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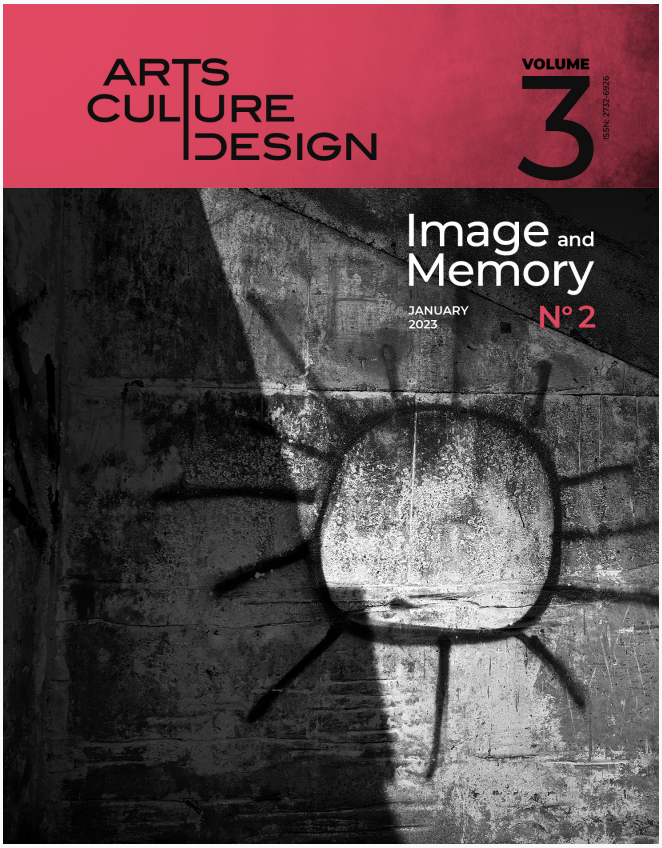

PETER DOIG'S ART AS A SIGNIFICATION OF THE RE-APPEARANCE OF THE SUBLIME IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Eftychia Tzanetoulakou

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ARTICLE

PETER DOIG'S ART AS A SIGNIFICATION OF THE RE-APPEARANCE OF THE SUBLIME IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH LANDSCAPE PAINTING

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PETER DOIG'S ART AS A SIGNIFICATION OF THE RE-APPEARANCE OF THE SUBLIME IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH LANDSCAPE PAINTING

Abstract

Purpose: The core of this research is the multi-layered and diverse presence of the Sublime in art today, as analysed through the oeuvre of Peter Doig, the contemporary British painter who belongs to the stream of the Young British Artists, which was developed in Great Britain in the 1990s.

Topic: The present research begins with the definition of the idea of the Sublime and continues with a historical review of its manifestations in British art. Peter Doig is chosen because it is a suitable field of research into the current image of the Sublime.

Methodology: Peter Doig's work will be thoroughly examined so that the above view can be demonstrated, through a critical analysis of his paintings, and the similarities and differences with the powerful landscape painting of the 19th-century Romanticism that filled the viewer with awe and fear. Doig translates this artistic knowledge into a peculiar, internally experienced image-making that acrobats on the fringes of the established structures of artistic composition, attempting to portray the unpresentable, the timeless, the transcendent, the ambiguous, the illusory, the after-human elements that construct the landscape of Today. The selected works' analysis is based on the immediacy of representation as an independent carrier of energy of human experience, which leads the artist to re-use the medium of painting. The research continues by examining, through its painting techniques but also via his use of photography and ready-made postcards, the ways in which the artist uses the materiality of the medium to test how the seemingly closed boundaries of representation expand into many fields of feeling, reading and understanding a timeless Now.

Result: The research concludes with critical predictions about the directions and the position that the notion of the Sublime may take, starting from the creative codes in the work of Peter Doig. The paper does not seek to build a position based on unshakable, definitive and non-negotiable conclusions, but to constitute an original and thorough academic springboard, with poetic coordinates of aesthetic consideration, in the research on the applications of the painterly Sublime today.

Keywords

sublime
contemporary art
contemporary painting
young British artists
Peter Doig
British landscape painting
contemporary Realism
magical Realism

INTRODUCTION

The Sublime — what exactly does this idea encompass, how is it defined conceptually and how is it visually represented? The Sublime is contained in the enigmatic experience of the intense pleasure that the human condition receives when overwhelmed by images, sensations, thoughts, greater and more powerful than anything the mind thinks it can experience or produce, resulting in feelings of awe and fear.

