SPHINX FINE ART



Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi, il Bolognese (Bologna 1608 - Rome 1680)

Landscape near Viterbo

annotated ‘Bolognese’ (lower left)
annotated on the reverse ‘Veduta presso Viterbo di Giovi Francesco Bolognese’
quill and brown ink
21.5 x 36.5 cm (8½ x 14⅜ in)

Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi’s *Landscape near Viterbo* is a brilliantly constructed composition containing a plethora of landscape elements. In the foreground is a river, which winds its way through the undulating Italian landscape to the background of the work, where a towering mountain dominates the horizon. In the foreground, the work is dotted with several medieval buildings of this hamlet near Viterbo, an ancient city in the Lazio region of central Italy. A stone bridge on the right-hand side leads to a fortified building, whilst on the left-hand side there is a Romanesque church, as well as various other buildings dotted along the riverbank. In the foreground, a dense variety of trees, plants and shrubs create delicate patterns across the work.

Grimaldi uses long, thin quill marks to portray this landscape, varying the density of these marks in order to create some tonal distinction and a sense of the different textures. Whereas the bare stone bricks of the buildings are lightly treated, the hatching used to portray the surrounding foliage is denser and the line occasionally thicker. Grimaldi unifies these styles to create a landscape which is bright and airy and enhanced by the white of the paper, which he allows to shine through. The same relatively sparse use of line can be found in the majority of Grimaldi’s drawings, an example being *Path Leading to a Fortress, near a Pond* (The Louvre, Paris). In this drawing different types of line are used to indicate various surfaces, with heavy hatching and thick line predominantly used on the trees. Overall the scene is imbued with the same bright sunshine, with only the faintest hint of cloud in the sky, giving the work an airy and still atmosphere.

In terms of composition, the two works are very similar and reflective of the techniques used by Grimaldi in much of his work. The eye is led from the foreground through the picture by a clear progression of planes culminating in a mountainous background. His landscapes are spacious and tranquil and the

scenes are usually animated by figures or large fortified buildings, their heavy bulk contrasting with the numerous natural features. Often, as is the case in the works illustrated, a body of water is included in the foreground, and the reflections off the still water accentuate the sunny atmosphere.

Grimaldi was both an architect and painter, and was known as il Bolognese from the place of his birth. He was a relative of the Carracci family, under whom it is presumed he was first apprenticed. He went to Rome, and was appointed architect to Pope Paul V and also patronised by succeeding popes. In Rome, Grimaldi regularly collaborated on public decorations with other artists, including Alessandro Algardi (1598-1654) and Gaspard Dughet (1615-1675). His landscapes were popular with many of the most important Roman families, such as the Santacroce, the Pamphili and the Borghese. In 1648, he was invited to France by Cardinal Mazarin, and for roughly two years he was employed in building projects for the minister and for Louis XIV, in addition to fresco painting in the Louvre. He executed history paintings and portraits, as well as landscapes, but it was this last genre that seems to have favoured, especially in his later years. He often produced engravings and etchings from his own landscapes and also from those of Titian and the Caracci. Returning to Rome, he was made principe of the Accademia di San Luca. He made many drawings, mainly in pen and ink with brown wash, often on blue paper, which demonstrate an accomplished variation on the Bolognese tradition, established by artists such as Annibale Carracci (1560-1609) and Domenichino (1581-1641). His many etchings and drawings spread the influence of the Bolognese landscape throughout Europe. In both his paintings and engravings he was assisted by his son Alessandro. His mistress was Elena Aloisi, daughter of the painter Baldassare Aloisi (1577-1638).[1] It was in Rome that Grimaldi died, in high repute not only for his artistic skill but for his upright character and charitable deeds.

[1] Charles Dempsey, 'The Carracci Postille to Vasari's Lives', *Art Bulletin 68 (1),* March 1986, pp. 72-76.

Artist description:

Grimaldi was an Italian painter, printmaker, draughtsman and architect. He was an accomplished fresco painter, whose decorative landscapes were popular with such leading Roman families as the Santacroce, the Pamphili and the Borghese; his many landscape etchings and drawings spread the influence of 17th-century Bolognese landscape throughout Europe. After studying in Bologna in the circle of the Carracci, he arrived in Rome c. 1626 and by 1635 was already a member of the Accademia di S Luca and associated with the circle of artists working with Pietro da Cortona. Sometime between 1635 and 1640 he collaborated with François Perrier and Giovanni Ruggieri on the decoration of the gallery in the Palazzo Peretti–Amalgia, Rome; the vault, which was probably designed by Grimaldi, was modelled on Cortona's gallery in the Villa Sacchetti at Castelfusano. In 1640–41, again inspired by the Villa Sacchetti, Grimaldi frescoed the vault of the great hall of the Palazzo Santacroce ai Catinari, Rome.

From 1645 to 1647 Grimaldi was involved in the building of the Villa Pamphili, Rome. It seems that, while Alessandro Algardi was responsible for the design, Grimaldi acted as site architect and may have contributed to the design of the garden; he also painted frescoes of episodes from the *Life of Hercules*, to accompany Algardi's stucco reliefs of the same theme. In 1647–8 Grimaldi worked with Gaspard Dughet on the decorations at S Martino ai Monti, Rome. From 1649 to 1651 he was in Paris, where he worked with Giovanni Francesco Romanelli in the palace of Cardinal Mazarin (now Bibliothèque Nationale) and at the Palais du Louvre. On his return to Rome, Grimaldi worked for Alexander VII on the decoration of the Sala Gialla in the Palazzo del Quirinale.

Between 1656 and 1659 Grimaldi was absent from Rome, and in this period he was probably employed by Cardinal Marcello Santacroce, Bishop of Tivoli, on the chapel of the Immaculate Conception in Tivoli Cathedral. A wash drawing of an architectural detail (London, British Museum) suggests that Grimaldi designed the chapel, as well as painting frescoes of scenes from the *Life of the Virgin*. In 1672 he painted wall frescoes of landscapes at the Villa Falconieri, Frascati, and between

1674 and 1676 he worked on the gallery of the Palazzo Borghese and decorated the end room, overlooking the port of Ripetta; from the end of 1674 he is documented as supervising the palace decoration. Between c. 1660 and 1680 he frescoed the gallery of the Palazzo Muti–Papazzurri, Rome, decorating the long walls with landscapes in fictive marble frames.

Grimaldi made many drawings (e.g. Paris, Louvre; London, British Museum), mainly in pen and ink with brown wash, often on blue paper. His *Landscape* (Windsor Castle, Berks, Royal Collection), where space is created by a clear sequence of planes leading into the distance, punctuated by travelling figures and geometric buildings, is a characteristically accomplished variation on a landscape formula developed by the Bolognese artists Annibale Carracci and Domenichino. Grimaldi's over 50 etchings are in a similar style, and his graphic work deeply influenced artists of the second half of the 17th century. His rare cabinet pictures include four paintings on copper (Rome, Galleria Borghese), acquired by the Borghese family in 1678.

Collections

Grimaldi is represented in the following collections: Art Institute of Chicago; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia; J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Royal Academy of Arts Collection, London, UK; Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford, UK; Courtauld Institute of Art, London, UK; Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan; Harvard University Art Museums, Massachusetts; Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, Scotland; Los Angeles County Museum; Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid; University of Michigan Museum of Art, amongst others.