



**Canaletto (1697–1768) is best known for his painted views of his native city, Venice.** Capturing its appearance and distinctive character, his paintings transport viewers to this famous city on water.

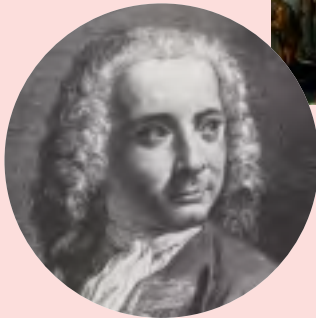
Explore Venice through two of Canaletto's paintings—*The Square of Saint Mark's, Venice* and *Entrance to the Grand Canal from the Molo, Venice*—on view in the West Building, Main Floor gallery 31.

Canaletto, *The Square of Saint Mark's, Venice* (detail), 1742/1744, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mrs. Barbara Hutton

who?  
what?  
how?

right and below details:  
Canaletto, *Entrance to the Grand Canal from the Molo, Venice, 1742/1744*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mrs. Barbara Hutton

In the far distance to the left is the domed church of the Redentore by the sixteenth-century architect Palladio. To the right is the double-domed Church of Santa Maria della Salute, which was built by Longhena in the mid-seventeenth century.



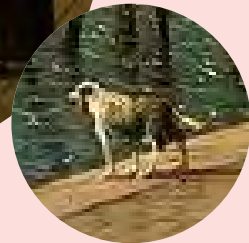
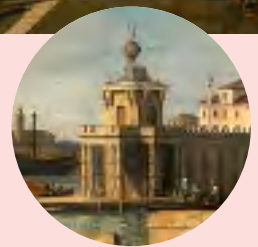
Portrait of the artist

1

## Tell me about the artist

Giovanni Antonio Canal was born in Venice in 1697 to a family of artists. Both his father and uncle painted scenery used in theater sets and opera productions, and Canaletto was taught to paint at an early age by his father. Giovanni was nicknamed Canaletto (“the little Canal”) to distinguish him from his father. Canaletto became a specialist in topographical views—paintings that describe the landscape and architecture of a particular place. He painted his native city most often and made a successful career selling his work to wealthy tourists.

Canaletto’s paintings were popular because he recorded the activities and appearance of the city in vivid detail. In order to achieve convincing realism in his scenes, Canaletto first made sketches outside. He then took them back to his studio to paint the final picture, working out the architecture before adding the figures. The people in his views provide a sense of scale and suggest the daily hubbub of a busy city. Canaletto’s pictures are much more than the painted equivalent of a photograph: he often composed his works to create an improved view of the city, making them look better even though they were not entirely accurate!



2

## Souvenirs from Venice

In the eighteenth century, Venice became a favorite tourist destination in Europe. With its beautiful setting, many canals, and magnificent architecture, the city attracted foreign visitors who enjoyed its carnivals, regattas, festivals, and theater. Travelers wanted souvenirs of their stay, and since cameras had not yet been invented, tourists bought paintings and drawings to take home.

# 3

## Entrance to the Grand Canal from the Molo

A large port on the Adriatic Sea, Venice was an important center for trade between Asia and Europe. It also boasted a thriving fishing industry. This is a scene along the popular waterfront leading to the Grand Canal, the main waterway through Venice. Large ocean-going ships, including one with a British flag, have dropped their sails to unload cargo and tourists. Gondolas glide across the glistening water, ferrying passengers across the canals. In the center of the painting is the Customs House—topped by a small globe symbolizing the city's overseas trade—where goods were unloaded and taxed.

Groups of people gather along the landing dock, stop to chat with one another, and shop. Fishermen display the day's catch of eels and mussels in round wooden trays. **If you were walking along this dock, what sounds might you hear?**

# 4

## The Square of Saint Mark

The Square of Saint Mark, or Piazza San Marco, is the heart of the city. There you will find the Church of Saint Mark with its mosaics shimmering in the sunshine. To the right of the church is the pink marble Doge's Palace, once home to Venice's elected rulers.

