

### **In which section does the writer**

- 1** suggest why Canaletto's work was less appreciated in his home city than elsewhere?
- 2** give examples of how Canaletto tricks the viewer in his pictures?
- 3** claim that Canaletto's paintings contain a kind of historical record of Venice?
- 4** tell us where Canaletto worked on the composition of his pictures?
- 5** mention the reason why Canaletto didn't paint exactly what he had seen?
- 6** suggest a weakness in the work Canaletto painted away from Venice?
- 7** give some details of Canaletto's initial painting technique?
- 8** say that Canaletto took a risk by specialising in a particular kind of art?
- 9** describe different artistic reactions to Venice?
- 10** refer to the effect Canaletto's paintings had on artists in another country?

### **Canaletto and Venice**

*An expert describes the close relationship between the great 18th century Italian painter Canaletto and his home city.*

**A** Canaletto's lifetime subject was the city of Venice. Apart from the works done during his decade in London, he painted virtually nothing else, and Venice has never been so minutely and extensively painted by any other artist. His response to Venice was not like the dramatic, emotional response of a visitor overpowered by the city's haunting beauty and magic, as the British painter Turner was later, for example. Canaletto's paintings, with their love of incidental detail, betray a deeper-rooted, more lasting attachment – the affection of a native Venetian.

**B** Canaletto depicted the city as it really was, documenting the changes in the cityscape over the years – Piazza San Marco being repaved, palaces being reconstructed, graffiti appearing and disappearing. Above all, he suffused his painting with the natural light and atmosphere of Venice which was second nature to him. When he went to London in 1746, Canaletto could not quite come to terms with painting the cooler tones and the unsympathetic climate of England, and somehow his paintings of the River Thames always ended up looking rather like the Grand Canal.

**C** In spite of his natural affection for Venice, Canaletto's paintings were rarely bought by his fellow Venetians. This was probably because the locals did not need reminders

of their city, and also because in Venice 'view painting' was not taken very seriously in comparison with historical and religious painting, or even landscape and figure painting. To become a 'view painter' at that time was quite a brave choice and, by the end of his career, Canaletto had done much to raise the status of the genre. However, his influence was felt more among painters in England, the home of his major patrons.

**D** Canaletto's extraordinarily detailed and accurate scenes were perfect for the foreign tourists in Venice, who wanted souvenirs or mementoes of their visits. The more accurate the scene the better, in fact, and Canaletto's first patron, Owen McSwiney, persuaded him to change from his earlier picturesque and theatrical style to a more factual one. Instead of loose brushwork and thick paint, alongside dramatic contrasts of light and shade, Canaletto adopted more of a snapshot approach, which proved to be very commercial. His colours became brighter, the paint surface smoother, and the scenes looked more realistic. McSwiney wrote 'his excellence lies in painting things which fall immediately under his eye', as if he worked directly from nature. At a casual glance, everything in his pictures is instantly recognisable and looks exactly as it does, or did, in reality. In fact, Canaletto never painted from nature – his pictures were created in the studio.

**E** In working out the compositions, he used his imagination and a certain artistic licence. Although he paid the minutest attention to the detail of a decorative carving, a ship's sails or washing hanging out, Canaletto felt at liberty to distort and reorganise the main objects in his paintings in the interest of dramatic effect. He would alter the sweeping curve of the Grand Canal, for example, or include more in a composition than could be seen from any single viewpoint. The clutter of traffic on the waterways looks random and natural, but the position of each boat was carefully worked out to achieve the best effect. In this way, he conveyed the essence of Venice even if he deceived the eye. The drawings which formed the basis of his compositions range from rapid sketches of ideas for painting, done on the spot, to large-scale fully detailed preliminary drawings. Sometimes, he made precise drawings for engravers to copy, and occasionally he produced them as works of art in their own right, in which case they were finished in the studio.