An Aesthetics Path
From Giorgione's *Joie de Vivre* to Callas' Cinematographic Opera

Iria-Friné Rivera Vázquez

Abstract

Aesthetics as a transcendental experience is a rare privilege of Art. It is the ultimate expression of Humanity, to the point that it was Stendhal who coined the impression he suggested. It was with him, and his own name, with whom the Stendhal Syndrome was coined precisely for this reason: the effects of the sublime of the work of Art in the spiritual and in the physical in equal parts. This was not an exclusive observation of the 19th century, nor was it a theorization of the 20th century. It is an element that is the fruit of genius and that has acquired a value of increasing dimensions throughout History, being studied, assimilated, considered and used in order to give ornament and splendor for prestige and interest in the public and social spheres. This article is focused precisely on that journey and on the values that were added over time to the concept of "aesthetics". The decision to start this journey from the Renaissance is based on the fact that it was from the sixteenth century when the idea of artistic patronage, splendor and liberality linked to a city or surname, took on a new facet. Of course, this already appeared since Antiquity, but since the fifteenth century such issues began to play a proactive role in what was the birth of the Modern Era. This role was to create an aura that conveyed an idea of taste, but then it morphed into something more: a sense of style, of proceeding, of high-mindedness. Such was its relevance that it maintained its validity, leaving its mark in new artistic media such as cinema and in those, such as opera, in which very different artistic branches meet.

Introduction

It was in the 19th century when some of the personalities appeared who, to a greater extent, elevated the term aesthetics to a lifestyle. It was no longer a philosophical concept as was the case with Kant, nor an idea of the State as with Augustus. Aesthetics now appeared from the pure perspective of Art. And this meant that, above all, Art was understood as a transforming element. For centuries, paintings, sculptures, illustrations or buildings had served to give a face to nations, kingdoms, governments and citizens as a society. But it was in this century when Art was discovered in another facet, which was no less impressive because it was new. It dealt with the idea of aesthetics in life, in the sense in which Art becomes the ultimate goal in shaping existence.

This idea, which at first can be isolating when concentrating above all on the nature of a single individual, nevertheless turned out to be the catalyst for one of the most notable aspects of contemporary times. It's about individuality and personality. In the 20th and 21st centuries such a question would be taken to a Shakespearean level. But its origin, its seed, was in figures such as Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), Luisa Casati (1881-1957) and companies such as the Russian Ballets of Sergéi Diagheliev (1872-1929). In all of them, aesthetics acted as an epicenter, a catharsis or a liberation. The value that all of them gave to Art cannot and should not be underestimated. But this mentality was the result of crossing different ideas that were floating in the air. It was the moment when British Aestheticism and nineteenth-century German philosophy had raised the appreciation of Art to a new existential level. Romanticism had understood the potential that the artistic had in terms of individual projection. At the end of the century such a concept brought Art into life and life as an artistic element. And that included an education, an appreciation of the visual arts, often linked to collecting and public image.

This was by no means new. In Renaissance Italy patronage, public image and Art were a cultural paradigm that evolved over time. But this was also the time when, following the line of anthropocentrism of classical cultures, the individual began to be a value to be taken into account. The same can be said of understanding the experience of a lifestyle surrounded by the ornateness of Beauty, be it fantastic (as in Bomarzo's Sacro Bosco or the Villa di Pratolino) or delicately regal elegance (Versailles). Those were years in which aesthetic impression was understood, cultivated and used. And it was done with such mastery, great works of art were achieved that even today continue to be visual references for very different branches. This article takes a tour of some of them, starting from the Venice of the 16th century to continue through the following centuries observing the way in which Aesthetics has not only been a way to see but also a content to experience.

Return to Venice:
The Human in the Divine and the Divine in the Human

In 1510 the painting *Country Concert* was completed (fig. 1). Giorgione (1477/78-1510) has been cited as his main hand, being Titian (1488/90-1576) his finisher. It is a beautiful work in which one of Giorgione's great steps is captured. His career was distinguished by the use of the *sfumatto* to mold the figures. It is therefore not surprising that his meeting with Leonardo Da Vinci (1542-1519) in 1500 was of great importance, as Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) testifies. Both had begun to explore the possibilities of the atmosphere. Their respective works served to mark the maturity of the Renaissance. The Quatroccento (1350-1464) was predominantly influenced by Florence. Cold colors, delimited outlines, mathematical perspectives, and definite figures are characteristic of the Florentine School. His opposition was the Venetian School. The Cinquecento (1500-1599) was its Golden Age. And Giorgione was the one who started the artistic empire of the Queen of the Seas. It is significant that the Country Concert, although not entirely by him, was completed by Titian. It would be this painter who would complete the triumphant quartet along with Tintoretto and Paolo Veronese (1528-1588).

Even with the difference in style of the three painters, Giorgione, Titian and Tintoretto (1518-1594) cultivated a sense of atmosphere that distinguishes them from Da Vinci. The Tuscan artist printed a classical lees stamp on his work. The Florentine influence is still well noticeable in it: balanced compositions and harmonious and proportionate figures. Its very atmosphere was mainly scientific. His geographical studies and his observations of Nature made him see the way in which the air can modify the perception of people or landscapes at a long distance. La Gioconda (1503-1519) or Bacchus (fig. 2) show to what extent the atmosphere and perspective worked so that it was adjusted by the mechanisms of the human eye. But in the same way, he manages to externalize how enigmatic Nature was for the human being at that time. And even the mystery that lives within the human character itself.

