Proposal for the 3rd MMHN Conference

Elinor Rotem

The Mediterranean Sea in European landscapes paintings

After the dark ages, when Europe begins to look for a more realistic way to describe life in art – the sea is discovered again. Giorgione, Titian, and Veronese the Venetian artists can not miss the sea who lays in front of them. They look at it but see the sea as a background to the plot which “is performed” on the “stage”, the surface of the painting. This tendency continues also during the seventeenth and eighteen centuries. French great artists like Claude Lorraine and Poussain, Nederland and Italian artists as Rubens and Reni describe the sea shore in their paintings often, but put it in allegorical surrounding which serves the target of telling an imaginative mythological or biblical episode. The names of the paintings, given by the artists, prove the idea that the scene is taken from locations known to us from the mythology or the bible as real places who lay in front the Mediterranean sea, but these scenes could be anywhere else on the earth, It has no specific topographic recognizable site to assure us that this is a real place. They even are not interested in it. They want to show the story with a nice background which surrounds the subject and give it a natural frame.

However, at the same time, in the seventeenth century a new subject has develops on the Atlantic coast of the ocean. It occurred in Holland, the first nation, who showed interest in the sea for its own sake. There are many Dutch artists, like Ruisdael, Van der Velde, Bauhuizen, Dubbels, who focused now, on the sea and make it the most important subject of their art. Their way to describe the scenes is completely different. The sea in their paintings is the main hero, the main subject and is usually painted in realistically way. They show the Ocean mostly with its storms, bad weather, when the ships and sailors have to struggle against the high waves in order to survive.

In the nineteenth century, in the beginning of modernism, subjects in European art began to change, but Italy who was always the country which symbolized western culture continued to be a highly aspired target destination for artists from all over Europe. Italian landscape and history engaged the thoughts and inspirations of all European artists. The Mediterranean Sea in general and Venice especially were sites of “must” for artists. The most known artists of their time, Turner, Monet, Manet came to Venice and painted the sea and the city over and over again and tried to capture the light and colour of the unique city.

In the meantime, in north Europe, the dramatic and cruel Ocean came back to become once again a major subject in art. Friedrich, Gericault and Turner described the power of the sea and the fight of man against nature.

In southern Europe, at the same time, the sea has gradually gotten a different role: a subject of leisure and fun. Courbet, Monet, Manet, Degas, Duffy showed a different character of the sea. Their sea is agreeable, friendly, usually in good weather. People,
who gather around, sit on the beach and seem to have fun. Is it because the Mediterranean sea is for itself more friendly, with less storms and bad weather, and has shores with soft sand, While the ocean is much less agreeable for humankind?
CV

Elinor Rotem


1997 -1998  Academic management, the north branch of “Breton Hall” College, Extension.

Education


1972-1976  B.A, Art History and Literature, Haifa University.

1975-1976  Teachers Training, Haifa University.

Elinor Rotem is an active artist who paints landscapes in oil and makes etchings and engravings.

Last years she has been making many exhibitions in Israel and in Europe.