



The Invisible Landscape

Photos by Rosetta Borchia  
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# The Invisible Landscape

Discovering the real landscapes  
of Piero della Francesca

Translated by Isabelle Riviere

*il lavoro editoriale*

## Foreword

Four years and seven months have passed since our adventure among Piero's hills came to an end. It is long enough to realize that this isn't the end at all, but rather a prelude, a marvellous introduction which marks the beginning of the hunt for the landscapes of the great art works of the Renaissance. Our research was meticulous and extended well beyond the ancient Montefeltro possessions. It was an exciting prospect and we followed it up enthusiastically. The commitment was unremitting and challenging, but also rewarding. Full of famous names, the treasure is now hidden, awaiting the outcome of historical and scientific checks. When he left, the *divin pittore* took his delightful landscape pictures with him to bring back memories of the places where he was born and grew up. We found the landscapes from many of Raphael's madonnas, and also from well known pictures by Leonardo da Vinci. In fact between 1502 and 1503 Leonardo roamed about between the Montefeltro and bordering Romagna, in the service of Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alessandro Borgia, supervising military fortifications in the area. Although he was only passing through, the works he completed here are evidently a declaration of his love for the hills, pinnacles and valleys. We are busy again with Piero della Francesca as we have some more clues, as well as something on Giovanni Bellini. Now that we have gained in experience and skill and are still inspired and enthusiastic, the game that began for fun has now become a unique and original activity: so now they call us *landscape busters* and we quite like it. Anyone trying to piece together the threads of an ancient story faces the challenge of rewriting much of the story itself. We like to think that our contribution will be accepted by scholars from many disciplines: geographers, art historians, geomorphologists and so on, resulting in a fuller understanding of the subject, and we hope that we shall receive due credit for our research. We are also convinced that those people who are appointed to the

administration, conservation and the exploitation of our artistic and landscape heritage will appreciate the significance of this original research. This means becoming aware, more than ever, of the immense value of our cultural heritage, of those landscapes and views whose beauty and magnificence have been immortalized by the greatest painters of the Renaissance, which the noblemen and popes of the time used to underpin their power and their personalities. Perhaps Piero and the other players in this story are not linked to this moment of history by chance, but in order to reawaken our dormant sensitivity and attention. They are inviting us to look with different eyes, at what is all round us: a landscape that is so full of beauty that perhaps we are no longer able to appreciate its richness. Perhaps our research will encourage the institutions to help us to look at the future in another way, a more serene and happy way for everyone. Just open your eyes and look around. Our deepest thanks to all the people mentioned and not mentioned, who with their culture, kindness and patience have helped us to complete this work. Thanks also to those who with their doubts, more or less vehemently expressed, gave us another stimulus in our search for truth. Because in the end, that is what we are all looking for.

Urbino, March 2012

*Rosetta and Olivia*

**Bibliographic notes about the authors***Rosetta Borchia*

She attained a diploma in painting at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Urbino and in 1980 began her career as a hyper realistic painter of Urbino landscapes. In 1989 she began her research in the Pesaro-Urbino region to collect ancient, forgotten roses, including some in danger of extinction. On this theme, she organised two international conferences in Italy. The project, still ongoing, involved the collection of hundreds of roses, now housed in a large garden museum – *il giardino delle rose perdute* (*The garden of lost roses*) just outside Urbino. In 2004 she made a short film with the Roman director Marco Perrotta, about her hunt for roses, *Un nome per la rosa* (*A name for the rose*). Still with Perrotta, the following year she made a medium-length film, *La notte del Concerto* (*The night of the Concert*), a romanticized story about the closure of Sant'Agata Feltrina's theatre, one of the most beautiful and smallest theatres of the Marche.

In October 2007, while she was completing a promotional video for a country house, she photographed a landscape which turned out to be the hill behind Federico of Montefeltro in the diptych of Piero della Francesca. The discovery had a national impact and was written about in "La Repubblica".

*Olivia Nesci*

Associate professor of Physical Geography and Geomorphology at Urbino University where she teaches Physical Geography and Applied Geomorphology. Her scientific activity, documented in national and international publications, has mostly been concerned with geomorphology, thematic cartography and Quarternary geology.

She is an expert in physical landscape evolution with particular regard to the central-northern Apennine and Adriatic coast. She has conducted conservation and popularization of science projects for the Marche and has collaborated with the drafting of regional geological guides for the Italian Geological Society, on the problems of Geomorphology and Quarternary Geology; and has produced guide maps and didactic courses. She has collaborated with the Soprintendenza Archeologica delle Marche and with the Archeological Institutes of Urbino and Bologna Universities on projects of compatible archaeology in areas of the Montefeltro, the Metauro valley and the Cesano.

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