Fig.1. Giorgione – Titian. *Country concert.* 1510. Technique: Oil on panel.
Measurements: 118 x 138 cm. Paris, Louvre Museum.
Copyright: U.S, public domain.

Fig. 2. Leonardo Da Vinci. *Bacchus.* Technique: Oil on canvas.
Measurements: 177 x 115 cm. Paris, Louvre Museum.
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The Venetian triumvirate has the same humanist approach. But its atmosphere does not correspond to science. It corresponds to the Venetian atmosphere. On the streets, in the palaces, in the churches, rich fabrics from the Near East, sumptuous and exclusive shades, embroideries and rare jewels appear one after the other before the eyes of artists. The shine of the blond hair of the abundant manes of the ladies. The climates also educate the eyes. And this had a deep echo in them. As well as the influence of the Flemish artists from the North, from whom they learned to capture fresh and lively colours. But what differentiated Venetian painting already at the gates of Mannerism is its expressiveness. Da Vinci's atmosphere was scientific. That of the Venetians projects the human spirit. *The Country Concert* is an image that celebrates life. Alludes to freedom and the five senses. And the atmosphere contributes to it: the silks and the air caress the bodies, the mind and the ears rest with the music, the sight is delighted with the calm landscape and the fruits and the fresh milk allude to the taste, while the grass—turned into an embroidered rug—recreate the sense of smell. The figures are perfectly integrated into the landscape, without appearing rigid. (Until then, the landscape was made based on the figures represented). For the first time the landscape breathes, as do the people in it. And so the atmosphere becomes relevant: it is not just a scientific consequence. It is a plastic element with its own entity.

Titian elevated it to the lyrical. No wonder his paintings—especially mythological—due to the warm and bright atmosphere were called *Ut pictura poesis*. But if Titian is the bright side, Tintoretto is its dark reflection. His diagonal perspectives from him contribute to the dramatic sense of his paintings. Tintoretto stages stories. But like any setting, he makes use of atmospheres: dense, contrasting and that give a pictorial reply to the sculptural terribilitá of Michelangelo (1475-1564). The hedonistic atmosphere that characterized Giorgione and most of Titian's productions is here metamorphosed. The light, the air energetically points out exceptional situations of the human being. But what it does is complete his humanist approach, in his case in the context influenced by the precepts of the Counter-Reformation Ecumenical Council of Trent (1545-1563) and the Wars of Religion (1562-1598).

Mystery and Splendor:
Between the Symbolic Portraiture of Elizabeth I and the Staging of Caravaggio and Bernini

Paradise (1579-1582) and *The Coronation of the Virgin* (1587-1588) are among Tintoretto's last works. In them the spaces are bathed in a golden light. Light that bathes hundreds of characters, standing out in the center and in a higher position than the greatest figures. It is a vision in which the Eternal is contemplated. But it is not about calm images, crystalline atmospheres. Within the order there is dynamism. In figuration there is expressiveness. In the colors, carefully rendered, the folds make them rhetorical. Visual ideas that influenced a new generation of artists. Michelangelo Merisi di Caravaggio was born in Milan in 1571, Peter Paul Rubens was born in Siegen in 1577, and Gian Lorenzo Bernini in Naples in 1598. The weight of the Venetian triumvirate was so important in that generation that it absorbed their teachings until they were able to recreate their respective styles with a new dimension.

That symbolic sense of the atmosphere, so vibrant and sonorous, has its own composition. Always part of the contrast (the warm tone and the cold tone, the color white and the color black, the small and the large figure). Such an emphasis is strongly influenced by one of the purposes of Trent. This was the constant cultivation of the sacred image of Catholicism in the face of Protestant iconoclasm. And yet, in both spheres images with atmospheres equal in symbolic power were produced. The ideas that they wanted to represent were close and understandable: the fight between Good and Evil, the triumph of Good, the joy of being chosen by God, the responsibility towards the execution of the divine mission and the power of Providence. The atmospheres would serve a vital task: eliminate emotional and intellectual distance. Draw the viewer into a visual understanding of what he is about to witness. The contrasts would serve to indicate identifying shapes and colors. The atmosphere, already developed at the end of the 16th century, was sufficiently developed to play an active role.

A sample of the way in which said sophistication materialized can be seen in the portraiture of Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603). In the last twenty years of her reign, her Court was enriched by the presence of British, German and Flemish artists who came from the European continent. The Court was a source of patronage. And, with a kingdom that enjoyed internal peace, numerous Huguenots, Calvinists and Lutherans found a refuge there. There the religious creed was practiced according to the knowledge, reading and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures in an individual and direct way. Derived from it were the freedom and personal awareness to understand human nature, finding a way to behave in life. This is how the portraits of the Sovereign became more complex, as they integrated reinterpreted artistic, religious, intellectual and political ideas and influences.

Fig. 3. Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger. *Portrait of Elizabeth I.* 1592.
Technique: Oil on canvas. Measurements: 241.3 cm x 152.4 cm.
London, The National Portrait Gallery. Copyright: U.S, public domain.

The Portrait of Elizabeth I (Ditchley Portrait), painted in 1592 by the Flemish painter Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (1561/62-1636), is a case in point (fig. 3). It is one of the most sumptuous portraits of the Queen. On the canvas you can see her enormous figure occupying the central axis of the composition. Her feet rest on Ditchley County, but the breadth of her land is matched by the breadth of her kingdom. The optical illusion of her makes her at first appear like she is on a map to the ground. But, in reality, she is on the face of the Earth: you can see the terrestrial sphere on which her ships sail (in smaller dimensions) through the great ocean.

