

„DIALOG” BETWEEN GEOGRAPHIC AND ART LANDSCAPES

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Abstract: The study focuses on the existing relationship between geographical landscape and artistic landscape. The connection painter-environment will be followed starting from the dialogue embedded in the cave paintings until its abstraction in the art of the 20th century painters. The relationship between painter and nature is highlighted through examples taken from the different art movements that make up the history of visual arts. The Nature, this inexhaustible source for pictorial motives and compositions, will be emphasized in this paper through enlightening landmarks that are found in numerous art works. The geographical landscape components have always been a source of artistic emotions and impressions, visible or invisible, concrete or abstract, which are found in the works of visual artists. Together, they highlight the relationship between geographical landscape and artistic landscape.

Key words: impressions, genesis, abstract, geographical reality, chorematic model

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INTRODUCTION

The study investigates the dialogue existing for ages between nature and man, considered as part of it ¹. And if man has been surrounded by things created by nature, having a personal life and the necessary composition to astonish the poets, musicians and painters, then the dialogue has turned into an inexhaustible source of forms for the artistic creation. The man-nature „concert” emphasized by Clark (1969, p. 9) reinforces the dialogue between the nature’s structures and the artist, in our case the visual artist: „trees, flowers, grass, hills, clouds...have been for us objects of pleasure. We have created them in our imagination as a reflex of our moods. And we have come to consider them as belonging to a notion that we called nature. Landscape painting marks the stages through which our concept of nature has passed. Its birth and development starting with Middle Ages belong to a cycle during which the human spirit has tried once again to achieve a harmonious union with the surrounding world”. The same author aims to demonstrate that landscape art has become „independent” and he suggests four types in which artistic landscape can be

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¹ It didn’t take long before man perceived himself as symbol. In many traditions, starting with the most primitive ones, he is seen as a synthesis of the world, a microcosm. He is the center of symbolic world. Many authors, from Upanishads wise men to Christian theologians and alchemist researchers, reported the analogies and correspondences between the elements that animate the human being and those that govern the whole Universe. For some of them, the bones are related to earth, the blood to water, the lungs to air and the head to fire. For others, the nervous system is related to fire, respiratory system to air, blood circulation to water and digestive system to earth. The man is said to reach the three cosmic levels: the earth by his feet, the air by his chest and the Heaven by his head (J. Chevalier, A. Gheerbrant, *Dicționar de simboluri*, Ed. Artemis, Bucharest, translation after the revised and supplemented edition published in 1969 in the "Bouquins" collection).

<http://istgeorelint.uroadea.ro/Reviste/Anale/anale.htm>

conceived: symbolic landscape, realistic landscape, fantastic landscape and idealized landscape. He manages to draw our attention on this classification using only examples taken from certain artistic periods when the landscape was the focal point of the painters. However, the present study is not limited only to the periods of time when the landscape dominated the visual arts, but it begins from the roots, continues with the stem and branches, and ends with the flowers and fruits representing the dialogue which is to be demonstrated.

The idea is also supported by Wojciechowski in his work in which the writer points out that „*the history of landscape painting, in its broad sense, roughly confuses with the history of art*” (Wojciechowski, 1974, p.5). At the same time, he reinforces the undeniable existence of the dialogue between nature and artist over the history of arts, the painter being the one who imposes the rhythm in which the environment becomes part of his creation. „*Nature, as an inexhaustible source of forms, as a model posing for the artist, as a background of dramas and epic stories, represents from ancient times an inexhaustible source of imagination for the visual arts of the entire world. Only the intensity of the interest for this theme differs. The degree of accuracy in expressing the motive on canvas grows or diminishes. The function of the landscape, which can be a basic element or a secondary issue of the pictorial composition, changes as a result of the unfolding of spatial perspective in front of the spectator*” (Wojciechowski, 1974, p. 5).

The numerous works of theory, philosophy, art etc. have addressed the human position in relation with the environment, with the space surrounding him with new visions; thus, man-nature relationship has been identified in different forms and connections. For instance, when Liliane Guerry (1950) theorized the space issues she stressed the connection between the space and the landscape as a structure, building largely on Einstein’s theory (1914) according to which light and matter interact when seen from different reference systems. According with, space, form and dimensions of the objects are correlated with the relative state of arts, or with the reference system.

