



Follower of Benvenuto Tisi da Garofalo, known as Il Garofalo
(Ferrara 1481–1559)

Landscape with ancient Ruins

Oil on canvas

Dimensions : 35" x 30 7/8" (89 x 78.5 cm) - Framed: 41 3/8" x 38" (105 x 96.5 cm)

Provenance: Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi (1595-1632) (according to two inventories of his collections kept in his *Vigna della Porta Pinciana* dated 1623 and 1633)

17th-century Italian frame in black lacquered wood surrounding a carved and gilded fillet

Price on request

We would like to thank Marialucia Menegatti and Olga Piccolo for suggesting the attribution to a follower of Garofalo and for identifying its Ludovisi provenance. Their study of the painting (in Italian), on which this presentation is based, is available on request.

This seascape with its vast horizons captivates us with its shimmering colors and intrigues us. While the meaning of the scene depicted here remains unclear, it fits perfectly into the Ferrara tradition of depicting autonomous landscapes, initiated by Dosso Dossi and perpetuated by Garofalo, and reflects the decisive influence of the Flemish painter Joachim Patinir on this school. It has been attributed by two Italian specialists to a follower of Garofalo, active in the second half of the 16th century.

Many paintings from Ferrara entered Roman collections after Ferrara was incorporated into the Papal States in 1598, and our painting was part of the collections of Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi, the cardinal-nephew of Pope Gregory XV, before its trail was lost once again...

1. Il Garofalo, a Ferrara painter attuned to the artists of his time

Benvenuto Tisi was born in Ferrara in 1481, where he became a pupil of Boccacino in 1497 and then, at the turn of the century, of Lorenzo Costa. He then traveled twice to Rome, then to Venice (around 1505-1508), where he became friends with the painter Giorgione. From 1512 onwards, undoubtedly influenced by the works of Raphael and Michelangelo, which he discovered during a trip to Rome accompanying Alfonso d'Este, his style evolved towards monumental representations executed in a classical style characterized by particular attention to anatomical accuracy.

Around 1524, the arrival of Giulio Romano in Mantua led to his style evolving towards a more dramatic narrative, often under an artificial lighting. The altarpieces he produced from 1525 onwards feature groups of large characters arranged in a compact manner, with particular attention paid to the expressiveness of each character.

While Dosso Dossi, the other great painter of Ferrara during the second quarter of the 16th century, had long been favored by Alfonso I for commissions, Garofalo received several ducal commissions after the accession of Ercole II in 1532. His rapprochement with the court was accompanied by an evolution of his style towards Mannerism. Garofalo lost his sight in 1550 and stopped painting, and passed away nine years later in 1559, still in Ferrara.

2. Dosso Dossi and the School of Ferrara landscape

Dosso Dossi (Giovanni di Niccolò de Luteri, born in 1491 in San Giovanni del Dosso and died in 1542 in Ferrara) occupies a special place in the history of the Ferrara School as a prolific painter of landscapes, a new genre that gained independence in the early 16th century. The most famous examples of his work are those commissioned by the dukes: the lost frieze of sixteen landscapes created for the bedroom of Alfonso I d'Este, which is now part of the Modena collections, and the frieze of the *Ten Stories of Aeneas* from the Painters' Room, which was later sent to the Borghese collection in Rome, of which seven pieces remain¹ to which can be added various "landscapes," often of obscure significance, which were probably intended for private commissions.

The importance of this production justifies the abundant presence in late 16th-century inventories of paintings described as landscapes and generically attributed to Dossi. However, the absence of subject descriptions or the approximate nature of these descriptions makes it virtually impossible to identify the paintings that survive today with those mentioned in these inventories. Under the generic label of "Dossi" appear also works by other artists, belonging chronologically to different periods, stylistically united by the presence of elements that can be linked to the Ferrara school, to which were added Nordic figurative elements to which the Este court, from the 15th century onwards, was particularly sensitive.

