

AIVAZOVSKY'S LEGACY IN THE MODERN WORLD

Name of Student

Course

Name of Professor

University

Date

Outline

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Aivazovsky's Artworks
4. Aivazovsky's Predecessors, Contemporaries, and Modern Followers
5. The Artist's Contribution
6. Conclusion

Aivazovsky's Legacy in the Modern World

In the world of modern art, classical landscape painting seems to be unpopular. Realistic, oar-inspiring depictions of Mother Nature appear to be a relic of the past. The obscure, highly implicit, often-minimalist, and reminiscent modern art does not seem to have a place for 'outdated' realism techniques. In a today's fast-paced lifestyle, people dwell at the center of a huge information flow. Therefore, it is relevant to stop and reflect on the Aivazovsky's artworks, compare his work with predecessors and followers, and assess his impact on the world's art.

Background

Ivan Aivazovsky was born in 1817 in Crimea where he spent most of his life. He received a good art education at Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint's Petersburg. There he attended the classes of landscape and battle painting that predetermined the course of the most of his artistic works. After his studies, which he finished two years before the appointed term due to his excellence, he acquainted himself with great Russian navy generals: Nahimov, Lazarev, and Kornilov. That probably gave him another incentive to work with battles at sea. Aivazovsky was one of the few Russian painters who achieved financial success during his lifetime (Leek, 2012). His works were often exhibited and critically acclaimed both at home and abroad.

He is considered one of the greatest marine painters in Russia and the world. Aivazovsky is also known as a painter who produced around 6000 works during his life period (Fraser, 2012). He rarely drew his paintings from nature and mostly worked using his memory often neglecting pencil sketches. He was able to produce an artwork within a day with only a few glances at the scene being enough.

Aivazovsky's Artworks

Aivazovsky is considered to be a romanticist at the beginning of his career. Throughout his life, he tended to depict the scenes as realistic as possible, though there was a certain transition from exceedingly bright images to more true-to-life visions. This was probably dictated by the Russian art tradition in the 19th century when most of the Russian painters moved and inspired others to move from romanticism to realism. (Leek, 2012) The primary topic of Aivazovsky's works was the sea and navy battles. The fascination with water transcended his whole art. He spent a lot of his life at the seaside at his home in Crimea. Above that, he traveled to Greece to draw inspiration from the Aegean Sea, observed the beauty of canals in the Netherlands, Suez Canal in Egypt, Niagara Falls in the US, and more.

One of the most well-known and recognized works of Aivazovsky is *The Ninth Wave* produced in 1850. The painting depicts a scene of shipwreck survivors holding onto the ship debris and looking at a huge sea wave that sunk their ship and can drown them too. The name of the painting relates to the theory of George Gabriel who claims that waves during the storm have a tendency to grow larger in cycles (Craik, 2005). After the most powerful and destructive ninth wave, the cycle starts anew.

The huge wave that may claim the lives of unfortunate people clinging helplessly to a mast torn from the ship symbolizes a great power of nature over man. However, the bright and warm tone of the sun, barely visible from the white non-storm clouds lightening the whole scene, suggests the duality of nature. It may have destroyed the ship but let some of the people live. It can be both cruel and merciful but, at the same time, staying beautiful in any incarnation. The name and the content of the painting

suggest that after the ninth wave, after rough and dangerous time will come the first wave that will bring peace and calmness.

Another magnificent painting that came from under the Aivazovsky's brush is the *Ice Mountains in Antarctica*, created in 1870. The painting depicts a Russian ship surrounded by massive icebergs. It is noteworthy to stress the fact that the artist himself saw few or no icebergs in real life and his works rarely featured them. However, according to Bulkeley (2014), there may be an evidence of him seeing the sketches of the artist, who traveled with F. Bellingshausen during the expedition to Antarctica. Therefore, the painting reflects his image of icebergs rather than an actual memory of seeing them with his own eyes. The detailedness and realism of color reproduction underline once more the artist's great imagination.

The colors and the overall mood of the artwork are grim. The sky and the sea are dark blue and menacing. A high and thick wall of ice is, apparently, the Antarctic continent itself that occupies the background with a few smaller icebergs in the foreground. In the center, there is a ship with an iceberg towering behind it. Ice structures seem to clench the ship from all sides though not directly touching it. The whole scene once again underlines the superior position of nature over man. Despite building huge ships to travel its seas and oceans, human creations cannot yet compete in size and grandeur with it.