The Queen here is represented according to the medieval theory of Monarchy. The sovereigns are two bodies: the ephemeral (mortal) body and the eternal (divine) body. She is the *Fidei Defensor* (Defender of the Faith), the Head of the Church of England. In this portrait Elizabeth I is the being that decides Nature, the same as God as Creator. She is what separates Good from Evil. Her presence drives away where darkness sets. She ignores Evil—she turns her back on the clouds that flood with uncontrolled rains and the skies are cracked by lightning in storms. And, before her face, the Sun opens. The clouds are clear and clean, moving letting the pure light bathe the Earth. With her, Nature is in favor, driving her kingdom beyond her geographical limits to extend throughout the world. She is, at the same time, a symbol of universal leadership, that of a naval power and that of a virtuous model. The white silk, embroidered with pearls, gives off so much light that it becomes a ray of the sun itself.

The atmosphere here is double: transparent in the foreground and contrasting in the background. The reason for the first is that she wanted to make what she had to stand out legible. The reason for the second is that the contrast makes the person of the Queen stand out, accentuating the significance of each side of her. The character of both sides was marked with mottos in Latin. The light atmosphere—a combination of blues, silvers, whites and golds—has *Da* (*illegible*) *expectat* (She gives and does not wait) written in gold and the dark atmosphere—in black and gold—has the golden motto *Potest nec ulciscitur* (She can but does not come). On the bottom right is written *Reddendo* (By giving back, she increases). Just as relevant as this is the painted text in the bottom right in which she is called "The Prince of Light." An aspect that was added from this painting to her *dramatis personae* and that would reach its zenith in the *Portrait of the Rainbow* (1600-1602, Isaac Oliver/Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger). In these latest portraits, the action is not found in moving bodies, but in psychological gestures in epic atmospheres on large canvases.

A year after the completion of the *Ditchley Portrait*, in 1599 Caravaggio was commissioned to begin a cycle of three paintings on the life of Saint Matthew. Said cycle would be arranged in a unitary way on the marble walls of the Capella Contarelli of the Church of Saint Louis of the French in Rome. In 1601 he painted the central work, called *The vocation of Saint Matthew* (fig. 4). The figures are in a completely dark room. Only when Christ enters, pointing to Matthew, is there a ray of light that illuminates the apostle. The light stands out in an environment plunged in darkness, illuminating a man immersed in an ordinary life. It is the moment in which Matthew makes the decision to follow Christ and leave behind everything he was. It is a scene with a gesture language as understandable and familiar as that of Elizabeth I. The difference is that this is a naturalistic interpretation, while the Queen's was intellectual.

The atmosphere is dry, harsh and austere. Once again it is applied to show the virtuous model, but in this case it is about making the spectators observe that anyone—whoever they are—can be called to glory. That it is something that they can make their own and have their own vocation within the divine dictate—and in turn, of their representatives on Earth. Large dimensions are used, in which small psychological gestures can be seen as contrasting as the atmosphere. The element of action is found by following the ray of light: they can be observed decision, doubt, surprise, expectation, observation and indifference in a chain. A whole range of emotions that stand out from the darkness, the same with the *grandeur* of a high relief on an ancient frieze or the intimacy of a meeting in a Roman house from 1600.

Fig. 4. Michelangelo Merisi di Caravaggio. *The vocation of Saint Matthew*. 1601. Technique: Oil on canvas. Measurements: 3.38 x 3.48 cm. Rome, Capella Contarelli of the Church of Saint Louis of the French. Copyright: U.S, public domain.

The references and comments made so far revolved around pictorial works. But the atmosphere was an element that, in the 17th century, found a new setting. It was Bernini who introduced it to architecture and sculpture. He combined both by creating three-dimensional paintings, as was the case with his approach to the Cappella Cornaro (fig. 5) between 1644 and 1651 in the Church of Santa Maria della Victoria in Rome. He reached his *bel composto* by turning a reduced space located to the left of the altar into a dramatization of beauty, fullness, dedication and discovery in a woman. The side walls served to place on each side the friezes that represented the members of the Cornaro Family. Friezes in which they appear seated under a dome, while they observe the moment in which some rays of light bathe the person of Teresa de Ávila (1515-1582).

