

# 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 14¾ in)

**G**IOVANNI 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*



Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi, *Path Leading to a Fortress, near a Pond*, The Louvre, Paris (Figure 1)

(fig. 1). 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 Carracci. 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).<sup>1</sup> It was in Rome that Grimaldi died, in high repute not only for his artistic skill but for his upright character and charitable deeds.

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

