

Salvator Rosa Landscapes. Compton Verney and London

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This sense of focus is unfortunately lost in the final section, 'Body and Soul', where many of the pieces appear to impinge on ideas already covered in 'Identity and History'. Loulou Cherinet's documentary film *White women* (2002; no.36) records an amusing after-dinner conversation among black men settled in Sweden talking about their relationships with white women, but much of the work in the section speaks in the language of the older artistic traditions of African sculpture and painting, and that translates less effectively. Indeed, it is Kentridge who shines in *Africa Remix*, and that is somewhat disappointing as one had hoped for new discoveries. Yet it would be wrong to assume that unfamiliar pieces in the exhibition are not well known among specialists. Chéri Samba was launched on the international stage in *Magiciens de la terre* and, represented here by three of his boldly illustrated and politically alert paintings, he demonstrates why he is still highly regarded. Even the large, roughly hewn wooden sculptures by Jackson Hlungwani, a self-taught artist and a minister who founded his own church, have been touched on in published historical surveys. *Africa Remix* is clearly a survey of popular names as much as it is a picture of the continent. Many will say that the exhibition is superficial for this very reason, that its scale is too ambitious and the overall quality of the work is poor. Nevertheless, it provides a noisy, persuasive context for art which is increasingly visible on the global art scene, particularly in biennales, and its picture of the continent itself – although it may be painted in broad strokes – looks honest and true.

¹ After its Paris showing, the exhibition travels to the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (May–August 2006). Catalogue: *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent*. By Simon Njami, with essays by Lucy Durán, David Elliott, Jean-Hubert Martin and John Picton. 224 pp. incl. 63 col. pls. + 26 b. & w. ills. (Hayward Gallery, London, 2005), £19.95. ISBN 1-85332-24-6.

Salvator Rosa landscapes

Compton Verney and London

by RODNEY PALMER

COMPTON VERNEY, in its park by Capability Brown, provided an apt setting for a display of landscapes by Salvator Rosa and works after him by eighteenth-century artists in Britain – plus a piece each by the contemporary sculptors Tania Kovats and Mariele Neudecker. This exhibition, now at the Wallace Collection, London, in a reduced version (to 18th September), was the first in a series to complement Compton Verney's permanent collection of Neapolitan art, part of the Peter Moores Foundation's engagingly populist museological adventure.¹

In a small group of works from British collections, the first room at Compton Verney (where this reviewer saw the exhibition)



79. *Empedocles leaping into Etna*, by Salvator Rosa. c.1660. 135 by 99 cm. (Private collection; exh. Wallace Collection, London).

devoted a wall each to Rosa's *Self-portrait as a philosopher* (National Gallery, London) and three of his finest landscapes. Ironically, while Rosa considered his philosophical subjects the best expressions of his artistic independence, it was his landscapes, painted for money, that were subsequently interpreted as romantic. One's eye is led into the exhibition by the masterly *Landscape with travellers asking the way* (Mahon collection, on loan to the National Gallery, London). The *Landscape with Jacob's dream* from Chatsworth, for all its asymmetry, is hardly a less meticulously ordered composition. Rosa's methodical approach is also evident in the close relationship between specific drawings and paintings, such as the study of a *Kneeling hermit, praying in the wilderness* (British Museum, London) and the *Landscape with Sts Anthony Abbot and Paul the Hermit* (Mahon collection, on loan to the National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh), and between several pen-and-ink studies of trees which relate to paintings on view. Rosa's better landscapes deploy gloomy motifs – splintered and twisted trees, rocky outcrops with vulnerable travellers beneath them – which intentionally complemented Claude's Arcadian repertory, and are equally thoughtful in arrangement. The considered artistry of Rosa's landscapes emerges even more clearly at the Wallace Collection where the Apo works join only his *River landscape with Apollo and the Cumaean Sybil*.

The most spectacular painting on show is *Empedocles leaping into Etna* (Fig.79). The description on a wall panel of the Greek philosopher's leap into the volcano in order to confirm his immortality, which was disproved by the re-appearance of his sandal, has always had its comic side, but for Rosa's contemporaries, familiar with Empedocles' doctrine of indestructible elements, the return of his sandal, although a token of his hubris, gave credence to his physics. Beside *Empedocles* was Neudecker's diminutive plaster sculpture *Mountain* in a glass case; it, and Kovats's equally unobtrusive *Basalt*, shown at ground-level in the next room, played wittily with Rosa's landscapes and on the idea of the artistic representation on a small scale of nature's immensity.

