

Nature and the European Spirit. The Aesthetics of Autonomous Natural Landscape in Painting

Ioan Pricop*

Abstract: *The present article analyzes the spring, development and consecration as an autonomous painting genre of natural landscape in European painting, bringing examples from the works of the most representative masters of landscape. The seeds of the appearance of natural landscape are identified in the religious, philosophical and aesthetic thinking of the Early Middle Ages. Up to the moment of amalgamation with the humanist current, Christian symbolism included various directions of capitalization of the natural world through artistic language, thus generating conceptual and representational models in the field of visual arts. Starting with the Renaissance period, once painting techniques and representation methods started to develop, being oriented towards naturalism, the philosophy of nature generated in the European space pays its tribute to the general orientation - towards the knowledge and mastering of nature having as immediate usage the realization of progress. In this respect, nature has started to be regarded, in time, as a distinct reality, distant from the civilized world, thus the acute feelings of alienation and nostalgia towards the world of nature appear. The aim of this article is to underline these trends and the way they are reflected in the natural landscape up to the appearance of Impressionism.*

Keywords: *landscape painting, nature, natural elements, symbolism, medieval, Renaissance, history, expressiveness*

Nature¹ in visual arts is always not only an interesting and appealing topic, but it also has a stimulating function in allegorical terms. In painting, the representation of nature both regarding its metaphysical meaning and the nature-image meaning is best reflected in the genre of landscape itself.

* PhD Lecturer, "George Enescu" National University of Arts, Iași, Romania, E-Mail: ioan.pricop@yahoo.com

¹ The word *nature* is derived from the Latin *natura* which means "birth"; the word *natura* is, also, the translation of the concept of nature used by the ancient Greeks, called *physis* (φύσις). In modern terms, the word *nature* means "the material world; the totality of beings and things from the Universe; the surrounding physical world, containing the vegetation, the relief forms, the climate" (The Romanian Academy, "Iorgu Iordan" Institute of Linguistics, *The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, the 2nd edition, "Univers Enciclopedic" Publishing House, 1998). in the present research article, we refer to *nature* as it is defined in the dictionary and *natural elements* are seen as parts of the mineral, vegetal and animal lives.

In most cases, the landscape is represented in painting as an external space and in the same time, open. It comprises the shape of the hills, of the hollows, of the mountains, of the trees or of the forest, of the clouds or of the sky, of some river meanders or of the seas, together with the presence of some towers, houses, roads or herds of animals. Even if each of these natural elements is differentiated through its characteristics from the others, they are usually represented as a true canvas in the landscape, what is important is their connection with the compositional assembly and less with their shape and nature. In the urban landscape, where architectural elements dominate the composition of a painting, natural space is especially suggested through the representation of some components of the vegetal life, of water or through the shape of the clouds. *The sky* is almost always present in landscape compositions and in a direct relation with it is the *weather*, often a topic which is preferred by artists. In this respect, the landscape identifies itself with *depth* and *distance* which are in a direct relation with architectural space, represented through buildings, walls and rhythmic columns. The urban landscape is in this context a *reality* in which the human being lives and develops a cultural space and nature expresses the feature of *place* where this action takes place. By paraphrasing Assunto who stated that the city is not a landscape, "(...) but there is a rapport of *representation* and not of *function* between the city and the landscape"², we mention here that along the article, we underline only the appearance, development and consecration as an autonomous painting genre of *the natural landscape* in connection with the general feeling of the European culture after contemplating nature; the urban landscape interests us less, because nature is not considered a topic and the examples of such works of art used in the article are justified.

When the landscape presents itself in a painting as a global entity, we overcome the immediate meaning of fragment from the nature; thus, the landscape reveals itself as a complex system which simultaneously contains space, place, time and has the role to produce an aesthetic feeling. First and foremost, the landscape is an "object" of the aesthetic experience, a space which becomes subject to judgement. Once the Middle Ages ended, this character has been developed over centuries in such a way, that "(...) the moderns have subjectivized the idea of nature, thus making it a content of one's conscience"³.

One of the most accepted theories about the spring of the autonomous landscape places this moment after the middle of the 16th

² Assunto, Rosario, *Peisajul și estetica [Painting and Aesthetics]*, vol. I, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1986, p. 17.

³ Vianu, Tudor, *Opere [Works]*, VI, Aesthetics, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1976, p. 142.

century, the main topic being an ordinary natural spectacle. Yvonne Thiery⁴ brings arguments that the landscape receives the aspect of a particular genre during the 16th century, in the Netherlands, and the first painter that rises the image of nature to the rank of autonomous topic inside a painting is Joachim de Patenier (1485-1524). Max J. Friedländer considers that we "(...) owe the highest achievements in landscape to Masters who were not landscapists (Jan Van Eyck, Rubens, Rembrandt)." ⁵ Some theoreticians attribute the birth of the landscape to Alberti and Leonardo, while others refer to specific components of a prehistory of landscape painting in ancient art. If we consider this perspective, the birth of the notion of landscape almost coincides with the beginnings of European art:

Hans Otto Schaller is willing to connect these beginnings with the name of the ancient scenographer Agatharchos and the one of Apollodoros from Athens, and for Margret Heinemann, the landscape elements from the Crete-Mycenaean art allow the conclusion that ever since that time, the landscape was «a purpose in itself of the artistic activity»⁶.

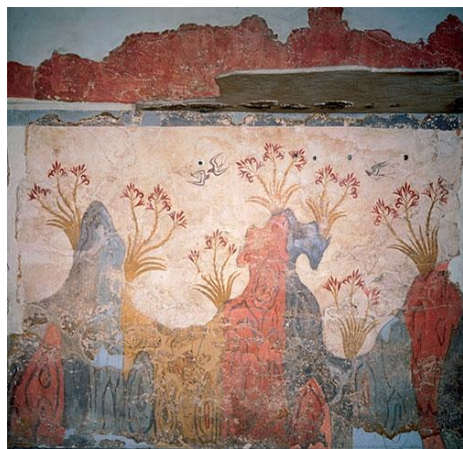


Fig. 1 - Fresco with a landscape in spring time from the bronze age excavations at Akrotiri on the island of Santorini. Greece.



Fig. 2 - *Painted Garden*, fresco, Villa of Livia, detail from the Underground garden room, National Roman Museum, Massimo Palace, Italy, c. 30-20 BC.

⁴ Thiery, Yvonne, *Les peintres flamands de paysage au XVII^e siècle: Des précurseurs à Rubens* (French Edition) [The Landscape Flemish Painters of the 17th Century: the Precursors of Rubens], Lefèvre et Gillet, 1988.

⁵ Friedländer, Max J, *Landscape, Portrait, Still-Life: Their Origin and Development*, Schocken Books, New York, Second Printing, 1965, p. 70.

⁶ Pleșu, Andrei, *Pitoresc și melancolie. O analiză a sentimentului naturii în cultura europeană* [Picturesque and Melancholy. An Analysis of the Feeling of Nature in the European Culture], Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, p. 13.

Even if in the 16th century, a considerable number of painted works appeared, having the function of *source* of the later autonomous landscape, the paintings where there is no architectural element, one or more characters or a little human element in the natural environment prove to be very rare. On the one hand, for our research, it is less important the problem of primacy, the assignation of a “pioneer” of the genre; the notion of *landscape* can have numerous and distinct interpretations. On the other hand, if we insist too much on this problem of primacy, we pay importance to a *quantitative* aspect: if in a work, there is *more* or *less* nature. The works in which artists represent natural elements which occupy a considerable space in the painting can be considered landscapes, according to the “extended” definition of the genre. If we extend the notion of landscape so that it also comprises the natural “backgrounds” represented in some compositions, we can state that the European landscape has had a remarkable development since the 14th-15th centuries.

This type of landscape backgrounds can be viewed in the works of artists like Giotto (1267-1337), Simone Martini (c. 1284-1344), Ambrogio Lorenzetti (c. 1290-1348), Fra Angelico (1395-1455), Piero della Francesca (c. 1415-1492), Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510), Titian (c. 1488-1576), Raphael (1483-1520). Other convincing representations, in this respect, belong to the painters Jan van Eyck (1395-1441), Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506), Giorgione (1477-1510), Rogier van der Weyden (1399-1464), Geertgen tot Sint Jans (1465-1495), Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516), Jan de Beer (1475– 1528), Hans Wertinger (1470-1533) or Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). “Early” paintings in which nature occupies a central place can also be identified in the works of the painters Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556), Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610) or of other masters around Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-1569), such as Jacob Grimm (1525-1590), Albrecht Altdorfer (1480-1538) or Herri met de Bles (cca. 1510-1560).

It is obvious the preoccupation of the above-mentioned artists for the study of nature and natural elements and also the fore-feeling of the importance of the new painting genre. Before we go into depth these aspects through case studies and historical contexts, we consider that it is necessary an ensemble analysis of the way in which the European culture establishes a rapport with nature during the entire time arch of the Middle Ages. This general characterization will be later used by us for some comparisons and conclusions.

