

GIUSEPPE DE NITTIS - MY ITALY



Eight Works by Giuseppe De Nittis (1846 - 1884)

Giuseppe De Nittis is one of the most important Italian painters of the nineteenth century. He took up his studies at the Istituto di Belle Arti in Naples but early on abandoned the academic tradition of his training. He came into contact with the group of young Florentine painters known as the 'Macchiaioli'.¹ Following their example, he began to practice *plein-air* painting. He moved to Paris in 1868 and quickly made his name in artistic circles. In 1874, he participated in the Impressionists' first group exhibition staged in the studio of the photographer Nadar. De Nittis was an influential figure in the world of art and letters. Independently wealthy, he acquired an elegant Paris residence which served as a popular meeting-place for artists and writers, particularly Degas, Manet, Daudet, Zola and the Goncourt brothers.²

In recent years a number of solo exhibitions have featured De Nittis's work. One was jointly staged at the Petit Palais in Paris and the Pinacoteca Giuseppe De Nittis in Barletta in 2010, and a second held at the Palazzo Zabarella in Padua in 2013.³

We are grateful to Professor Christine Farese Sperken for the following comments on this group of seven works by De Nittis.

De Nittis⁴ left Paris for his native Italy in 1870. This was before the Franco-Prussian War and en-

suing Paris Commune, so almost three years passed before he could return to the French capital. This enforced sojourn was nonetheless to be of critical importance to his development as a landscape artist. He was to produce what are almost certainly his most powerful and modern works in his Apulian home town of Barletta, in Naples and in Portici, a village at the foot of Vesuvius. These works were small in format and almost all were on panel. They show him working highly methodically towards a formal and chromatic synthesis of his techniques as a landscapist.

Vesuvius was the first subject to attract his interest. The volcano was the main focus of his work and provided a source of constantly changing motifs for a twelve-month period between 1871 and 1872. He made laborious daily ascents and descents on horseback, filling a diary with a day-to-day record of his impressions. The diary – his *taccuino*⁵ – is an animated and entertaining account of his experiences. It reveals his fascination for shifting perspectival effects and the effects of changes in weather and light conditions. He was to produce some seventy studies unmatched in Italian painting of the period. They can be seen as genuine precursors of late Impressionism.⁶

The first of the oil studies presented here, titled *Paesaggio Vesuviano* [Vesuvian Landscape] with its

benign, rather than threatening, volcanic plume, is certainly datable to 1871-2. In terms of handling, it is a fine and characteristic example of the work De Nittis produced in this twelve-month period of intense artistic experimentation. The modeling of the foreground in broad strokes of rapidly applied, free-flowing paint is also entirely characteristic of his style.

A painting now in the collection of the Indianapolis Museum of Art titled *La Strada di Brindisi* [The Road to Brindisi] (Fig. 1) dates from the same period. It was shown at the Paris Salon in 1872 (listed as no. 1177). It depicts a barren, shadeless Apulian landscape in burning sunlight, and is rich in narrative detail – plants, animals, a horse-drawn coach and two travelers.



Fig. 1 Giuseppe De Nittis, *La Strada di Brindisi* [The Road to Brindisi], 1872, oil on canvas, 27.6 x 52 cm, Dini and Marini no. 344, Indianapolis Museum of Art, R. Eno collection

1 *Macchia*, meaning stain or blot, was a term used by these Tuscan artists to explain their pictorial technique. The name 'Macchiaoli' was originally attributed to them by a critic as a term of ridicule, and later adopted by the group.

2 See Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis. La vita, i documenti, le opere dipinte*, catalogue raisonné, Turin 1990, I, pp. 83-161.

3 Gilles Chazal, Dominique Morel and Emanuela Angiuli (eds.), *Giuseppe De Nittis: la modernité élégante*, exhib. cat., Paris, Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris and Barletta, Pinacoteca Giuseppe De Nittis, Paris 2010; Emanuela Angiuli and Fernando Mazzocca (eds.), *De Nittis*, exhib. cat., Padua, Palazzo Zabarella, Venice 2013.

4 See Christine Farese Sperken, *Giuseppe De Nittis*,

Barletta, Palazzo Della Marra, catalogo generale, Bari 2016.

5 See Enzo Mazzocchi and Nelly Rettmeyer (eds.), *Giuseppe De Nittis, Taccuino 1870-1884*, Bari 1964.

6 See Christine Farese Sperken, 'Alle Falde del Vesuvio', in *De Nittis. Impressionista italiano*, exhib. cat., Rome, Chostro del Bramante, Milan 2004, pp. 33-8.



