

Landscape paintings – the distortion of tectonics

The syntagm “abstract landscape”, which we have been using for decades now, is in its essence contradictory. Landscape is, in fact, a motif in visual art and motifs exist only in fine art, which means that abstract landscape is *contradictio in adjecto* – the inner disharmony within the very concept. For some time now, the inspirational impulse of Labin’s painter Vinko Šaina has been the landscape of the Istrian coast, as it has been the case with a large number of Istrian painters, among whom we can mention E. Kokot, Q. Bassani, Đ. Božić or H. Ivančić. However, Šaina’s landscapes have not entirely lost their recognisability, their mimesis, although it is possible to experience them as cosmic, not only terrestrial.

The particularity of these landscapes within not only the Istrian but a wider Croatian artistic environment with the same creative starting points (Gliha, Šimunović, Parać, Dogan, Murtić...) lies in the way they are structured. In actual fact, Šaina does not use the so-called bird’s-eye perspective, the view from above, as it is the case with most authors inspired by the same set of motifs, which is why their pattern is, from the very start, a more or less abstract matrix. What Šaina opts for is a high eye level and a vertical arrangement of elements still identifiable as sky, earth and sea. He structures these sections according to the method of the Romanesque vertical perspective. In other words, what is behind, and therefore hidden from our usual means of perception, ends up being above, thus becoming visually available, like in the case of Byzantine mosaics. In addition to the vertical perspective, he also chooses the chromatic perspective, whose space dynamics (warm colours seemingly approaching one another and cool colours moving away), like the purple and bluish shades of the atmospheric perspective backgrounds, enrich the scenes with a large number of schemes characterised by unimagined plasticity and inner spatiality. Although these are always horizontal compositions which are by definition static, the slight bevels of the paintings (earth) make the surfaces dynamic and more accelerated. Moreover, the central parts of the images are almost always slightly spiral-shaped, appearing to be the richest in their structure and marking the dense rhythm of the shades between the empty spaces and the ones covered with bitumen. By choosing all the elements listed above, Šaina created a brand new mobility of landscape; through the decomposition of its natural tectonics into its components, he created a new one, different and extraordinary, which resists the classical definitions of the opposing categories figurative-abstract. As it happens with the sound that we can model and modulate, in the same way this painter’s landscape became distorted, only to be given again the form of extraordinary dynamic structures which not only reveal the outer source of stimulation but offer also the diagnosis of the inner spiritual conditions.

It is a poetics of the infinite within the finite, the uncertain in the certain and the invisible in the visible. A poetics of sky and earth, the divine and the human in all of us.

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