When Constantine the Great created his empire and the Christian religion became official in the Roman Empire, there is a change of the artistic vision in the history of European art. The main centres of the new empire having the capital at Constantinople are Ravenna and Thessaloniki, where new forms of art and painting techniques are developed, having a powerful character and an artistic fingerprint, especially in fresco and in mosaic.

Natural, mineral, vegetal and animal motifs can be found in all styles and visual concepts developed in different places of the empire. The Christian symbolism supposes the representation of animals especially, but also plants that have an important and irremovable function. Fish, sheep and lambs, different species of birds, trees, mountains and other natural elements are used in the representation of gospel scenes. Except for fresco, in the Byzantine Empire, a massive development is known by iconography and the illustration of manuscript pages based on rules established in canons.

Beyond the borders of the Byzantine Empire, on the time axes of the Early Middle Ages, the painting revealed by the Orthodox monks, the art of miniature and of illustrated books know an extraordinary development. Just like in the other painting genres which are typically byzantine, the art of miniature has abundant examples of vegetal and animal representations with symbolic meanings. Even if the doctrine of the canons imposed by the church seems restrictive, the artists of the Early Middle Ages still have a specific liberty of expression, and the technical and conceptual progress is done in steps. The miniature compositions are associated to sacred texts and painting representations are powerfully schematized and stylized. Animal or vegetal representations are, very often, the result of the imagination of medieval artists. The fantastic images of some animals and fish that show the scenes of some mythological moments are, sometimes, impossible to recognize regarding the species, just because they are the result of some literary descriptions or of the free imagination. The geometric registers of manuscript pages are minutely embellished with sophisticated ornamental elements, in many cases of floral inspiration and having a well-established symbolic value.

Miniature painters are influenced by two arts that knew a great blossoming during the Middle Ages: the art of stained glass and of tapestry, the last one being of two types: *verdure* (with floral motifs and curved lines) and *mille fleurs* (having a dark background splashed with leaves, flowers and small animals). Out of these two art, they have borrowed both the general conception of the composition and the ornamental motifs for miniatures⁷.

Again in the art of the Early Middle Ages, especially in Western Europe, the art of tapestry blossoms. In the fight scenes or the ones of hunt, it is always present and supported the relationship of man with natural life, through the means of vegetal motifs and the secret byzantine bestiaries. The sacred animals from the Judeo-Christian tradition are often represented in cult sanctuaries, in Christian imagistic, in general, or in the vestiges of the pagan traditions. Ornamental tapestry enjoyed an enormous success because

⁷ Cartianu, Virginia, *Miniatura germană [German Miniature]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1982, pag. 46.

it allowed to be easily moved from one nobiliary dwelling place to another or to be exhibited in churches on the occasion of some events. The iconography of Western tapestry finds its roots in written texts, in the Bible or in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

The icon masters from Constantinople who made some scenes that impress us given their simplicity and beauty, they reached high peaks regarding painting techniques. Almost all the icons abound in mineral, vegetal and zoomorphic symbols, but the scene of *The Birth of the Virgin Mary* reunites a complex scenario of the relationships which can be established in the natural world, the one of people and the transcendent one, both in Byzantium and in the Western world. Again, in a natural environment, the scenes of *The Baptism* and *The Transfiguration of Jesus* and also the scene of *The Entrance in Jerusalem* or the one of *The Ascension of Jesus Christ*. Natural elements occupy an important place on the painting surface.

In medieval Christian art, there is a common belief reflected according to which the natural world, the so-called *Book of Nature*, is arranged and matched by the Divinity in order to be the instruction source of human kind. According to medieval theological doctrines, the entire creation is made to be a reflexion of the Creator and this is exactly the role of art, to teach man about the Creator. This view that we met ever since the Early Middle Ages is based, at least partially, on Biblical versicles, like the ones from the Book of Jov:

But ask the animals and they will teach you, or the birds of the sky and they will tell you; or talk to the earth and it will teach you or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of these mentioned here do not know that the hand of God has done all these things? In His hands is the life of every creature and the breathing of the entire human kind⁸.

Animals do not have their features because of a simple accident: God created them with their characteristics in order to serve as examples towards a rightful behaviour, in order to strengthen the knowledge of the Bible. Just like the pelican comes back to life after three days from its death, by the power of its own blood, similarly Christ revives humanity with His blood. Just like the gull is protected by other predators such as its enemy, the dragon, as long as it hides at the shelter of the *peridexion* tree, in the same way, Christians are saved if they are protected under the roof of the Church, protected from their enemy, Satan. Medieval traditions mention allegories where eagles eliminate the eaglets that do not fly lion-heartedly towards the

⁸ Jov (12:7-10).

Sun; similarly, God bears away the sinners that do not come close to the divine Light.

Reading, together with the Holy Bible, of the signs that are inscribed by God in *The Book of Nature* can lead to an interpretation, if all the right conditions are met, an interpretation meant to make man get closer to the “Author” of nature Himself. In other words, knowing the wisdom of God becomes possible by knowing nature. Once mythological concepts about nature are slowly removed,

[i]t was now possible to love nature in a new way and, as always, love casts out fear. There was nothing to fear from the phenomena of nature, for however impressive or perilous they were, they were ordained by God. Whereas the scholars of the Early Middle Ages had delighted in the manifold manifestations of nature as signs and symbols of something else, it was now possible to study them for their own sake, for the Book of Nature was not a heretical work⁹.

The fact that the Church allowed this way of looking at nature promotes a positive attitude for nature and its study at a cultural level.

In this way, the doctrine of creation contributed to the victory of a new attitude which no doubt paved the way for a renewed study of nature by removing any religiously founded objection to the exploration of its secrets¹⁰.

In the Gothic period, architecture knows a powerful development, and the majestic cathedrals contain a very rich number of vegetal motifs and a varied bestiary. We can identify collections of real or fantastic animals, hybrid animals, having symbolic functions which are also found in Biblical stories, in myths and pagan traditions, in apocryphal gospels or specific popular traditions accepted by cult art in some areas of Europe. It is generally valid the geometrizing character of art for this period, all over the continent. In Western art, the first signs of the representations of static nature and landscape appear, and at the level of painting technique, the first elements of geometric perspective and realistic representation make their appearance, thus preparing the field for introducing the deeply revolutionary spirit of the Renaissance.

⁹ Pedersen, Olaf, *The Book of Nature*, Vatican Observatory Publications, 1992, p. 36.

¹⁰ Ibidem.



Fig. 3 – *Guidoriccio da Fogliano at the Siege of Montemassi*, Simone Martini, 1328, Fondazione Musei Senesi, Siena, Italy.



Fig. 4 – *St Francis Giving his Mantle to a Poor Man*, Giotto di Bondone, 1295, [Basilica of San Francesco d'Assisi](#), Italy.

Marking a significant change at a stylistic level compared to the work of Giovanni Cimabue (1240-1303) or the one of Duccio di Buoninsegna (1255-1319), painters such as Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Giotto and Simone Martini started to adopt a specific "realism" as a way of representing the sacred. The medieval religious conscience and its symbolic codes can be found, deeply illustrated, in the work of Simone Martini and also in the creation of Giotto. Giotto creates a space that allows the birth of a realism in

front of which the viewer immediately connects, at a deep, intimate level. Vasari states: "in my opinion, painters owe to Giotto as much as they owe to nature"¹¹. Relevant examples for our study are the fresco of Simone Martini, made in 1328, *Guidoriccio da Fogliano at the Siege of Montemassi* (Fig.3) and the painted fresco from 1295, *St. Francis Giving his Mantle to a Poor Man* (Fig.4) by Giotto. The two paintings have some similarities: one or more characters in the foreground that are active, while in the background there is a landscape with mountains, rocks, small buildings, fortresses and a sky which considerably covers the surface of the artistic framework, a sky which has shades of blue.



Fig. 5 – *Effects of Good Government in the Country*, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 1337-1339, Room of the Nine, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.

Another important example which has just recently received the deserved attention¹² is represented by the three frescoes, made between 1337-1339 by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government*. The mural paintings represent points of view and aspirations of the government from Siena, under the lead of nine members or chief magistrates.

¹¹ Vasari, *Viața artiștilor [Lives of the Artists]*, Vol. I, Penguin Publishing House, London, 1987, p. 57.

¹² Polzer, Joseph, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti's "War and Peace" Murals Revisited; Contributions to the Meaning of the "Good Government Allegory"*, *Artibus Et Historiae*, Vol. 23, No. 45, IRSA Publishing House, Krakow, 2002, p. 63.

They formed Siena's highest executive council during the city's greatest period of prosperity covering roughly the first half of the Trecento when its artists and architects achieved unprecedented international renown¹³.