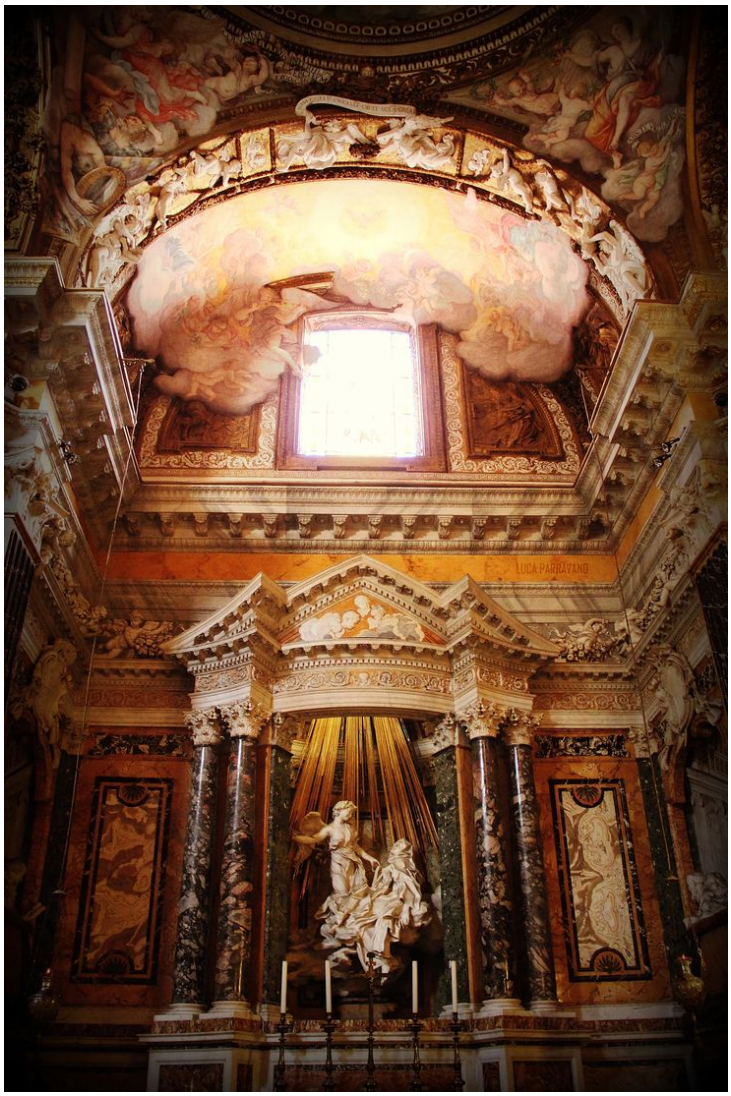

Fig. 5. Gian Lorenzo Bernini. *Capella Cornaro, with the sculpture of Teresa of Ávila's transverberation*. 1644-1651. Rome, Church of Saint Mary of Victory.

Golden light slides down the white robe folded over her suspended body. An angel has an arrow with the tip of fire in the air, which he makes enter and leave his heart. Teresa of Ávila remains with her body in lethargy. She watches through narrowed eyes, overwhelmed by what she is about to experience. And she opens her mouth to make, with her spirit carried away from her, a sound of wonder. She shows herself as God makes himself discovered in a woman without a major title or status. Grace and Salvation reach everyone, in ways as wonderful as the language of Love.

The atmosphere that Bernini achieved was a combination of grandeur and intimacy. He empowered the extension of the height, reserving the extensive roof for the clouds and the angels. The huge window allows natural light to enter and the majestic circular pediment serves as a screen to channel part of that light. He caused it to reflect off the gilt bronze rods as an aura. Thus, from his superior position, God opens the clouds to let his presence be felt in a constantly moving light. And through one of his angels, he shows Teresa of Ávila the infinity of his Love. The reasons that impel God to do so appear in the declaration of love written between clouds: *Nisi coelum creassem ob te solam crearem* (if he had not created the honey, I would create it now just for you).

The ingenuity and femininity with which it was raised fit perfectly with the work of Teresa of Ávila. She also had the gift of writing situations visually. Bernini felt inspired by this and tried to adjust the figure of the saint to one of the written paragraphs of her *Book of Life* (1562-1565). The atmosphere that was typical of her—fervent of hers—moved her through physical aspects, colors and lighting effects. The central scene in the chapel is an experience that many women and men would have understood in its profane sense. And it was something that, with Trent, could be seen as parallel to what could be achieved with divine love. The colors are warm (red, chestnut, gold) and pure (white), similar to those of your own room. But that in the veined marbles and the golden bronze make it a luxurious space.

Humanity and divinity. Contemplation and burning. Simplicity and abundance. Wit and instinct. Contrasts, as happened in the *Portrait of Elizabeth I* and in *The vocation of Saint Matthew.* But here it is integrated into the architecture from the *composto*. However, the atmosphere here recreated by Bernini also showed another facet that was yet to be revealed. This is the ability to show the Truth of a character. The one that the atmosphere can discover the depths of a human being. And that the artist goes into, analyzes and captures that personality, emerging beyond his position in the world.

From Daily Notes to Metaphor: Velázquez and Goya

The faithful representation of a person was a highly valued aspect. But there were few capable of doing it. When saying "reliable" in an artist, it is about being able to capture his physical appearance in a non-superficial way. He should be able to project the internal energy of a gesture. But also of the spirit that animated him. Individuality was a growing value since the Renaissance, which was evident in portraits (*Diane de Poitiers*, 1571, by François Clouet) and the effigies themselves (*Self-portrait*, 1500, Albrecht Dürer). Being able to show spirit became a topic to explore. And with it the atmosphere took a specialization that had infinite repercussions.

Those with a singular gift for it became referents. It is possible to make a magnificent portrait, painting or sculpting in a harmonious, proportionate way. But recreating an atmosphere that projects a state of mind entails being the one to tell a story from silence. The atmosphere is concentrated and analytical. This is what happens in Rembrandt (1606-1669). In his *Scholar in Meditation* (fig. 6) he shows the reflective spirit of the figure. Not on the man himself, but on the entire room he is in. Soft, nuanced golden light blends into dark shadows. The air blurs the only two people, highlighting the spiral staircase. In this silence his head concentrates on abstractions, intertwining conflicting ideas about existence. And this translates into light transitions, twists and turns, as well as the predominant warmth, which communicate the mind of the scholar. This atmospheric concept was typical of him and of another great Baroque painter, Diego Velázquez (1599-1660). His canvases, with each year, acquired a psychological atmosphere of greater subtlety and elegance. It was a highly appreciated value considering that his portraits were emperors and aristocrats. The images that he made thus enhanced the natural dignity of the Court without falling into pomposity.

Fig. 6. Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. *Scholar in meditation*. 1632. Technique: Oil on canvas. Measurements: 28 x 34 cm. Paris, Louvre Museum. Copyright: U.S, public domain.

