

LANDSCAPES<sup>25</sup>

All human beings are attracted to nature, even true city dwellers. The need man has to experience fresh air and nature is like a sixth sense, a superior sense he feels spiritually more than physically. This desire to be close to nature arises in man from his deep, distant, subconscious and atavistic memories that make him conceive an ideal nature, which gives an extraordinary sense of well-being.

Perhaps these memories can be traced back to forgotten times when man, more animal-like, was happier with his primitive life that was totally bonded to nature. Or perhaps his memories go even further back and he is vaguely remembering earthly Paradise, now forever gone, where he lived amid trees, plants, animals and flowers. Or maybe it is the premonition of a future paradise that pushes man closer to nature; a good, perfect, beautiful and merciful nature that, through memories and forebodings, is closer to the spirit of man.

The happiness that every man is looking for, to get closer to and possess, is instinctively linked to his idea of ideal nature. It is as if this vision of happiness is surrounded by beautiful and fantastical landscapes, veiled dreamlike images that man contemplates secretly and silently, images that are so dissimilar to reality.

What man loves, after all, is what reminds him of these subconscious visions, visions that are his secret world. A world, present in his mind and instincts, unknown to others, and which cannot be taken away from him.

These images and visions are created in the human mind through premonitions and memories. Premonitions of well-being to be experienced one day in the future and deeply pleasurable memories transmitted to him through atavism.

One cannot say how ancient the dreamlike images of nature are that come from a particular man's spirit. One cannot say if they originate from his birth or if their origin is lost in the infinity of time. The preference man tends to have for the ideal rather than reality and the attachment to visions of a dream-like nature probably explains why man, particularly the city dweller, lives exclusively in contact with imaginary nature. He sees nature with his thoughts, with his spirit, with his instincts. This explains why when he finds himself in front of real nature in the countryside he becomes sad and discontent after a few days or even a few hours. He wants to escape from this real nature that disturbs him with its brutality and imperfections.

The country dweller also has visions of an ideal nature that come from the nature surrounding him. Often, driven by nostalgia, he leaves for distant lands and great cities.

When the country dweller reaches these new and distant lands and cities... he feels deceived and abandoned. The more primitive and instinctive he is, the stronger is his desire to return to his native land and familiar landscapes. He prefers those places familiar to him from birth to those unknown and foreign lands and that are so different from what he had hoped for. But many of these men from the country stay in the city. They often stay out of necessity and then once they have overcome the sadness of the early days remain out of their own free will. These men are probably the most aware and understand the advantages the city offers them. Great cities are a creation of man's intelligence; the intelligence that has created these safe refuges where man can escape from the dangers and cruelty of real nature.

Man has always searched for an imaginary nature, the nature of his visions.

The ancients built parks, gardens (the hanging gardens of Babylon). The Chinese, who in this art form reached the highest level of perfection, built gardens for their kings, which had to be made according to

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25 G. de Chirico, *Paesaggi*, in "L'illustrazione Italiana", Milan 5 July 1942, p. 26; republished signed "Isabella Far" in *Commedia...*, cit., pp. 170-174. Published in English in *Nature According to de Chirico*, cit., pp. 280-281.

depictions of paradise. In ancient poems they often sang about the beauty of phantasmagorical gardens, the beauty of a wonderful nature, and poets composed songs driven by nostalgia for the nature of their dreams. Man had at long last understood that he could finally see an ideal nature only through works of art.

Painting is the art that, above all others, can express the visions of the human mind with clarity, concreteness and evidence.

Painting is the art through which man translates his abstract thought into concrete matter and the images of his spirit into visible and tangible works of art. Musicians and poets create music and poetry, which remain in the domain of thought. They cannot touch, grasp or look at their creations. However, the painter, once he has completed a painting, he has created something that stands there before us in a constant, evident and unchangeable form. A beautiful painting offers the eye and the spirit the work of art as it was created.