The three frescoes are in the Room of the Nine inside Palazzo Pubblico from Siena and they are separate in six different scenes: *Allegory of Good Government*; *Allegory of Bad Government*; *Effects of Bad Government in the City*; *Effects of Bad Government in the Country*; *Effects of Good Government in the City*; *Effects of Good Government in the Country*¹⁴. These scenes visually exemplify a political theology, depicting the ideas that the "(...) good government results in peace and harmony for its citizens, whereas government not based on Justice under Wisdom results in war and chaos"¹⁵. In the scene that illustrates *Effects of Good Government in the Country* (Fig.5) Lorenzetti represents the hills around Siena, well-groomed by people, under the form of a landscape. Even if nature is partially under the control of mankind and we can see characters spread in the composition, small houses and towers, we consider that the ensemble image is part of the genre of natural landscape, according to our definition. This scene is, from our perspective, the most distant representation in time of an autonomous landscape that we have met in our research and, by extension, the first landscape from the European painting.

* * *

The Renaissance represents a period in which mystic, philosophical and artistic tendencies met and merge, having their roots in all the other previous epochs. The Renaissance seems to be a normal continuation of the Middle Ages, but it is also a mirror of the Antiquity. About the position and the intermediate character of the Renaissance compared to the other important historical periods, Lucian Boia offers a remarkable synthesis:

The Middle Ages favoured the divine kingdom at the expense of living in this earthly world. Modern times reverse the tendency, gradually fading away from divinity. Between these two opposite orientations, the Renaissance followed the middle way, trying a compromise formula between the earth and the sky, between the human being and the providence, between free will and

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ This titles are all modern conveniences. Moreover, the title of the wall painting *The Allegory of Good and Bad Government* is not the original one, it was initially called *Peace and War* (idem, pp. 84-85).

¹⁵ Southard, Edna Carter, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Frescoes in the Sala della Pace: A Change of Names*, 24. Bd. H. 3, journal Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz, 1980, p. 362.

destiny. It is separated from the Middle Ages by its thirst for liberty and the affirmation of the individual and of individualism¹⁶.

Now appears the powerful attraction to the nude representation of the human body. We can discuss in this case about a true "triumph of the flesh", this aspect contradicts the spiritualized models of the representations of medieval art and it shows the interest for obtaining a high level of life comfort or a longer period of life. Such values become interests just as important as the ones of redeeming one's soul, which was a top priority wish for the Middle Ages man.

The pure interest for the ideals of classical antiquity is reflected in the new formulas, painting or compositional techniques. The great spirits of the Renaissance approached a complex position towards all the fields of knowledge and this idea is seen in their artistic works. Natural geometrical models - known ever since the time of the great civilizations of human kind - are revived during the Renaissance. This period can be defined as an *Artistic Will*, having its sources in the study of nature:

Nature is the *basis*, the centre from which all artistic discoveries start and return. This process of assimilation of nature takes place at different *style levels* and it consequently goes hand in hand with the subjective development of linguistic means. To be more specific, it takes place once these means of artistic writing are invented and verified. (...) The artist is expected to forget all one's schematic knowledge acquired beforehand, to elaborate one's formal vocabulary in a dialogue with nature. This process must take place directly, without mediators, so that one completely offers oneself to the act of contemplation¹⁷.

The great discoveries of precise sciences, of mathematics, astronomy, geography, natural sciences consistently influence artistic thinking and creation. Following the steps of Pythagoras and Fibonacci¹⁸, mathematicians such as Luca Paccioli¹⁹, Piero della Francesca or Leonardo collaborated or transmitted to each other, directly or indirectly, knowledge about the organization of natural world. These complex personalities contributed to the building of a new knowledge paradigm, generating new directions of thinking and artistic expression, marking almost all future centuries. Thus, during the Renaissance, the basis of innovative science and artistic directions are set: the linear perspective, the usage of optical systems of catching and reproducing an image, the realistic representation of images, their

¹⁶ Boia, Lucian, *Tinerete fără bătrânețe [Youth without Old Age]*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 63.

¹⁷ Hofmann, Werner, *Fundamentele artei moderne [The Basis of Modern Art]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1977, pp. 142-143.

¹⁸ Leonardo Fibonacci (c. 1170–c. 1240–50).

¹⁹ Fra Luca Bartolomeo de Pacioli (1446/7-[1517](#)).

sophisticated deformation in order to generate some visual centres, some artistic rhythms having clearly defined functions, directly connected to the nature of the theme or of the presented topic.

The powerful relationships between philosophical thinking, literature and arts of all kinds is a generally valid characteristic to the epoch of the Renaissance. All the myths of the Antiquity regarding the relationship with natural kingdoms are redefined in a modern language, specific to the humanist spirit of understanding the dimension of existence, of its meaning and of the rapport with the supersensible world and spiritual hierarchies. The way of representation of the great themes and topics of the Antiquity opens new possibilities of generating meanings and symbolic connotations of the works of art.

The development of the portrait, of the realist landscape, of the nude and of other painting genres allow for the activation of a phenomenon of secularization regarding artistic topics and themes. The portraits of some contemporaries of the artists, mandatories of works of art, serve as a symbolic support for the representation of some historical, religious or mythological characters. To the same extent, the environment, the architectural or scenographic frames where a visual reading or an action take place are projections of daily reality. Beyond the artists' and thinkers' attraction to the hedonist aspects of life and also to natural sciences, during the Renaissance, there is also an intense development of religious thinking. The widening of the flexibility of moral laws and the conceptual development of individualism - specific to the Renaissance - find fertile field on the territory of religion.

The specifically medieval rigor and coherence are transformed into an abundant diversity, by multiplying Christian churches, after the protestant reform. In parallel with religious mysticism, it is allowed the development of some hermetical sciences such as astrology or alchemy. The reconciliation of anthropocentric and transcendent tendencies is admirably obtained in this period; there is no contradiction between the search for longevity of the physical body, the obtaining of alchemists' immortality elixir and the redemption of the soul. An eloquent example in this respect, according to the writings of Lucian Boia, is represented by the personality of Isaac Newton, the scientist that is the discoverer of some of the basic principles of classical physics, he is also a passionate alchemist, interested in the beginnings of history and of the end of all times. The anthropocentric approach of the renaissance artist is still gravitationally inscribed around the Personality of Christ and of the Christian doctrine. The vast majority of Renaissance masterpieces are illustrations of the Old and New Testament, and the entire ensemble of the relationship with the manifested world is thought depending on the laws of universal creation. In opposition with the apparent difference between the thinking of the Middle Ages and the one of the Renaissance,

there is a powerful bridge that unites them and along it, the other epochs successively developed themselves.

For a long time, historians have privileged the opposition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance to the great benefit of the latter. A re-balancing is about to take place. We rediscover the Middle Ages as being more modern than initially thought (at least, in its final phase) and the Renaissance which is far less modern than the one imagined by its admirers (though, obviously, closer to modernism than the previous epoch)"²⁰.

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), as we know, left drawings and studies which try to decipher the composition of natural structures, of crystals and stones, of some species of animals, plants and some natural phenomena²¹, from an early age. "(...) Leonardo, like other artists at the start of their career, trained his hand and eye by making studies of older works of art, and in particular, too, of nature"²². In order to understand nature, Leonardo is preoccupied to discover the finest details of the structures and of the "artistic models" of natural elements. The studies on animals, plants and minerals made by the artist directly on the model and after detailed, minute, laborious observations made future generations regard him as a model of encyclopedic spirit. Almost all the paintings of Leonardo are the result of his own studies and sketches done in order to discover scientific aspects. Leonardo made not only extremely accurate representations, inspired from the point of view of expressivity, but he also attributed adequate symbolic functions to each natural element or character from his paintings. In many cases, the compositional plan and the symbolic meaning which are the basis of a painting are accessible on several layers of understanding, and sometimes they are completely hermetic.

The landscapes from the background of his compositions which, in most cases, contain forms of relief, various species of plants and trees with a known and especially mentioned meaning are panoramic, and in the distant background, we can notice the presence of some massive mountains whose presence sends us to the ascending, spiritual meaning that the mountain has in the traditions along centuries. The fir, the pine, the cypress, different species of plants and flowers (the lily, the juniper, the so-called *tulipa silvestris* - a flower which is similar to the tulip etc.), animals such as the lamb, the horse, the swan, the ermine, the cat etc., are detailed, inspired and expressive

²⁰ Boia, Lucian, *Tinerețe fără bătrânețe [Youth without Old Age]*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p. 64.

²¹ see Nathan Johannes, Zöllner Frank, *Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) The Graphic Work*, Taschen, Bibliotheca Universalis, Köln, 2014 edition and Zöllner Frank, *Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) The Complete Paintings and Drawings*, Taschen, Köln, 2015 edition.

