

A LAUREL WREATH ON THE ARTISTS' ANNIVERSARY

At first glance Salvator Rosa and Gaspard Dughet seem to have little in common, although they were born in the same year and both lived in the artists' quarter of Rome by the Trinità dei Monti church, effectively as professional rivals. The first was brought up in a small town in the shadow of Vesuvius, a rebel and a rake whose life was steeped in legend, yet with a romantic aureole so grandiose that he determined the birth of Romanticism long before the movement actually appeared. The second was the son of a French pastry-chef, a relative and pupil of the great Poussin and talented successor to the tradition of the ideal classical landscape, an artist with a solid reputation, although his paintings never evoked the same rapture from the general public as that bestowed on Rosa in the 19th century.

Contemporaries and descendants have often compared them, at times finding similarities in their desire to completely renounce odious modernity, their absorption in the lost ideal of the classical idyll and their remarkably speedy painting skills (both Rosa and Dughet managed to complete large multi-figured landscapes in a single day). Or, on the contrary, the contrasts were highlighted, with Rosa as heir to the pathos of Baroque grandeur and also the Baroque 'whimsicality', as creator of the 'landscape beset by a tempest' and wild, 'untamed' scenes — melodramatic crags overshadowed by scudding clouds, with broken stumps and treetops. Meanwhile Dughet was admired for the harmony of his landscapes in the Roman Campagna and his ability to combine the Italian sense of form and the Northern sensitivity towards nature.

After Dughet and Rosa began to work independently in the mid-1630s they numbered among the Roman artists that were later celebrated and older than Poussin and Lorrain, although they were alive during the pontificate of Urban VIII. A poet and moneygrubber who completely bankrupted the papacy, Urban was also a passionately admirer of the arts and a generous patron of architects, artists and actors, initiating international and diverse artistic activities within the Aurelian Walls that knew no precedent. Partly due to this turbulent creative life fused with energy and intrigue, a conflict arose between the outspoken Rosa and architect Gian Lorenzo Bernini, as a result of which the artist was compelled to leave the town in 1640 and relocate to Florence. But when the Holy See of St. Peter announced celebrations to honour the upcoming jubilee year in 1650, the artists met again in Rome, caught up in the fever of rapid construction work amid preparations for the festivities. Here, after more than two decades, they also met their end — Dughet, the French artist who never once crossed the borders of Italy, and Rosa, the unruly southerner who never lost his adherence to the Neapolitan school of painting nor the accompanying temperament in the twists and turns of fate.

The only common factor for both artists throughout their lives was their interest in the magnificent legacy of classical culture, its philosophy and poetry, which became for Rosa and Dughet an image of cultural paradise, and their recollections of it were always coloured by their love for the exquisite landscapes of ancient Latium. This world of classical antiquity is a constant theme with both Dughet and Rosa. The outskirts of Rome — the hilly Tibur whose praises were sung by Virgil and the ruins of the ancient villas in Tusculum, where, if we are to believe Martial, 'nature has brought together all of the most beautiful things that can be found in other places', served for the artists as the source of inspiration and fantasies of an Arcadia where people exist in peace and harmony with nature. These scenes of the past are not infused with the melancholic nostalgia characteristic of those who contemplated ruins in the 18th century, but alive here and now, allowing Dughet's bucolic shepherds and anglers to settle comfortably with views of the surrounding towns in the background, while Rosa's philosophers wander through the wild woodland beside the Via Cassia.

The strict hierarchy of painting genres in which historical painting took precedence and landscape was for many years relegated to the lower ranks frequently meant that the authors of landscape compositions experienced difficulties when applying to join the Accademia di San Luca. Artists who thirsted after fame and commercial success were obliged to take strategic action. The most effective means was to include

staffage in landscape compositions, often depicting an entire mythological, historical or biblical scene. Hence Dughet, who at the onset of his career lacked expertise in figure painting, often asked for assistance from other Roman artists who could add the required staffage to his landscapes.

Wishing to consolidate his position in the noble *métier* of 'high art', Rosa went even further and created an entire cycle of historical compositions. Here the heroes of antiquity even move from their landscapes to the foreground — Jason charming the dragon, Glaucus seeking to win the favour of the nymph Scylla, the shade of Hector appearing to the dormant Aeneas with a portent of the future foundation of Rome, and Diogenes asking Alexander of Macedon not to block the sun from him.