From classical antiquity to modern times and throughout the diversity of various forms of culture around the world, the Sublime has inspired generations of scholars and artists, while being connected to a wide range of topics from nature and art to politics and religion. Primarily the artistic image that is inspired by the idea of the Sublime, follows the philosophical definition of the concept, which as an aesthetic experience is separated from the Beautiful and the Picturesque. At the same time, due to the aforementioned aesthetic pleasure contained in the feeling of awe, it is also separated from the concepts of the purely melancholic, tragic and terrible.

The concept of the Sublime in contrast with the Everyday, via its osmosis of fear with pleasure, of the positive arising from the negative, is endemic in both texts and paintings, which, by surpassing the first impact on the retina, seek to penetrate deep into the psyche, delving into the Unconscious, making the experience superhuman and supermundane. The Sublime, as it first appeared in the writings of Longinus and was later defined by Burke and Kant, influenced the philosophical thought of Romanticism of the early 19th century, mainly through the impressive landscape expressions of its exponents, is experiencing a great revival nowadays in contemporary painting reflecting an environment that is constantly changing.

Today, the representation of the Sublime rediscovers the image, which, having travelled a path of deconstruction, fragmentation, abstraction and decline, returns dynamically. Before the end of the 20th century, after the development of conceptual art, the controversial theory of the 'death' of painting had started a debate within art, when figurative painting seemed to retreat from the foreground to gain strength and absorb new techniques of artistic creation brought forward by the new forms of installations, multimedia, physical performance and video art. The restoration of representational art during the fin de siècle, followed by the new millennium, was dynamic and conceptually expressive. A possible reason for this triumphant return is the revival of Romanticism, as the revision, in times characterized as uncertain and transitory, of the inner feelings that drive artistic inspiration and reflect feelings of pleasure and existential anxiety, contemplation and aesthetic experience. The re-emergence of Romanticism today will be sought in the work of the contemporary British painter Peter Doig, and his candidacy as a contemporary representative of the idea of the Sublime will be explored.

PETER DOIG, WHEN THE LANDSCAPE TRAVELS THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

Peter Doig, 1959, is considered one of the most important figures of the new landscape. Peter Doig was born in Edinburgh. During the 1980s he studied at the great nurseries of contemporary British art, St. Martin's School of Art and Chelsea School of Art. One of the first artists of the YBA generation, his solo exhibition early in his career at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1991, while simultaneously winning the Whitechapel Artist Prize, gave a great boost to the young artist's career, which culminated in his participation in the prestigious annual award given by the Tate Gallery, the Turner Prize in 1994. With his retrospective at Tate Britain in London in 2008, his career was universally recognized. He is also an example of a successful artist in terms of the sales of his works, as in the years 2007 and 2013 the prices of his works set sales records for a living contemporary visual artist.

During 1989, when Doig was studying at St. Martin's School of Art he came into contact with his fellow students who together would form the visual spring of the Young British Artists (YBA), an open group of iconoclastic artists who re-interpreted the shock of the everyday and the mundane with an exuberant iconographic style, such as Damien Hirst, Tracy Emin and Chris Ofili. Despite all the sensationalist ways of expressing the new language of art that characterized their generation,

the new British art scene mostly relied on the traditional painting medium that had been praised so much by great British painters such as Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon, David Hockney. The common feature between them and Peter Doig is the treatment of painting with as much emotional distance as is necessary to avoid yet another sugar-coated representation of reality.

Like David Hockney before him, Doig chooses to distance himself in order to paint, and in this way to revive a feeling that remained in his mind as an invisible memory of something ideal for him, such as the feeling of vastness across the open Canadian planes he grew up in. The emotional distance is necessary attaining a visual balance, especially when living and working in a crowded and feverish cityscape like that of London and its fast-paced cultural milieu in the first half of the 90s epoch of Cool Britannia.

At the epicentre of his searches, a post-romantic immersion in a secret, inner place is being developed, an emblematic sacred garden (hortus conclusus) that unfolds as an idiosyncratic visual arabesque of fantasy, dream, irrationality.

Through a hyper-realist gaze, as well as his need to return to the painstaking gesture of figurative painting, Doig's iconography bears affinities with early Renaissance attempts to represent a rich newfound naturalism, where at its core lurks a latent atmosphere of theological hubris, through pity and fear when confronted with the smallness of man.