²² Zöllner Frank, *Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) The Complete Paintings and Drawings*, Taschen, Köln, 2015 edition, p. 15.

descriptions of these species and their role is to integrate natural lives in the sacred or cultural history of human evolution.



Fig. 6 – *Arno Landscape*, Leonardo da Vinci, 5 August 1473, Uffizi Gallery,

Along the studies dedicated to minerals, plants and animals, Leonardo made research on the dynamics of fluids, of currents and their effects, the proportions of the human body, its internal and external anatomy and many other aspects connected to the physical conditions or the immediate aesthetic properties of organic and inorganic matter.

Though Leonardo uses the natural landscape in his paintings only as a background, we can identify in his studies and sketches around twenty natural autonomous paintings as drawings (pen, ink, coloured chalk). One of these landscapes, *Arno Landscape* (Fig.6), was created by the artist when he was 22 years old and it is considered his earliest dated drawing. In the left-upper part of the drawing

(...) in his own characteristic mirror-writing, there are the words «on the day of St Mary of the Snow Miracle 5 August 1473»²³. Moreover, this drawing is considered as one of the earliest autonomous landscape studies in art history²⁴.

Among the artists mentioned as precursors of autonomous landscape, we should have a closer look at the works of some artists, like Geertgen tot

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

Sint Jans, suggestive from this point of view. Geertgen's painting is especially focused on religious topics such as *The Birth of God*, *The resurrection of Lazarus* or *The Burning of the Bones of St John the Baptist*. If in these compositions, the natural environment is only suggested, in the work *St John the Baptist in Wilderness* (Fig.7) nature has as great an importance as the main character, represented in the close-up. John the Baptist is seated, resting leaning on his hand, meditating in a natural environment composed of a field seen from above which graciously flows marked by the presence of some trees, of some birds or animals. The way in which the artist manages to represent nature

[m]akes you exclaim: the world is perfect where it is not touched by man, with all one's suffering. Nature and human being confront and complete each other in form and colour: the saint is represented restless, full of thoughts, built after a triangular schema, in a cloth which is cold brown an blue-greyish, seated(...) on the one hand, and a meadow rising in dip, warm, soft, glowing happily, on the other hand²⁵.



Fig. 7 – *John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, Geertgen tot Sint Jans, 1490, Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin Jans.

²⁵ Friedländer, Max J., *Despre pictură [About Painting]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983, pp. 36-37.

The magnanimity of the represented figures - of the saint and of the lamb -, of the sensitivity through which form and light are rendered in the composition, the accuracy of details are, probably, the qualities that have made Geertgen one of the most important artists of the Netherlands.

Being contemporary with Geertgen, Bosch created in his works an embodied and spiritualized nature, being among the promoters of the conception of imaginative landscape or vegetative landscape. In his works, the natural environment is rendered in a very expressive manner and it has the aspect of a fantastic, austere plan. Generally speaking, Bosch creates numerous anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures of small dimensions, disposed in groups which combine to form the harmony of the ensemble, totally corresponding to illusory nature. In the triptych called *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Bosch painted an universe which is in the same time organic and geometric. One first geometric aspect is represented by the fact that the central panel is marked by two rectangular wings which can be folded, similar to some louvers, towards the interior. Once "closed", they perfectly cover the surface of the central panel and they reveal another painting, made using the technique *grisaille*, showing the Earth during the Creation. Represented having a flat circular form, the Earth is "encapsulated" in a transparent sphere, almost tangent to the extremities of the panel. The sphere is suspended in a cosmos cloaked in darkness and it refracts the light of the Creator, represented in the upper corner of the left panel. Inside it, a water surface glitters under the light which penetrates the mantle of dark clouds. On the circular surface of the Earth surrounded by water, the only form of life is the one of the vegetal world. The absence of animals or man from this composition can indicate the fact that the scene presents the Biblical events corresponding to the Third Day from the Genesis. Judging things from another perspective, this unpopulated earth - having only plants and minerals - is in contrast with the interior panels of the triptych itself, depicting a paradise full of the sensual presence of people, on the one hand, and of numerous animals or birds - sometimes oversized – on the other hand.

The narration of the triptych starts from the left wing, with the *Heaven*. In this panel, as J. Combe brought arguments, the artist created a prototype of the "landscape itself"²⁶.

The natural environment includes: a series of conic forms similar to mountains - some of them organic, other made of rock; plants and exotic animals like the giraffe, elephant or lion; aquatic animals having awkward features (for example a fish is represented having human hands); various terrestrial animals like the cat, rabbit, horse, pig, deer, snake etc; vegetal structures - trees, bushes, grass -, water and birds that fly in spiral. The central panel has a terrestrial paradise of sexual excess represented, but it

²⁶ Combe, J., *Jérôme Bosch*, Editions Pierre Tisne, Paris, 1957, p. 58.

proves to be just an illusion; this thing becomes obvious once we see the third panel where *hell* and the punishment of the sinners are represented. Diverse fantastic creatures populate the landscape, and from oversized fruits, appear characters which have an adolescent's sexual curiosity.



Fig. 8 – *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1480-1490, exterior panels (shutters).

In time, we are amazed by the carnality used by the artist to render layers of ground, the rocks, the buildings, the plants. In the upper parts of the triptych (...), he places geometrical bodies which are fantastically chained, out of which elements suggested by the world of flora and fauna grow. Sometimes, they leave the impression of some living innervated organisms, the colour also contributes to this impression, because it is close to the shades of the human skin. And also the shape of these zoomorphic constructions, where rounded, twisted elements dominate, reminding us of the shape of the antennae on the heads of monsters from the deep, sometimes soft and sticky, suggests the painting of living creatures which deliberately know different erotic experiences. If we searched here for a symbolic meaning, we should probably think about the allusion referring to the vital force of nature²⁷.

²⁷ Wojciechowski, Aleksander, *Arta peisajului [Landscape Art]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1974, p. 17.

After having been in a relative obscurity for centuries, the work of Bosch was “rediscovered” by the surrealists in the 20th century, they have “taken over, partially, his erotic, magic and grotesque (...)”²⁸.

Though Bosch did not have a direct successor, his works became the study object of the painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Before referring to the way Bruegel revolutionarily integrated natural elements in his works, as a landscape, we consider that it is welcomed a last case study from the humanist period, underlining the way in which some artists still connect specific symbolic meanings having a religious character with the world of nature.

We have seen so far that European art is always dedicated to the sacred and to the relationship of our world to the Creator. Nature is an integrant part of the divine work; furthermore, Adam, the proto-parent of the human species, is empowered as the sovereign of all the other natural lives. The natural world is perceived as being part of God’s manifestation in the entire Universe. Plants and animals are very much similar to us, citizens of the planet, and our relationship with the representatives of the natural lives is a means of rapping to the Principle. Always, plants and animals all over the world are considered the messengers of divinity, immediate symbols of the divine presence.



Fig. 9 – *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1490-1500, interior panels.

²⁸ Ibidem.

In the composition *The Virgin among a Multitude of Animals* (Fig10) painted by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), the Virgin holds Baby Jesus on Her left arm, so that the Baby seems to be floating, his attention fixed, according to the tradition, on St. Joseph, showing no attraction to the splendors of the natural world and the representatives of the animal life which can be identified inside the composition. Joseph is represented on a reduced scale and place in the right part of the composition, near a house and he seems to be talking to a stork.

What is very interesting is the ensemble symbolism of this work, but also the symbolic role of each element of the composition (plant, animal, fortress or mountain). They are closely connected to the nature of the event *The Birth of Jesus Christ* and they have different symbolic functions. A closer look reveals us a multitude of important moments from the presented story. An angel descends from the Sky in order to spread the word to the shepherds that were on the peak of a hill with their flocks. The richness of details and the perspective science of Dürer is impressive, especially because each accent has its own symbolic meaning and visual function, in the same time. From the flock of sheep, for example, a ram stands out, jumping to fight, making the compositional area dynamic because of the complementary trajectory compared to the angel's.

In the upper-left corner of the composition, it is represented a harbour with the ships that carry the three king-magi to the celebration of the great event.

This fascinating visual work is different from other types of representation of the Birth of Jesus Christ because Dürer exalts the miraculous dimension of nature. Mary is, in the same time, also the goddess of the natural world, the new Eve of the mystics and Christian theologues. On the left of the Virgin Mary, we see a parrot that is sitting on a wood spar, as the symbol of the prophet who brings the news of the arrival of the magi. Dürer drew this bird after one of the numerous studies dedicated to it.

Underneath the parrot, Dürer represented a green woodpecker, ready to keep its rhythm just like the semantron's sounds which announce the nearness of Liturgical events. Again in the lower-left part of the composition, we meet, this time, the representatives of other species of animals, charged with a symbolic role. Consequently, the stag beetle – also met in other studies of Dürer – aggresses the almost fallen-asleep dog of the Virgin, on whose spine a butterfly delicately rests.