Velázquez made two great trips to the Italian Peninsula. Both served to broaden his pictorial knowledge, taking great interest in the Venetians. (He was a great admirer of Titian and Tintoretto). He extended his stay between 1649 and 1651. It was then that he produced the *Portrait of Innocent X* (fig. 7) in 1650. The Pope posed for Velázquez in his robes of red and white silk, embroidered with lace. He is seated in an upholstered chair embellished with gold leaf. His aesthetics are noble and excellent, something that the painter represented with the greatest fidelity. He painted the light sliding through the silk, the brightness of the fabric, the different tones produced by the folding of the fabric. Velázquez noticed the soft undulations in the fall of the white tunic…the drama that it generates due to its contrast with the dark red of the background. And the festivity produced by the combination of white and gold.

The only discordant note is that the face of the person who wears this clothing, who occupies this space, does not match the nobility of the aesthetics. Velázquez does not accentuate or soften anything. He merely represents what he sees in this person: his ruthlessness, ambition, mistrust, and talent for intrigue. Necessary to reach a position like the one he holds. There is nothing particularly constructive in it. The light is direct on the figure of Innocent X, and the atmosphere is revealing. The artist did not wish to criticize the Pope. (The reference he had taken were the portraits of Julius II (1511-1512) and Leo X (1518-1519) by Raphael Sanzio (1483-1520). He Created from the Truth of Innocent X, revealing the nature of the person and the exercise of it in the institution.

Fig. 7. Diego Velázquez. *Portrait of Innocent X.* 1650. Technique: Oil on canvas. Measurements: 140 x 120 cm. Rome, Doria Pamphili Gallery.

The atmospheres of the two previous works are important because they show to what extent this began to be used to show human nature. But, at the same time, he began to place it in a place beyond social position. It began to display feelings, personalities, and attitudes. It began to reveal pretensions, the vision that people have of themselves and the world. And the artist who brought this to symbolism to a greater extent was Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828). His works clearly show his intellectual nature: he was an artist of the Enlightenment and a fervent admirer of Velázquez. Where the painter of Felipe IV (1605-1665) had balanced the character of his portraits and his position—highlighting above all his dignity—, Goya continued in his footsteps.

His aristocratic portraits and of Spanish monarchs—for example the *Portrait of the Dukes of Osuna and their Children* (1788) or the *Portrait of Charless IV in Red* (1789)—can be placed on a par with the portrait works of Thomas Gainsborough (*Mr and Mrs William Hallet* (1785), Sir Joshua Reynolds (*Portrait of The Duchess of Devonshire and her daughter Lady Georgiana Cavendish* (1785), Marie-Louise Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (*Portrait of Charles-Alexandre de Calonne* (1784), *Portrait of the Queen Marie Antoinette Seated, in a Blue Velvet Dress and with a Book in Her Hand* (1788) and Jacques-Louis David (*Portrait of Antoine Lavoisier and His Wife, Marie-Anne Pierrette Paulze* (1788). Goya worked mostly in prints. Velázquez had already begun to experiment with a technique of stains to try to reflect the effects of light and air, Goya continued with it, in such a way that he managed to capture vaporous effects in the backgrounds, translucent in women's dresses, iridescent in costumes male bright and bright in jewelry and embroidery. The atmospheres, in short, served to expose the best of the people who posed.

Velázquez had shown the Truth adjusting to the virtue of honesty of spirit, a trait that Renaissance culture and education had inculcated. Due to the protocol of the Spanish Court—rigorously regularized, private around the space of the monarch and representative of the imperial power—, Velázquez had to take into account the emphatic respect that he was imposed. The naturalness that he included was, in fact, the element that managed to soften said severity to emphasize a natural dignity. Goya was well aware of this. More his environment was that of enlightened circles, where the ethical message mattered a lot. The secular, pragmatic, legislative-representative and scientific values of the Baron de Montesquieu (1689-1755), Voltaire (1694-1778), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Denis Diderot (1713 -1784) and the project of the *Encyclopedia* (1751-1772) were in the air. The cultivation of naturalness continued, so that continuity in style was possible. What the change signals is that the atmosphere no longer implied inexorably the exaltation of rank, environment or talent. The atmosphere began to manifest the coherence (or incoherence) between the positions of power and the people who occupied them.

Fig. 8. Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes. *The family of Charles IV*. 1800. Technique: Oil on canvas. Measurements: 280 x 336 cm. Madrid, Prado Museum. Copyright: U.S, public domain.

The Portrait of the Family of Charles IV (fig. 8) is one of Goya's best works. One of his paintings that best shows what was explained. Taking the reference from the canvas *The Family of Phillip IV* (also known as *The Meninas* (1656) by Velázquez, the King's family appears bathed in a golden light. The headdresses, silks and embroidered gold dazzle in the light, as much as they clearly see the simple, vain, capricious and insignificant faces. When Goya painted this portrait, the French Revolution (1789-1799) had left its mark on Europe and America. And far from even carrying out social, economic or political reforms, the decisions that were taken from the royal cabinet were for personal interests instead of the benefit of the kingdom and the Empire. Goya showed his rejection of the influence of such characters by placing himself in the dark, turning his back on this family. Gestures were used again instinctive, the psychological study and its expression on large canvases, but in 1800 these same characteristics opened up a new perception that heralded the Contemporary Era.

Dream and Reality: The Evocative of Romanticism

Goya was the bridge between two centuries. His atmosphere was analytical, until he entered his phase of the Terrible Sublime with the so-called Black Paintings (1819-1823). These are the years in which the incipient Romanticism, born in 1760, had entered a new phase. The atmospheres that until then had served to show individuality with an analytical message, now began a total revolution with Romanticism.

