

Giovanni Battista Cimaroli  
(Salò 1687-1771 Venice)

*View of the Brenta with Palazzo Barbarigo*  
Oil on canvas, 83 x 114.5 cm

Comparative Literature

F. Spadotto, *Giovanni Battista Cimaroli*, Rovigo 2011.

Giovanni Battista Cimaroli's artistic training was initially led by the masters Antonio Aureggio and Antonio Calza, the latter being a well-known landscape and battle scene painter who would later become Cimaroli's brother-in-law. In the second phase of his artistic formation, around 1722, Cimaroli moved to Venice and became acquainted with Canaletto, who was ten years younger at the time but already well-established, later becoming one of his main collaborators. Indeed, he worked with Canaletto on the execution of several allegorical paintings depicting the Tombs of illustrious English figures, which had been commissioned to a group of Venetian and Bolognese artists by the Irish impresario Owen Mc Swiney on behalf of the Duke of Richmond. In these works he was mainly responsible for the pictorial execution of the landscapes.

One can find examples of his first phase of artistic production in the landscape paintings conserved at Buckingham Palace, where the collaboration with Marco Ricci and Magnasco appears quite evident when witnessing the arcadian and serene lyricism in his portrayal of nature.

In his second phase, Cimaroli intensified his production of Venetian views, as one can witness in his *View of Villa Contarini-Negrelli in Strà*, a painting significantly influenced by Canaletto. In Venice Cimaroli was able to autonomously establish himself as an artist, working "for commissions coming from England and other distant cities that liked his paintings" (Orlandi, 1751, p.272), as can be demonstrated by the six landscapes expressly executed by the artist on behalf of the English consul and collector Joseph Smith. Interestingly, the great liking and approval of the painter's works in the English market was generated in part because they were considered surrogates of Canaletto paintings, works which were hard to access due to their staggering prices. One finds evidence of this in several documents of the time, including a letter from the Swedish count Carlo Gustavo Tessin, sent from Venice to Stockholm June 16, 1736 which reviews the most famous Venetian painters of the moment and specifically mentions Cimaroli, noting how the thematic affinity of his paintings with those of Canaletto was greatly appreciated by English collectors who, unable to obtain the originals of the Canaletto itself, were able to raise the price of the smallest of these paintings to an outstanding thirty coins (O. Sirén, *Dessins et tableaux ... dans les coll. de Suède*, Stockholm, 1902, p 108).

The work presented here is set along the Brenta, one of the most represented sites of the 18th century, depicted in engravings by Coronelli, Costa and Volkamer and the great Venetian *vedutisti*, such as, Canaletto, Guardi, Tiepolo and Cimaroli. The luxuriant nature together with the wide-range architecture are remarkably striking in these portrayals, where each villa is different from the next, capturing the viewer's full attention. When looking at an evocative painting, such as this one, one steps into another dimension and can't help but fantasize about the past, its customs and habits at the time.

Throughout the centuries, the Brenta Riviera was frequented by Casanova, Galileo, Byron and d'Annunzio, designed by Coronelli and Costa, painted by Tiepolo, Cimaroli, Guardi and Canaletto, praised by Goethe and Goldoni, and also hosted royal courts from France and

Russia, such as Napoleon, the Habsburgs and the Savoy. Interestingly, on April 17, 1345, the Greater Council of the Republic of Venice abrogated the law that had until then forbidden the citizens of the Serenissima to purchase land on the mainland, thus, making it advantageous for patricians to move their trade from the mainland to include the banks of the Brenta.

Starting from the 16th century, the canals and rivers that were easily reachable from Venice were flanked by sumptuous summer residences. The Brenta Canal, which connected Venice with Padua was considered the most fashionable canal, an ideal extension of the Grand Canal of Venice, where more than seventy luxurious villas flourished.

*"The banks on either side of this river are all full of palaces and the delightful homes of Noble families, and more opulent citizens, with Gardens, and well-populated Villages, to such an extent that, for those who sail above through it, it resembles going travelling in the middle of a City for the course of 16 miles that form the Borgo, which unites the Metropolis of Venice with the City of Padua"* (1697 Vincenzo Coronelli).

Cimaroli's painting brings a sense of liveliness thanks to its inclusion of small figures which animate the scene. Along the canal, one can spot the entrance of Palazzo Barbarigo to the right, where people are conversing on the first-floor balcony. Simultaneously, one catches a glimpse of a someone looking out the window and of person about to enter through the ground floor on the ground floors. Small groups of people chat or play with dogs, others can be seen outside the church on the left. The boats guide the viewer's gaze deep, along the canal. The palette is delicate, composed mainly of the ochre-yellow tones defining the architecture and street, and the blue of the sky and the canal.