

Johann Jakob Wolfensberger



View of Smyrna

Reference: 10924

Dimensions:

Height: 54.20 cm / 21³/₈ in

Width: 75.10 cm / 29⁵/₈ in

Signed and dated l.r.: Wolfensberger/Smyrna 1836, watercolour over pencil with scratching out

54.2 x 75.1 cm; 21 5/8 x 29 1/2 inches

This view of Smyrna from the outskirts of the city shows shipping moored in the bay and a number of individual buildings which are carefully drawn. Wolfensberger's watercolour views of the Near East, Greece and Italy, are characterized by a topographical accuracy combined with a picturesque viewpoint and a distinctive soft palette.

Born near Zürich, Johann Jacob Wolfensberger studied there with Heinrich Fuseli between 1814 and 1817, when he travelled to Italy where he lived in Naples, for several years, and also spent some time travelling in Sicily. In 1825 he was in Rome, where he befriended Horace Vernet, the director of the Académie de France. In Rome Wolfensberger was employed as a drawing teacher to the Marquess of Northampton, later President of the Royal Society. In 1829 he returned briefly to Zürich, where he lived with the painter Johann Conrad Zeller, before coming back to Rome in 1830. Between 1832 and 1835 Wolfensberger lived and worked in Athens, where he was employed by the French envoy the

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Baron de Rouen and the Austrian Baron Prokesch von Osten. During this time he visited Smyrna, Constantinople and Asia Minor in 1834. He also travelled with Joseph Count of Estourmel (1783-1853) in the early 1830s in Greece and Asia Minor. The illustrated book of the Count of Estourmel's journey was published in 1844 entitled 'Journal d'un Voyage en Orient.

In 1838 an exhibition of two hundred of Wolfensberger's views of Italy and Greece was held in Zürich. With the financial support of the Swiss bibliophile, scholar and collector Martin Bodmer, further exhibitions of his work took place in Vienna, Paris and London. A trip to London in 1840 resulted in a commission from the publisher Henry Fisher for a series of seventeen prints of Italian and Greek views. The artist's marriage the following year to Hanna Dorothea Burdon, an Englishwoman, allowed him some financial security. Wolfensberger continued to make sketching trips around Europe; visiting Italy in 1843, Switzerland in 1844, and England and Scotland in 1846. Four years after he died from encephalitis in 1850, a biography of the artist was published by his widow.

A large group of around five hundred drawings and watercolours by Wolfensberger can be found in the collection of the Kunstmuseum in St. Gallen. Further works by the artist are in the collections of the Kunsthaus, the ETH Graphische Sammlung, Zurich and the Zentralbibliothek in Zurich.