The earliest account of Canaletto as a painter was published by the Venetian critic Anton Maria Zanetti the Younger in 1771, three years after the artist's death:

In his pictures Canaletto combined nature and artistic license with such skill that his works appear to be absolutely accurate to those who judge them only according to the principles of good sense; but those with real understanding will find in them great judgment in the choice of views, in the distribution of figures and space and in the arrangement of light and shade—as well as beautiful clarity and vitality and ease of color and brushwork: the effects of a serene personality and happy genius.

_Della pittura veneziana_ (Venice, 1771) after a translation by Francis Haskell

Zanetti's words aptly describe this view of Piazza San Marco—the first major painting by Canaletto to enter a collection otherwise rich in eighteenth-century Venetian paintings, drawings, and prints.

This is the first painting of the piazza to show the characteristic white geometric design of Andrea Tirali's pavement, which was completed in 1723. Obviously, the work could not be dated earlier and, on grounds of style, was probably executed closer to 1730. In the interest of pictorial effect, the appearance of the Piazza San Marco, unchanged to this day, was modified by the artist in certain details not immediately apparent even to the most seasoned traveler and frequent visitor to the city: The flagstaffs are taller than they should be, for example, and the windows of the bell tower are fewer in number and more widely spaced than they are in fact. The painting is animated by details of which the artist never tired—striped awnings, birds in flight, potted plants, the hem of a man's cloak caught by a slight breeze, and more than a hundred lively figures. The sky is freely painted, especially where the brushwork abuts the contours of the campanile, and the white pigment used for the clouds projects slightly in relief. The loose, ragged brushwork and the high key are typical of Canaletto's paintings of the 1720s.

The painting was not engraved, nor is there any evidence of a pendant. Prior to its recent acquisition the picture was probably never publicly exhibited. W. G. Constable provided what little information we have about its earlier history: According to W. G. Hoffmann, a former owner, it had been acquired for his grandfather by the renowned nineteenth-century art historian and connoisseur Wilhelm von Bode.


Ex coll.: W. G. Hoffmann, Berlin; [Colnaghi, London, as of about 1938]; Robert (later Sir Robert) Barlow, Wendover, Buckinghamshire (from about 1938); Lady Barlow; private collection (until 1988); [Newhouse Galleries, New York, and Alex Wengraf Ltd., London, 1988].

Entries by Katharine Baetjer, Curator; Keith Christiansen, Jayne Wrightsman Curator; Gary Tinterow, Associate Curator.
“Today it is beautiful and I am about to go out. I have begun three or four landscapes of the area around Aigues-Mortes. In my large canvas, I am going to do the walls of the city reflected in a pond at sunset. It will be an absolutely simple painting, which should not take long to do. Nevertheless,” wrote Bazille to his mother in the summer of 1867, “I would need at least eight good days.”

Evidently, the artist changed his mind. On this, his large canvas, he did not depict a reflection of the fortified town in south-central France. Instead, from up close, he painted the massive Porte de la Reine, conveying all of the impressive weight and solidity of the thirteenth-century gate, while tempering its forbidding appearance with a glimpse onto a charming, light-filled street. The painting is the most striking of Bazille’s three known views of Aigues-Mortes, and the most daring. The other two (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and Musée Fabre, Montpellier) are standard panoramic views—blue skies and sunlit walls seen from a distance—whereas this work presents a novel, unexpected composition with unusual lighting. The strong southern sun has fallen behind the city, enveloping the foreground in a shadow that makes visible the nuances of color in the ancient limestone walls and grassy field. Bazille has rendered these subtle distinctions with broad brushwork, at once reminiscent of the fluidity of Édouard Manet’s technique and the blocky, constructive stroke then used by Claude Monet.

Bazille came from a wealthy Montpellier family. He met Monet in 1862 in the painting academy run by Charles Gleyre in Paris, where they befriended fellow students Alfred Sisley, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Armand Guillaumin. Bazille and Monet, however, were especially close and mutually supportive: Monet, the more precocious and ambitious of the two, coaxed Bazille out of his academic approach to art; Bazille, for his part, encouraged Monet with his companionship and financial support. The painters worked side by side throughout the 1860s, deriving inspiration from Manet and Courbet, Boudin and Jongkind, and, with Guillaumin, Sisley, and Renoir, developed the style of painting that in the 1870s would be called Impressionism. By 1867 Bazille had developed his own style, distinguished by a simple and almost naive manner of drawing coupled with a preference for strong lighting and dramatic contrasts. Already esteemed by his colleagues, he achieved some public recognition with his acceptance at the Salons of 1868 and 1869. His promising career was cut short, however, by the Franco-Prussian War. He enlisted in the infantry and was killed in an attack in 1870, at the age of twenty-nine.

Bazille left a small opus of some seventy paintings. Porte de la Reine at Aigues-Mortes is the first work by the artist to enter the Museum’s collection. There are drawings for the foreground figures in a sketchbook now in the Département des arts graphiques, Musée du Louvre, Paris.