Thus, even though the presence in Ferrara of Hendrick Met de Bles, known as Il Civetta (who lived during the first six decades of the 16th century, 1510-1560) is uncertain (although a 17th-century source states that he died in Ferrara), his influence on Emilian painters in the mid- 16th century has been confirmed by numerous studies, as illustrated by the painting from the Borghese Gallery reproduced below.

¹ On the frieze of *the Stories of Aeneas*, see the contributions in the *Dosso Dossi* catalog, *Il fregio di Enea*, exhibition catalog edited by M. Minozzi (Rome, Galleria Borghese, 2024), Milan, Electa, 2024.



Hendrick Met de Bles, known as il Civetta (attributed to), *Landscape with Saint Jerome*, Rome, Galleria Borghese, inv. 363

Similarly, Patinir's paintings (of which an example dated 1515 from a former Venetian collection is reproduced below) strongly influenced the landscape painting of Dosso and his brother Battista, as well as that of other Ferrara artists², thanks to the few paintings by the artist preserved at the court of Ferrara.

² Please refer in particular to: C. Limentani Viridis, *Flemish Presence in Ferrara in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: The Cases of Rogier van der Weyden and Herri met de Bles*, in *The Camera of Alfonso I's Paintings*, edited by A. Ballarin, 6 vols., Cittadella, Bertinocello Artigrafiche, 2002-2007: vol. VI, *Dosso Dossi e la pittura a Ferrara negli anni del ducato di Alfonso I*, conference proceedings (Padua, 2001), edited by A. Pattanaro, 2007, pp. 53-76; the fundamental reference text by A. Pattanaro, "Pictores interdum sed frustra conentur effingere": da Decembrio a Giovanni da San Foca, spunti di riflessione sulla questione del paesaggio dipinto a Ferrara nel primo Cinquecento, fra Umanesimo ed espressività nordica, in *Il paesaggio veneto nel Rinascimento europeo*, edited by A. Caracausi, M. Grosso, V. Romani, Milan, Officina Libraria, pp. 65-83, in particular pp. 72-73, with an important reference bibliography; C. Occhipinti, *Sul termine "paesaggio" e sulla sua prima attestazione italiana (Fontainebleau, 1546). Note sugli inventari patrimoniali del cardinale Ippolito II d'Este*, in *Il paesaggio veneto nel Rinascimento europeo*, op. cit. pp. 85-98.



Joachim Patinir – *The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine* – Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Other artists active in Ferrara after Dossi's death, such as Garofalo³, perpetuated this taste for enigmatic landscapes executed in a northern style, as illustrated by this painting attributed to him and preserved in the Galleria Borghese.



Benvenuto Tisi da Garofalo, known as Garofalo (?), *Landscape with a Magical Procession*, Rome, Galleria Borghese, inv. 008