Similar to Dürer, Doig explores with wonderfully minute, almost monastic design detail, botanical realms of dense viridian vegetation, where he will weave his metaphors for the timeless, fundamental metaphysical error of the human condition, around pagan silhouettes, polished with intense emotional activity, characteristic of William Blake but this time more ethereal and non-corporeal, struggling to escape from their own nature, and at the same time yearning to integrate with it. Doig's romantic landscapes are full of distant horizons, waters deep and opaque, and trees standing bare. The impression of superlative scale is enhanced by the use of small human figures, as in Flemish painting. It also relates to early Romantic landscapes, used as the emotive backdrop in mythological, historical and theological scenes, or as a scenographic framework (coulisses) that brings the viewer into the center of the scene. With Casper David Friedrich, the human presence grew in size and the landscape was masterfully staged to be the vessel of a purely Romantic angst, during the Sturm und Drang era.

For Doig, the landscape functions both as a visual support and as the stage where several muted, ambiguous scenes, that walk a tightrope between reality and artificiality, are enacted. The works mainly feature large open landscapes with little or no visible human presence. The inertness they evoke looks back to the personal look of diverse artists such as Gaspar David Friedrich, Claude Monet, Pierre Bonnard, Gustav Klimt, Henry Matisse, Emil Nolde, Edvard Munch. The use of a dull, almost bleached palette that creates a continuous subcutaneous tension between involved emotions and distance, reflects similar visual preoccupations with Doig's contemporary Belgian artist, Luc Tuymans.

The signs that the paint has undergone a struggle before drying on the canvas, are evident, which brings materiality back to the artwork as the expressive conceptual tool that inscribes on the surface, in addition to the memories of the creator and the autonomous memory of the material itself. The sources of the artist's inspiration, even though they do not concern the traditional starting points of Romanticism, i.e., the awe-inspiring landscapes of the end of the 18th century, remain just as idealistic, since, like his predecessors (with Turner as the main exponent), he does not seek to reflect the topography of a particular place but to create a feeling corresponding to the German term 'stimmung' (mood of introspection, attunement of the soul). Accordingly, the sources of Doig's rich iconography come not from a search for the right landscape but from a large archive consisting of photographs, postcards, newspaper clippings, album covers, films. This material, the artist transforms and binds it together, often discolouring it, photocopying it and creating collages, which he will later paint anew. With this process, he opens the everyday to the otherworldly, connecting indeterminate meadows to Arcadian places, eventually forming inescapable landscapes of solitude that seem to swallow the person, in or outside the painting.

The subject matter is deliberately anti-heroic, approaching the banal, such as rowers, vacations, empty buildings, nature, and each of these is presented in a way that while at first seems familiar and a place of vacation, becomes increasingly distant, alienating, out of sync with the reality.

Doig's canoes are not mere boats but long rust-coloured bridges that connect the two realities of the viewer and the painted adventure. The people in them look pale, with long unkempt hair, emaciated, shadowy transporters of souls to another world, the subconscious, the dream, an imaginary unknown beyond. The colours of the atmosphere seem toxically intense, the whites are bleached, the blues frozen, the qualities, occupations and intentions of the people unclear, while nothing seems to happen on first reading, except the image itself, or rather its strange reflection. There is nothing in the work that belongs anywhere, everything seems aloof and incongruous, as if there is nothing that stands concentrated, peaceful or stable. Everything has a strange glow, alluring and deceptive. It is this confusion and hazy emotional atmosphere, but at the same time the creative complications along with the gestating chaos and all that lies between the images, the lines and the meanings, that makes Doig's works bearers of the Sublime.

In his paintings, Doig challenges the viewer to remember if he has ever seen, or has ever experienced the image unfolding before him. The unsettling feeling of déjà vu is common. The memory that someone has once experienced something similar places Doig's works in reality. In a sort of Rorschach blot performance, the painting invites the viewer to decipher aspects of himself. The works seem like a second life, but not in the sense that modern technology gives, for example, through RPGs (Role Playing Games), but through a more refined and at the same time more atmospheric inversion of reality. Doig attempts to create the feeling that the viewer is inside a dream, through the use of inverted colours and design techniques such as the grid, a dream governed by seeming calmness and anticipation as if experiencing the moment vividly and inescapably. Rather than provoking the emotional response directly from the image, Doig's landscapes and the response to them are 'shaped' by the very space of memory, by the dreams left there, which these emotions have raised. Peter Doig's choice of subject matter is interwoven with the style of art creation, banal and sublime at the same time, with an element of surprise interspersed, drawn from disparate sources such as film scenes, album covers and autobiographical elements from photographs, constructing the modern idiom of the casually charming (Solway, 2008).

High and everyday culture, abstraction and realism, the need of constantly seeking a refuge, or the question of what it means to belong somewhere, are issues to analyze, with wilderness or willful exile standing seemingly opposite to each other or meddling within. Although he himself considers painting to be nothing more than a specific placement of colours, it is the color of human absence that is the deepest and most penetrating of all in his painting.

