



**Lucas Gassel**

**(Helmond, 1490 -Brussels, 1568)**

***Landscape with St Jerome***

**Oil on panel**

**56 x 85 cm.**

**Signed with monogram LG lower left**

**1540 ca.**

**Expertise by Peter van den Brink**

**We are also grateful to Luc Serck to have fully endorsed the authorship of the artwork**

Dear friends, in this month of December the gallery presents this magnificent landscape by the important Flemish painter Lucas Gassel.

Lucas Gassel was born around 1500 in the small village of Helmond in North Brabant and became a great master capable of turning topographical gigantism into a true work of art. The beginning of the 16th century was a particularly fruitful period for his artistic style. The path that a select number of painters decided to follow with their own twist had been traced by the "father" Patinir and his nephew Herri met de Bles, also known as Il Civetta. In analyzing the evolution of landscape painting in the sixteenth century, it is paramount to identify and underline the individual characteristics of each artist. In fact, although the painters shared similar purposes and points of view, each was able to interpret the compositions in a personal way.

Very little is known about the artist's life. There is speculation that he may have lived in Brussels and traveled to Italy on a few occasions. He was a friend of Dominicus Lampsonius, who instructed him in geography. In contrast, much is known about his pictorial corpus. Gassel had a methodical and calculating artistic personality, less eccentric than that of Bles, but no less innovative. The author's original creations were often repeated in many signed works, in which characters and orographic architectures alternate under the guidance of an acute inventiveness, the ability to imagine creative but harmonious solutions in a coherent scenario.

His paintings are like magnificent tales told through images, in which each chapter leaves the reader captivated by a multitude of coherently linked plots, eager to read the next one.

Our work masterfully depicts Saint Jerome penitent, a very recurrent theme in the compositions of that time.



This landscape with St. Jerome in the foreground was one of the author's favorite compositions. He made at least two other signed versions. One of them is currently preserved in the Carlos Slim Foundation in Mexico City (Fig. 1). As Luc Serck pointed out, the work has coherent balance, proving to be an authentic variant of Slim's version and can be fully attributed to Gassel. In addition, a



(Fig.1.) Lucas Gassel, *Landscape with the Penitent Saint Jerome*, Carlos Slim Foundation, Mexico City.

vibrant preparatory drawing shows the confection variations that Gassel himself must have made on the painting, highlighting the compositional authenticity that can only accompany a painting of such a high standard.

The panel dates from the forties of the sixteenth century and can be compared with other



(Fig.2) **Lucas Gassel**, *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt*, London, Christie's Old Master 22.04.2021, Estimated 180,000-220,000 GBP.

works by the master, especially with the Flight into Egypt, which is also known in many versions, a recurring theme to be found on the art market (Fig. 2). In addition to the chromatic range and the almost identical arrangement of colors, both works share the stylized naivety of the characters, either in the foreground or in the small silhouettes in the background.

They also share the design of the various buildings, such as taverns, picturesque castles, winding paths, crossroads, rivers and ponds that form intricate roads. In the background you can see imposing and dramatic mountains that seem to be made of cardboard. In the center of a rocky spur, the wise old man with a thin body and serious face, is kneeling ready to beat himself while contemplating the Salvation represented by the crucifix and meditating on death represented by the skull, elements that allude to his penitence in the desert. His religious objects are on a large tree, while a lion crouches beside him. According to the book *The Golden Leyend* by Santiago de la Vorágine, when Jerónimo was in retreat in Bethlehem, he cured a lion that had a paw wounded by a thorn. From that moment on, the lion never left the saint's side, helped him and protected him from any threat. For the providentialist mentality of the Middle Ages, this legend became a metaphor of brute force overcome by Christian piety.



After passing over an extremely dangerous and steep ridge, a vast landscape unfolds in front of the viewer's eyes. The viewer does not observe icy tones, turquoise and blue as in Patinir's paintings, nor the dark tones of Bles, but strong browns, ochres, yellows and light

greens. This stylistic temperature is better suited to the purposes of the author, who intends to construct a "mental topography", which shows that he was clearly influenced by his friendship with Lampsonius and his interest in cartography, which became the subject of passionate artistic speculations following the geographical discoveries of the time.

Along the course of a river that resembles a lake, between a grassy hill and a canyon, lies a city. It has been rendered down to the smallest detail, resulting in an exquisite group of accurate but unrealistic buildings. The water mill on the right protects a bridge over which two camels have just passed, while on the lake a flock of ducks swims along the ramparts of a city literally leaning against a Gothic cathedral, all protected by a drawbridge guarded by an outpost, on the side wall of which red jugs have been hung.



At the confluence of the road, a large crucifix directs our gaze upward to the sign designating an inn, probably converted from a prominent building no longer in use. At the entrance and just before another vertiginous ridge, some pedestrians with their walking sticks and dogs walk in small groups. And only from this geographical level is it possible to access the upper town, which is perched between gorges and protected by two walls.



In fact, only after passing a large stone bridge (which looks more like an aqueduct) and the first wall on which wooden houses have been built, you can access the upper town. Traversing an immense staircase that was counterproductive for defensive purposes, and leaves the way to a steep unpaved climb, leading to another arched wall connected to the castle itself. The

structure, consisting of corridors, towers and a palace, overlooks the valley from an elevated position. It is not difficult to imagine that the last arch outside the castle leading to a small path, which climbs to the top of the rock, located on a rocky spur in which human features are hidden.

On the opposite side in the valley, the stream has become a navigable river, full of harbors, boats and characters. Miles away, a large oriental-looking city stretches from one bank to the other, where colossal bridges alternate with windmills. Some birds swirl on the ground, conveying great immensity in the scene. This scientific ability as an architect is what made Lucas Gassel the great master of 16th century landscape painters. In fact the architectural structures are shown from a broad and elevated point of view, which



emphasizes the epic and heroic character of the adventurous journey, not focusing on the numerous dangers of the road, which prevail in Bosch and Bles. The substantial inconsistency of this orographic architecture is directly opposed to the Italianate landscape.

These landscapes and architectures are subconsciously accepted by the observer, who feels transported to his childhood, when he looked at the models of the cities or the little houses of the Nativity Scene. Moreover, the whole composition can be read as the spiritual projection of St. Jerome's penitence. The hardness and the tormented line of the horizon thus symbolizes the inner martyrdom of the Saint, following the moralizing objective landscape that in Bosch and Patinir was defined as "pilgrimage of life".

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## PROVENANCE

- Dr. Alfons Jaffé Collection (1861-1948) Berlín (Alemania)
- Prof. Paolino (or Paoli) Collection Roma (Italy), sold Goudstikker (on or shortly before 1928)
- Jacques Goudstikker Gallery, Amsterdam (Holand), like 'Patinir-achtig, Landschap' (Patinirlike, Landscape (black-book, no. 1981)

## MUSEUMS

There are works by Lucas Gassel in the museums of the following cities among others: Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Brussels (Belgium) - University of Michigan Museum of Art (USA) - Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht (The Netherlands) - Museum of Fine Arts, Helmond (The Netherlands) - Louvre Museum, Paris (France) - Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (The Netherlands) - Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp (Belgium) - Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Austria), etc.