**Find three bronze flagpoles in the piazza.** Around them merchants are setting up tables, taking goods out of trunks, and displaying bolts of cloth at umbrella-covered booths. These activities, and the ships off in the distance, highlight Venice's role as a center of trade.

Strolling through the piazza was a popular activity. Canaletto included about two hundred figures in this painting! **Find gentlemen in capes and three-cornered hats, fashionable women, monks, laborers, children, and pets.** **What are some of the things the people are doing?**



left and above details:  
Canaletto, *The Square of Saint Mark's, Venice*, 1742/1744,  
National Gallery of Art,  
Washington, Gift of Mrs.  
Barbara Hutton

## book nook

These books with stories set in Venice can be found at your local library or bookstore.

### There's a Dolphin in the Grand Canal!

By John Bemelmans Marciano  
ages 4 and up

### Vendela in Venice

By Cristina Bjork, illustrated by  
Inga-Karin Eriksson | ages 4 and up

### Gabriella's Song

By Candace Fleming, illustrated  
by Giselle Potter | ages 4 and up

### Gaspard on Vacation

By Anne Gutman, illustrated by  
Georg Hallensleben | ages 4 and up

### Zoe Sophia's Scrapbook: An Adventure in Venice

By Claudia Mauner and Elisa  
Smalley | ages 6 and up

### The Paint Box

By Maxine Trottier, illustrated by  
Stella East | ages 6 and up

### This is Venice

By M. Sasek | ages 8 and up

### The Thief Lord

By Cornelia Funke | ages 10 and up

### Daughter of Venice

By Donna Jo Napoli | ages 10 and up

### Stravaganza: City of Masks

By Mary Hoffman | ages 10 and up

## try this!

# activity

### Views of Venice

Made up of more than one hundred islands spread over a saltwater lagoon, Venice is built directly upon the water. The city is crisscrossed by more than 150 canals, which are spanned by nearly four hundred bridges! Without streets, transportation around Venice is generally by foot or boat, such as the traditional Venetian gondola. These long, slender, flat-bottomed boats are rowed by gondoliers and are among the best-known features of Venice.

This beautiful city has inspired artists for centuries. After looking at the work of Canaletto, find paintings of Venice made by other artists.

**Observe the different ways artists have painted the city. What is similar? What is different? Decide which one is your favorite view of Venice and explain why.**

**Look for gondolas in each painting. Some gondolas have cabins for the passengers. Find gondolas rowed by two gondoliers and gondolas steered by only one. Describe how the gondoliers are dressed. What movements do the gondoliers make to glide the boat along the water?**

Most people travel by motorboats in Venice today, but you can still find gondolas floating through the canals. Gondolas are remarkably uniform: all weigh 1,500 pounds and are 35½ feet long and 4½ feet wide. Each boat is made of eight different types of wood—lime, larch, oak, fir, cherry, walnut, elm, and mahogany—and has an oar made from beech. Gondolas are painted black, with the exception of those ornamented for special festivals and regattas. The bow has a multipronged design called a *ferro*.

*Two views by Venetian artists:* Bernardo Bellotto (Canaletto's nephew and assistant) and Francesco Guardi also painted cityscapes for tourists.

1 Francesco Guardi, *Grand Canal with the Rialto Bridge, Venice* (detail), probably c. 1780, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

2 Bernardo Bellotto, *The Campo di SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Venice* (detail), 1743/1747, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

*Two views by traveling artists:* English artist Joseph Mallord William Turner and French artist Claude Monet visited Venice specifically to paint. Both were captivated by the city's location on the water and the reflections of light and color.

3 Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Venice: The Dogana and San Giorgio Maggiore* (detail), 1834, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection

4 Claude Monet, *Palazzo da Mula, Venice* (detail), 1908, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection



1



2



3



4