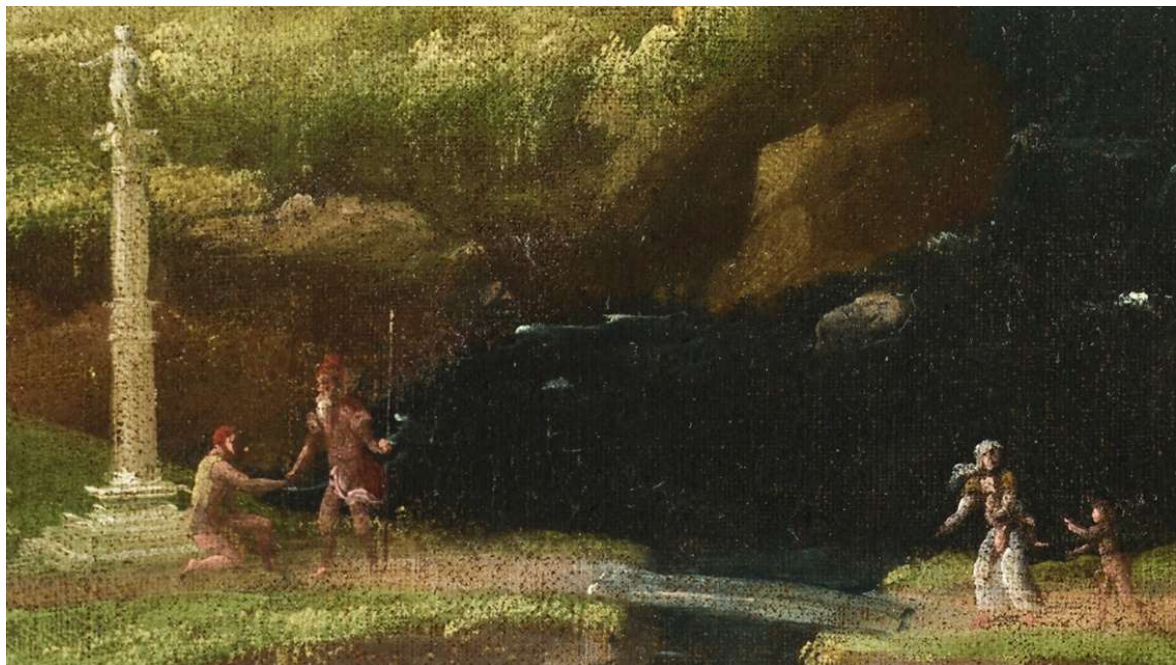
³ A. Pattanaro, *Girolamo da Carpi*, Rome, Officina Libraria, pp. 102-103.

Despite some specific references to certain landscapes by Garofalo, our painting is quite different from the refined and elegant style, tainted with a Mannerist tone, used by both Garofalo and Dosso from the mid-1520s, following Giulio Romano's arrival in Mantua. It should therefore be considered the work of a follower of Garofalo, active in the second half of the 16th century⁴.

3. Description of the landscape

Like most of the autonomous landscapes of the Ferrara School, the meaning of our composition remains unclear and we can only offer a few hypotheses for a partial interpretation.

Two scenes, separated by a contrast in lighting and a dichotomy in the size of the characters, occupy the lower third of our composition. In the foreground, a crouching shepherd is pointing out the two goats grazing on a hillock to the veiled woman accompanying him. Behind this first group there is a ruined bridge, whose central arch has collapsed (but remains visible below in what could be a river flowing into the sea). On either side of this bridge we find two enigmatic groups: on the right, a woman holding a baby in her arms seems to be turning back under the threat of a child (or a putto), while on the left, a traveler kneels before a bearded figure wearing a red cap who is shaking his hand.



Follower of Garofalo - *Landscape with Ancient Ruins* - Detail of the various characters across the collapsed bridge

⁴ The reference to a follower of Garofalo is also supported by Alessandra Pattanaro, professor of modern art history at the University of Padua and a leading expert on Garofalo (see most recently: A. Pattanaro, *Garofalo. Studi e ricerche*, Editori Paparo, Naples-Rome 2024), whom we thank for her contribution.

Above those various characters, a tall grove of trees on the right echoes a group of ruins on the other bank⁵, which we believe anchors the narrative in Antiquity (with a certain anachronism, since ancient monuments were not in ruins in Antiquity...).

Beyond the green hill on which these ruins stand, the landscape changes radically and we enter a blue horizon⁶ that occupies the entire upper half of our landscape. In the middle is a walled port city at the foot of high mountains, one of whose peaks appears to be snow-capped. The influence of Patinir's landscapes is most evident in this part of our picture.



Follower of Garofalo - *Landscape with ancient Ruins*: detail of the port city

In our opinion, the scene in the foreground with the goats disappearing into the thickets could represent **the discovery of the oracular site of Delphi**⁷ as recounted by Diodorus of Sicily

⁵ These may have been inspired by the prints depicting Roman ruins published by Hieronymus Cocks after his stay in Rome in 1546-1547.

⁶ IRFC analysis suggests that the pigment used for the blue is azurite.

