

SUGGESTIVE CLIMATIC ELEMENTS IN PAINTINGS

ELEMENTE CLIMATICE SUGESTIVE ÎN PICTURĂ

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Abstract: The present study aims to demonstrate that storm plays a vital part in painting, being also an important source of inspiration that reflects over the compositions and artistic approach in some works of art, the painter always being visually and emotionally connected to the details and changes of the nature that surrounds him.

This paper deals with the paintings of some artists such as Ivan Aivazovski, the Russian painter of Armenian origin (1817 –1900) who used storm as key factor in the composition of his works conceiving one of the most lasting impressions of the sea in a whirling storm; William Turner, the English painter (1775-1851) who explored the effect of a vortex is attracted to this atmospheric phenomenon thus reproducing the storm and tumult of the sky a symbol of mankind's effort to combat the forces of nature, or Henri Rousseau, the French painter (1844-1910) who painted the rain, atmospheric phenomenon associated to the storm, which symbolizes the fertilizer for the universe power to recovery.

Moreover, one of the main theorists of the German expressionism, Vasili Kandinski (1866-1944), stimulates a view beyond the material, his works rendering the world's signs in a heavily abstracted manner; atmospheric phenomena preceding and succeeding the storm are rendered as symbols.

Acknowledging so many signs proper to the storm, rain and hail, fog and solar radiation, vortex and clouds living in full deployment of these forces on sea or land, in dreams or in spirit it can be concluded that correlations between air and plastic storm are obvious.

Key-words: storm, vortex, rain, colour, composition, symbols, impressions

Cuvinte cheie: furtună, vortex, ploaie, culoare, compoziție, semne plastice, impresii

INTRODUCTION

This study aims to demonstrate that some atmospheric phenomena represent the compositional centre in some paintings. Of course, the painter, due to his human nature, perceives the phenomenon in the same way as every human being, amazed, excited and thrilled by the intensity, extent and consequences of its harshness, but, beyond these facts, he is delighted, in a very particular way, by the colours and effects that occur at different times of the evolution of the respective phenomenon.

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Scientifically, storms are risk atmospheric phenomena occurring suddenly and extending locally (Ciulache S., Ionac Nicoleta, 1995), as well as fog, blizzard, hail, etc.; they have a direct influence not only upon environment, but also upon people's life, society in general.

Storm also represents an important inspiration subject in pictural art reflecting itself in the composition and approach of certain works of art.

The painter is interested in the view he sees and that he will remember at a certain moment. Always in search of subjects and research themes, he is permanently connected, primarily visually and emotionally, to the details and transformations of the nature that surrounds him. Secondly, the obvious elements of the landscape are translated and transformed by the filter of his temperament, thoughts, desires and manner of working, thus the artist rendering on his canvas a world seen only by himself, a world seen in another way, a state of facts, life events and details that transmit to the viewer multiple emotional challenges.

The French writer, an art theoretician and member of Parnassian school, Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), stated that „Painting is not, as one might think at first glance, an art of imagination, although it seems to be limited to the representation of external things, the painter bears the painting in himself and, between nature and himself, the canvas plays the role of the intermediary. When he wants to paint a landscape, it is not the wish to copy a tree or rock or the horizon that impels him, but nostalgia for a certain dream of rural freshness, pastoral rest, tender melancholy, serene harmony, ideal beauty, which he attempts to translate into his own language” (Scieri despre artă, pag. 47, Ed. Meridiane, 1980). It underlines the connection between painting and environment, between painter and landscape.

The connections between art and geography, in this case art and storms, are captured and well emphasized by Elena Teodoreanu, who underlines the obvious correlation between the two sciences starting from examples of the works made by different painters, writers or musicians that were inspired by the environment; she stated: In various books, the meteorological phenomenon becomes a trope and the climatic features get enriched by a psychological or philosophic one. The realistic information amplifies in a description where reality disappears in many cases and all that remains is the mysterious world of art. (Elena Teodoreanu, Muzele și vremea, 1983).