Figure 1. Peter Doig, *Pond Life*, 1993, oil on canvas

IMMERSING INTO THE WORKS

The work *Pond Life*, 1993, [Figure 1] is based on a photograph of a house near the artist's father in the cold Canadian landscape where they had moved as a family for a long time, and it is a motif to which he often returns. The ataraxia of the landscape with an idea of classical perspective leading the eye beyond the house to the horizon could result in yet another representational landscape of the revival of traditional painting. But the result is unexpectedly abstract as the artist leaves behind the documentary role of the photograph and creates a grid of geometric shapes sculpted almost in relief.

White vertical lines that cross the bare trees and are separated in the same shot by a strong horizontal line in the reflection of the building on the frozen lake, form a dreamlike image reminiscent of Van Gogh when he translated the simple wetness of Japanese Ukiyo-e painting with allegorical expressionism.

Doig worked on the piece for three months before adding, as another Pieter Brueghel, the three skating human figures, which only function as coloured buoys that slowly liquefy as they fail to 'climb' the dividing line of the upper part, remaining forever trapped within the transparent flat depth of the shattered glassy ice surface. The light, the shadows, the reflections, the airborne snowflakes (like snow on a television set), the indentations from the ice skates, the vegetation, the people, everything is woven into this crystalline unbroken web (like the women in the upholstered interiors of The Nabis), all focus on an otherworldly form of life that stirs in the heart of the lake, drawing modernist constructivist shapes on the canvas. The visual effect is like an arabesque, extremely rich both in readings and references. The realistic frame of the work and the tonal feel of an old sepia photograph, make even more evident the link between past and present, between reality and image, between the existent and the imaginary, but also between a homeland and a faraway foreign land.

Although abstraction dominates the artist's influences, the way he constructs its painterly synthesis remains recognizable and contributes to the creation of an atmosphere, usually muted and gloomy. The large three-story house on the corner, of a typical North American architectural style, enhances the brooding feeling reminiscent of a Hitchcock movie house. Nevertheless, it is the metaphysical immensity of Canada's landscapes that dominates the artistic memory and translates as the Great Loneliness of the Sublime in Doig's work. Like a young Friedrich, he pushes humans to the brink of their existence, leaving them teetering between personal insignificance and universal immensity. The landscape acts as a host for this immensity, to the point that it exhausts even the color that seems to stretch in order to embrace the infinite and bring its surface to life.
Historically, the landscape motif, as it appears in the medieval manuscripts, over to Leonardo da Vinci, right up to minimalism and conceptual art, is an ideal gymnasium for the artist to practice technical innovation, but also to express the innermost feelings towards the mysterious space that surrounds him. Doig's Romanticism implicitly capture, with its effortless truth reflected in realistic fragments of memory built upon the fleeting moving glimpse of a landscape, familiar and at the same time strange, the reflections on the faceless passers-by who occasionally cross it, expressing a complete absence of irony for the small, unseen dramas taking place (Jones, 1992). And although painting at the end of the 20th century became a tug-of-war of fierce ideological and aesthetic confrontations, like a showcase where everyone projected their idea of what art is, and what can be considered modern or not, Doig treats landscape painting as a natural process of externalizing internal images.

In relation to his pictorial choices, a particular element that underlies several of his works, some of which feature human activities, e.g., *Milky Way, Iron Hill and Red Deer*, (the latter playfully inspired by a banal postcard of the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History), is imbued with a folkloric naïve atmosphere, justified by the willful departure from its sources. This clearly distinguishes him from the faithfully idiomatic style (vernacular genre) of the Flemish landscape painters of the 16th century, bringing him also close to non-establishment artists such as the primitivist Henri Rousseau or early Romantics such as Salvator Rosa. The element of the Naive, which interests the artist is the structural simplification and the formalization of the composition as a whole.
Decorative eccentric elements appear and are repeated as long as they add to the flatness rather than the traditional sense of depth and the need for a 'livelier' transfer of the image on the frame. This combined with the large sizes of the canvases 'tie' the image from a distance, while the colours are chosen directly from the Symbolist vocabulary. The tension of the composition is resolved in this timeless environment that breathes with a pulsating rhythm and places fragments of myth directly into the collective mnemonic, approaching iconic works of archaic allegory such as Henri Matisse's *Dance*, 1909-10. Doig pursues the austerity of expressive means as an instrument in the appearance of the Sublime because it gives him the necessary freedom to externalize specific emotions, without losing his integrity as an avant-garde artist.