⁷ Pierre Brulé - *Héraklès à l'épreuve de la chèvre* - Presses universitaires de Liège paragraph 45

(XVI, 26)⁸. The veiled woman at his side could then be a representation of the **Pythia** or the **Delphic Sybil**. The bearded figure at whose feet a traveler kneels could be **Hermes** (the god of travelers), under whose protection our traveler would seek refuge before embarking on a perilous journey. Both are wearing their petasos (a round hat, here in the form of a Phrygian cap for Hermes). Note the possibly ithyphallic nature of this representation of Hermes, a detail that would corroborate this interpretation.

While both of these partial explanations seem appealing, the link between the two scenes is difficult to establish. Our landscape thus retains its captivating mystery...

4. Provenance and framing

Research carried out in Ferrara inventories, both those of the Este court and those of private collections in Ferrara, has not made it possible to identify the first owners or patrons of this painting. However, a painting appearing in two inventories of Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi's (1595-1632) collection, dated 1623 and 1633 respectively, deserves attention. This collection included several paintings that had belonged to the Este family or, in any case, came from the former capital of the Duchy of Este, and was kept at the *Vigna di Porta Pinciana*. In the *Stanza dell'Armario de' libri* (i.e., the library), according to the 1623 inventory, there was "*Un paese alto p^(mi) quattro*" [89.2 cm, the Roman palm equals 22.3 cm] *con pecore, e figure cornice dorata di mano del Dossi*" (a four Roman palms high landscape depicting sheep and figures painted by Dossi in a gilded frame), which is cited in almost identical terms in the inventory drawn up in 1633, shortly after the cardinal's death¹⁰. The height measurements, although approximate,

⁸ "They say that the manner of its discovery was the following. There is a chasm at this place where now is situated what is known as the "forbidden" sanctuary, and as goats had been wont to feed about this because Delphi had not as yet been settled, invariably any goat that approached the chasm and peered into it would leap about in an extraordinary fashion and utter a sound quite different from what it was formerly wont to emit. The herdsman in charge of the goats marvelled at the strange phenomenon and having approached the chasm and peeped down it to discover what it was, had the same experience as the goats, for the goats began to act like beings possessed and the goatherd also began to foretell future events. After this as the report was bruited among the people of the vicinity concerning the experience of those who approached the chasm, an increasing number of persons visited the place and, as they all tested it because of its miraculous character, whosoever approached the spot became inspired. For these reasons the oracle came to be regarded as a marvel and to be considered the prophecy-giving shrine of Earth." Diodorus of Sicily in Twelve Volumes with an English Translation by C. H. Oldfather. Vol. 4-8. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd. 1989.

⁹ C.H. Wood, *The Ludovisi Collection of Paintings in 1623*, in *The Burlington Magazine*, CXXXIV, 1992, 1073, pp. 515-523: p. 517, n. 19

¹⁰ K. Garas, *The Ludovisi Collection of Pictures in 1633 (II)*, in *The Burlington Magazine*, CIX, 1967, 771, June, pp. 339-348: p. 347.

correspond to those of our painting, while the description of the subject and the generic attribution to Dossi indicate that it was indeed a painting from the Ferrara school.

The events surrounding the dispersal of the Ludovisi collection after the cardinal's death are unclear. An inventory of the collection was drawn up a few days after the death of his heir, Prince Niccolò Ludovisi, on December 25, 1664. The latter had taken great care not to comply with the provisions of his brother's *fideicommissum* aimed at protecting the integrity of his collection¹¹. Perpetually short of money and engaged in an ambitious but futile and costly pursuit of honorary positions and noble titles, he sold off the most important pieces in the family collection within a few years. It is likely that our painting, which cannot be found with certainty in the inventory of his collection made after his death, was among those which were sold after Cardinal Ludovisi's death.

Purchased in Rome without a frame, our painting is now presented in a 17th-century Italian frame made of black lacquered wood surrounding a carved and gilded fillet.



Follower of Garofalo - *Landscape with ancient Ruins*

¹¹ C. Caramanna, M. Menegatti, *The Fideicommissum of Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisi and Raphael's "Madonna del Passeggio,"* in "Musica e figura," 2013, 2, pp. 35-56.