The necessity for balance between 'nature' and the 'idea', like the mutual influence of artists working side by side, brought fruit. It could be said that landscapes and their closest relative the *veduta* were Roman creations, although practised by artists who were certainly not of Roman origin.¹ Caterina Volpi, author of a monograph on Rosa's painting, notes that a powerful stimulus for the development of the artist's painted poetics was his arrival in Rome, and also his contact and joint work with Gaspard Dughet and Francesco Mola.² Experts on Dughet have in turn often mentioned the influence of Rosa, with the appearance of landscapes featuring storms and tempests. Even biographers occasionally found it hard to ascertain which of the artists invented the 'storm' genre. While an authoritative reference work from the early 19th century compares the individual 'propensities' of Rosa and Dughet, stating that the former showed a passion for stormy landscapes and seascapes, the latter for 'charming and visually pleasing localities and grandiose views',³ Dughet's biographer d'Argenville writes that it was Dughet who first introduced the representation of storms in painting.⁴

Today these arguments are unlikely to carry any weight. In the landscapes of both Rosa and Dughet imagination is united with observation of nature. The ecstatic sensibilities of Salvator Rosa become as much a part of the artistic landscape of Rome as the Classicist austerity of Nicolas Poussin, and also exceed the bounds of personal style, transformed by the supra-individual force of time. A new landscape genre is generated, one that British theorists have dubbed 'sublime', in counterbalance to the 'beautiful' element in the work of Claude Lorrain. Somewhere between them lies the diversity of subject matter in the exhibition, ranging from the idyll to elemental forces of nature.

In the course of time Rosa's descendants spawned legends about this poet, musician and rebel in Masaniello's band of insurgents, his image inspired E. T. A. Hoffmann and Franz Liszt, operas and 'cloak and dagger' adventure films were dedicated to him, while Balzac's heroes visualised themselves on the field of battle 'en regardant un combat de Salvator Rosa'. But Dughet always remained an artist for refined connoisseurs of art rather than the wider public.

Although romantic legends still retain some of their charm, their significance is viewed quite differently today, and former director of the Musée du Louvre Pierre Rosenberg describes Rosa and Dughet as the two most outstanding Roman landscape painters of their generation,⁵ and their later influence on painting as very significant although largely indirect.

Neither Rosa nor Dughet had an extensive studio or large body of students, yet the importance of their work has been considerable in the development of the landscape genre, as can be seen in Northern Europe as well as in Italy, particularly in England from the 18th to early 19th centuries. English aristocrats on their educational 'Grand Tour' not only referred to the artists by name in letters and diaries, but also brought their pictures home to their family estates. Here the landscapes of Rosa and Dughet became an object of admiration and a source of motifs for the designers of Romantic country parks. The best English painters subsequently showed great admiration for them, and it is known that Reynolds, Scott and Wordsworth favoured Rosa, while Gainsborough, Wilson and Cozens preferred Dughet.⁶

Our exhibition marks an anniversary. Any ceremonial date traditionally summarises past events, or at least gives a retrospective view, 'looking back at past history'. The organisers of this exhibition did not consciously set themselves any such goal. There is no need to seek any particular artistic or historical context for Rosa and Dughet in this exposition, in the hope of demonstrating their position and significance in 17th-century European painting. Nor is the personal creative evolution of each artist visible here, nor do we pose

the on-going problem of dating the works or the correlation of original pieces by the artists with compositions produced by their followers and imitators. Even the waves of influence from Rosa and Dughet's legacy seen in the history of art in later years are only presented in outline.

All this was done for good reason: such questions will be put on 1 December 2015 at the international academic conference entitled 'The Western European Landscape of the 17th–18th Centuries: On the 400th Anniversary of the Birth of Salvator Rosa and Gaspard Dughet', organised by the IN ARTIBUS Foundation jointly with the State Institute of Art Studies.

Our exhibition is more of a homage or dedication and would have been called 'a laurel wreath on the artists' anniversary' in the early 20th century. It is also proof of the vibrant collecting tradition and interest shown by Russian collectors in the legacy of Rosa and Dughet, from the reign of Catherine the Great to the present day.

A tradition that is carefully preserved in museum collections and lives on in the contemporary Moscow collections.