Figure 2. Peter Doig
Canoe Lake, 1997,
oil on canvas

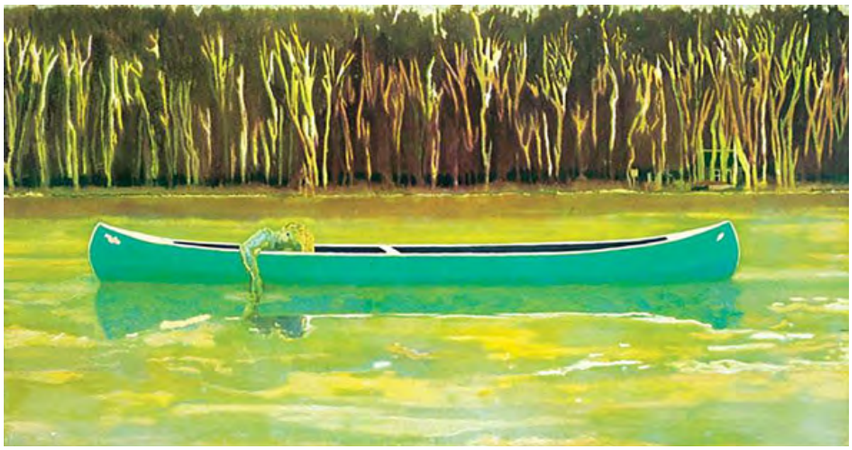

Figure 3. Peter Doig, *Ghost Canoe*, 1991, oil on canvas

Figure 4.
Peter Doig
100 Years Ago, 2000,
oil on canvasvas

The canoe-lake themed works *Ghost Canoe*, 1991, *Canoe-lake*, 1997-98, and *100 Years Ago*, 2000-01, [Figures 2.3.4.] summarize the above ideas as typical examples of his work. The use of individual elements such as the bushes behind the lake suggests the voyeuristic observation of a scene that contains the element of privacy and exclusivity, as if we are peeking into someone else's dreams, staying there and being hypnotized by them. The horizontal, Rothkoesque format in most of the paintings seems to have been cut from a reel of film, a haunting stop-frame from a menacing series of ominous narratives that still carry the terror of loneliness in the original dream.

The colour choice of the background, from yellowish off-white, to pale green and cold grey, is also employed in the shades of the man. Yet the canoe with its strong colour forms a contrast, perhaps because, while the man is seen as part of the background, the canoe is the only medium that separates him from the abyss. Although the person in the canoe seems part of the dream, he seems to be dreaming, a dream within a dream. The latter work is inspired by a rock album cover, while the title is thought to refer to the art history of the previous century, and is characterized by a similar fin-de-siècle tone-deaf anxiety about the times to come.

References to Arnold Böcklin's *Die Toteninsel-The Island of the Dead*, 1881-86, are evident, as is the influence of Van Gogh's *Starry Night*, 1889, [Figure 6] on Doig's existentially galactic *Milky Way*, 1989 -90 [Figure 5].

Figure 5. Peter Doig, *Milky Way*, 1989-90, oil on canvas

Figure 6. Vincent Van Gogh, *Starry Night*, 1889, oil on canvas

Doig in these works has an unexpected conversation with the idiosyncratic realist painter, Edward Hopper. The resignation of human existence, like a Robinson Crusoe forgotten in a canoe in the middle of nowhere, or like a drinker left in a bar in the Midwest in the *Nighthawks* [Figure 7], expressed by a horizontal line intersecting a vertical and surrounding flat colours forming strange reflections in an eerie light, forms the spiritual universes of both Doig and Hopper, and their bona fide landscapes of sublime solitude, that stay in memory just as much as it is needed to change the viewer's worldview. Lonely figures are the par-excellence exponents of a dystopia, which experiences everyday life on the fringes of lost dreams, through one-act visual stories. Those stories form a palimpsest of silent moments overflowing with unutterable emotion, through a visual gaze that circulates unbroken across the canvas and with equal comfort between the adventurous avenues of Romanticism, Realism, Symbolism.

Figure 7.
Edward Hopper
Nighthawks, 1942,
oil on canvas

Despite all the realist rendering, the abstract impression of emotion and the metaphysical, Giorgio de Chirico-like mystical atmosphere of the setting, foreshadows the post-reading of Modernism in representational painting, where the esthete naturalism of the Nouveaux Réalistes meets the deadpan realism of British YBAs. With the cinematographic method of montage, the artist joins the gap between a scene that does not refer to reality with the portrayal of a potentially real event, but also to the narrative one has in one's mind, referring to one's personal archives. Cinema's ability to create stop-frame works of art inspires Doig, as did the fine arts, influencing cinema in the previous century.

