SPHINX FINE ART



Jan Frans van Bloemen, called Orizzonte (Antwerp 1662 - Rome 1749)

The Flight into Egypt and The Rest on the Flight to Egypt

oil on copper, a pair
26.7 x 43.8 cm (10½ x 17½ in) each

'Beautiful pictures done in such beautiful sites, with verdant foliage, limpid silver water, and with an agreeableness of colour; accompanied by small figures of the utmost gracefulness, with rural dwellings and urns: all so well assembled, that his pictures were welcomed into all the galleries of Italy'

-Nicola Pio, on the landscapes of Jan Frans van Bloeman[1]

The Flight into Egypt depicts the Holy family making their way through an idealised classical landscape. Joseph leads his donkey, which bears mother and child, along a path which winds its way into the distance before disappearing behind a grove of trees. Beyond this, the painting opens up to a dramatic, undulating mountainous background, with a fortified town perched atop one of the peaks. On the left-hand side, a stream flows gently along and it is flanked, on the far bank, by a rocky wall. Acting as a repoussoir, we are drawn by the stream into the background, with the meticulously depicted tree on the right-hand side serving as a framing device.

In the accompanying picture, *The Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, Jan Frans van Bloemen, called Orizzonte, has painted a similar, Arcadian landscape. However, the most significant difference is the inclusion, on the left-hand side, of ancient artefacts, which help to contextualise the scene. The large stone urn on a plinth reinforces the sense of antiquity, with which both paintings are imbued; however the sphinx and the triangular structure behind it, the shape of which echoes the pyramids, specifically place this scene in ancient Egypt. This corner of the painting recalls the capricci of artists such as Giovanni Paolo Pannini (1691-1765), which were so popular with fashionable Roman society in this

period. Again Orizzonte has used a precisely constructed composition that leads the eye from foreground figures through the landscape to a town set against a mountainous background.

The carefully constructed compositions evident in the present works are very much a feature of Orizzonte's work, a further example being his *Landscape with the Communion of Saint Mary of Egypt*. In this painting the diagonal line of the river guides our focus from the foreground figures, through the relatively lush Italianate landscape to the imposing background. The river is particularly reminiscent of that in *The Rest on the Flight to Egypt*, with Orizzonte delighting in displaying his skill in depicting the play of the bright Italian sunshine on the water's surface. In both *The Flight into Egypt* and *Landscape with the Communion of Saint Mary of Egypt* the prominent positioning of an overhanging tree serves, not only as a framing device, but also as a chance for Orizzonte to carefully record natural features. His scrupulous observation is especially evident in *The Flight into Egypt*, where the orange tinge of some of the leaves serve as the earliest signs of the coming autumn.

Orizzonte predominantly painted similar classical landscapes throughout his career, taking his inspiration from the Roman campagna. His landscapes, with their recession through a series of planes, soft, warm lighting and classical and religious subject matter, draw on the examples of artists such as Claude Lorrain (?1604/5-1682) and Gaspard Dughet (1613-1675). Orizzonte gained his moniker, meaning horizon, due to the wide panoramas found in his work. His paintings are exquisitely imbued with 'that difficult-to-define pastoral ambience' which helped to make him such a great painter in the eyes of his contemporaries.[2]

[1] Nicola Pio, *Le Vite di Pittori Scultori et Architetti* (1724), cited in E. Bowron and J. Rishel, *Art in Rome in the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 2000, p. 333).

[2] Vernon Hyde Minor, *The Death of the Baroque and the Rhetoric of Good Taste*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 69.

Provenance:

Henry Hucks Gibbs, 1st Baron Aldenham, by 1887;
thence by descent to the previous Private Collector.

Artist description:

Jan Frans van Bloemen was a member of a Flemish family of painters and draughtsmen. He was also active in Italy and France and was the brother of Pieter van Bloemen. While still in their native Antwerp, Pieter was the first teacher of his brother Jan Frans — who later also studied with Antoine Goubau — and probably also of his younger brother Norbert (1670-c. 1746). Jan Frans was soon summoned to Lyon by his brother and is said to have worked with van der Cabel in the city. It was only once Jan Frans reached Italy, however, that he would be given the moniker "Orizzonte" (the Italian word for "horizon"), which reflected his proficiency in producing panoramic landscapes.

Although patronised by aristocratic Roman families, Orizzonte's artistic career was marred by his prolonged confrontation with the Accademia di San Luca. The precise reasons for the difficulties are unknown, but he was only finally accepted by the Accademia at the age of 80, after his third application for membership.
Orizzonte was inspired by the classicising landscape paintings of Gaspard Dughet, as well as by the beauty of Rome and the surrounding *campagna*. With the Flemish landscape tradition as his foundation, he easily absorbed Dughet's dynamic and analytical style, producing such works as *Landscape with Ruins, Nocturnal Landscape* and the *Storm* (all Rome, Palazzo Doria-Pamphilj). Some of Orizzonte's views, painted at the end of the 17th century, anticipate the *vedute* (view paintings)

of the 18th century and mark a shift from the classically orientated Roman landscapes of his French predecessors in Rome. In pictures such as the *Viewof Gardens with Statues* (Schloss Wörlitz, near Dessau) and the *Landscape with the Colosseum* (Rome, Galleria Pallavicini), there is a more realistic representation of views, and the paintings show characteristics close to those of Andrea Locatelli, Giovanni Paolo Panini and Paolo Anesi. Around 1730 Orizzonte began to adapt his delicate and sensitive style towards a calmer and more synthetic artistic vision, some features of which were borrowed directly from Poussin, as in the *Landscape with the Belvedere of the Vatican* (Rome, Galleria Pallavicini) and the *Landscape with Temple* (Tivoli, Villa d'Este). Among the painters who provided figures for his landscapes were Carlo Maratti, Placido Costanzi and Pompeo Batoni.

Considered a great artist by his contemporaries, Orizzonte produced some of the finest classical landscape painting in Rome during the first half of the eighteenth century. His numerous Italianate landscapes are distributed in museums and private collections throughout Europe, many being in England. His pupils, for example Francesco Oelefe, known as 'Bavarese', Gabriele Ricciardelli and Nicolo Bonito, all imitated his style.

Collections

Van Bloemen is represented in the following collections: Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Brussels; Palazzo Braschi, Rome; Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford; Fitzwilliam Museum at the University of Cambridge; Norwich Museums, England; The Louvre, Paris; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig; Museo de Bellas Artes de Valencia, Spain; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, amongst others.