



HENRY WOODS, R.A. (1846-1921)

*La Friulanella,
Flower Seller on the Giudecca, Venice*

Signed, inscribed and dated 'Henry Woods, Venice 1894' (lower right)

Oil on canvas

36 x 21 in. (91.3 x 53.3 cm.)

47 x 31 ½ in. (119.5 x 80.5 cm.) (framed)



Provenance

George McCulloch Esq., of 184 Queen's Gate, London.

Christie's, London, *The Well-Known Collection of Modern Pictures ... formed by the late George McCulloch, Esq.*, 23 May 1913, lot 200 (£231 to Tooth).

Leonard Slater, Esq., of 47 Rundle Road, Sheffield.

Cooling Galleries, London.

Private Collection, Kitchener, Ontario.

Private Collection, U.K.

Exhibited

London, Royal Academy, 1895, no. 123.

London, Royal Academy, *Exhibition of Modern Works in Painting and Sculpture forming the collection of the late George McCulloch, Esq.*, 1909, no. 121 (as *The Flower Seller: Venice*).

Literature

James Greig, *Henry Woods, R.A.: His Life and Work*, special edition of *The Art Annual*, 1915, illus. p. 6, pp. 24, 30.

In *La Friulanella, Flower Seller on the Giudecca, Venice* Henry Woods has captured the charm of all things Venetian. Having made Venice his permanent home in 1878 Woods became fluent not only in the language of the people but in his observation of the ordinary inhabitants of the city - the various merchants and street vendors, all the beautiful young women selling fruit and flowers, and even the Catholic priests going about their daily tasks bathed in the golden light of the most glorious city.

In *Henry Woods, R.A.: His Life and Work* published in 1915, James Greig describes the picture: 'The title *La Friulanella* – a native of Friuli, where the Italian guns were heard battering the Austrian forts at Gorizia [part of the Austrian empire until 1918] - painted in front of the great door of Palladio's Church of the Redentore on the Giudecca Island. Across the canal we see the Salute, the Campanile, the Ducal Palace and the boats lying idly by the Dogana. It is a splendid scene, but, alas, it reminds us that the paintable subjects of idyllic description are fast disappearing from the Giudecca. Factories are being rapidly built, and work people from Venice are crowding into great stacks of depressing flats.'



Woods portrays the flower seller resting on the balustrade in the shade of Il Redentore, the magnificent church designed by Andrea Palladio on the Giudecca, overlooking the Canale della Giudecca. But the scene is more than that: it is a vignette as the young woman has plucked a sweet-smelling rose from her basket of flowers and is lost in moment of reverie perhaps thinking of her beloved or some thought faraway from the daily routine of plying her trade selling flowers. One of her friends stands at the bottom of the steps, hands on her hips striking a pose of exasperation as she gazes up at her wayward companion. Two other figures sit by the water's edge, one shielding her face with a fan from the intense heat of the sun. They are all waiting for the *traghetto* to take them across to the Dorsoduro on the other side of the canal where Woods paints various shipping vessels and the most prominent features of the Venetian skyline – the dome of Santa Maria della Salute, the Campanile and the Doge's Palace. This view inspired many artists before Woods including J. M. W. Turner who captured the theatrical grandeur in *Venice from the Giudecca* in 1840 (Victoria and Albert Museum).



J. M. W. Turner
Venice from the Giudecca, 1840
 Oil on canvas
 24 x 36 in. (61 x 91.4 cm.)
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Henry Woods, c.1889-91
 Photograph by Ralph W. Robinson
 Royal Academy of Arts, London

Henry Woods was born in 1846, the eldest of nine siblings, in Warrington, a major industrial town on the banks of the River Mersey halfway between Liverpool and Manchester. He studied at the Warrington School of Art where he met Luke Fildes (1843-1927) who was to become not only a lifelong friend but also his brother-in-law. At the age of 18 Woods received a scholarship to study at the South Kensington School of Art in London, where he joined Fildes who had made the move two years earlier. Initially studying stained glass, Woods soon progressed to the antique and life classes before advancing to painting. He further enhanced his skill as a draughtsman by producing illustrations for *The Graphic*, of which he was one of the original staff, providing not only a source of income but also a practical way of honing his talent.