On the right, at the same level, the enchained fox is the symbol of evil forces, just like the two owls hidden under a tree's trunk are the messengers of the same dark forces. But, in the presence of Jesus, according to the tradition, they no longer have malign powers. The eagle owl and the owlet are birds charged with ambivalent symbolic meanings, being

representative for wisdom and knowledge, on the one hand, but also of the dark forces.



Fig. 10 – *The Virgin among a Multitude of Animals*, Albrecht Dürer, 1503

If we carefully analyze every register of the painting, we discover other two important details: a snail, a dragonfly, a pair of swans, a moth, all of them are recurrent elements in the work of Dürer. Beyond the animals that represent the terrestrial and the airy sides, Dürer introduced, in the lower-right corner of the composition a crab, the symbol of the aquatic bestiary, so that the entire nature is present at the great event of the Birth of Christianity.

Unlike most of the works of this artist, drawings or engravings, where visual elements are precisely marked by powerful contrasts, in this composition, the artist adds delicate tint drawings of aquarelle over the drawing made in pencil and ink. The entire composition has a specific delicacy and a warm note of humour and serenity. Except for it, there are

known two other versions of the composition found at the Museum Albertina Wien from Austria. Dürer creates numerous landscapes in different techniques, among them we mention only *View of Arco*, an aquarelle made on paper in 1495 (Louvre Museum).

* * *

In his landscapes, Pieter Bruegel the Elder manages to underline the forces of nature (the weather, its impact on the environment), the features of a season or the diverse activities of people in a revolutionary unitary and valuable vision from a stylistic point of view *in puncto*. For Bruegel, nature is in full and continuous creativity. "«The enciclopedia» of the months of the year was a good occasion for him to illustrate all atmospheric phenomena, of lighting, of the way the weather changes, how seasons alternate"²⁹. In his search for running dry the possibilities of landscape representations, Bruegel focuses his attention towards a series of natural phenomena such as the snowfall, atmospheric pressure, temperature variations, the movement of water and clouds, the tempest etc. An example in this respect is the work *Hunters in the Snow* (Fig.11), one of those rare masterpieces which presents a universal attraction.

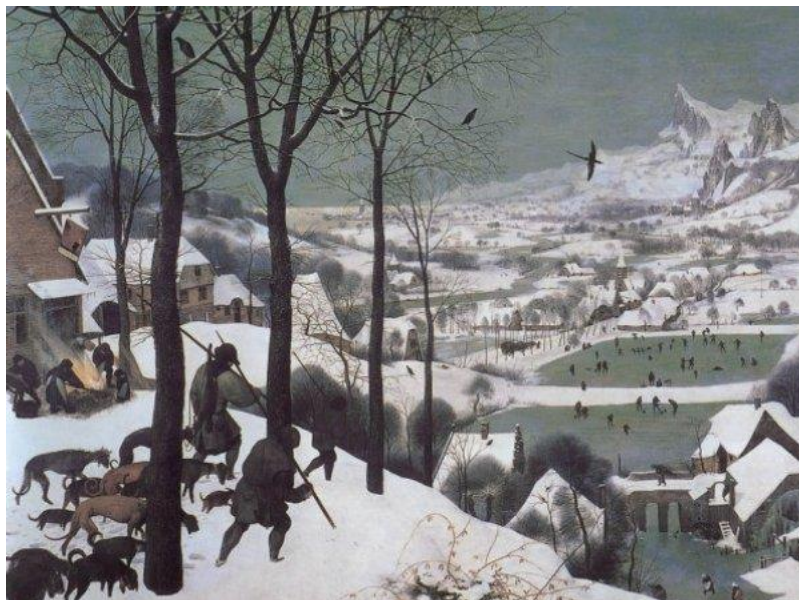


Fig. 11 – *Hunters in the Snow*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1565

²⁹ Friedländer, Max J., *Despre pictură [About Painting]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983, p. 75.

Being part of a series of six paintings whose topic is represented by different climatic aspects during the year, the work displays a winter landscape, seen from the top of a hill and in front of which a large perspective opens, marked by buildings, people and a rocky relief. On the hill, three characters returning from hunting are represented, together with more dogs. The artist indicates by the direction and way in which these characters are grouped that there is a compositional line marked by the linear rhythm of the trees in the foreground, inviting the viewer to the landscape itself. The image offers the impression of serenity and in the same time, it gives the sensation of coldness given the chromatic dominated by colourful shades of grey and white. Another work, this time an engraving, presents a vision which is similar to the one of *Hunters in the Snow*: it is the work called *The Rabbit Hunt* (1566), whose action takes place also on the diagonal of a hill which is in contrast with the cadre of the distant field. Among the landscapes of this artist, we also mention *The View of Tivoli*, *Landscape of the Alps*, *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt* (1563), *The Harvesters* (1565) or *The Tower of Babel* (1563).

The efforts of some artists such as Leonardo, Bosch or Geertgen to render nature, continued by the work of Pieter Bruegel, represent the premises of the blossoming and development of the autonomous landscape from the 17th century. Works that approach this painting genre can also be found at artists like Aelbert Cuyp (1620-1691), Jacob van Ruisdael (1628-1682) or Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640).

Though Cuyp is a good interpreter of the Dutch landscape, in his works, we can identify Italian stylistic influences. One of his most well-known landscapes is *River Landscape with Riders* (Fig.12), a painting created between 1653-1657. The entire represented scene is bathed in the subtle and warm light of the sun, harmonizing all natural elements: the sky and the clouds, water, earth and mountains, vegetal structures and animals (horses, cattle, ducks and a dog). The atmosphere created by the artist is a calm one, quiet and marked by the feeling of time stop, evoking harmony and the beauty of nature.

Some marine paintings and landscapes, painted at the peak of its maturity, are powerfully marked by the liberty of execution and the amplexness of the vision on nature. The fog penetrated by sun rays, the mellowness, the incandescence and the enamelled brightness of its yellowish chromatic, the precise and alert brush - these elements are the arsenal through which he defeated all his rivals. (...). The influence of the art of Cuyp can be remarked especially in England than in the Netherlands³⁰.

³⁰ Idem, p. 103.



Fig. 12 – *River Landscape with Riders*, Aelbert Cuyp, c. 1653-1657, Gallery of Honour, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Together with painters like Jacob Van Ruisdael, Meindert Hobbema (1638-1709) and Salomon van Ruysdael (1603-1670), Cuyp has a considerable influence regarding the development of the *English School of Landscape* from the next century. The realistic landscapes of Ruisdael get detached from the creations with the same topic of the previous generations - monochrome and somehow monotonous - the dramatic force of its compositions is underlined by the usage of a powerful contrast of light and darkness. His large repertory of natural motifs contains scenes with dark mountains and sharp cliffs, wood landscapes with millenary trees and noisy waterfalls, marine or winter landscapes. In the work *Windmill at Wijk* (1670), the artist represents a high sky with many clouds, vessels on water, together with a field on which a few house and a mill are erected – the focal point of the painting. For the first time, Ruisdael presents the typically realist Dutch landscape, with its shades of blue, grey, green and brown. In another painting, *The Jewish Cemetery* (1660), the artist alludes to the transitory nature of life by representing a wild and agitated sky, of a tree which is almost dry, of a river that flows fast and wild or of some burial stones.

Regarding the landscape of Rubens, the following works are simply remarkable: *Chateau de Steen* (1636), *Atalanta and Meleager Hunting the Calydonian Boar* (Fig.13) or *Landscape with Philemon and Baucis* (1620). Being an emblematic representative of the exuberant baroque style, the famous painter combines the Flemish traditions with Italian influences, the accent falling especially on movement, force, sensuality and pathos. In his works that have a landscape topic, Rubens proves an extraordinary ability of understanding and representing the pulse of nature seen as a whole. The

viewer feels almost overwhelmed in front of the visual representations of the forces that animate nature. The way in which Rubens renders the natural environment is in connection to the literary tradition of the antiquity, especially with pastoral poetry. In many of the works created towards the end of his life, the artist celebrates this tradition. An example in this respect in the work *Nymphs and Satyrs*, made between 1637-1640, characterized by the same suggestion of continuous growth of the vegetation underlining the exalted life of Nature.



Fig. 13 – *Atalanta and Meleager Hunting the Calydonian Boar*, Peter Paul Rubens, 1635-1640, Museo del Prado

Another important artist of the 17th century whose work has brought significant contributions to landscape painting is the French Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665). Influenced by Caravaggio's painting (1571-1610) and Greek-Roman mythology, the artist abandons the baroque style in the third decennium for he preferred to develop his own version of classicism. Regarding the represented topics, he is known especially for his religious compositions and for his narrative landscapes. The feeling of the mysterious force of nature is the main characteristic of Poussin's landscapes. If in his early works of the artist, the environment has a secondary role, starting with the 40's, it receives a new importance. Sometimes – as it is the case of the two canvas which illustrate the story of Phocion, *Landscape with the Ashes of Phocion* (1647) and *Landscape with the Funeral of Phocion* (1648-1650) – the majestic trees and the city from the background are elements which

underline the greatness of character of the represented hero. In the work *Landscape with Diogenes* (Fig.14), the luxurious vegetation expresses the ideal of nature seen as the source of abundance of things, also necessary for producing human happiness.



