



**DOERR DALLAS  
VALUATIONS**



**Dave Dallas**  
Old Master Specialist

## THE ONE THAT GOT AWAY..

The “ones that got away” would be a more apt description of my career! Jan van de Capelle, Hugo van de Goes, John Constable, they have all slipped through my hands.

When you are young, you don't always back your own judgement: you buy paintings speculatively and then start to research them. This involves showing photographs or the picture itself to whoever is the acknowledged expert. If they come back to you and say: “no, it isn't by such and such”, you take it on the chin. You would never have the temerity to ask them to justify their opinion. That comes later, when you are older and have seen how fallible scholars are.

The picture I have chosen is a Transfiguration by Ludovico Carracci. I bought it at Phillips Son and Neale (now Bonhams) 40 years ago, catalogued as Italian School. I thought it was beautifully painted and probably Bolognese. It had a noble provenance “The Earl of Darnley” and was housed in a fine, if bulky, William IV carved and giltwood frame, all of which felt very positive to me. My brother, James, still has the frame with a mirror in it, in his hall.

After cleaning, which revealed a surface in remarkable condition, I had it photographed and sent images to the two most eminent scholars on Bolognese Baroque Art, one in the USA and the other in Germany. Their names are available upon request! Sadly, neither of them had a clue who painted my picture, nor did they show any enthusiasm for it. I advertised it in Apollo (Art Magazine) as “Italian School” and there was no response to that either!

Several years passed and I got a call from a friend who had found an old copy of Apollo and wondered if I still had the painting and, of course, I did. By some extraordinary fluke he had been working in a provincial museum Print Room and had come across two 17<sup>th</sup> Century engravings after my painting where the author was given as Ludovico Carracci, so he immediately realised the significance of what he'd seen. He asked me what the best price was and we shook hands on £6,000. It had cost me £3,000 before cleaning and



Transfiguration, Ludovico Carracci, Oil on Canvas, 102.50 x 83.40cm

reframing so it wasn't a greedy price despite looking as if I had doubled my money.

He was not a rich man so I knew that he must know who the author of my Transfiguration was and that's when he told me about the two prints. Good luck to him but, why on earth didn't the two scholars I had consulted know about the prints and, therefore, the missing picture? Anyway, my friend kept it for decades, but in 2007 he sold it to the National Gallery of Scotland where it hangs to this day.

The moral of the story is... be patient and back your own judgement.

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