

The Statue of Fortune on the Dogana, Venice

John Singer Sargent



Description

John Singer Sargent, R.A. (1856-1925)
The Statue of Fortune on the Dogana, Venice

Signed and inscribed upper left: to Elena Rathbone / John S. Sargent
Watercolour over pencil
48.3 by 34.3 cm., 19 by 13 ½ in.

Provenance:

Given by the artist to Elena Rathbone (1898-1964), daughter of William Gair Rathbone VII, on the occasion of her marriage to Bruce (later Sir Bruce) Richmond (1871-1964), 1913;
Thence by descent

Exhibited:

London, Royal Academy, Exhibition of Works by the late John S Sargent, R.A., 1926, no.160;
Washington, National Gallery of Art, 2nd October 2022 to 2nd January 2023 and San Francisco, Fine Arts Museum, 11th February to 14th May 2023, Sargent in Spain, no.70

Literature:

W. Howe Downes, John S. Sargent: His Life and Work, London, 1926, p.272;
W. Adelson, W.H. Gerds, E. Kilmurray, R.M. Zorzi, R.Ormond and E. Oustinoff, Sargent's Venice, New Haven and London, 2006, p.94, no.88, illustrated;
R. Ormond and E. Kilmurray, John Singer Sargent: Venetian Figures and Landscapes, 1898-1913, Complete Paintings: Volume VI, New Haven and London, 2009, p.206, no.1150, illustrated

The present picture of the bronze statue of Fortune on a golden orb, supported by two bronze atlas figures, is an iconic feature of the Venetian skyline which is depicted here against a billowing sky and without the sturdy structure below of the Dogana below.

Sargent painted another version of this view which is a more studied architecturally and less spontaneous in feel, which is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

This watercolour was given by Sargent to Elena Rathbone, the daughter of William Gair Rathbone VII (1849-1919) of the well-known trading house Rathbone's originally based in Liverpool. William Rathbone married the American Blanche Marie Luling (1856-1938) in 1877 while representing the firm in New York before returning to the London office in 1879. He was a close friend of John Singer Sargent and they shared a mutual taste in music, both helping to promote the careers of several young composers. He commissioned work from Delius and held recitals in his home, including by Francis Korbay and Percy Grainger. At one point Rathbone also owned a Sargent drawing of Korbay (now Ashmolean Museum, Oxford). He, his wife, children and daughter-in-law were all sketched by the artist and Rathbone built up a collection of Sargent's watercolours through purchases and gifts from the artist.

Sargent preferred not to sell his watercolours and sketches, as he explained to Rathbone in 1904: 'I feel rather ridiculous at not wanting to sell that sketch, especially when such a friend and such a knowing one lusts after it - But if my sketches are not here, how could I prove to myself and others that I am not a duffer...These sketches keep up my morale and I never sell them.'

Sargent and Rathbone met several times in Venice, including in 1903 and 1906. One such occasion was in February 1906, when Sargent wrote about a sketch he was working on, asking if he would like to '...see

some more watercolours? If so come on Wednesday after 3, but by daylight - and bring Miss Rathbone if she will'. He wrote again saying, 'As you always had a m...