At the suggestion of Luke Fildes, Woods made his first trip to Venice in 1876. Woods was bewildered by the extent of Venice's pictorial wealth and set about depicting the various characteristics of Venetian life. Captivated, he returned to Venice two years later and made it his home. Although he was primarily an open-air painter, he set up a studio in a glass house attached to an old palace near the church of San Sebastiano at the south-west corner of the city. In the heat of the summer, he retreated to the village of Serra Valle at the foot of the lower hills north-east of Venice.



Fanny Woods, Henry's sister and also a painter, married Luke Fildes in 1874. A painter of social realist subjects most notably *The Village Wedding* (1883, Private collection) and *The Doctor* (1891, Tate, London) Fildes himself was not averse to the charms of Venice and spent considerable time there. His lively composition *Venetians* exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1885 (Manchester Art Gallery) is one such example, very similar to Woods in style.

Luke Fildes
Venetians, 1885
 Oil on canvas
 91 x 65 3/8 in. (231.5 x 166.1 cm.)
 Manchester Art Gallery

In Venice Woods met American artists John Singer Sargent and James McNeill Whistler and the writer Mark Twain, and befriended the colony of continental artists including Eugene de Blaas, Ludwig Passini and Cecil van Haanen. The well-to-do visitor to Venice wanted more than just a standard tourist 'veduta' and these painters along with Woods provided lively scenes of Venetian life most notably captured in the celebrated local beauties.



Henry Woods
Rivals, 1891
 Oil on canvas
 34 x 45 ⁷/₈ in. (86.2 x 116.5 cm.)
 Royal Collection Trust

Woods continued to send his pictures back to England for the summer exhibitions at the Royal Academy and he made trips to London to keep in contact with the art world and visit his sister and brother-in-law. In 1891 he exhibited *Rivals* (Royal Collection) which was bought by Agnews from the artist and sold to the Lord Mayor of Manchester in 1893 for £1,050 as a wedding gift to the Duke and Duchess of York, later King George V and Queen Mary. In order to facilitate his membership to the Royal Academy, as Fildes's suggestion Woods rented a *piéd à terre* in London, thus providing an English address. Hence in 1893, the year before he painted *La Friulanella*, he was elected a full Academician. He was the only foreign member of the Accademia di belle Arte di Venezia.



Woods was not only well versed in portraying the 'local colour' provided by the street sellers and markets but also in accurately rendering the Venetian architecture with its numerous churches and palazzos. The island of the Giudecca and in particular the church of Il Redentore provided a source of inspiration for Woods not just for the present work but the following year, in 1896, he exhibited *At the Giudecca, Venice* at the Royal Academy. Subsequently *In the Shade of Il Redentore* was shown at the R.A. in 1905.

Henry Woods
In the Shade of Il Redentore, 1905
 (repr. J. Greig, *Henry Woods, R.A.: His Life and Work*, p. 17)

What visitor arriving in Venice for the first time has not been transfixed by the magic and beauty of this the most romantic of all cities. For Woods Venice provided not only a lifetime of inspiration and livelihood but also a place, even in his final years, he could not give up. While his sister and brother-in-law urged him to return to London, Woods found it impossible to abandon the city he had made his home for more than forty years. In fact, such was his dedication to his metier that on 27 October 1921 he was found dead beside his easel, paintbrush in hand. He was buried in Venice's Protestant cemetery on the island of San Michele.