Fig. 14 – *Landscape with Diogenes*, Nicolas Poussin, 1648, Department of Paintings of the Louvre.

Poussin alludes to the cyclic process of nature in *Blind Orion Searching for the Rising Sun* (1658) by representing the fertilizing natural forces. In this context, humanity almost lacks importance because even the ogre Orion looks as if he is short compared to the trees around him. Similar motifs can also be identified in *The Birth of Bacchus* (1657) or in the series of paintings called *The Four Seasons* (1660-1664). This series is composed of a mild spring, a rich summer, a dark but productive autumn and a cold and cruel winter. But Poussin also represents the successive daily periods: thus, the morning corresponds to spring, the middle of the day - to summer, evening to autumn and winter-marked by the presence of moonlight -to winter.

Space in Poussin's landscapes is not a desert where objects have an individual experience. It does not represent the backstage of the scene where the action takes place. It is not something far away and full of mist, meant to sweeten the

harshness of forms. It is particularly the presence of objects which helps define space and the other way round - space influences the proportions between bumps and flat surfaces, it tames the too big expressiveness of lines, it defines the architectonics of constructions. He is a linking element, he lacks the specificity which limits the free development of shapes. Giving up on the «limited space» (*espace limitée*) has opened new possibilities of free composition of the landscape, in the case of Poussin's art, despite the embarrassing rigours of classical harmony³¹.

Claude Lorrain (1600-1682) is one of the most important exponents of landscape painting of the 17th century. The artist is preoccupied especially by the *idealized landscape*, a traditional form of painting based on the idyllic representation of nature. Among the remarkable idealized characters of the epoch, we mention *The Mill* of Rembrandt (1650) or the mountain view of Hercules Seghers (1590–1638) made between 1620-1630. Claude Lorrain spent his entire life painting in Italy, except for a visit in Germany and France, between 1625-1627. In his landscape creations, the artist fathoms the major artistic preoccupations of Italy during the 17th century, like the study of nature and the exploration of light. Moreover, he uses traditional landscape elements, coast scenes, mythological, Biblical or pastoral figures and architectural frames. Up to 1640, Claude painted numerous marines and landscapes characterized by schematic compositions finding their echo in the landscapes of Agostino Tassi (1578- 1644) and Paul Bril (1554-1626). The artist surprises us by the way he represents the natural environment, impregnated with subtle ethereal aery gradations. His landscapes are not bathed in a lot of light – being the result of studying nature, underlined by numerous outdoor studies. In this respect, Claude Lorrain is among the first painters that tries to create a canvas representation of the sun and the effects produced by its light, as natural and faithful as possible.

Unlike the splendid prodigality of some artists like Rubens, the paintings of Claude Lorrain always give the impression of lucid economy, full of tact. At first sight, we could attribute their extreme simplicity to a specific lack of resources; but after we get familiarized with them and we compare them with the works of some of his imitators, we realize the richness of the observations put by him in every branch, we realize the extreme subtlety of the tonality of the forefront of his paintings, the delicate drawing of the waves and the dimples where the golden light of his skies is reflected³².

³¹ Wojciechowski, Aleksander, *Arta peisajului [Landscape Art]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1974, p. 36.

³² Clark, Kenneth, *Arta peisajului [Landscape Art]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1969, p. 66.

Lorrain left over a thousand drawings made in nib and tint which illustrate the precincts of Rome. "Sometimes, these drawings are minute studies of details, in other cases, they have a totally impressionist character by the sense of light that they display, finally, in other cases, they have a delicacy of accent which reminds us of Chinese painting"³³. During the last decades of his life, his naturalism is influenced by the humanist classical feeling. The maturity of his work is reflected in a series of works like *Landscape with Apollo Guarding the Herds of Admetus* (Fig.15), *Moses Saved from the Water* (1639-1640), *Landscape with Apollo and Sibila from Cumae* (1646), *Landscape with Dancers* (1669) or *A View of Carthage* (1676). His influence was tremendous, especially in England, changing the public perception on nature.



Fig. 15 – *Landscape with Apollo Guarding the Herds of Admetus*, Claude Lorrain, 1645, Doria Pamphilj Gallery, Rome

³³ Ibidem.

The Netherlands' school knows a remarkable development towards the middle of the 17th century regarding landscape. Once this idea appeared, it was accompanied by the desire to refresh the classical principles of drawing and composition, put in light by the architectural works of some painters like Pieter Saenredam (1597-1665), Gerrit Berckheyde (1638-1698) or Emanuel de Witte (1617-1692). Except for the mentioned ones, Vermeer (1632-1675) proves to have a remarkable sense of observation and he renders the atmosphere in the work *View of the City Delft*.

This unique work is of course the one in which painting of all times came closer to colour photography. Not only does Vermeer prove to have an extraordinary sense of the tone, but he also uses an inhuman detachment. His interest was not held by any point of the view more than another, and everything was rendered from a rigorously uniform point of view. (...). The closer we study *View of the City Delft*, the more ingenious it seems to us, more carefully calculated regarding the construction, more coherent as far as its component elements are concerned³⁴.

Given its ensemble, the landscape painting of the 17th century seems to have ran down all its possibilities. Especially through the creation of the Netherlands' masters, this art directly addresses nature, inside it, one can find inspiration and true "lessons" about composing colours of light distribution.

Towards the end of this late autumn of humanism, landscape is regarded less as a purpose in itself and more like a background serving pastoral works or gallant celebrations. Thus, in the 18th century, landscape painting starts from the concrete reality – reduced to a mechanistic world whose components can be chopped up in pieces and reassembled according to personal taste - and nature becomes more and more a simple occasion to exhibit the psychic transitions of an artist. In a nutshell, "Nature is subordinate to human being"³⁵. After this process, the desire of idealizing the landscape becomes known by the means of a soul's mood characterized by drama, lyricism and melancholy.

For the first time, one can feel the romantic excitement, the romantic appeal as a poetic inspiration, the romantic vision of the cosmic space. We finally discover the first manifestations of the «romantic realism of light (...)»³⁶.

The works from the 18th century which can be included in the category of landscape were created, on the one hand, by artists like Francesco

³⁴ Idem, p. 38.

³⁵ Friedländer, Max J., *Despre pictură [About Painting]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983, p. 105.

³⁶ Wojciechowski, Aleksander, *Arta peisajului [Landscape Art]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1974, p. 39.

Guardi (1712-1793), Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806) or Jean Siméon Chardin (1699-1779). The imaginary landscapes of these painters foretell both the appearance of sentimentalism, of the fantastic specific to the romantics and also the appearance of the school from Barbizon or the plein-air of the impressionist painting. On the other hand, painters like Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), William Blake (1757-1827) and Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) open the way for modern impressionism and surrealism. By expressing different quests, the works of these artists together form the artistic phenomenon known as proto-romanticism.

The English landscape blossoms in the 18th century by the art of Richard Wilson (1714-1782) – the founder of The British Landscape School that regards Nature through the eyes of Claude Lorrain and Cuyp –, Thomas Girtin (1775-1802) or Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788). Though his preoccupation for being a portrait maker left him little time for the study of Nature, Gainsborough catches natural structures with very much sensitivity, as we can notice, for example, in the work *Mister and Misses Andrews* (1748-1749).



Fig. 16 – *The times of day: The evening*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1821-22, Landesmuseum Hannover

After the dramatic events of the French Revolution, followed by the wars led by Napoleon, the art of landscape knows a major development in the

first part of the 19th century, also being an increasing attraction among the patrons and art collectors. In this period, two great landscape traditions can be underlined – the British and the French - that influence various painters from Europe or North America. In Russia, the landscape finds its expression in the group *The Itinerants*, among whose representatives are Feodor Vasilyev (1850-1873), Ivan Shishkin (1832-1898), Arkhip Kuindzhi (1842-1910) and Nikolai Dubovskoy (1859-1918).

The Landscape School from Norwich, founded by John Crome (1768-1821) and John Sell Cotman (1782-1842) continues the Dutch tradition, producing landscapes, marines and scenes around cities. In the same time, the artists' desire to work outdoors becomes intense.



Fig. 17 – *The Hay Wain*, John Constable, 1821, National Gallery, London.