The third room at Compton Verney was mainly devoted to graphic art by and after Salvator Rosa, including etchings by John Hamilton Mortimer the 'Salvator of Sussex', Lady Louisa Greville and Joseph Goupy (1689–1769). All six Goupy etchings shown are inscribed with the name of the owner of the original paintings by Rosa after which they were made. For instance, the *Landscape with Jacob's dream* from Chatsworth was already in the Devonshire collection when Goupy etched it; his *Tobit* print is from Rosa's *Tobias and the angel*, then in the Methuen collection, now in the National Gallery, London. A gouache by Goupy,



80. *Augurs prophesying from the flight of birds*, by Joseph Goupy after Salvator Rosa. c.1717. Gouache heightened with white, 18 by 23.3 cm. (British Museum, London; exh. Compton Verney House).

exhibited ex-catalogue at Compton Verney, is closely related to his etching after Rosa's *Augurs* (formerly Knowsley, present whereabouts unknown), which it mirrors. Published here for the first time (Fig.80), Goupy's *Augurs* exemplifies the qualities that Horace Walpole admired in his paintings: 'Goupy imitated the boldness of strokes in oil . . . and excelled in imitating Salvator Rosa.'² This is probably the version of *Augurs* which John Hedges commissioned Goupy to paint in 1717. Goupy's prints after Rosa date from 1724 and not, as twentieth-century scholars believed, from the mid-1700s: one reason why Goupy's role in disseminating the taste for Rosa's compositions in eighteenth-century England has been underestimated until now.³

Rosa's reception in France is the subject of a recent book by James S. Patty.⁴ The author's chronological survey of references to Rosa in French literature from the seventeenth to the twentieth century will benefit students both of the fortunes of Italian art and of French Romantic art criticism. Its subtitle, 'From the Bizarre to the Sublime', carries a teleological assumption that the 'bizarre' would give way to the Sublime; but, almost a century after Edmund Burke's *Essay on the Beautiful and the Sublime*, Baudelaire in 1855 could declare '*le beau est toujours bizarre*'.

The exhibition catalogue is slight and unevenly edited.⁵ While nearly all Rosa's exhibited paintings are illustrated, none of his drawings and only one work after him is reproduced. The text concentrates mainly on provenance. The first of two essays, by Helen Langdon on 'Salvator Rosa in Italy', discusses the Neapolitan painter-poet's career at the Medici court in the 1640s, and his later Roman patrons. Langdon suggests the pertinence to Rosa's art of the seventeenth-century revival of interest in Lucretius. Notwithstanding that Rosa fashioned himself as pro-Stoic and thus anti-Epicurean, mention of Lucretius is germane, especially to Rosa's *Empedocles*, since the Augustan poet analysed the Empedoclean elements and described Etna as a metaphor for the daunting power of the natural universe. Jonathan Scott on 'Rosa and the English' adds to the cast of English collectors of Rosa that he assembled

in his *Life and Times of Salvator Rosa* (1995), and affirms that by the early nineteenth century, most major works by Rosa were in British ownership. Many still are, and this welcome show tantalisingly proves the desirability of a more comprehensive exhibition.

¹ See S. Jenkins, ed.: *Compton Verney Handbook*, Compton Verney 2004, pp.25–63.

² H. Walpole: *Anecdotes of Painting in England* . . . , 2nd ed., London 1782, IV, p.202.

³ For the date of the gouache, see C.R. Grundy: 'Documents relating to an action brought against Joseph Goupy in 1738', *Walpole Society* 9 (1920–21), p.82; for Goupy's prints from Rosa, see S. O'Connell: 'Goupy, Joseph', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004, XXIII, p.84.

⁴ *Salvator Rosa in French Literature: From the Bizarre to the Sublime*. By James S. Patty. 280 pp. (The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, 2004), \$55. ISBN 0-8131-2330-5.

⁵ Catalogue: *Salvator Rosa: Wild Landscapes*. By Susan Jenkins, with essays by Helen Langdon and Jonathan Scott. 40 pp. incl. 17 col. pls. (Compton Verney House Trust, 2005), £5.99. ISBN 0-9546545-5-2.