The work *Canoe Lake*, 1997, came from observing the dream sequence at the end of the 1980 pop horror film *Friday the 13th*, where the evil lurking inside the boat during a seemingly peaceful boating trip suddenly appears before the viewer. The extroverted symbolism of *Milky Way*, 1989-1990, which attempts to unite the viewer with the universe, here is twisted inwards, in an inner trial that vibrates with an undefined threat akin to *Goya's Sleep of Reason*, 1797, but without the small nightmarish figures peeking around. Here the source of danger is lurking in the subcutaneous tension that exudes from the apparently calm scene.

Figure 8.
Peter Doig
Charley's Space, 1990,
oil on canvas

The sense of fantasy is enhanced in the artist's most peculiar work, *Charley's Space*, 1990 [Figure 8]. Orange snow falling in the twilight leaves a thatched house glowing. A white shadow enters from the lower right corner while an eerie purple circular presence of some indistinct matter, with trees growing on top of it, occupies the center and draws attention within the painting. The artist's purpose in creating this spectral scene is to present viewers with a world behind what is visible. As the artist believes, beyond the influences from movies or books, there is something more primal in painting that has to do with its materiality. Painting is completely non-linguistic, non-descriptive, supra-textual. What he does is to construct something that will form a challenge, something that cannot be expressed in words, or that precedes them, while he will constantly change perceptions, opinions and meaning, in the same way that the canoe is carried away by the flow of water in his works or as the meanings twist into purple vortices. The particular apocalyptic landscape dominated by the metaphysical purple orb is reminiscent of Antoine de Saint-Exupery's outwardly illustrations of The Little Prince that chronicle the loneliness of a planet brought to life through the communication of a flower with a child, as the 'skin' of Doig's work seems to breathe through the perpetual dance of snowflakes.

Another reading is that this enigmatic circle refers to the opening sequence of Orson Welles' landmark 1941 film noir *Citizen Kane*, with its surreal landscape reflected in a falling and shattering glass snowball, while a pair of male lips whisper the mysterious, symbolic word 'Rosebud'. At the same time, it could work as the refraction of an invisible lens that magnifies a piece of reality to explore the hidden image within the circle, awakening the voyeuristic mood of the viewer who attempts to plunge his gaze into the forbidden area of a possible, grand secret. With the project *Concrete Cabin*, 1991, [Figure 9] Doig pays homage to the father of modernism in architecture Le Corbusier (Charles-Édouard Jeanneret 1887-1965), and his demystifying view that buildings are mere machines that serve as shelters, with emphasis on their building materials, glass, steel, cement. In Concrete Cabin, he draws inspiration from his vision of *Unité d'Habitation*, a modernist apartment building in Marseille in 1945.

Figure 9. Peter Doig
Concrete Cabin, 1991, oil on canvas

The painting is only a glimpse of the building, part of which is hidden by the trees in the foreground. Unconstrained by the absent horizon line or the existence of terrain, the image hovers in the space between sensation and memory created in a moment. The rare flowing abundance of the painted surface, where there is not even the smallest part unpainted, recalls the symbolically suffocating decor of The Nabis. In the painterly social commentary of the latter through their Ibsenian claustrophobic interiors, Doig juxtaposes an artificially constructed nature that spreads and branches like a mutated biomorphic organism that swallows Le Corbusier's modernism, condemning it to the fate of architecture, failing to escape from its inevitable natural decay, an ephemeral melancholic elegy of the decline of human creations that Piranesi so eloquently captured in his once-heroic ruins decorated with ruin-lust architectural memento mori or seen in the unfulfilled non-buildings by Étienne-Louis Boullée.

Here modernism collides with nature, as it is presented through traditional landscape painting. The artist does not openly reveal this creative confrontation. He only shows as much as is needed to pose these questions to the viewer, and no more that would distract him from appreciating the moment. Moreover, according to the dream dimension of the artist's works, the dream is the most suitable place where two opposite images can freely coexist.

In *Concrete Cabin*, although at a first reading the concrete volume of the building contrasts with the rich nature around, the glow of the building illuminates the very landscape that its visible entity depends on.