DATA AND METHODS

The main method of analysis was focused on the frequency of atmospheric phenomena in international painting, based on the idea that their dominance shows a structural propensity of major artists for such items.

The materials that formed the basis of the study were albums, geography books, biographies, history of arts, confessions written / recorded by artists, reproductions and images taken through the Internet from famous museums of the world.

The methodological axis is a specific approach for each of the five artists dedicated to the scientific relevance of the idea.

For this paper we tried to cover a certain part of Europe regarding the start of atmospheric phenomena and we selected the works of certain painters that, regardless the current they belonged to, followed and caught on canvas the unleashing nature.

DISCUSSIONS

Ivan Aivazovski, a painter of Armenian origin (1817-1900), used the storm as the main element in his paintings, eliminating human figures and concentrating on light, sea and sky. Thus, he created one of the most lasting impressions of the sea affected by storm (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1. *Stormy Sea*, 1868, Oil canvas, Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia
(image taken from www.abcgallery.com)**

Storm, resulting from the rapid upward movement of warm and humid air, often accompanied by strong winds, heavy rain and sometimes snow and hail, as well as by lightning and thunder, is captured in various marine paintings where the wave, the mast, the boat or ship, the vortex eye betray inner restlessness, unleashing nature being rendered by green and blue and white that are like gods of colours.

Beings are born from chaos, from the multitude of indescribable cosmic disturbances. During storms, creative action is carried out, and by using the storm as the subject of his works, Ivan Aivazovsky makes us love this atmospheric

phenomenon that betrays an existential need of emotions, even with maximum intensity, fleeing banality. Thus, in different world mythologies, the gods seen as creators and organizers of the universe are the storm gods: Zeus (Jupiter) for Greeks; Bel for Assyrian-Babylonian people; Donar for Germans; Thor for Nordic peoples; Afui and Indra for Hindu people. Ivan Aivazovsky created and organized a universe seen only by himself in a special way, and once caught in his world, watching and feeling so much tumult, struggle and drama, so much beauty, all captured into an imaginary and yet so realistic manner, you long even more for peace and quiet...

The storm also inspires devotion to the greatness of the world. In this regard, choosing as favourite topics blizzards, storms and floods, William Turner, an English painter (1775-1851), defying the social conventions of the time, painted canvases where the explosive mixture of colours, scratches and shavings expresses human nothingness in front of disaster and his powerlessness in front of the unleashed nature that cannot be controlled, unrolling in this unique manner certain cosmic truths known only by himself.

The clouds seen by William Turner swirl forming vortices that stir up the world order (Fig. 2). In fact, the vortex of the storm clouds represents the swirl within Cumulonimbus clouds, like a funnel, which extends from the base of the cloud to the surface.



**Fig. 2. *Snow storm: Hannibal and his army crossing the Alps*, 1812,
Oil canvas, Tate Gallery, London, Great Britain
(image taken from *Mirror of the World: A New History of Art*, Julian Bell, 2007)**

Moreover, risk atmospheric phenomena characterized by sudden appearance, such as tornados, storms, lightning are all associated to Cumulonimbus clouds, which represent the source of these violent phenomena. Cumulonimbus clouds (from the Latin cumulus, which means stack, heap, pile and nimbus – rainy) present a great vertical and horizontal development; the lower part of the clouds is formed by water droplets with a diameter of 0.5-5 mm, the middle part of super cooled droplets and ice crystals, while at the top there are only ice crystals. The occurrence of a supercell of Cumulonimbus type means, most of the times, the appearance of a tornado.

William Turner explored the vortex effect in his paintings. Attracted by this atmospheric phenomenon, he rendered the storm and whirlpool, a symbol of mankind's effort to combat the forces of nature, proving himself to be a visionary that comprises the entire universe into a single cloud, a single rock or a single sunbeam.

In this sense, John Ruskin, an English writer, art critic and philosopher (1819-1900), declared: „a Turner reveals more about rocks than all academies will ever lean about”, making reference to William Turner’s ability to integrate the infinite on the square canvas.