The concept "artist" became independent in its assessment. It was no longer a Count, a Baron, an Archduke, a Viscount, a King, a Viceroy, a Court or the Church that set the tone. Of course, there continued to be an official art directed by, for and from the new bourgeoisie, the aristocracy, royalty and the ecclesiastical state—that of the Neoclassicism of the First French Empire (1805-1814/1815), the Art of the Salons, that of the official portraitists, the painters, architects and sculptors of the Second French Empire (1852-1870), the pompiers, the academicists. But Romanticism proposed a radically new perspective, which was the one that in many aspects led to an evolution equal to that of society. In the 19th century, the Romantics, the Nazarenes, Pre-Raphaelism, Impressionism, Symbolism, Post-Impressionism and Decadence arose. Essential difference between them: those belonging to official art always sought the pleasure of the image. The seconds the evocation. And of the two, it was the evocative ones who left an indelible artistic imaginary.

If there is an artist with whom to explain the new atmosphere, it is Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840). His landscapes contain an atmosphere in which the human being is not projected into it. The world is not his imagination. It is Nature that dominates everything, and the human being is immersed in that domain. His paintings are a vivid reflection of the ideas of the Jena Circle, specifically of authors such as Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1743) and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Von Schelling (1775-1854). The atmospheres transfer that infinity, as seen in *Monk of him on the seashore* (fig. 9).

There are no spaces crowded with figures, no great masses of trees to surround a palace. There are no central figures. Mist floats over the sea, larger than life itself. It is so abstract that only Joseph Mallord William Turner (his *Landscape with a River and a Bay in the Background* (1845) is an exemplary reference in this case) can be compared in atmospheric sensitivity. You can't see anything: just feel the humidity that sinks into your bones, the drizzle posing on your hair, the cold that immobilizes your muscles. But, above all, freedom: the wind against the unruly waves, the heavy clouds against the rain. Everything resonates with the human mind as one more aspect among the forces of Nature. Forces that

coexist with each other, fight with each other, combine, kill each other, are reborn and kill each other again. It is a painting that begins to show more than just individuality in a tangible way. He shows her in her most restless, conscious and introspective facet. In short: he begins to show the human being entirely. With his internal conflicts, his needs, his desires and his resolutions.

Fig. 9. Caspar David Friedrich. *Monk by the sea*. 1808-1810. Technique: Oil on canvas. Measurements: 110 x 171.5 cm. Berlin, Alte Nationalgalerie. Copyright: U.S, public domain.

The artists who took this exploration to the fullest were the symbolists. The impressionists explored the atmospheres from the decomposition of objects and people from light. But his landscapes, portraits, everyday scenes, and still lifes were reality as it was. Symbolism proposed another kind of atmosphere. Such were more figurative, but the use of light, darkness, colors and textures gave rise to a plastic language. Theme and image were on par. How then could personifications be conceived as Sin (fig. 10)? The female figure is visible in naked white skin, attracting the eye. But her gaze remains in the dark, along with the reptile that covers her. It is an image that invades the viewer. Not because he overwhelms him, but because they are waiting: he just needs to stand before them. Everything attracts him: the light has a single focus among the darkness (ie, the chest). The soft skin of the lady contrasts with the shine of the snake. The only thing different is the hellfire-like red behind both.

There is no pedagogical sense that works of a religious nature could give it. It is about symbolically representing the repressive claustrophobia, the implacable and constant sensation, the perception of danger. It is a sample of the way in which human beings can transform what is natural-sexuality, and female sexuality specifically—into something torturing due to conventions. The artist decided to represent such a vision by proudly showing "evil" through shadows, cold lights, female figures without a differential aspect and slimy animals gliding over them. If this image causes fear, it is because of its indefinite atmosphere in the *chiaroscuro*. As it does not have well-defined lines, the eye cannot identify it, cannot locate it. It is unpredictable and therefore exposes viewers to any unexpected and destabilizing situation.

Fig. 10. Franz Von Stuck. *The sin*. 1893. Technique: Oil on canvas. Measurements: 94.5 x 59.5 cm. Munich, Neue Pinakothek. Copyright: U.S, public domain.

The *spectacle* of tradition:
From the Painting to the Theater, from the Theater to the Cinema, from the Cinema to the Operatic Concept of Callas

Three years after Von Stuck exhibited the aforementioned painting, a new art appeared. In 1896 in France the first cinematographic projections appeared. Moving images used simple, imaginative or realistic stories, with a basic technique. The photography, lighting effects, interpretation, setting or camera movements were to be developed. But it soon became the flag of the new styles that were being born. Symbolism saw its end with the First World War (1914-1918). But the atmospheres that had arisen up to him became a source of perpetual inspiration. The cinema saw the enormous possibilities it offered. Sound had not yet been incorporated as such, so all the narrative weight fell on the image. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the great films of the 1920s produced atmospheric imagery. Horror cinema was the one that took this issue into account the most, especially in films of expressionist taste. These films were made with the collaboration and work of numerous Expressionist artists (1912-1939). But outside of avant-garde films, it is difficult to find films that were truly conceived as Art and not just as entertainment.