A continuation of the correlation between artist and nature are the ideas of Gombrich (1981), who emphasizes the moment when the landscape became an artistic genre, making the distinction between the background landscape and the Landscape as „*independent art*”, arguing that the latter gradually emerged from the former.

METHODOLOGY

The research started with the choice and selection of some artistic „*landmarks*” from the history of visual arts, relevant for the present study and meant to consolidate the dialogue between geographical landscape and artistic landscape, which is visible in art throughout the history. At the same time, we pinpointed the dialogue’s coordinates on the methodological axis of each exemplified artist and specified the ways in which the geographical landscape was structured, organized and turned to account. Further, we developed a classification of the dialog between the geographical landscape and the artistic landscape by taking into account its evolution over the centuries.

The study focused on the pictorial space as a coherent phenomenon, shown by the painter either in a figurative or in a non-figurative manner, which depicts the unreal environment, while also including elements from the real world. The research relied heavily on albums and books, both from geographical field and from visual arts, bibliographies, art histories, written evidence left by the artists, reproductions, images taken via Internet from famous museums of the world, specialty sites etc. The research materialized in the many examples selected with the purpose to emphasize the connection between the environment and visual artist.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to get an enlightening picture of the dialogue we proceeded to a chronological classification of the history of landscape art by taking into consideration the landmark elements present in the visual works. We managed to emphasize this harmony by analyzing the sources and the longevity of the dialogue between geographical landscape and artistic landscape, from the first forms of visual expression till the end of the 20th century.

The Genesis Of The Dialogue Between Nature And Art

The first forms of visual expression are found in various caves of the world. It is worth mentioning here the Altamira Cave in Spain, sheltering primitive drawings made about 22000 years B.C. and The Lascaux Cave in France (approximately 15000 years B.C.), in which „*sorcerer artist*” (Debicki et al., 1995) or „*Paleolithic artist*” (Faure, 1970) shyly drew on the walls the first elements of the geographical landscape, which existed beyond the safety offered by the cave (figure 1).



Figure 1. Cave paintings - The Cuciulat Cave (Romania), approximately 15000 years B.C.
(Source: image taken from www.transilvania-online.com)

The Dialogue Nature-Artist In Antiquity

The art of Antiquity was dominated by architecture, which produced various constructions, from Mesopotamian and Egyptian mega structures to the elegant Greek columns and the beauties of the Roman art. In this period, geographical landscape can be seen in the frescoes that decorate the façades of many buildings.

In the art of Ancient Egypt, geographical landscape is conceived as a reality that will be encountered even after death (figure 2).

The painter writes using forms, communicates through colors overlapped into strips called friezes, and uses the el fresco technique (the fresco) when painting the walls of the temples and palaces, but especially those of the tombs and hypogees. Thus, the painting of Ancient Egypt is the essence representing both an artistic period and a part of world culture. The Roman painting, known due to the frescoes unearthed at Pompei (the city destroyed by the Vesuvius eruption in 79 A. D.) and in other locations, continues the representation of geographical landscape, seen in its relationship with mythological scenes or moments of everyday life.



Figure 2. Pharaoh hunting - Theban fresco, 15th century
(Source: image taken from www.sctitube.com)

The Dialogue Between Geographical Landscape And Artistic Landscape In The Art Of The Period Between The 15th And The 18th Centuries

During this period, the dialogue between geographical landscape and artistic landscape goes on. We see again the geographical landscape represented as a decorative background of the figurative compositions. For instance, the natural components of the geographical landscape highlight the portraits or accompany the historical (figure 3), religious or ritual scenes.



Figure 3. The Hunt in the Forest by Paolo Uccello, around 1470, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
(Source: image taken from *Istoria vizuala a artei*, Frontisi, 2003)

Most of the times, the landscape is not just a mere background, but an expression of the environment's components, of the same rank with the human figures. Often, these components continue through form and color the action carried out by the characters present in the painting, thus emphasizing the expressiveness of the forms and compositional movements.



