



Scottish Paintings & Sculpture (603)

15th July 2020, Live Online

Lot 77

Estimate: £1000 - £1500 + Fees

CHARLES OPPENHEIMER R.S.A., R.S.W (SCOTTISH 1875-1961) VENICE

Signed and dated 1912, watercolour

28cm x 20cm (11in x 8in)

Note: Charles Oppenheimer is very much associated in many minds with his chosen home of Kirkcudbright, and the surrounding picturesque countryside of Dumfries and Galloway, which he depicted to stunning effect repeatedly over the course of his career. However, as Euan Robson so eloquently reveals, 'Italy was as much his muse as Galloway.' From his very first visit in 1896, funded by an artistic cash prize, he was captivated by this beautiful country – the heat, light, warmth, friendship and culture he found there. It was the start of a long-standing love affair and many decades of inspiration and subject matter.

Possibly his most artistically-significant visit was the tour he undertook with William Stewart MacGeorge, an important friend and advisor to Oppenheimer, who also called Galloway home. They spent the summer of 1912 touring Northern Italy by train, dedicating particular time and attention to Venice and Verona. It would seem that both paintings offered here date from this trip – watercolour scene 'Venice' is explicitly dated 1912, while 'Serenata' was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1913, as part of the exhibition season where both artists were showing their Italian works from the 1912 trip. One such exhibition was pivotal for Oppenheimer, placing him as a significant player in the Scottish art scene: he exhibited fifty-two of his works in Glasgow, and received a rave review in the Glasgow Herald, celebrating his 'dignified draughtsmanship and refined sense of colour' as well as his 'exhilarating sparkle.'

Later in his life, Oppenheimer continued to return to Italy to find inspiration and refresh his palette and approach. In 1923 he exhibited 'A Song of Venice' at the R.G.I. exhibition and from Robson's description this appears to be a re-working of the subject of 'Serenata': 'a collection of gondolas lit by lanterns float together of an evening, the gondoliers and their passengers listening to a recital by a chanteuse delivered from the prow of one of the boats.' It is probably unsurprising that such a glamorous, dramatic and quintessentially Italian scene would captivate an artist obsessed with light and reflection, for over a decade.

Looking at the two offered Venetian works by Oppenheimer truly demonstrates the range of his talent, and his ability to bring his 'exhilarating sparkle' to wildly differing scenes of this beloved city. We move from the watercolour depiction of the light, bright sunshine of daytime Venice, and the everyday Venetian sight of a gondolier navigating one of the myriad canals to the dramatic spectacle in oil of a singer performing from a gondola, as a crowd gathers around her – the lanterns glow, the boats bob and all the glittering lights are reflected in the darkening waters.