Paesaggio Vesuviano, 1871-2,
oil on panel, 18.5 x 31.7 cm



La Strada di Brindisi, 1872,
oil on panel, 9 x 17.8 cm



Porticato Sotto il Sole, 1872,
oil on panel, 9.1 x 17.8 cm



Coincidentally, the painter Marco De Gregorio actually depicted De Nittis at work on *La Strada di Brindisi*. This is, of course, of particular documentary interest and underlines the importance of De Nittis's canvas.⁷ Like De Nittis, he was a member of the School of Resina, an informal group of painters working near Naples.

The second study discussed here is an early preliminary study for *La Strada di Brindisi*, the 1872 painting now in Indianapolis. It focuses on a few sparingly indicated compositional elements, such as the flat white construction in the background – clearly identifiable in the finished painting – and on the tonal value of the clear, translucent blue of the sky, which was one of De Nittis's major preoccupations at the time. His aim – as his friend Adriano Cecioni explained – was to produce an enamel-like translucency. This quality is also present in the study mentioned above, *Paesaggio Vesuviano*. One further detail: the imprint of a cat's paw in the upper area of the image (Fig. 2). This detail emphasizes the spontaneity of the study. De Nittis was a cat enthusiast. Edmond de Goncourt describes how De Nittis's favorite cat would sometimes sit on his shoulder at mealtimes.⁸ It is likely that he left the study unsupervised for a moment while it was drying.

The study titled *Porticato Sotto il Sole* [Arcade



Fig. 2 The imprint of a cat's paw, detail from *La Strada di Brindisi*

in the Sun] was very probably executed at about the same time as the preliminary study for *La Strada di Brindisi*. The dimensions of the two panels are the same, and they also match the dimensions of the three studies of harbor and coastal views discussed below.

It is illuminating to reflect on the provenance of this remarkable group of oil studies: they were all at one time owned by the noted Paris collector Jean Dieterle.⁹ In this connection, Enrico Piceni,

ates. His great-grandfather, Charles Dieterle, spent a decade in Corot's atelier as a student and factotum. Charles's wife, Marie Dieterle, was a successful landscape and animal painter. She was also a close friend of Corot. Martin Dieterle's grandfather, Jean Dieterle, annotated the catalogue raisonné of Corot's work. He was a friend of De Nittis's son, Jacques. Jean Dieterle's

the De Nittis expert, collector and critic, has noted: *Scholars researching the work of De Nittis will find the collection of Jean Dieterle particularly interesting. The collection has probably been dispersed in the meantime. Dieterle was a friend of De Nittis's son, Jacques, from whom he acquired a large number of sketches and drawings. For the most part they were simple, summarily sketched chromatic studies on tiny panels or fragments of canvas.*¹⁰

Porticato Sotto il Sole, like *Vesuvius*, was a subject which De Nittis returned to again and again, producing multiple variants and versions of it. Like *La Strada di Brindisi*, the present study was probably executed in Apulia, perhaps near Barletta. There are a number of parallels with the three recorded versions¹¹ of *La Masseria* [The Farm] (Fig. 3), but although the study is a highly condensed image composed in close-up perspective,



Fig. 3 Giuseppe De Nittis, *La Masseria* [The Farm], oil on canvas, 7.4 x 10 cm, Dini and Marini no. 7, private collection

father, Pierre Dieterle, was also a leading Corot scholar. See <http://www.oac.edlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt867nc9vn/entire_text/> (accessed 30.1.2017).

10 Enrico Piceni, *De Nittis*, Milan 1955, p. 178.

11 Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis. La vita, i documenti, le opere dipinte*, catalogue raisonné, Turin 1990, nos. 5-7.

7 De Gregorio's work is now in a private collection in Milan.

8 Information kindly supplied by Professor Farese Sperken.

9 Jean Dieterle and the Dieterle family: Martin Dieterle is a fifth-generation Corot expert. His great-great-grandfather, Jules Dieterle, was one of Corot's closest associ-



Le Barche, 1871-3,
oil on panel, 9 x 17.8 cm



Spiaggia e Barche, 1871-3,
oil on panel, 9 x 17.8 cm



Marina e Velieri, 1871-3,
oil on panel, 9 x 17.6 cm

where only the arcade, and the silhouettes of a few animals and figures are defined, it clearly relates to a different pictorial concept.