The person who managed to incorporate artistic atmospheres into cinema was Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau (1888-1931). His *Journey into the Night* (1921), *The Haunted Castle – Vogeloed Castle* (1921), *Nosferatu. A Symphony of Horror* (1922), *Phantom* (1922), *The Last One* (1924), *Faust* (1926), *Dawn: A Song of Two Humans* (1927) and *4 Demons* (1928) show to what extent he managed to understand and create such atmospheres. as they had been conceived since the Renaissance. Murnau had studied Art History, Philosophy and Music at the University of Heidelberg, and for this reason had an enormous pictorial culture. Contrary to what happens in many films, especially historical ones, Murnau did not literally copy the atmosphere of the painters, sculptors or architects for his staging and photography. What he did was see how life goes by—people waiting for news on a gray day, despair during an illness at night—and transfer it with an atmosphere. In that aspect he worked as a painter. That atmosphere was, in turn, one that followed one another and was transformed according to the situation, because Murnau made moving images. In this sense he was a film director. His works can be counted as authentic encyclopedias of the History of Art. The naturalist style, the Biedermeier (1814/1815-1848) and Expressionism are evident in *Nosferatu*. Rembrandt, Goya and Symbolism in *Faust* (fig. 11) and Friedrich appears above all in the first scenes of *Dawn*.

Fig. 11. Directed by: Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau.
Photography: Carl Hoffmann. *Faust (frame).* 1926. Copyright: U.S. Public Domain.

The cinematographic aesthetic transmits, in essence, dynamism. The assembly is of the utmost importance to give coherence and verve. The performing arts, in this sense, are also guided by a director. But in the case of theater, ballet or opera, they must stick to a script already written in advance. Atmospheres usually help to a great extent to update stories, characters or situations that, if kept literally, would be exaggerated or not very credible. The atmospheres should not be decontextualized in works as maximalist as operas, because then the musical, verbal and interpretive meaning of the same is lost. It was something that artists like María Callas (1923-1977) understood very well. Callas—who possessed a singular aesthetic instinct—defended that the Truth must be found in the meaning of music. And that the works should be respected just as the composers had conceived them, without lending themselves to superficial modifications made only for the sake of displaying the voice. She was also aware that operas had to be interpreted not with the surface of reality, but with the underlying life. They had to convey the instantaneousness of an emotion, the decisiveness of an action, the way in which the mind mutates as a character is subjected to increasingly pressing situations. These were the reasons why she, as soon as she was able to do so, incorporated film directors such as Luchino Visconti (1906-1976) to work on the opera productions in which she was involved.