Figure 4. Hunters in the Snow by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1565, oil on canvas, Vienna, Austria
(Source: image taken from 1001 Paintings You Must See Before You Die, Farthing, 2008)



Figure 5. View of Delft by Jan Vermeer, around 1658 – 1660, oil on canvas, Hague
(Source: image taken from www.artgallery.com)

Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque, Classicism and Rococo are artistic movements specific for the period between the 15th and 18th centuries. They had complex and various ways of manifestation, which revived the ancient culture. Besides, the artist acquires the dimension of individual creator, thus turning the art history into a history of artists and their creations. Often, together with the human beings, geographical landscape is a component of the works of the visual artists', which is seen as an object of esthetic and symbolic search.

During this historical period, landscape painting in the Low Countries became a real school for the great masters of the following époques. The Flemish painters emphasize the structure of the rural and town landscapes, as well as the light that will become an element of wonder for the impressionists (figure 4 - 5).

The Emergence Of Geographical Landscape In The 19th Century Art

Of the visual art movements of this century, Romanticism, Realism and Impressionism are the most eloquent and illustrative in terms of the scope of our research, which refers to the dialogue between geographical landscape and artistic representations. Never before was the landscape the focal point of the visual artists' works. Secondary element of the creations belonging to the former époques and background for the main characters, starting with this century the landscape will become a subject and a theme; core of the curiosity and seed of the search of the visual artists, source of inspiration and of fusion with nature itself.

From the multitude of visual works, we made a minimal but precise selection in order to exemplify some landmarks regarding the organization and structure of the geographical landscape in Europe. At the same time, we emphasized the way in which these elements can be interpreted based on the pictorial canvas. Thus, the dialogue can be perceived as a harmonious relationship between nature and painter, in which the latter filters everything in sight through its own perception depending on the environment he lives and works in and the artistic trend to which he belongs.

For the German painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774 - 1840), the native landscape of Germany was one of the most important sources of inspiration for his works. The artist managed to render the sublime power of nature and to fill it with emotional content (figure 6). *„The artist should paint not only what he sees before him, but also what he sees within him. If, however, he sees nothing within him, then he should also refrain from painting that which he sees before him”*.

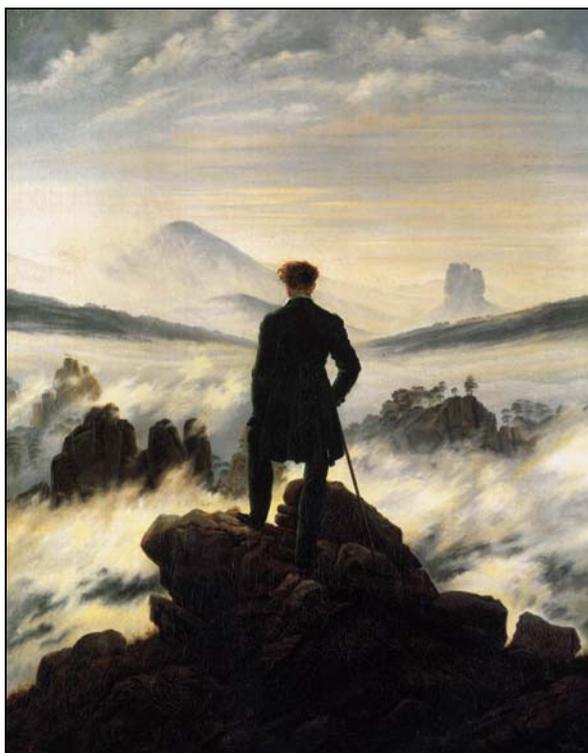


Figure 6. Wanderer above the Sea of Fog, Caspar David Friedrich, 1818, oil on canvas, Hamburg
(Source: image taken from 1001 Paintings You Must See Before You Die, Farthing, 2008)

The century of reactions, as the visual art critics and chroniclers used to call it, the 19th century is rich in works where geographical landscape, be it rural or urban, is central to the compositions. The works mentioned below demonstrate the genuine interest of the visual art masters for the environment and the obvious dialogue between painter and nature. Moreover, the artists wish to capture and express a wide range of feelings, sensations, emotions and real moments of everyday life (figure 7 - 8).