John Constable (1776-1837), one of the most important representatives of romanticism, has rendered in his landscapes pictorial images of the British province. In his works, we find the influences of Ruisdael, Lorrain and Gainsborough. In its turn, Constable influenced the art of Delacroix and of the paintings reunited under the program of the School of Barbizon. Being passionate about the charm and features of the rural English landscape, Constable made paintings of reduced dimensions, in general, with detailed elements and carefully noticed, but also scenes on large dimensions created in the workshop, after his drafts. One of the features of Constable's painting is the virtuous catching of the dramatism of atmospheric phenomena

and, in this respect, he made numerous studies of the same frame of topic, but having different weather conditions. Outstanding are the works *Landscape with River* (1820) and *The Hay Wain* (1821). The refinement and expressiveness of his landscapes derives from the inspired placement of frames of screens and lights from the cloudy skies, elements which are artistically harmonized with the structures and rhythms present in the lower part of his paintings. The virtuosity of the ensemble and also the delicacy of details trigger powerful emotional answers from the viewers, thus offering the romantic feature of his works.

In *The Hay Wain* (Fig.17), a work that can be seen in the collection of the National Gallery of London, the idillic landscape is built by dividing the painting in two big registers, the upper part is dedicated to the sky with clouds, painted in a variety of shades, taken over from the chromatic of the lower part, where we can see a rustic house typical to the English province of the 20th century and a scene in which a character crosses the waters of a river. Constable establishes a circuit of reading the painting starting from the upper-left part of the work, with the clouds that “melt” in the group of trees that rise above the horizon’s line and frame the house, reflecting themselves in the river waters. The caught reflexions of the trees create a horizontal trajectory which reaches the right area of the painting where the character is placed.

Turner, the illustrious representative of the romantic school, creates an art characterized by a constant intention of catching the clarity and brightness of the represented scenes. On the one hand, the painting of Turner is influenced by the art of Joseph Wright of Derby, Willem de Louthwebourg and Nicolas Poussin; on the other hand, his painting vision creates the premises of the appearance of modernist painting experiments, finding the influences of his conception up to the area of appearance of abstract painting. In this respect, the large surfaces of some of his landscape compositions can be considered an exercise of artistic abstractization. Approaching various environments and painting techniques, Turner managed to preserve the freshness of his early water colours even in the context of oil paintings. Being fascinated by the marine panoramas of the coasts of England, he proliferated in his works the representation of the spectacular games of light and its reflexes on the surface of the sea.

The most often used chromatic scales are composed of yellow, red and different shades of ochre, but colours are placed in a sophisticated game of transparencies. The illuminations full of light are the main feature of the romantic dimension from Turner’s painting, swamping and dissolving forms, transforming them in suggestions which are connected to abstractization.

In *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up* (Fig.18), Turner compositionally organizes the surface of the painting proposing two great interest centres, both of them placed in the lower part of

the canvas. Like in most works having a marine topic, the sky occupies almost three quarters of the surface of the canvas and it is the arena for developing surprising and touching chromatic games, caught given the careful observation of optical phenomena, but also the result of the romantic imagination of the artist. The vase from the left side is balanced by the sun's presence which is violently coloured in shades of red, orange and yellow, close to the horizon line. Both the flagpoles from the left and the reflexes on the sky and the ones of the sun determine two vertical traces, delineating the vertical registers of the painting. The dominant chord is composed of warm tones enchainned in a sinusoidal trajectory that passes through the entire surface of the canvas.

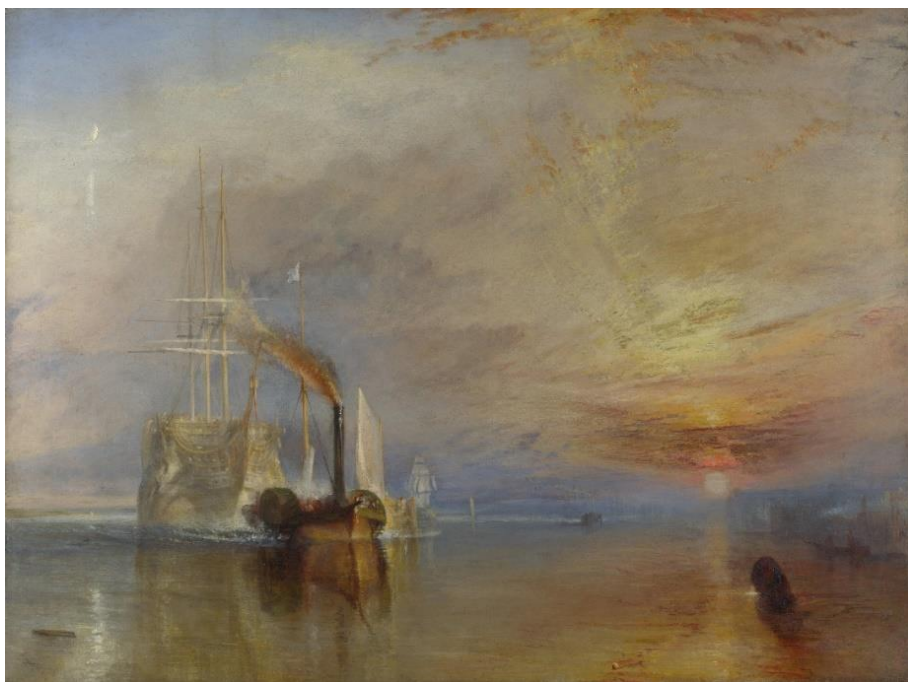


Fig. 18 – *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up*, J. M. W. Turner, 1839, National Gallery, London.

Impressionism appears in the conscience of the careful observer of the entire history of art as being one of the greatest revolutions of artistic thinking and practice. Like any defining moment, impressionism appears as a reaction to a state which no longer corresponds to the cultural and spiritual demands of the moment. Impressionist painters are equally part of the literary circles of the symbolists and this is the reason why, most often, the impressionist and symbolist current were reunited under a common aegis.

Degas, Manet, Renoir, etc., are at the beginning naturalist painters, simple observers of the objective data of the landscapes. They received the support and enthusiastic incentive of Paris literates, first of all of Emile Zola, ever since the period when they cultivate that naturalistic vision born under the *appanage* of symbolism and of the painting of Courbet, but in a more “urbanized” manner, according to the demands of the public from Paris. The first exhibition of the canvas of Manet in 1863 is considered the starting point of the appearance of the true doctrine of the impressionists, the canvas being considered the equivalent of the influence and of the impact that the work of Baudelaire, *Les Fleures du Mal*, had at its time.

As we know, the canvas of Claude Monet “*Impression. Sunrise*” (Fig.19) is the landscape that will give the name to the impressionist trend in 1874 and it will build a new paradigm of the genre. In the same exhibition where the canvas of Monet is presented are also exhibited the first impressionist experiments of Renoir, Cezanne, Pissarro, Sisley or Degas. It has always been underlined, from that moment up to nowadays, that impressionism is not intended to be a school, but a new artistic attitude towards the world of nature. As a normal continuation of Romanticism, the impressionist painting has a powerful emotional dominant, obtained by catching and exulting the normal dimension - and this is why it is fascinating - of the natural landscape. These aspects become the more penetrating in the Parisian conscience of the time the more distant the painting modality and the conception about chromatology launched by impressionism are from the normal rules of historical painting.

Like in all the other great moments of history, in impressionism, nature remains an important source of inspiration and artistic research. The exercises conceptualized by the painting of Cezanne open unlimited horizons to all the artists of modernity and *avant-garde*; the reduction of forms to the principles of tridimensional geometry - the sphere, the cube, the cylinder, the cone -, on the one hand, and the minute observation of optical phenomena generated by the aerial perspective, on the other hand, are the main work pillars from the painting of Cezanne, elements which allow for the appearance of expressionism, cubism, abstract expressionism and, in general, of a new aesthetic of the landscape, of dead nature and compositional portrait. The compositional rigor showed by Cezanne counterbalances the enthusiastic dilution of most impressionists that count of retinal effects.

Even if he is very dedicated and he also dedicates scenes with characters in gardens or in the urban landscape, Monet is well known for his numerous exceptional landscapes which catch fragments of nature. His painting studies envisage the exploitation of the effects of solar light, of shadow and their transposing through complementary colours, charged with luminous intensity and brightness. The observation of the relationship between shadow and cold colours, respectively light and warm tones, can

also be met in the works of some artists which precede the impressionist moment, but Monet pushes these observations up to the limit, thus charging his paintings with an impressive luminous and chromatic energy.

The work *Waterlily Pond, Pink Harmony* (1899) has an obvious ornamental character, by the simple structure of some great registers on the surface of the canvas. Homogenous and distinct artistic structures are made by using a rapid brush, with spontaneous touches and shades harmonized around green and red. The presence of light and air thus becomes an individual reality in the painting of Monet, being a topic in itself, together with the game of points and round shapes of the waterlilies painted in different shades of pink that swamp the feeling of the painting. The arched bridge offers an ascending direction to the entire composition and it is the only element with linear and stable attributes from the painting, augmenting the luxurious effect of the game of the elements belonging to the vegetal world.

