

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri GUERCINO (Cento 1591 - Bologna 1666)

Landscape with Falconers by a Tree

Pen and brown ink, laid down on an 18th century English (Barnard) mount. Inscribed Guercino. on the mount.
Further inscribed (by Barnard) J:B. No:332. / 10 3/4 by 7 3/4. / Engraved by Mr. Pond & / out of his Collection. on the reverse of the mount.
195 x 269 mm. (7 5/8 x 10 1/2 in.)

The practice of landscape drawing was one that occupied Guercino throughout his career, and such drawings account for a large and prominent part of his output. Indeed, it has been noted that more landscape studies by Guercino are known than by any other Italian draughtsman of the period. Yet these drawings appear not to have been intended as studies for his paintings, and instead were done for their own sake; drawn for the artist's own pleasure or, perhaps, given away as gifts. As Denis Mahon and Nicholas Turner have pointed out, 'Since they are not connected with his figure paintings, they presumably cannot have been made with any expectation of financial gain. For an artist who was attentive to such matters, besides being under pressure for time from his numerous commissions, this dedication to what might be considered a merely peripheral activity bespeaks Guercino's devotion to what he himself must have considered of some importance.' Because they are not related to his finished paintings, these drawings are often difficult to accurately date.

Almost always executed in pen and ink, but without wash, Guercino's landscape drawings display little of the reworking and experimentation so typical of his figure studies. Carefully composed and incorporating such stock elements as solitary windblown trees, many of these drawings were probably not drawn on the spot, although they often contain motifs reminiscent of the landscape and river of the artist's native town of Cento. Indeed, while a number of Guercino's landscape drawings appear to depict actual views in and around Cento, most are imaginary views, combining different topographical and figural motifs in a fanciful manner to create a pleasing scene. As Mahon and Turner note, 'As statements, many of [these landscape drawings] have a completeness not found in his more experimental and hastily drawn figure studies, and they contain something of the force and concentration of a painting rather than a drawing. In them the artist demonstrates the fecundity and power of his imagination by inventing a scene, shaping the space within it, giving the whole a unity by the suggestion of light and, finally, evoking a mood – all within the confines of a relatively small piece of paper.'

There is, in many of Guercino's landscape drawings, an echo of the pastoral views of 16th century Venetian artists such as Giorgione, Titian and Domenico Campagnola. The artist may also have found other sources of inspiration in the work of such contemporaries in Rome as Agostino Tassi, Annibale

Carracci, Domenichino and Paul Bril, all of whom produced landscape drawings. It has been further suggested that Guercino may have been influenced by Netherlandish landscape prints of the early 17th century, of which he may have owned some examples; he is certainly known to have admired the etchings of Rembrandt.

Guercino's landscape drawings were greatly admired well into the 18th century. Indeed, as early as about 1674 a series of fourteen landscapes, all of which were until recently in the collection of the Dukes of Devonshire at Chatsworth, were sent by the artist's nephew Cesare Gennari to Paris to be engraved by the printmaker Jean Pesne. These were published a few years later in Italy, accompanied by a frontispiece designed by Gennari. The largest surviving group of landscape drawings by Guercino, numbering some thirty sheets, is today in the Royal Library at Windsor Castle, having been acquired from the artist's heirs in the late 1750's and 1760's by King George III's Librarian, Richard Dalton.

The present sheet is a fine and characteristic example of the artist's landscape drawings. A sense of spatial recession is achieved by Guercino's use of the pen, with darker and thicker strokes of ink in such prominent foreground elements as the trees at the left becoming progressively lighter and more delicate as the eye moves through the landscape towards the mountains in the far distance. Also typical of the artist are the figures which populate the landscape, adding a vital human element to the finished composition.

Provenance:

Possibly the artist's nephews, Benedetto and Cesare Gennari (the 'Casa Gennari'), Bologna
Thence by descent to Carlo Gennari, Bologna
Arthur Pond, London
Possibly his posthumous sale, London, Langford, 25 April – 3 May 1759
John Barnard, London, on his mount and with his initials J:B (Lugt 1419) at the lower right corner of the mount
Probably his sale, London, Greenwood's, 16-24 February 1787
Benjamin West, London (Lugt 419)
Possibly Philippe Huart or P(ierre?) Huard (Lugt 2084)
Mrs. A. Rosenheim
Her sale, London, Sotheby's, 3 July 1940, lot 72
Aydua Scott-Elliot, London
Given by her to A. Paul Oppé, London, in 1940
Thence by descent until 2006.

Literature:

Rudolph Weigel, Die Werke der Maler in ihren Handzeichnugnen, Leipzig, 1865, p.289, no.3440; Henry M. Hake, 'Pond's and Knapton's Imitations of Drawings', The Print Collector's Quarterly, December 1922, p.341, no.35.

Artist description:

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, known as Il Guercino ('the squinter') because he was cross-eyed, was by the second decade of the 17th century one of the leading painters in the province of Emilia. Born in Cento, a small town between Bologna and Ferrara, Guercino was largely self-taught, although his early work was strongly influenced by the paintings of Ludovico Carracci. In 1617 he was summoned to Bologna by Alessandro Ludovisi, the Cardinal Archbishop of Bologna, and there painted a number of important altarpieces, typified by the Saint William Receiving the Monastic Habit, painted in 1620 and now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna. When Ludovisi was elected Pope Gregory XV in 1621, Guercino was summoned to Rome to work for the pontiff and his nephew, Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi. It was in Rome that Guercino painted some of his most celebrated works, notably the ceiling fresco of

Aurora in the Casino Ludovisi and the large altarpiece of The Burial and Reception into Heaven of Saint Petronilla for an altar in Saint Peter's. The papacy of Gregory XV was short-lived, however, and on the death of the Pope in 1623 Guercino returned to his native Cento. He remained working in Cento for twenty years, though he continued to receive commissions from patrons throughout Italy and beyond, and turned down offers of employment at the royal courts in London and Paris. Following the death of Guido Reni in 1642, Guercino moved his studio to Bologna, where he received commissions for religious pictures of the sort that Reni had specialized in, and soon inherited his position as the leading painter in the city.

Guercino was among the most prolific draughtsmen of the 17th century in Italy, and his preferred medium was pen and brown ink, although he also worked in red chalk, black chalk, and charcoal. He appears to have assiduously kept his drawings throughout his long career, and to have only parted with a few of them. Indeed, more drawings by him survive today than by any other Italian artist of the period. On his death in 1666 all of the numerous surviving sheets in his studio passed to his nephews and heirs, the painters Benedetto and Cesare Gennari, known as the 'Casa Gennari'.

The drawings of Guercino, which include figural and compositional studies, landscapes, caricatures and genre scenes, have always been coveted by later collectors and connoisseurs. Indeed, the 18th century amateur Pierre-Jean Mariette noted of the artist that 'Ce peintre a outre cela une plume tout-à-faite séduisante'. The largest extant group of drawings by Guercino is today in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle; these were acquired from the Gennari family by King George III's librarian, Richard Dalton, between about 1758 and 1764.