

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 reverse of each)
21.6 x 17.5 cm (8½ x 6½ 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 stretches out his hand towards the donkey. The adult figures, turned towards the toddler, delight in his reaction, the two female figures looking on with considerable affection. The family have stopped by 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 stubbornness 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 in 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. (fig. 1). 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 (1619-1668) (see inventory). Ferg studied landscape painting under his father, Adam Pankraz Ferg (1651-1729), and Josef Orient (1677-1747), studying staffage painting with Johann (Hans) Graf (1653-1710). He also studied the engravings of Jacques Callot (1592-1635) and Sébastien

Leclerc (1637-1714). His early works show subjects such 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 incorporated 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 (1685-1752) whom he accompanied to Dresden. Later Ferg travelled to Lower Saxony, and from about 1724 he 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. The current pair of works are very much in the style of this late period. Filled with charm, Ferg's pictures found a ready market amongst collectors who sought after the dwindling supply of Dutch masters that would not be returned to 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.



Franz de Paula Ferg, *Italian Landscape*, c.1730, Belvedere, Vienna (Figure 1)