Between 1482 and 1499 and again between 1506 and 1513, Leonardo da Vinci worked in Milan, where he dominated artistic life in a way that would have been impossible in the highly competitive environment of his native Florence. Leonardo was a dilatory painter, and it was primarily through the work of his pupils and followers that his innovative style was disseminated. Among his most faithful students was the artist today known conventionally as Giampietrino, whose most interesting pictures involve a female nude of allegorical or mythological theme; most of these are related to drawings by Leonardo.

This picture of the goddess Diana—a new addition to Giampietrino’s oeuvre—derives from Leonardo’s studies for his celebrated painting of Leda and the swan. (The work was begun by Leonardo in Florence, possibly executed in Milan after 1506, and carried with him to France in 1513. It seems to have been destroyed in the seventeenth century and is known today from copies.) The contrapposto of Leonardo’s Leda is more accentuated than that of Giampietrino’s Diana, but both exemplify Leonardo’s concern that “there should always be variation in the limbs of posed figures; that is, if one arm goes forward, the other should be still or go backward…. ” No less characteristic of Leonardo’s ideas are Diana’s ample proportions and the use of soft lighting and a delicate play of shadows to model the forms. None of Leonardo’s pupils were able to replicate the subtlety of observation and the complexity of thought inherent in his work, but our picture conveys some of the poetry of the master’s enigmatic creations.

Pictures of Diana abstracted from a narrative context are rare in the sixteenth century. In this work she is shown simply as the virginal goddess of the hunt standing before a dense grove of trees. Behind her is a deer, possibly a reference to Actaeon, whom the goddess transformed into a stag. The iconography became especially associated with the French monarchy and the school of Fontainebleau, and although this picture cannot be traced earlier than 1881 (when it was in the Mailand collection in France), it may conceivably have been painted for a French patron. Unfortunately, nothing is known about Giampietrino that might clarify this matter, for the very identity of the artist is still uncertain.

“Gianpietro” occurs in a list of names, presumably pupils, in one of Leonardo da Vinci’s notebooks (the Codice Atlantico, fol. 264r), and later in the century a “Pietro Rizzo” or “Ricco” (i.e., Giovanpietro Rizoli, who is documented between 1508 and 1549?) is mentioned as a pupil of Leonardo by the Milanese painter and theorist Giovan Paolo Lamazzo. Whether these notices refer to the same person is far from certain, and of the homogeneous group of works ascribed to Giampietrino, only an altarpiece in Pavia—painted in 1521—is dated. Under these circumstances, it is not possible to date Diana the Huntress with any precision, nor to suggest who may have commissioned this alluring work.

KC

G I A M P I E T R I N O
Italian (Milan), active 1st half of the 16th century

Diana the Huntress

Oil on wood

$44 7/8 \times 23 7/8$ in. (114 \times 59.1$ cm)

Purchase, Frank E. and Nancy M. Richardson Foundation Gift, 1989

1989.21

In fifteenth-century Florence the production of altarpieces, paintings for domestic interiors, and marble or stucco reliefs of the Madonna and Child were collaborative efforts involving the services of a painter, wood-carver and/or sculptor. The panel and frame of a painting were supplied by a professional wood-carver, whose work was frequently subcontracted by the commissioned artist. Similarly, a sculptor normally engaged a painter to color a sculptural relief and decorate its frame. On July 2, 1468, for example, the Florentine painter Neri di Bicci recorded that he had returned to the renowned woodworker and architect Giuliano da Maiano a tabernacle, “which was given to me in wood and I gave it back painted....” The same day Neri sold a small painting of the Crucifixion in an elaborate tabernacle frame (“uno tabernachioletto da chamera drentovi dipinto r’ Crocifisso”). The frame and support panel had been ordered previously from a woodworker and were held in stock to enable Neri to fill commissions quickly.

The tabernacle frame given to the Metropolitan Museum is the product of a similar collaboration. The lunette, showing the Trinity adored by two angels, has been identified by Everett Fahy as a work by Bartolomeo di Giovanni. It bears comparison to three other works by this artist of the same subject: a drawing in Christ Church, Oxford; a small painting in the Martello collection, New York; and, perhaps most interestingly, the painted lunette on the frame of a terracotta relief in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, of the Madonna and Child that was designed by Giuliano da Maiano’s brother, Benedetto da Maiano. The Metropolitan Museum’s frame, which is of exceptionally fine quality, may well have been carved in the workshop of Giuliano da Maiano. Whether it was made to contain a sculptural relief or a painting cannot be determined. However, it may not be coincidental that there exist two pictures by Bartolomeo di Giovanni with dimensions that match this frame. Both works depict the last communion of Saint Jerome and derive from the well-known picture in the Metropolitan Museum that was painted about 1495 by Botticelli for the Florentine wool merchant Francesco del Pugliese. It is not impossible that the frame—“uno tabernachioletto da chamera”—was made for one of these two pictures. If so, this gift to the Metropolitan Museum is doubly welcome, for henceforth it will adorn Botticelli’s Last Communion of Saint Jerome, thereby uniting one of the Museum’s most exquisite masterpieces with a virtually contemporary frame—decorated by an artist who not only collaborated with Botticelli in 1483 but actually copied the work in question.