In the years 1871-3 subjects such as harbors, seascapes and fisherfolk also played an important role in De Nittis's *oeuvre*. These small-format studies testify to his strong attachment to the sea – Barletta, where he had grown up, is directly on the Adriatic coast. His output of marine studies was extraordinarily prolific and extremely varied. His imagery included tiny seascapes dotted with sailing ships and fishing boats, highly evocative views of the Naples coast, and sunsets over the sea. He also produced more mondaine versions of the subject with a distinctly Parisian flavor, for example the painting *Amazzone sulla Riva del Mare* [Amazon on the Shore]¹² (1873).

Of the three marine studies presented here, the two that display the most modern and most rigorous attempts to include the brown tone of the panel as a coloristic element are the compositions *Le Barche* [Boats] and *Spiaggia e Barche* [Beach and Boats]. In *Le Barche*, two massive barges seem to pierce their way vertically into the center of the image. In *Spiaggia e Barche* a substantial area of the panel has been left bare for the nets, allowing the brown tone of the wood to gleam through, and this barely touched area is framed by richly glowing expanses of yellow.

Members of the Tuscan artists' group known the Macchiaioli had made similar use of this ingenious stylistic device. De Nittis had come into contact with the group – despite being from Apulia – through his friend Adriano Cecioni, a painter

12 *Ibid.*, no. 468.

and sculptor based in Florence. Both De Nittis and Cecioni were founding members of the School of Resina. Two of the Macchiaioli – Giovanni Fattori, who is probably the leading member of the group, and Giuseppe Abbati – made frequent use of the device.

In *Marina e Velieri* [Seascape with Sailing Ships] De Nittis employs a more delicate palette – the tonality is considerably lighter – and places emphasis on spatial depth. The two sailing boats seem to have been forced away from the center of the composition to the sides, to provide an unimpeded panoramic view of the sea, the headland and the distant hills.

The painting titled *Foro Triangolare, Pompei* [The Triangular Forum in Pompeii] is signed and dated 1873. Neither a study nor a sketch, it is a magnificent finished work which contains numerous distinctive elements of his style. It is datable to the spring of 1873 and was executed in the final weeks of De Nittis's extended stay in Italy. A topographically exact *veduta* vibrant with detail, it is identical with a work consigned by De Nittis to Goupil, his dealer in Paris, and listed in the gallery's stock ledger.¹³

Three massive columns in the foreground give rhythmical balance to the severe symmetry of the composition. De Nittis picks out and effectively orchestrates the damage to the central column through which distant hills are glimpsed. He deliberately dispenses with staffage. The motif is timeless – the columns of the Foro Triangolare – testimony to the enduring presence of antiquity – are embedded in the sun-drenched landscape of the

13 Goupil & Cie and Boussod, Valadon et Cie records, stock ledger no. 6, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, p.179, no. 1831 or p.180, no. 1841

Sarno valley. A veil of delicate grayish-blue shrouds the massif of the Monti Lattari.

Only two years later De Nittis was to handle the view in an entirely different way in the painting *Il Foro di Pompei* [The Forum at Pompeii] (Fig. 4).¹⁴ Executed in 1875, this view now served as a backdrop for a vivid scene peopled with elegantly dressed travelers. This was very much in line with fashionable artistic trends which De Nittis, a master of versatility, had adopted to please the contemporary French art market. A number of preliminary studies for the painting are preserved, in which special emphasis is placed on the columns and their dominating height.¹⁵



Fig. 4 Giuseppe De Nittis, *Il Foro di Pompei* [The Forum at Pompeii], 1875, oil on canvas, 80.5 x 57.3 cm, Dini and Marini no. 599, private collection

14 Dini and Marini 1990, op. cit., no. 599.

15 *Ibid.*, nos. 594-6.



Foro Triangolare, Pompei, 1873,
oil on panel, 17.8 x 30.7 cm



Elegante Signora di Parigi,
watercolor on paper, 23.5 x 14.5 cm

Giuseppe De Nittis - My Italy



GIUSEPPE DE NITTIS
(Barletta 1846 - 1884 St.-Germain-en-Laye)

Paesaggio Vesuviano
[Vesuvian Landscape], 1871-2

Oil on panel, 18.5 x 31.7 cm

PROVENANCE:
Jean Dieterle, Paris
Thence by descent in the Dieterle family

LITERATURE:
Mary Pittaluga and Enrico Piceni, *De Nittis*, Milan 1963, no. 37
Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis. La vita, i documenti, le opere dipinte*, catalogue raisonné, Turin 1990, I, p. 392, no. 427; II, repr.

We are grateful to Professor Christine Farese Sperken for examining the work. She has confirmed its authenticity.



