

TECHNICAL IMAGING REPORT

TITLE	Landscape with Washerwomen—Landscape with Figures
ARTIST	Alessandro Magnasco
DATE	1715
DIMENSIONS	28 1/2 X 22 1/4 in.
MEDIUM	Oil
SUPPORT	Linen canvas
FRAME	18th c. "Salvator Rosa" giltwood frame
DISTINGUISHING MARKS	none
ACCESSION	61.72– 61.73
IDNUM	47412—47413

SUMMARY

Landscape with Washerwomen by Alessandro Magnasco, together with its pendant *Figures in a Landscape* (61.73), both dated 1715, came to the MFAH as part of the donation from the 1961 Samuel H. Kress Foundation donation of 23 paintings. The pair was acquired by Kress in 1930 from John S. Thacher, Washington DC and previously owned by the Earl of Suffolk, Charlton Park, Malmesbury, Wiltshire (Sold, Spink & Son's, London, 1930.)



Landscape with Washerwomen 2015 EX, normal light



Landscape with Figures 2015 EX, normal light

The artist Alessandro Magnasco was born in Genoa in 1667 to a minor painter apprenticing with Valerio Castello then in Milan with Filippo Abbiati. Magnasco lived most of his life in Lombardy, chiefly in Milan. His paintings are most highly prized for their lively compositions, brilliant brush work and subtle color harmonies. He emulated the painterly technique that Peter Paul Rubens brought to Genoa via Venice, raising the expressive style of loose, free and dashing brushwork to an intense melodramatic pitch. Magnasco's painting was striking and original, transcending the academic Baroque style of his contemporaries. His work was principally influenced by Morazzone, Jacques Callot and Salvator Rosa. His facility with the brush, in his bold, loose strokes greatly influenced the painters *de tocco* (by touch) Gianantonio and Francesco Guardi and Sebastiano and Marco Ricci. His paintings are peopled not with individuals but with figures as representative of the social classes. The figures and draperies serve to catch and shatter the light giving a fantastic drift to the scene.

Landscape with Washerwomen is a bucolic evocation with two women washing clothes in the river under the shade of trees and a blue sky and grand drifting white clouds. On the river bank, seated near the women is a hunter with his napping dog while behind them a figure idles on a large rock. This is a scene influenced by classical notions of the pastoral, of classical poetry in which human beings are portrayed, like fauna, in har-

mony with a mild, peaceful nature. In the far background is a small town looking similar to the one in *Landscape with Figures*, which is identical in palette and format. At first glance *Landscape with Figures* also appears to be a bucolic evocation like its companion painting,

but a closer look reveals something ambiguous and unsettling in the scene. It depicts a young woman and man, the central figures resting on a river's edge, a small boat behind them. They converse, both gesticulating and pointing in different directions. Beside them on a rocky outcrop sits a figure with a staff playing a reed flute. His face is hidden in shadow cast perhaps by the animal skin hood over his head. Beyond the stream are two more hooded figures vaguely resembling monks, faces hidden, crouching and crawling along the shore. In a painting by Sebastiano Ricci, *Landscape with Monks*, dated 1704, SNG, monks also populate the landscape, but in both these paintings the sense of pastoral balance encountered in *Landscape with Washerwomen* is banished by the contorted poses and almost grotesque exaggeration of the figures. In the two landscapes by Magnasco a zig zag distribution of light leads the eye from the foreground to the distant horizon, although the mood of each work in the pair is subtly contrasted.



Sebastiano Ricci, *Landscape with Monks*, 1704, NGS.

The last time these paintings received conservation treatment was prior to acquisition by the MFAH. Records state the painting was relined with paste/glue in 1958 by Mario Modestini. He restored losses with dry pigments, and polyvinyl acetate resin AYAB, alcohol and bleached beeswax mixture. The painting was coated with Rembrandt varnish (Talens) (polycyclohexanones -Ketone resin) which has a relative low molecular weight (400-500) and a high refractive index (~1.53). As can be seen in the UVF images below, a certain degree of oxidation of the surface coating has occurred, producing the slight cool fluorescence evident in the photos.