Figure 7. The Boulevard Montmartre on a Winter Morning by Camille Pissarro, 1897, oil on canvas, private collection
(Source: image taken from www.abcgallery.com)



Figure 8. Girls Working in front of the Gate by Nicolae Grigorescu (1838 - 1907),
oil on canvas, The National Art Museum of Romania
(Source: image taken from <http://fr.wikipedia.org>)

Abstraction Of Geographical Landscape In The Art Of The 20th Century

The representation of space, environment and geographical landscape is characterized by freedom in the use of color, by form abstraction and geometry, by diversity of employed materials and by the explosion of genres (figure 9). This critic art, coming like a protest, conveys a message and invites to reflection and philosophical thinking.

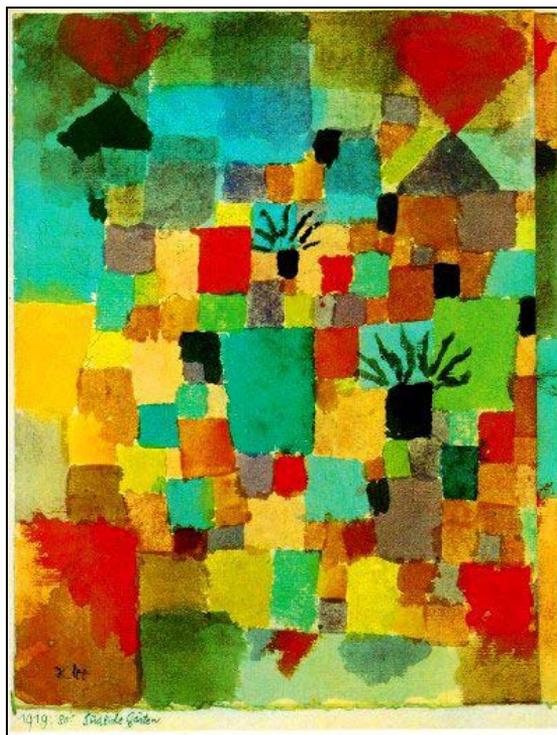


Figure 9. Tunisian Gardens by Paul Klee, 1919, watercolor
(Source: image taken from 1001 Paintings You Must See Before You Die, Farthing, 2008)

Starting from the nature, Paul Klee (1879 - 1940), expressionist painter, writer and graphic artist, was concerned by the psychological and philosophical interpretation of the forms. „*I have admitted as entitled the notion of concrete in the painting and using it I have started a new dimension. I have named the formal elements one by one and in their specific connection I have tried to explain their emergence from this state....*”, confessed Paul Klee on January 26, 1924, at the conference organized on the occasion of its exhibition at the Kunstverein in Jena. The entire discourse mirrors the spiritual position of the artist and his major concern for the geometric form that symbolizes the Universe.

Similarly, geographical reality (including the geographical landscape) suffered an abstraction process in the works of some geographers, who tried to retain the essential from the multitude of features. Without pushing it too far, we think that chorematic modeling developed by Roger Brunet might be the geographers’ reply to the expressionist movement, although the distance in time between the two is about 100 years. Yet, the main difference is that the latter appeared from utilitarian reasons. Today, if we are to analyze some chorematic models (Ianoş, 2000, p.110), without appealing to the accompanying legend, we might find certain similitude with impressionist art. A chorematic model, besides its scientific content, includes a part of the rational feelings, but also the creative and artistic character of the geographer in his endeavor to represent graphically some hidden features of the landscape.