Romanesque France

Paris

by NEIL STRATFORD

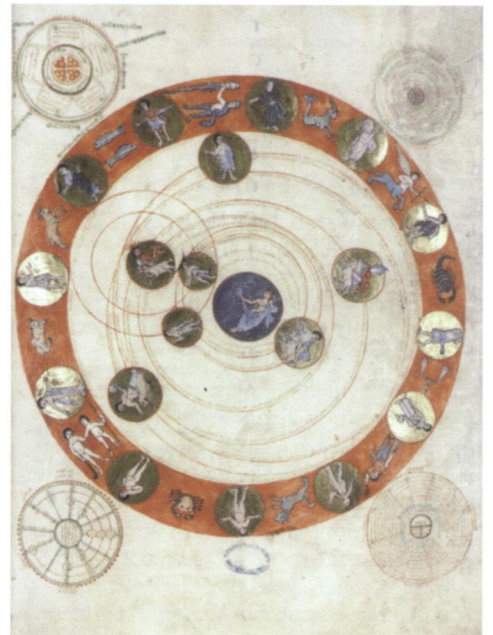
IN RECENT YEARS three great French Gothic exhibitions in Paris have set high standards of coherent presentation and scholarship.¹ However, *La France romane au temps des premiers Capétiens (987–1152)* at the **Musée du Louvre, Paris** (to 6th June), is an altogether different challenge: where is there an artistic or, indeed, a linguistic or politico-economic coherence in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the area that we recognise today as France? Can themes be drawn out or key monuments identified which might serve to explain the buildings and artefacts of these centuries?

The parameters of the exhibition are difficult to comprehend. The date limits (987–1152) are based on political events, respectively the coronation of Hugues Capet and the marriage of the future Henry II of England to Eleanor of Aquitaine. The geographical bias is present-day France, which has no historical basis whatsoever in these centuries. Thus expectations are created which cannot be met by an anthology of works of art. These, it must be said at the outset, are often magnificent, deeply moving or deeply interesting. To be welcomed by a rotunda of capitals (cat. nos.271–78) with the Vendôme window of the Virgin and Child (no.187) on axis in the opening space is memorable; to stand in front of the relief of St Michael from Notre-Dame de Nevers (no.159) is unforgettable; to ponder the manuscripts – the great page, for example, of the Saint-Bertin Aratus manuscript of the *Phenomena* (no.159; Fig.81) – is a stimulating half-hour in an exhibition of well over three hundred objects. But the story told is extremely difficult to follow.

The first half of the exhibition is thematic,

as is now the fashion: Castle and Village, the Church, Relics and Pilgrimage, etc. In these early rooms there are many great works of art, but it has been an exercise in ingenuity to find artefacts to flesh out some of the themes. Excavated material is supported by models, coins, weapons, seals and charters. Here the sculpture is chosen for the costume or the activity that it is supposed to represent. Even if the metalwork is obviously appropriate to the theme of the Church, it has been treated as an aspect of social history. The present reviewer would have preferred to see the beautiful bronze figures of Christ crucified (nos.87–89; Fig.82) occupy a central place in the exhibition. After all, they were made for meditation, at that moment in the years before and after 1100 when new notions of introspective piety were born within the movement of the Gregorian Reform in, for instance, the circle of St Anselm.

This first part of the exhibition is indeed resolutely post-1960s; there is little recognition of the spiritual fuels which created much of this great art or of the shift in religious values which saw the rise of the reformed monasteries and the hermits. Of course the manuscripts carry this message; they are a strong and coherent thread through the exhibition, an outstanding contribution from François Avril. The *objets précieux* are also implicitly made specifically for the devout and the intellectual; a chalice is after all a chalice, the ivories often come from book-covers or crosiers. They are impeccably catalogued by Danielle Gaborit-Chopin and are presented as part of a newly revealed area of Romanesque art. One of the strengths of the exhibition, on the other hand, is the emphasis on monumental stone sculpture, curated by Jean-René



81. The celestial sphere inhabited by the symbols of the constellations, from a copy of Aratus' *Phenomena*, made for Abbot Odbert of Saint-Bertin at Saint-Omer. c.1000. Parchment, 36 by 30 cm. (Bibliothèque Municipale, Boulogne-sur-Mer, MS.188, fol.30; exh. Musée du Louvre, Paris).