Landscape with Washerwomen—UVF illumination, 2015



Landscape with Figures—UVF illumination, 2015



SUPPORT

The painting was paste /glued lined on a 2/2 basket weave linen. The lining was done by M. Modestini in 1958. Many of the Kress paintings in the MFAH that were treated by M. Modestini are recognized by the glue/paste adhesive. The 2/2 basket weave canvas and the type of stretcher. It is stretched on a five member, butt-end, beveled, miter-through-tenon stretcher with all 10 keys present. The lining canvas is stiff from the glue/paste adhesive. Some of the adhesive has strained through the fibers and stains the verso. The lining is in excellent condition and well adhered. The tacking edges have been cut and the edges are covered by gray paper that wraps around to the verso stretcher. The primary support is a coarse, irregular weave estimated linen canvas. The edges of the canvas scallop with placement of the original nails. There is some pulling and waving of the fibers in the top and left edges probably from the initial stretching of the painting. There are no tears or holes in the original canvas. Both 61.72 And 61.73 have the same relining and re-stretching techniques and both are similarly structurally secure at present.

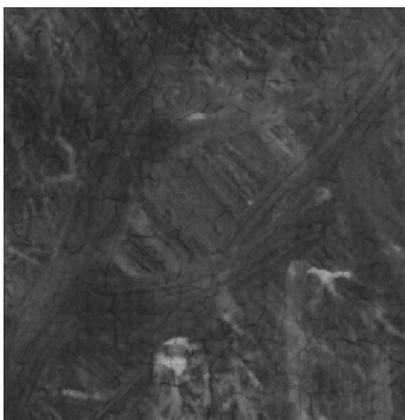


GROUND

The ground is estimated to be a regular layer of a creamy white, probably animal glue gesso. It adheres well to the canvas support with no history of cleavage or loss. Most of the losses are along the edges and associated with the cutting of the tacking margins. The tonality of the painting is more influenced by the dark red *imprimatura* layer (see detail at right) than by the underlying ground.

PAINT LAYERS

The paint is an oil medium over a dark red *imprimatura* that was used as the middle tone and occasionally glows through the thinner passages of paint or can be seen where two color areas meet. The palette is limited to ochre, Naples yellow, lead white, indigo blue, a dark green and an umber. The blue paint was analyzed with FTIR spectrometry by Dr. C. Rogge, Research Scientist MFAH. Results showed peaks for lead white, silicates and indigo in a drying oil binder. Ultramarine is a silicate species so it may be that both organic and inorganic blue pigments are present in this sample. No peaks were present for Prussian blue. The paint was brushed wet-into-wet throughout the background, as can be seen in a detail from the x-radiograph of *Landscape with Washerwoman* (below left), where brushstrokes describing tree branches in the creamy paint disrupt the still-wet background paint below. Throughout a lively, confident handling is evident on the surface of the painting and in the x-radiograph image (see next page). The foliage and landscape were mostly created in one to several thin applications of opaque or transparent paint, with short strokes of medium impasto highlights. The paint was applied with brio, in spectacularly long, bold, diagonal strokes abstract in



Site of FTIR sample (61.73)

their abbreviation in the distant background. Both paintings show energetic and decisive handling, but the x-radiograph of 61.72 reveals an astonishingly energetic directness of composing on the canvas. In comparison, 61.73 seems to have been painted with less wet-into-wet spontaneity. In both paintings, the figures were rendered in liquid paint manipulated with great agility (detail, right). There is a fine network of age craquelure with tiny losses of paint at the intersections of cracks. There are some passages of slightly abraded paint. The semitransparent golden umber in the vegetation has been thinned, probably by a harsh cleaning in the past. Most of the retouches are confined to the four edges of the painting associated presumably with the cutting of the tacking edges, although there is a cluster of small losses in the sky just left of center in 61.73. Scattered throughout the painting are small retouches. UVF illuminations shows areas of older, scattered retouches camouflaged by the thick surface coating and an approximately 3 inch horizontal tear or deep scratch involving paint loss in the center right sky. X-radiography does not show any changes in the composition the painting appears to have been painted *a la prima*.



2015 X-radiograph (61.72)



2015 X-radiograph (61.73)

SURFACE COATING

There is a brush applied surface coating of a natural resin, FTIR characterizes it as a triterpenoid probably a dammar. It is glossy and unevenly applied with random glossy patches. Also there are some scattered patches of micro fissures in the coating where the film is broken, showing white and powdery following a crack pattern. In the impasto of the paint are residues of a very darkened, older natural resin. The coating in general appears rather thick and probably is comprised of several layers of different resins.