofs of the Georgenburg and its adjoining buildings are sharply delineated, an effect Bellotto achieves by setting them against a pale blue sky. The Georg bastion, protruding like the prow of a ship from beneath the Georgenburg, provides a focal point to the composition. Bellotto blends the colours of its smooth facade to give the impression of a flat, stony surface. An abrupt transition of light to dark marks out its sharp corner, and a fine streak of paint illuminating the edge of rough rock on the adjacent side. Above and below, Bellotto demonstrates his skill in rendering different surface textures: the thick, blotchy brushstrokes of the stained facades above contrast with the smooth wall and, in turn, with the interlocking strokes of paint for the brick wall below. The far end of the Georgenburg complex, which housed the commander and his family, is illuminated in white paint; the very same facade is shown in Bellotto's interior view of the Brunnenhaus (cat. 5). The spiny roofs of the barracks are glimpsed above the fortress walls to the right, and the Seigerturm, a bell tower built in 1601, marks the easterly corner of the promontory, known as the Horn. Hempel's Corner, the furthest reaches of the fortress wall to the right, together with the Seigerturm and the Horn, are also visible on the



S19 Joseph Mallord William Turner. *View up the Elbe to Lilienstein and Königstein, from the Hillside: Königstein Fortress, North Side*, from *Dresden and Saxon Switzerland Sketchbook*, 1835. Graphite on paper, 10.4 x 17 cm (sheet). Tate Britain, Turner Bequest, CCCVI 28a, D30939



S18 Joseph Wagner (1706–1780) after Francesco Zuccarelli (1702–1788). *Villanella gentil ch'attenta mira* [...], date?. Engraving, 59.3 x 42.9 cm. Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Braunschweig. JWagner AB 2.129

extreme left of Bellotto's view from the south-west (cat. 3), creating a view of the fortress 'in the round' when viewed side by side. Beneath the ramparts, workmen build a defensive platform known as the Flèche, commissioned by Augustus III and constructed between 1755 and 1756, when Bellotto was making his drawings. The platform, which was used to fire arrows over the surrounding open area, is taller and longer than in the Washington painting (cat. 2), appearing closer here to the path that leads up to the entrance.

Figures and animals enliven the scene, a device Bellotto uses to guide our eye around the composition. The bodies and clothes of the workmen on the scaffold are just small dabs of coloured paint; their pink skin and white shirts are picked out by the evening light, and a man's waistcoat is highlighted with a dash of red. Bellotto expertly marks out the individual scaffold poles, using a fine brush to paint thin, controlled lines. Above the platform, two tiny soldiers, described with dots of colour, stand watch from the Horn. A sliver of sunlight breaks through the clouds and illuminates a grassy ridge below, whose tufts and undulations are roughly rendered with strokes of yellow paint. The light also falls on a rider, two men on foot and, further along, two cows grazing contentedly. One lifts its right hoof, poised as it looks towards a group of people who disturb the serenity of the moment. Bellotto's source for this cow is a composition by Francesco Zuccarelli, published as an engraving by Joseph Wagner (1706–1780) in which it appears in reverse.¹ Bellotto had used the same cow in an earlier view of Dresden from 1748 and had recourse to it again for his view of *The Ruined Castle of Theben*, painted several years later (fig. 00, s17).² Bellotto has lifted the brown cow, grazing behind a nearby shrub, from a design by Nicolaes Berchem, reproduced in the same series of prints by Wagner.³ Another of Zuccarelli's pastoral scenes has been identified as the source for the woman holding her baby encountering a young child in the foreground (fig. 00, s18). The group, bathed in dusky light, is conceived with great attention to detail, probably a result of Bellotto directly copying Zuccarelli's design. Three male figures talk and relax at the base of a tree, which frames and balances the composition on the left side. The track pulls the viewer into the depths of the painting, drawing our attention to the woman dressed in blue who has stopped to talk to a man with a small child. A carriage, caught in a single moment, kicks up clouds of dust as it disappears into the forest in the distance.

A smaller replica of this view, with similar dimensions to those replicating the other two external views, was on the art market in Munich in 1966.⁴ When compared to the National Gallery painting, this replica has minor differences: the tree in the foreground is larger, the man and his two cows on the far right are omitted, there is no horse and carriage, and the clouds are given greater emphasis. Also inspired by this viewpoint was Joseph Mallord William Turner, who filled 18 sheets of a sketchbook made during a trip to Dresden and its environs in 1835 with drawings of the fortress. In addition to two views of the west side, Turner drew one view from the north, taken from this exact same position (fig. 00, s19).⁵ LC



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