Provenance

La Friulanella was formerly in the important collection of George McCulloch (1848-1907), who made his fortune from mining in New South Wales, Australia, and retired to England where he became an avid art collector. Born in Lanark in Scotland, the youngest of five siblings of James McCulloch, a road contractor, and his wife Isabella Robertson, McCulloch was a member of the syndicate that owned a mine at Broken Hill, New South Wales, where large deposits of silver were discovered. He became manager and chairman of Broken Hill Proprietary Co. Ltd. Through this and other investments in the Western Australian goldfields he became a multi-millionaire by Victorian standards. In 1891 he returned to London and, having married Mary Agnes Mayger (1857-1945) the widowed daughter of another miner, he set about acquiring the trappings of wealth and social status. McCulloch bought a house at 184 Queen's Gate to which he added several large galleries. Between 1893 until his death in 1907 he formed an art collection of international renown. The parameters of the collection were that each work had to have been painted within McCulloch's lifetime. A photograph shows Mr and Mrs McCulloch seated in one of the galleries at 184 Queen's Gate with Henry Woods's *La Friulanella* prominently displayed on the left behind Mr McCulloch and next to Leighton's *The Garden of the Hesperides* (1891-2, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight).



Mr and Mrs George McCulloch in their house at 184 Queen's Gate, London
(*La Friulanella* on the left behind Mr McCulloch)

McCulloch spent more than £200,000 purchasing over 300 pictures. His collection included works by American artists working in Britain, notably Sargent and Whistler, Irish painter William Orpen and several Scottish painters including William Quiller Orchardson, John Pettie, David Murray and John Lavery. Works by the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers were well represented including John Everett Millais's *A Dream of the Past: Sir Isumbras at the Ford* (1857, Lady Lever Art Gallery) and Burne-Jones's *Love amongst the Ruins* (1874, Wightwick Manor). Classical and mythological subjects also appealed to McCulloch and in 1894 he acquired Henrietta Rae's remarkable *Psyche before the Throne of Venus* (Private collection, purchased from Martin Beisly Fine Art) from the Royal Academy exhibition of that year. With regard to Woods's *La Friulanella* exhibited at the Royal Academy the following year, records show that the picture was not for sale at the Summer Exhibition in 1895 suggesting that it may well have been purchased by McCulloch prior to the exhibition.

McCulloch died in 1907 and two years later the Royal Academy exhibited his collection of paintings and sculpture in their Winter Exhibition. *La Friulanella* was no. 121 described as:

THE FLOWER-SELLER: VENICE.

Henry Woods, R.A.

Full-length figure of a woman, leaning against a balustrade and holding a flower in her r. hand; beside her is a large basket of flowers; behind is seen the Giudecca, with buildings beyond, among them the church of Santa Maria della Salute, and the Campanile.
Signed and dated, "Henry Woods, Venice, 1895." Canvas, 35 ½ by 20 ½ in.

Traditionally the Winter Exhibition at the Royal Academy was devoted to showing the works of Old Masters lent from various private collections. Thus, exhibiting the McCulloch collection was an exception and it was seen by certain members of the press to be promoting the work of current Royal Academicians, generally reserved for the annual Summer Exhibition.

A few years later at the end of May 1913 the McCulloch collection was dispersed through a series of sales at Christie's, numbering over 300 lots and making a total of £136,859. Catalogued as lot 200, the present work was purchased by the dealers Arthur Tooth & Sons for £231. The painting was subsequently in the collection of Leonard Slater Esq. (typed label on the stretcher). From 1919–1925 Slater, a successful metal broker from Sheffield, lived at Spring Leigh, a handsome Victorian villa at 47 Rundle Road, a prosperous area of the city. *La Friulanella* was with the Cooling Galleries in London and found its way to a private collection in Ontario, Canada, before returning to the U.K.

An essential destination on the Grand Tour since the 18th century, Venice inspired generations of artists and writers – visitors have long been captivated by the city on the sea with its grand monuments juxtaposed with countless canals and narrow byways all bathed in a luminous light.

The pictures of Henry Woods mirror the passing world of their day. Woods '... painted Venice - where he made his home for the greater part of his working life - with a charm, an understanding, a fidelity in representing the Venetian scene, which many painters in the long line of Venice addicts have failed to catch.' (L. V. Fildes, *Luke Fildes, R.A., A Victoria Painter*, 1968, p. xiv). With its distinguished provenance, *La Friulanella, Flower Seller on the Giudecca* captures the allure and vitality of this unique city.