Figure 10.
Peter Doig
Iron Hill, 1991, oil on canvas

Peter Doig's solo exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, which occurred so early in his career as mentioned above, gave rise to the first works of buildings on hills, most comprehensively *Iron Hill*, 1991 [Figure 10]. The artist enlivens the memory of the Canadian landscape of Quebec but also recalls a certain photo of North American houses of Maine from National Geographic, working on a project that overturns the landscape so far. The landscape that unfolds before the viewer's eyes is not a specific place but a well-organized capriccio in the atelier, despite the plain air elements it seems to bring forward with the use of sharp impressionistic brushwork and vivid colours. The original sense of indeterminacy is replaced by a poetic composition that looks back for inspiration to Giotto's landscape backgrounds, when the landscape first comes to life, aiming to climb out of the pages of the *Book of Hours* and be read not transversely but sculpted in winding paths along the way, offering several narratives instead of one.

With greater intensity but via a more schematic structure, early childhood memories are formed in the white of the snow, the dark cypress of the trees and the red of the rust that carves, like a bloody waterfall, the right edge of the canvas, creating a new fantasy landscape, constructing a scene that partly reflects reality, partly borrows from purely cerebral data.

This non-specific nature of the image invites the viewer to mentally participate in its structure, being astounded in front of the Sublime of the unnaturally elevated perspective and superlative scale of the hill that 'absorbs' and dwarfs the hut, a commentary on nature which will always prevail over human forgeries and treasons. The frontal intake of the image is done by collapsing perspective and illusory depth using the very tools of illusion, such as the road on the right, as abstract forms where nothing comes forward and nothing recedes to create some kind of depth of field. The sensation of awe is enhanced by the temporal placement of the scene at the dramatically reflective hour of twilight, which is presented poetically above the horizon line as a blood-red hue occupied with supernatural miracles such as sparkling stars, the glittering reflections of the snow, and the dim lights of the of ridge houses, with their evocative abstract shadows.

Doig's virtuosity lies in his ability to marry the creative process with the image, developing a tension between the content of the canvas and the abstract concepts behind it.

Practically evolving the performance through abstraction, Doig constructs a painting surface with various layers, whose final image is constantly moving and changing.
Translucent films of color are painted over while other colour elements are either dispersed or submerged, seeped or poured into each other, in reptilian mazes on and into the canvas, like a variegated 'tapestry' reminiscent of Monet's late Giverny water lily works. The different levels of color and the rich impasto, characteristic of the great Impressionist painter, create a special state of depth in themselves as in the case of Doig.

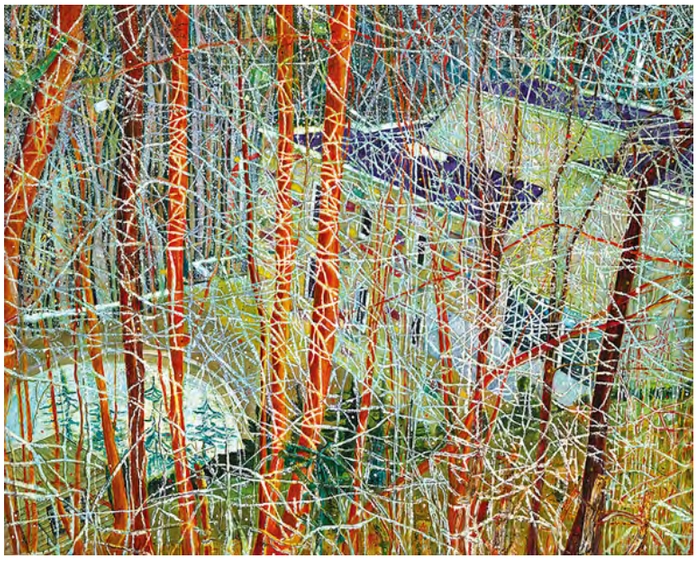

Figure 11.
Peter Doig
The Architect's Home in the Ravine, 1991,
oil on canvas

The skilful use of figurativeness in the foreground houses in Iron Hill coexists with extended abstract areas, often featuring a panspermia of splatters and intentional flecks of colour that recalls Jackson Pollock's flat disturbing surfaces, joining the background with the foreground, as in the *Architect's Home in the Ravine*, 1991, [Figure 11].

Figure 12.
Peter Doig
Daytime Astronomy, 1999,
oil on canvas

The work *Daytime Astronomy*, 1999, [Figure 12] contains all the achievements of Peter Doig's painting explorations and at the same time is a peculiar homage to Jackson Pollock and to a photograph of the artist sitting on the grass in front of his East Hampton studio taken by Hans Namuth. Its geometric structure is dynamic and carries the aura of a glance as if from a window view of a moving car. It is divided into three parts by colour and design. Light and transparent colour back and foreground darkness, and three black horizontal lines, where the great Abstract Expressionist once rested, now stretched like a tightrope between representation and abstraction. In this work, although the design motif is based on Pollock's photograph, Doig's entire world is built upon the three horizontal monographs that cut through the raging vegetation in the foreground, reminiscent of Barnett Newman's recumbent zips which Doig says look like openings that allow the existence of life to be seen but at the same time can also suddenly close it within themselves (Bonaventura, 1994, p. 14).