CONCLUSIONS

Through examples and descriptions, we have demonstrated so far the existence of the dialogue between geographical landscape and the artistic landscape understood as a way of expression, as form and color, as a representation of the environment's components and as a method of capturing inexhaustible subjects and themes of reflection. Implicitly, we have confirmed the hypothesis that most of the times geographical landscape was defined in the visual landscape as an argument for the existence of emotions, philosophical concepts, theoretical notions and creative taste. Synthetically, we might express the essence of the dialogue between geographical landscape and artistic landscape through the medium of some remarks that have become famous in the artists' world (figure 10):

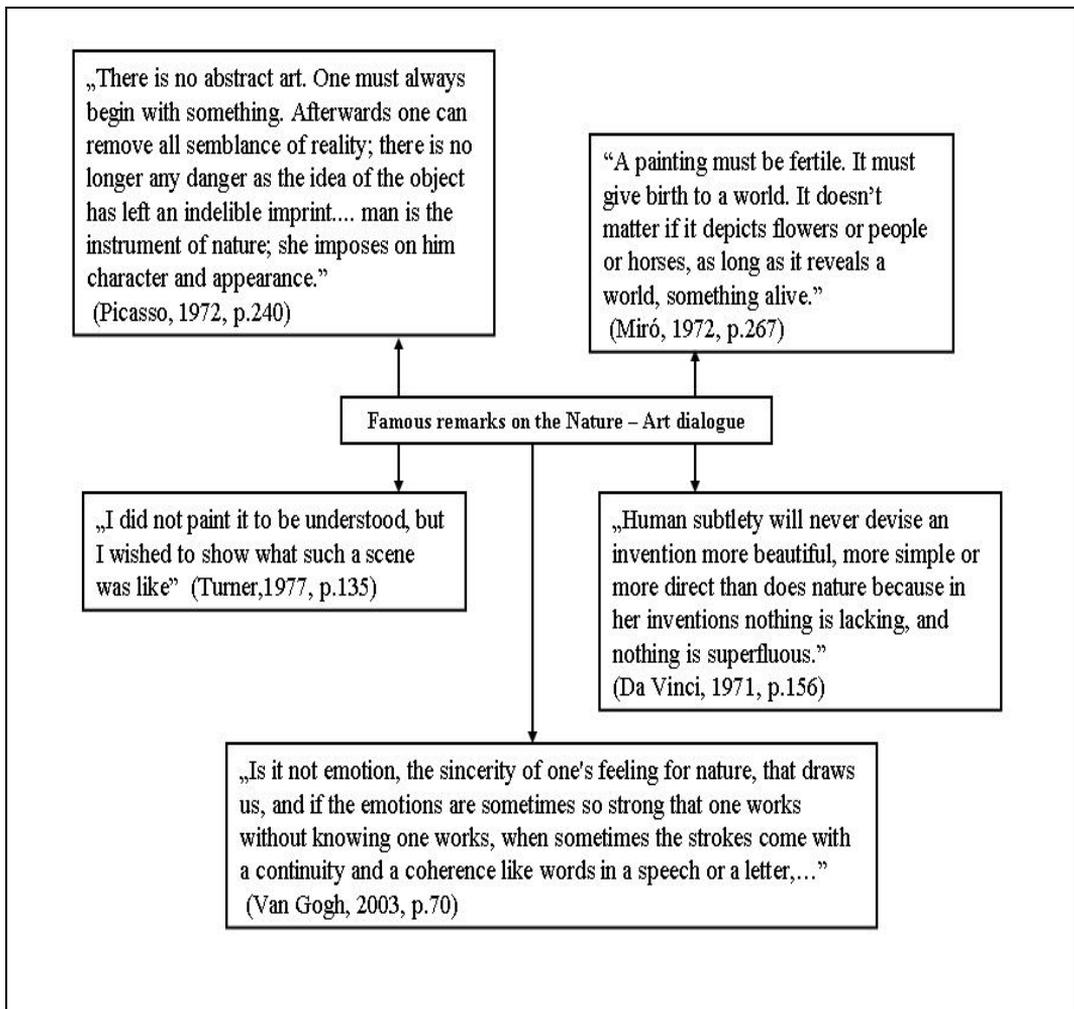


Figura 10. Famous remarks on the Nature – Art dialogue

Despite the artificial environment, contemporary man feels the need to reintegrate himself into nature, and he can do this mainly through his emotional feelings. The artist adds his unique perception in order to amplify and remove from the crowd emotions that are normally undetectable for a common admirer of the landscape. In other words, the artist becomes an agent who delivers the perennial values from nature to society, after having passed them, perhaps, through a divine filter.

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