SPHINX FINE ART



Franz de Paula Ferg (Vienna 1689 - London 1740)

A Classical Landscape with a Family Resting by the Ruins of a Fountain, a Man with a Pack-Donkey Passing by

&

A Classical Landscape with a Family Resting by the Ruins, a Boy Struggling with an Obstinate Pack Mule

oil on copper, a pair

inscribed ‘AP.No83’ and ‘AP.No84 ’ (‘AP’ in monogram, on the reverses)

17.5 x 21.6 cm (6½ x 8½ in)

With this pair of paintings Franz de Paula Ferg presents us with two delightful figurative mountainous landscapes set amongst classical ruins. In *A Classical Landscape with a Family Resting by the Ruins of a Fountain, a Man with a Pack-Donkey Passing by* a mother, father and child rest on a rocky mound. The child, open-mouthed, excitedly grasps out towards the donkey. All the adult figures, turned towards the toddler, delight in his reaction, the two female figures looking on with considerable affection. The family have stopped next to a fountain decorated with classical heads of satyrs or fauns, and the foliage that grows on the top of the fountain reinforces the impression of age and antiquity. The viewer’s eye falls back to the gentle, mountainous landscape beyond, through which we imagine the group have travelled.

The accompanying work, *A Classical Landscape with a Family Resting by the Ruins, a Boy Struggling with an Obstinate Pack Mule* is set in a similar Arcadian landscape. A classical ruin again provides a backdrop under which a family rest, the head of a faun appearing once more, this time

carved into the stone under the right-hand scroll. This scene is however animated by the vigorous misbehaviour of the pack mule, which a young boy struggles to control. Both arid landscapes are lit with a soft gentle light and the rich colours of the figures' clothes brighten the scenes. The two paintings are clearly a pair, unified by size, setting, subject matter and palette.

Ferg painted many of these types of Italianate landscapes. Although *Italian Landscape* depicts a more panoramic view than the present pair, it is set in a similar dry but idealised landscape, dotted with ruins and infused by the same soft, golden light. In terms of the composition once again Ferg's landscape recedes through a series of carefully composed planes to a hazy and mountainous background. On the left-hand side of *Italian Landscape* is a similar family group, replete with mules, whilst in the shadows on the right-hand side a couple of shepherds watch their small flock. Like the present works it is a charming scene of rustic life, set in a brilliantly depicted Arcadian landscape.

A prolific artist, Ferg specialised as a painter of small-scale landscapes and genre scenes in the manner of the Dutch seventeenth-century masters, particularly Philips Wouwerman. Ferg studied landscape painting under both his father, Adam Pankraz Ferg, and Josef Orient, studying staffage painting with Johann (Hans) Graf. He also studied the engravings of Jacques Callot and Sébastien Leclerc. His early works show such subjects as harbours, markets and villages as wide vistas with many figures, trees and buildings, such as his *Fair with Temple and Maypole* (Vienna, Belvedere). These scenes combine both landscape and genre painting and are characteristic examples of early eighteenth-century Austrian panel painting, showing the influence of Dutch, Flemish and Italian models. The colours are dark, and the staffage figures, in the manner of Graf, are slender, with petite heads.

In 1718 Ferg left Vienna and went to Franconia, Bamberg, and Leipzig. There he met Johann Alexander Thiele whom he accompanied to Dresden. Later Ferg travelled to Lower Saxony, and from about 1724 lived in London. In 1726 he created a series of eight etched Capricci (Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco), which help to date many smaller pictures to the London period. His late cabinet pieces contain fewer, clearly drawn figures, set in Italianate landscapes with ruins; their Arcadian mood, brilliant colour and Rococo manner are particularly pleasing. *A Classical Landscape with a Family Resting by the Ruins of a Fountain, a Man with a Pack-Donkey Passing by* and *A Classical Landscape with a Family Resting by the Ruins, a Boy Struggling with an Obstinate Pack Mule* are very much in the style of this late period. Filled with charm, Ferg's pictures found a ready market among collectors who sought after the dwindling supply of Dutch masters that would not be re-released onto the market until the upheavals of the French Revolution. Ferg's principal patrons were the Elector of Saxony at Dresden, and after his move to London in 1718, the Duke of Brunswick.

Artist description:

Franz de Paula Ferg studied landscape painting with his father, Adam Pankraz Ferg (1651–1729), and with Josef Orient (1677–1747) and staffage painting with Johann (Hans) Graf (1653–1710). He also studied the engravings of Jacques Callot and Sébastien Leclerc. His early works show such subjects as harbours, markets and villages as wide vistas with many figures, trees and buildings, for example *Fair with Temple and Maypole* (Vienna, Belvedere). These scenes combine landscape and genre and are characteristic examples of early 18th-century Austrian panel painting, showing the influence of Dutch, Flemish and Italian models. The colours are dark, and the staffage figures in the manner of Graf are slender, with small heads and peculiarly wooden poses.

In 1718 Ferg left Vienna and went to Franconia, Bamberg, and Leipzig. There he met Johann Alexander Thiele (1685–1752), whom he accompanied to Dresden. A small self-portrait (untraced) from this period was bought by the painter Christian Wilhelm Ernst Dietrich. Later Ferg travelled to Lower Saxony and from about 1724 lived in London, where he made an unfortunate marriage and died in misery. In 1726 he created a series of eight etched *Capricci* (preparatory sketches in Vienna, Albertina), which

help to date many smaller pictures to the London period. His late cabinet pieces contain fewer, clearly drawn figures, set in Italianate landscapes with ruins; their Arcadian mood, brilliant colour and Rococo manner are particularly pleasing.