GIUSEPPE DE NITTIS
(Barletta 1846 - 1884 St.-Germain-en-Laye)

La Strada di Brindisi
[The Road to Brindisi], 1872

Oil on panel, 9 x 17.8 cm

PROVENANCE:
Jean Dieterle, Paris
Thence by descent in the Dieterle family

LITERATURE:
Mary Pittaluga and Enrico Piceni, *De Nittis*, Milan 1963, no. 26
Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis. La vita, i documenti, le opere dipinte*, catalogue raisonné, Turin 1990, I, p. 386, no. 298; II, repr.

We are grateful to Professor Christine Farese Sperken for examining the work. She has confirmed its authenticity.



GIUSEPPE DE NITTIS
(Barletta 1846 - 1884 St.-Germain-en-Laye)

Porticato Sotto il Sole
[Arcade in the Sun], 1872

Oil on panel, 9.1 x 17.8 cm

PROVENANCE:
Jean Dieterle, Paris
Thence by descent in the Dieterle family

LITERATURE:
Mary Pittaluga and Enrico Piceni, *De Nittis*, Milan 1963, no. 22
Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis. La vita, i documenti, le opere dipinte*, catalogue raisonné, Turin 1990, I, p. 375, no. 11; II, repr.

We are grateful to Professor Christine Farese Sperken for examining the work. She has confirmed its authenticity.



GIUSEPPE DE NITTIS
(Barletta 1846 - 1884 St.-Germain-en-Laye)

Le Barche
[Boats], 1871-3

Oil on panel, 9 x 17.8 cm

PROVENANCE:
Jean Dieterle, Paris
Thence by descent in the Dieterle family

LITERATURE:
Mary Pittaluga and Enrico Piceni, *De Nittis*, Milan 1963, no. 29
Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis. La vita, i documenti, le opere dipinte*, catalogue raisonné, Turin 1990, I, p. 379, no. 120; II, repr.

We are grateful to Professor Christine Farese Sperken for examining the work. She has confirmed its authenticity.



GIUSEPPE DE NITTIS
(Barletta 1846 - 1884 St.-Germain-en-Laye)

Spiaggia e Barche
[Beach and Boats], 1871-3

Oil on panel, 9 x 17.8 cm

PROVENANCE:
Jean Dieterle, Paris
Thence by descent in the Dieterle family

LITERATURE:
Mary Pittaluga and Enrico Piceni, *De Nittis*, Milan 1963, no. 23
Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis. La vita, i documenti, le opere dipinte*, catalogue raisonné, Turin 1990, I, p. 379, no. 116; II, fig. 117

We are grateful to Professor Christine Farese Sperken for examining the work. She has confirmed its authenticity.



GIUSEPPE DE NITTIS
(Barletta 1846 - 1884 St.-Germain-en-Laye)

Marina e Velieri
[Seascape with Sailing Ships], 1871-3

Oil on panel, 9 x 17.6 cm

PROVENANCE:
Jean Dieterle, Paris
Thence by descent in the Dieterle family

LITERATURE:
Mary Pittaluga and Enrico Piceni, *De Nittis*, Milan 1963, no. 32
Piero Dini and Giuseppe Luigi Marini, *De Nittis. La vita, i documenti, le opere dipinte*, catalogue raisonné, Turin 1990, I, p. 379, no. 121; II, repr.

We are grateful to Professor Christine Farese Sperken for examining the work. She has confirmed its authenticity.



GIUSEPPE DE NITTIS
(Barletta 1846 - 1884 St.-Germain-en-Laye)

Foro Triangolare, Pompei
[The Triangular Forum in Pompeii], 1873

Oil on panel, 17.8 x 30.7 cm
Signed and dated lower right *De Nittis 73*
A label on the verso reading *Une vue de Pompeii par Nittis 1873 ...*

PROVENANCE:
Private collection, Rome
Rome, Christie's, auction sale, 4 June 2001, lot 780
Private collection, USA
New York, Sotheby's, auction sale, 27 January 2010, lot 225 (US\$98,000)

LITERATURE:
Goupil & Cie and Boussod, Valadon et Cie records, stock ledger no. 6, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, p. 179, no. 1831 or p. 180, no. 1841

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GIUSEPPE DE NITTIS
(Barletta 1846 - 1884 St.-Germain-en-Laye)

Elegante Signora di Parigi
[Elegant Parisian]

Watercolor on paper, 23.5 x 14.5 cm

PROVENANCE:
Galerie Charpentier, Paris
Jean Dieterle, Paris
Thence by descent in the Dieterle family

EXHIBITED:
Deux siècles d'élégance, Galerie Charpentier, Paris 1951, no. 398



John J. ...