The thick impasto of the lush vegetation in Klimt's footsteps, gradually degrading into the white, ethereal line at the horizon ridge, which just might be an electric wire, echoes the absorbing quality of colour in the works of Mark Rothko. In Doig's work the pervasive heroism of the epic landscapes in Abstract Expressionism are instilled in an everyday, ephemeral snapshot of man's influence on his environment and vice versa, in apparently familiar but at the same time disturbingly indeterminate environments, nostalgic and at the same time enigmatic (Shiff and Lambert, 2011, p. 323).

This painted snapshot demonstrates the new face of painting, as a melancholic record of the unspeakable, with the humanism of painting now spreading over many levels of visual-mental representation with photographic, cinematic, and virtual reality elements, some of which the artist collects himself and incorporates in his painting practice. But it also works on a higher metaphysical level of perception which is orchestrated by the geometry of the composition, creating a symbolic tripartite elevation, born in the chthonic secrets of the ground, suspended in the ambiguity of the idea of memory[1], when the artist uses his own experience to paint the collective experiences of others. Peter Doig presents us with a painting that can still evoke the feeling of pathos, although the truth no longer emerges like a cataclysmic, apocalyptic event from the depth of the canvas, but momentarily touches upon its unstable, planetary surface, and in her, every meteoric step, reveals the Sublimity of the fragility of existence.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary landscape painter Peter Doig rekindles interest in a landscape that embodies Immanuel Kant's thought as it exudes awe and fear, provoking the philosophical paradox of 'negative pleasure' in the viewer. The murky waters of rivers, where attraction and repulsion liquefy into an ambiguous and timeless form, function as weaning cradles of the unconfirmed present that is life. The artist's colour palette is saturated with ripe autumn grasses, dry and at the same time wet, with the textures thick and impenetrable, and the emotions just as distant and indecipherable the rare instances they appear on the scene. It is the human absence that is the main protagonist, but also the viewer himself, from the particular way the artist uses the viewpoint on eye-level, being the most 'human' element of the works.

The landscape expresses the season of the year with its corresponding weather, like a prelude to a coming event. Winterscapes cover human existence with a transparent atmospheric film, as if life is crystallized in an inescapable cage where the snow never seems to melt, creating a hermetic narrative that the viewer watches through its reflection but cannot penetrate, trapped in a mirror-like mesmeric image.

The iconography develops against a background of complex disorienting decorativeness reminiscent of Klimt, as the artist presents images like photographic snapshots or film frames, sculpted with an aura of timelessness and monumentality, made up with fragments from the chest of dreams.

The design abstractness and the use of grids aim to relinquish the memory of a landscape from some time in the artist's childhood in Canada, when the strange image of the existence of geometric modernist buildings in the natural landscape back then fascinated and at the same time puzzled Doig, who began to perceive architecture as a self-willed entity and as an interesting discontinuity of natural spatial planning. With the image divided into foreground, middle and back, but not necessarily in that order, or in depth, often overlapping or even with multiple points of convergence in the horizon, the familiar becomes open and the viewer feels like a climber on a hill with many peaks, where the experience of the Sublime is always so near and at the same time so far. Doig's landscapes sometimes look like safe havens, sometimes impersonal places of strange events, points of personal narratives, shared experiences and unknown encounters. Their commanding presence, their complex layout, the drama that develops, not so much in front of the eyes but in the mind of the viewer, and the ambiguity of this drama being influenced by humanity but also evolving independent of it, make Peter Doig's landscapes the forerunners of the contemporary re-reading of Romantic landscape painting. The perception and rendering of contemporary painting by Peter Doig has been discussed thoroughly in order to show that the artist succeeds in articulating a new aesthetic proposal that will reflect the image of the society from which it originates, proposing an evolved Meta-Romantic aesthetic as a possible method of viewing images. It focuses on how this art can create open images by proposing a new humanistic model of thinking, expressing a world where we will not have to align so much with shock, but more with the fractured times of today. These images will always be there to remind the viewer that the ceaseless flow of human imagination gives birth to the idea of the Sublime when lined up against its limits.

1. Peter Doig, exhibition catalogue, Tate Britain, 2008, p. 21.

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