

Nicolino Calyo, The Great Ash Eruption, Mixed Media.

Nicolino Calyo lived an international life, painting landscapes, and important events across two continents and a multitude of countries. Although it was unknowable to him at the time, this work, a gouache and watercolor painting of an erupting submarine volcano, depicts an event that had an indelible impact on the history of the United States. Michaan's Auctions is proud to offer **Nicolino Calyo, The Great Ash Eruption, mixed media** (\$5/8,000) for sale in the "Chapter I" Vito Giallo Auction, held on Monday, June 17th.

This painting is a marine scene depicting a volcanic eruption that pours black smoke and white steam from the

ocean into the evening sky. The calm sea takes up the lower quarter of the frame and is empty save for a small British ship, likely in the Royal Navy, which moves out of frame from its position in the lower left. The volcanic eruption takes place in the distance, nearly level with the horizon, set against a blue sky with the red-orange hints of a sunset just emerging. The eruption generates



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three distinct but proximate clouds, a large cloud of black soot and raining debris to the left, a cloud of white steam to the right being pulled towards the edge of the frame by the wind, and a small brown cloud of tephra, a form of uncompressed volcanic ash, at left bottom. These clouds are rendered with chalk, making their white edges and raining debris contrast strongly with the rest of the painting, which is painted using gouache and watercolor.

This work is from an early period of Calyo's career, it was painted while he was living in an Italian immigrant community in Malta, less than ten years after he fled Italy for political reasons. The evidence of his Italian education is evident in the technique he employs with his gouache and watercolors, using a substantial amount of pigment relative to the English and American styles, which are generally rendered much

more transparently. This striking use of color would be present throughout his future works, as would the use of deep shadows and heightened contrast. His choice of subject matter is also indicative of his future work, an action-packed marine scene would be a recurring subject of his work.

This painting depicts the 1831 eruption of the Empedocles submarine volcano, located between Tunisia and the Italian island of Sicily, and is also proximate to the English colonial island of Malta, where Calyo was living in exile. This volcano has erupted and briefly spawned a new island, called Isola Ferdinanda in Italian, or Graham Island in English, four times since 300 BCE, each time being quickly washed away. Its most recent eruption was in July 1831, and briefly inspired a four-way dispute over its sovereignty until

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the island was again eroded beneath the waves in January of 1832.

This eruption had an outsized impact on the history of the United States, stemming from the gasses released by the volcano, which caused a worldwide discoloration of the sun on August 13th, 1831. This discoloration, which produced a sun-tinted blue, purple, or green, was widely noted by observers around the world and is now believed to have originated in the Empedocles eruption. The tinted sun was observed by enslaved Virginia preacher Nat Turner, who interpreted the event as a divine sign and launched the most significant rebellion in American history less than a week later. While the uprising was quickly defeated, the fear inspired by the revolutionary effort limited efforts for integration in the North, resulted in the criminalization of teaching Black people

to read or write, and made abolitionist organizing illegal in Southern states.

Further deepening the divide between Northern and Southern states concerning the rights and perceived humanity of Black Americans, Nat Turner's rebellion played a significant role in the buildup to the Civil War, America's deadliest conflict.

Nicolino Vicompte Calyo was born in Naples, then an independent kingdom, in 1799, the son of an army officer. As a young man, he attended the Naples Academy of Fine Arts, where he studied Neoclassical, Italian, and Dutch landscape painting. He joined a democratic revolution against the Spanish-Bourbon King Ferdinand in 1820 that secured Naples's first constitution; however, this movement was crushed the following year by the Austrian army invited by the former King, who was restored to the throne.

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Fearing for his life, Calyo fled the country, living in various countries in Europe before settling in Malta, at the time a British colony, in 1829. He immigrated to the United States in 1835, eventually settling in New York, where he painted his best known work “Great Fire of New York,” which was licensed as prints and widely distributed. He painted urban workers in the city, reported from the Mexican War of 1846, and painted landscapes while traveling the Mississippi and Ohio rivers. He hosted many important European figures in his New York home, including Napoleon III, the future President and Emperor of France. He briefly returned to the continent to serve as a court painter for Spanish Queen Maria Christina but quickly came back to New York, where he died in 1884.

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(\$5/8,000) will be offered in Michael's Auctions “Chapter I” Vito Giallo Auction on Monday, June 17th. This sale will present an initial selection from the vast estate of the notable New York artist and antiques dealer, Vito Giallo, who is finally offering the most treasured items from his Madison Avenue store, in a special auction preceding our Summer Fine Sale. This collection, titled “Chapter I” to commemorate the recent publishing of Vito Giallo's memoir, features exceptional pieces across every department, headlined by bronzes and painted works in the Fine Art Department, as well as impressive collections of Silver & Objects de Vertu. Also included are important collectibles, quality decorations, and admirable pieces in glass.

Also on June 17th, Michael's Auctions Summer Fine Sale. This auction features an incredible selection,

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full of the season's most esteemed items.

The sale is headlined by historically important works in the Asian Art Department, exquisite jewelry in the desirable Art-Deco style, and important works from notable American and European modernist artists. Also featured are fine examples of Persian carpets, sterling silver dishware, and an

extremely rare book by an icon of American poetry.

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