Whilst musical creation is always added to and changed by a third party who serves as an intermediary between the original, pure creation and those who listen (instances when the composer plays and directs his own compositions are very rare). A painted work of art is purer, more constant, less convertible than a poem or other written work. Language is quickly transformed. Words change meaning and thought is often distorted, even deformed by the passage of time.

Human eyes always see in the same way and by this, I mean, that intelligent men with an artistic sense can fully appreciate a classical painting. It is not necessary to have any particular artistic knowledge to appreciate the work; all that is needed is the ability to see, the natural ability of sight. Whilst languages are invented and created by man, the eyes show visible things to the spirit, which then must be able to understand what it is seeing to fully appreciate it. Sight does not undergo transformation. It is the spirit that changes and becomes poorer in times of artistic decadence such as ours. Whilst in times of development and artistic renaissance the spirit is rich, articulate and powerful.

Painting is the purest of the arts. This is not to be confused with the purity without meaning, which modernism specialists see in certain paintings of today that are empty, flat and inconsistent. Painting offers itself to our sight and spirit exactly as the artist created it; such purity means that a third party is not needed to interpret it (I apologise to art critics).

This purity and constancy of expression means painting is an art, which more than any other, can express the vision of an ideal nature. Visions of an imaginary nature possessed by great artists and men of genius. These creative visions are stronger, more beautiful and more forceful than the visions that come from the minds of average men. Painters have a privilege, which does not exist for other arts, to be able to render visible these visions and project them into reality.

Primitive painters did not dare to attempt to create a picture that would have represented the sacred nature of their visions. However, these visions were spiritually so strong that they tried to represent this nature as if seen from a certain distance. They depicted nature in the background of their paintings or framed in a window, near to a human figure. We are talking of fairly timid attempts here.

The intelligent and ingenious man wanted to improve and excel in the art of painting and drawing before being able to realise a painting of perfect and divine nature, so as to avoid the pain of delusion.

All the great artists have depicted landscapes in which they have portrayed the nature they desired, the nature of their visions. Poussin, Rubens, Titian and Giorgione have all bequeathed to us a marvellous spectacle of nature that we ourselves seek and desire.

In these paintings everything that is depicted blends together to form a truly perfect harmony:

magnificently monumental trees are, to the plant kingdom, what Greek sculpture is to the kingdom of the human body. The wonderful skies, the beautiful vegetation and mountains, everything that is painted in such works is blended and completed in perfect harmony.

In these paintings, at times, one sees animals and men emanating serenity, superiority and majesty, qualities humans possessed perhaps before they became conscious of evil.

Great artists were in due course able to show in their painted landscapes, images that every man subconsciously and instinctively venerates.

In order to depict perfection the artist had first to reach a state of conscious greatness, a greatness that gave him the authority to paint that which is nearest to God. What profound gratitude toward Universal Talent must have been felt, I say, by these great men; that Universal Talent which is the source of all art and the inspiration of great artists, which, in guiding and supporting their work has allowed them the possibility to wholly realise their venerated visions!

It is more than evident that a landscape must be painted with a superior substance of paint in order to become a work of art with its own ideal meaning. The subject matter attracts one to look and continue to look, opening first the eyes and then the spirit to unlimited perspectives that disappear into space; the spirit, detached, lifts its moorings and wanders far from reality, from banality, from wickedness, from stupidity, far from this earth.

The characteristic aspect of a great painting, made with perfect material, lies in the absence of limits that objects, skies and horizons normally have. This is a strange and unreal phenomenon that leads us to think of infinity and of serene, playful abstraction.

Great art does not have the limits and barriers of reality. It is as beautiful, eternal and infinite as the ideal nature that has always existed and will always exist in our instincts, in our heart and in our spirit.

Neither modern painters nor preachers of modernism who infest our planet and even those refined connoisseurs of the so-called wretched spiritual painting, have ever thought of this aspect of landscape painting.

This is as clearly evident in the paintings of the former as it is in the talk and writings of the latter.