Aivazovsky's Predecessors, Contemporaries, and Modern Followers

The first purely landscape painting dated 1500 years BC was created by an artist of Minoan civilization. It did not feature a realistic depiction of nature focusing instead on the perception of it like in expressionism. Medieval landscape tradition was largely

absent featuring only some garden fresco works. The landscape was merely a decoration for iconographic, portrait, or narrative works. However, Pieter Brueghel, Joachim Patinir, and Claud Lorrain have brought landscape painting to new heights contributing to making it a self-sustained genre. Lorrain used broad hatched strokes and tonal wash, which added even more realistic look (Silver, 2012). Despite these artists achieved greater realism in depicting it, nature was not their primal concern as most of the works still told people's stories.

One of the closest artists to Aivazovsky by spirit and technique in the 18th century was John Robert Cozens. In his works, he tried to express the still and solemn grandeur of foggy mountains, forests, and lakes. The difference, however, was that Cozens primarily used watercolors, while Aivazovsky preferred oil. In addition, he did not pay much attention to water detailing. Another fellow-landscaper and Aivazovsky's contemporary, who created mesmerizingly realistic depictions of nature was Frederic Edwin Church. His work, *The Heart of the Andes*, was executed in much detail and featured both smooth and rough forms. Still, the religion played a great role at that time, and many artists tried to insert Christian topics in their works. So did Church, placing a cross and a kneeling man in the foreground suggesting the unity of church with nature.

One of the prominent figures in the modern world of landscape art who devoted himself to nautical art is Geoff Hunt. Similar to Aivazovsky, his paintings feature 19th-century civil and war ships engaging in battle, caught in storms or drifting in still waters. In his works, Hunt generally prefers to use the bright color palette and daylight scenery, while Aivazovsky was often attracted to the depiction of evening-nighttime scenes with the respectively darker color choice. The water in Hunt's paintings looks realistic though

does not inspire thoughts of nature's superiority as his topics mostly revolve around the ships and historical events. Water is used mostly as an entourage, a background in contrast to Aivazovsky who almost personalized his seas and oceans making them actors and protagonists.

The Artist's Contribution

Aivazovsky's passion for the sea and nature easily passes to the person standing before the canvas. This was one of his greatest achievements that made a huge impact on perception and practice of landscaping and art in general. He attracted attention to what was long considered merely a setting, a background revealing its true marvel. His works conveyed ideas that despite all advancements of technology, nature can still be deadly retaining its beauty and needs to be respected, loved, and glorified (Kamensky, 2016). The oar-inspiring effect of the paintings is produced due to the genius use of color, perspective, and lighting. In an aspiration to make the water look alive and natural, he perfected the application of glazing reaching the effect of transparency in wave tops. The utilization of deep contrast made the colors brighter or darker when it suited the artist. Despite the common practice when many landscapists are working 'on site,' Aivazovsky showed that memory and impression are instruments as viable as a direct observation.

Conclusion

Ivan Aivazovsky left a great legacy in the form of several thousands of his paintings stored in private collections and hundreds of museums around the world. Through them, he taught the world to love, fear, and respect nature that was both his passion and his muse. The relentless power of the sea is depicted with an utmost zeal

and commitment. There were many good landscape artists before and after him, but it was Aivazovsky who showed a genuine potential of landscaping in terms of expression and made the sphere even more popular. His skill and techniques are still considered one the best both in the 19th century and now. In the modern over-urbanized world that almost brought nature down on its knees, the artists such as Aivazovsky show that there is nothing more valuable, beautiful, and frightful than Mother Earth.

Reference List

Bulkeley, R. (2014) 'Aivazovsky's Icebergs: an Antarctic mystery,' *Polar Record*, 51(2), pp. 212-215.

Craik, A 2005, 'George Gabriel stokes on water wave theory,' *Annual Review of Fluid Mechanics*, 35, pp. 23-42.

Fraser, P. (2012) *Aivazovsky's View of Venice leads Russian art auction at \$1.6m*. Available at: <https://store.paulfrasercollectibles.com/blogs/art-photography/aivazovskys-view-of-venice-leads-russian-art-auction-at-1-6m> (Accessed: 26 August 2017).

Kamensky, M. (2016) 'The Aivazovsky "brand" in the surging sea of Russia's elite,' *The Tretyakov Gallery Magazine*, 17 March, p. 12

Leek, P. (2012) *Russian painting (temporis)*. New York, NY: Parkstone International.

Silver, L. (2012) *Peasant scenes and landscapes: the rise of pictorial genres in the Antwerp art market*. Philadelphia, PA: Penn UP.