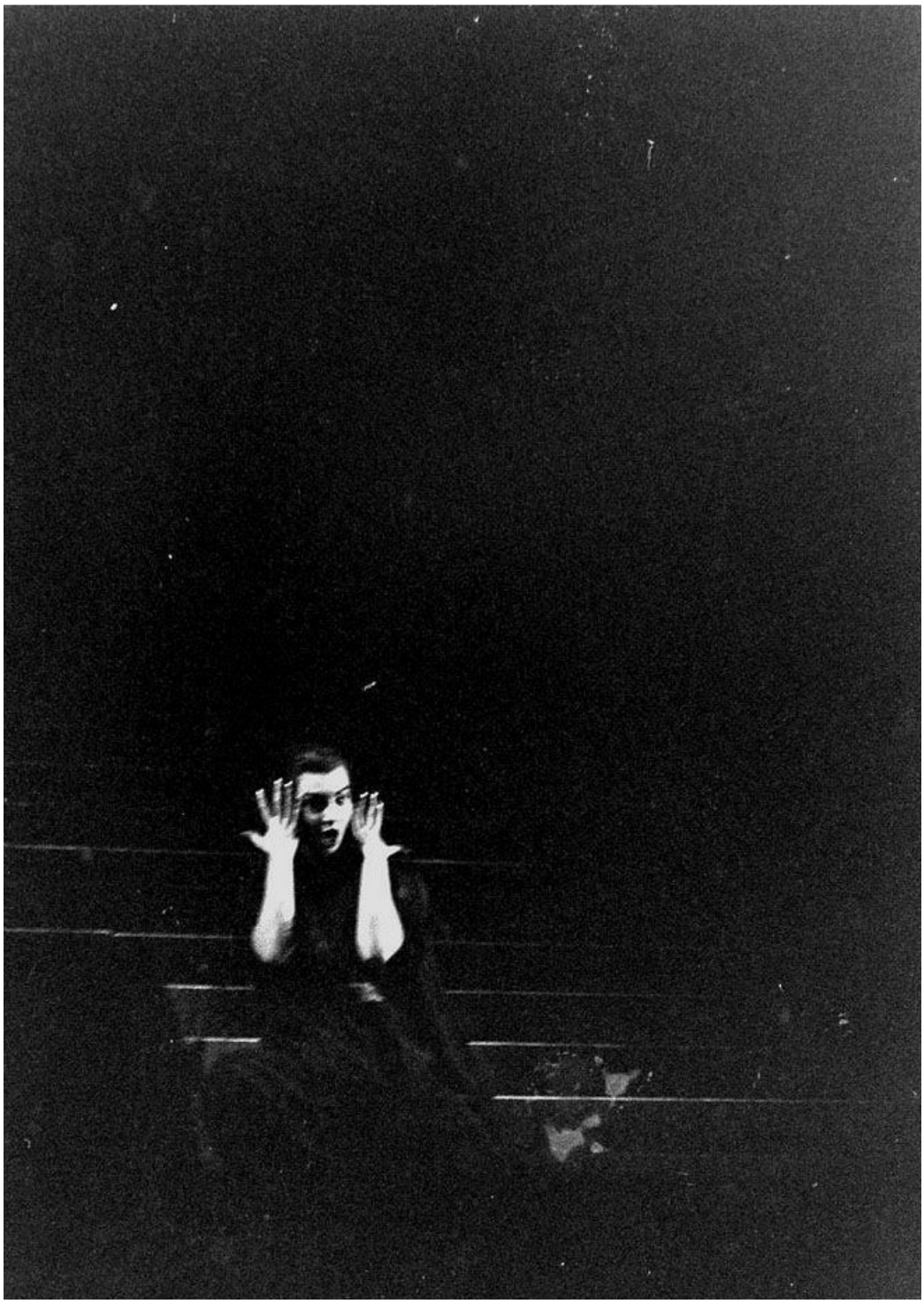

Fig. 12. Direction: Alexis Minotis. *Maria Callas as Medea, in the staging of the opera Medea* (1797, Luigi Cherubini) at the Epidaurus theater. 1960. Copyright: U.S., public domain.

Visconti intervened in *La vestale* (1954) —with an atmospheric aesthetic inspired by the textures of Cánova—, *La Traviata* (1955), *Anna Bolena* (1957)—with environmental references to Rembrandt's chiaroscuro—and Iphigenia in Tauride (1957)—in which took lighting quotes from the paintings of the Venetian Giovanni Battista Tieppolo—represented at La Scala. Callas worked both with Viscontian historicism and with the purist viscerality of Alexis Minotis, above all in the productions of *Norma* and above all *Medea* in Dallas (1958), Epidaurus (in 1960-1961, fig. 12) and at La Scala (in 1962). The authenticity achieved was only possible after Callas managed to convince him to work on the opera. Minotis did not understand her reasons:

> "But I don't know anything about opera,"
> Minotis told her, "I don't even like it."
> "So much the better"—she replied"
> I don't want opera directors.
> I want directors" (Huffington 2002, 132).

This attitude on her part led to a modernization of the opera in terms of its staging. The atmospheres achieved managed to move the public. They were the perfect union of music, drama and word. Unfortunately, not enough recordings of their performances have been obtained to understand this phenomenon. But the photographs that have survived show the extent to which opera—without distorting it as a musical and theatrical art—brought the dynamism, the immediacy, of the cinematographic sphere. And they also allow us to see how the atmosphere, which was born as an expression of refinement of spirit, maintained that character over the centuries. Artist after artist, from painting to opera, the atmosphere continued (and continues) to be the medium through which Humanity sees its reflection, its nourishment and its projection.

Conclusion

With Callas this aesthetic path ends. As it has been possible to see and read, aesthetics has prevailed as an aspect in which something more than the spirit of a time resides. Indeed, aesthetics have the power to reflect the zeitgeist. This is one of the bases of this article. But it is also true, as has been seen, that at the same time aesthetics transcends its own temporal limits to be something else. And this something else is the achievement of the human in its very essence. If you want to understand an era, often an image—that of a painting, a palace, a dress or a stage—says it all. It communicates it, expresses it, because all its aspects are defined by the unique meaning of its character. This may well be that of a film producer, a monarch or a patron. The same can be said of the strong will of the artists, as it happens with the divas. In the creation of a trend, a taste, as has been seen, very different lines are crossed that end up outlining the appearance of existence. None of it undergoes involution, it only becomes the means by which it is transmitted. From illustrations at popular prices of the 17th century to digital photography, from commemorative albums to magazines, from historical recreations to recordings, a mentality, principles, their consecration in the visual and their retransmission flow in all of them. Every work—smaller or larger—is in that gear and accompanies on a day-to-day basis. Hence its power, its creative and transformative capacity at very different levels and times.

But more than just creating a taste has been involved here. It has been about style, about the impression caused by the observation of a work of art. And in very different spaces: from the interiors of palazzos and aristocratic manors to churches where very different people go every day. From works destined for bourgeois salons to those that were acquired for private collections. From those that were contemplated repeatedly during different generations to those that only lived in just a few weeks and that it is only possible to capture in brief recordings and photographs. He may come to think, far from the current perspective, that a farmer from 1603 might have thought when he saw a painting by Caravaggio. Or of a young seamstress seeing Bernini's sculpture. The same can be imagined with the public that saw the vast landscapes of Friedrich. Of course the centuries change. But if it is verified that the population felt identified with and liked Caravaggio, in the same way that Bernin's Teresa—despite the censorship—became an absolute icon from the moment she showed herself. Friedrich's painting of the *Monk at the Seashore* was so formidable that it became part of the royal collections. The fact that today they continue to maintain the same fascination says a lot about themselves and the people who contemplate them. The years that follow do not matter. Human beings will continue to find pleasure, comfort, elevation or inspiration in them, following a path that is as enigmatic as it reveals human nature itself: that of aesthetics.

Author Biography

Iria-Friné Rivera Vázquez (Vigo, 1988). Patroness of the Luís Seoane Foundation (A Coruña) and the Vicente Risco Foundation (Allariz). She has a degree in Art History, with a specialty in Art of the Modern Era, from the Faculty of Geography and History in Santiago de Compostela. Her Master's Degree on the Historic City from the Faculty of Geography and History in Santiago was the precedent for her doctoral studies at the Faculty of History and Geography in Santiago de Compostela. She is, in addition to art historian, writer and lecturer. Since 2013, she has been part of the publications and conferences of, among other institutions, the Royal Galician Academy of Fine Arts and the Galician Culture Council. She was part of the exhibitions of the Xunta de Galicia as an advisory curator in 2020 and has published books such as *O legado pioneiro de Camilo Díaz Baliño* (2021).
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1227-532X Email: iriarivera@gmail.com

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