According to the true Bible, the storm is the wrath of God, symbolizing the divine power, vindictive, yet beneficial, that slays the enemies, ensuring believers’ peace and tranquillity. Rembrandt van Rijn, a Dutch painter (1606-1669), revives this religious theme in the work of *Christ in the Storm on the Lake of Galilee* (Fig. 3).

In his view, the storm is the symbol of man's aspirations towards a better life; passing through the unleashed wrath of nature and being the victim of his own bodily and spiritual weakness, he fights against them with the hope and trust that, as the atmosphere gets calm and revive after the wrath, with even more splendour, so the human being can self-build, reaching new heights, as the ‘Sun-Light-Fire’. As Heraclitus of Ephesus said (ancient philosopher and thinker, 540-575 BC) "This world has always been, is and will be an ever-living fire kindling itself by regular measures and going out by regular measures " suggesting the self-perpetuation power of life.

The rain associated to storm, in its turn, symbolizes the recovery power of the universe as its fertilizer agent. This idea was explored by the French painter Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) in his *Surprised! Tiger in a Tropical Storm* (Fig. 4) represented in a naive manner like images on sheets of a storybook. The painter uses shapes overlapping as a 3D drawing and vivid colours and patterns that cannot be seen with the naked eye. The storm ravages the nature imagined by Henri Rousseau and the tiger looks like cut from another story; the rain here represents the fertilizing element which leaves the land fertile; the whole atmosphere urges the viewer to imagine the rain like a daughter of the storm and clouds who embodies itself in a fantastic manner beyond the canvas frame.



Fig. 3. *Christ in the Storm on the Lake of Galilee*, 1633,
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, MA, USA
(image taken from www.artgallery.com)



**Fig. 4. *Surprised! Tiger in a tropical storm*, 1981,
Oil canvas, National Gallery, Londra, Great Britain
(image taken from www.artgallery.com)**

If the painters' imagination exercises mentioned above are easy to recognize by the storm concrete forms (clouds, vortex, lightning, rain, etc.), Vasili Kandinsky (1866-1944), creates a world in which "the viewer can walk inside the painting ... and become part of it".

As one of the main theoreticians of the German expressionism, Kandinski intentionally uses lines and colours as a subliminal conclusion in order to achieve a new level of spiritual understanding. Through his desire to stimulate a vision beyond material existence, the painter presents the world symbols in a highly abstract manner; thus, in his work entitled *Composition IV* (Fig. 5), atmospheric phenomena that precede and succeed the storm are symbolized by two suns, one surrounded by a rainbow (which means that the storm has passed) and the other lighting the right side of the painting as seen through a giant wave, the walls of a destroyed city that stand up unsure on the top of a blue mountain, clouds, the hooves of two horses, three Cossacks and two bodies wrapped in sheets. All the elements of the composition mix together symbolizing birth and death, destruction and rebirth.



Fig. 5. *Composition IV*, 1911, Oil canvas
(image taken from 1001: Paintings You Must See before You Die, Stephen Farthing, 2008)

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed the importance of the meteorological elements that precede and succeed the storm as subject of pictorial compositions.

Artists have highlighted how over time art was sometimes the authors' inspiration product from the exceeding complexity of the environment. "... gradually arts contaminate with this climatological content that enriches them, gives them new meanings, and sometimes - rarely - even subjugates them." (Elena Teodorescu, *Muzele și vremea*, 1983).

By analysing all these 'worlds' exposed and transposed on the canvases of the aforementioned painters, there are proven the connections between atmospheric phenomena and paintings.

Thus, there are emphasized the obvious correlations between colour and the signs specific to storms, rain, clouds, hails, fog, vortex, between the reality felt during these phenomena at sea or ashore and the artists' imaginative spirit.

The conclusion is that the artist's answer to an atmospheric storm is an artistic storm.

This explains the transformation of the elements of nature, by different perceptions and impulses, in attitudes and creative facets, the passing from wonder, awe and fear to admiration and joy of discovering new experiences. This confirms: "The more we know of the fixed laws of nature the more incredible do miracles become" (Charles Darwin, 1809-1882).

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