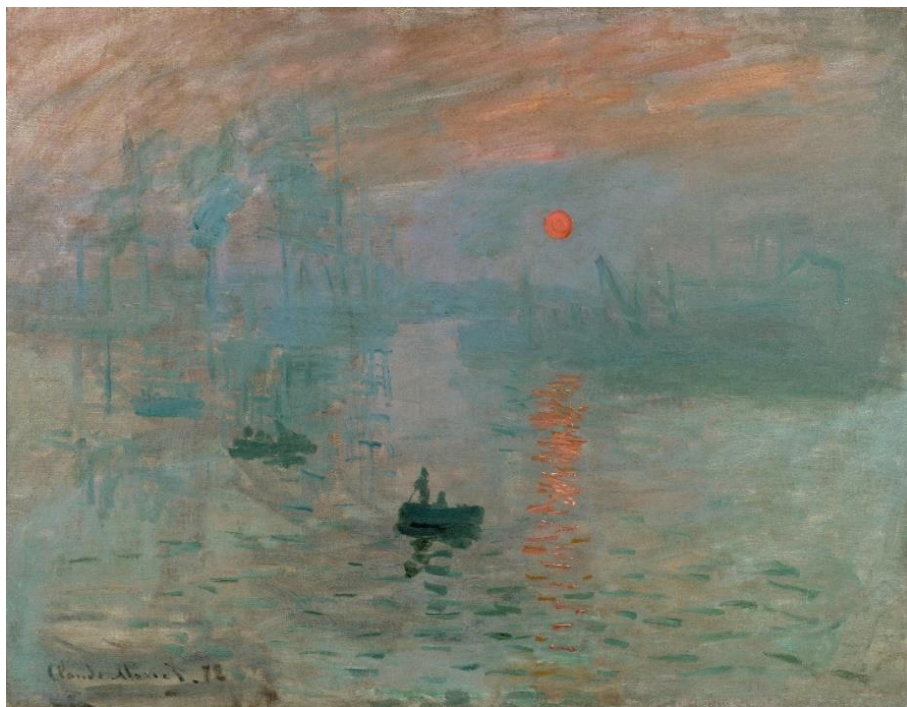


Fig. 19 - *Impression. Sunrise*, Claude Monet, 1872, National Gallery, London.

Most impressionists practice plein-air painting, in order to satisfy their exigency connected to the research and painting experimenting whose purpose is to build some chromatic programs and of painting technique capable of illustrating a new spontaneous, direct but also deep vision. In

order to perceive and simultaneously transpose the *truth* to the beauty of nature and the emotion that this *beauty* stirs in the painter and viewer, regarding the art of the impressionist landscape, sharing the belief that the same painter that has favoured the giving of this name to the artistic trend is also an impressionist landscape painter, *par excellence*.

The natural landscape is today to a reduced extent the support of meditative contemplation - the spring of the artists' melancholy and of ancient, medieval and Renaissance poets - being the support of proliferating tourism which, sometimes, can also have cultural dimensions. The man of large urban communities meets a natural environment once or twice per year and one notices the change of seasons only by adapting oneself to the clothes requirements imposed by the fashion collections promoted by mass-media or through other market mechanisms. Given the circumstances, culture and art - in general - support the same departure from the laws and criteria of natural harmony, reflecting the requirements of a system based on competition, benefit and immediate effect. On this criterion, art has "attributed" the removal from the principles of natural beauty, paying its attention to a world of ideals which are richly placed in a hierarchy, from the highest metaphysical peaks to the deepest levels of decadence. This separation from natural rhythms is sometimes regarded as a factor of modernity, so art is obviously the reflexion of the alert rhythm of all aspects of daily life or of the lack of serenity of the general competitive spirit.

List of illustrations³⁷

Fig. 1 Fresco with a landscape in spring time from the bronze age excavations at Akrotiri on the island of Santorini, Greece, c. 1600 BC.

Fig. 2 *Painted Garden*, fresco, Villa of Livia, detail from the Underground garden room, National Roman Museum, Massimo Palace, Italy, c. 30-20 BC.

Fig. 3 *Guidoriccio da Fogliano at the Siege of Montemassi*, Simone Martini, 1328, Fondazione Musei Senesi, Siena, Italy.

Fig. 4 *St Francis Giving his Mantle to a Poor Man*, Giotto di Bondone, 1295, Basilica of San Francesco d'Assisi, Italy.

Fig. 5 *Effects of Good Government in the Country*, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 1337-1339, Room of the Nine, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.

Fig. 6 *Arno Landscape*, Leonardo da Vinci, 5 August 1473, Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

Fig. 7 *John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, Geertgen tot Sint. Jans, 1490, Gemäldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin. The reproduction is part of a collection of reproductions compiled by The Yorck Project. The compilation

³⁷ All images are faithful photographic reproductions of a two-dimensional, public domain, work of art from Wikimedia Commons <https://commons.wikimedia.org>. The images has been identified by Wikimedia Commons as being free of known restrictions under copyright law, including all related and neighboring rights.

copyright is held by Zenodot Verlagsgesellschaft mbH and licensed under the GNU Free Documentation License.

Fig. 8 *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1480-1490, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, exterior panels.

Fig. 9 *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Hieronymus Bosch, c. 1490-1500, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, interior panels (shutters).

Fig. 10 *The Virgin among a Multitude of Animals*, Albrecht Dürer, pen, ink and watercolor on paper, 1503, Albertina Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 11 *Hunters in the Snow*, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1565, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Fig. 12 *River Landscape with Riders*, Aelbert Cuyp, c. 1653-1657, Gallery of Honour, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Fig. 13 *Atalanta and Meleager Hunting the Calydonian Boar*, Peter Paul Rubens, 1635-1640, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

Fig. 14 *Landscape with Diogenes*, Nicolas Poussin, 1648, Department of Paintings of the Louvre.

Fig. 15 *Landscape with Apollo Guarding the Herds of Admetus*, Claude Lorrain, 1645, Doria Pamphilj Gallery, Rome

Fig. 16 *The times of day: The evening*, Caspar David Friedrich, 1821-22, Landesmuseum Hannover, Hanover, Germany.

Fig. 17 *The Hay Wain*, John Constable, 1821, National Gallery, London.

Fig. 18 *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up*, J. M. W. Turner, 1839, National Gallery, London.

Fig. 19 *Impression. Sunrise*, Claude Monet, 1872, National Gallery, London.

Bibliography

Assunto, Rosario, *Peisajul și estetica [Painting and Aesthetics]*, vol. I, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1986.

Boia, Lucian, *Tinerete fără bătrânețe [Youth without Old Age]*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000.

Cartianu, Virginia, *Miniatura germană [German Miniature]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1982.

Clark, Kenneth, *Arta peisajului [Landscape Art]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1969.

Combe, J., *Jérôme Bosch*, Editions Pierre Tisne, Paris, 1957.

Friedländer, Max J., *Landscape, Portrait, Still-Life: Their Origin and Development*, Schocken Books, New York, Second Printing, 1965.

Friedländer, Max J., *Despre pictură [About Painting]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1983, pp. 36-37.

Hofmann, Werner, *Fundamentele artei moderne [The Basis of Modern Art]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1977.

Nathan Johannes, Zöllner Frank, *Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) The Graphic Work*, Taschen, Bibliotheca Universalis, Köln, 2014 edition.

Pedersen, Olaf, *The Book of Nature*, Vatican Observatory Publications, 1992.

Pleșu, Andrei, *Pitoresc și melancolie. O analiză a sentimentului naturii în cultura europeană [Picturesque and Melancholy. An Analysis of the Feeling of Nature in the European Culture]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009.

Polzer, Joseph, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti's "War and Peace" Murals Revisited; Contributions to the Meaning of the "Good Government Allegory"*, *Artibus Et Historiae*, Vol. 23, No. 45, IRSA Publishing House, Krakow, 2002.

Southard, Edna Carter, *Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Frescoes in the Sala della Pace: A Change of Names*, 24. Bd. H. 3, *Journal Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 1980.

Thiery, Yvonne, *Les peintres flamands de paysage au XVIIe siècle: Des précurseurs à Rubens* (French Edition) [The Landscape Flemish Painters of the 17th Century: the Precursors of Rubens], Lefèbvre et Gillet, 1988.

Vasari, Giorgio, *Viața artiștilor [Lives of the Artists]*, Vol. I, Penguin Publishing House, London, 1987.

Vianu, Tudor, *Opere [Works]*, VI, *Aesthetics*, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1976.

Wojciechowski, Aleksander, *Arta peisajului [Landscape Art]*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1974.

Zöllner, Frank, *Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) The Complete Paintings and Drawings*, Taschen, Köln, 2015 edition.