

Hazardous natural phenomena and weather conditions appreciation in Russian landscape painting

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The fixation of various natural phenomena by landscape artists of different historical periods in different regions and countries has not only purely aesthetic interest, but also particular interest to science. During the period of Romanticism that has spread in the European and Russian art in the 19th century, Russian art turned to real living nature. Landscapes of the native country began to play a dominant role in the formation of landscape image. Romanticism aroused interest not only in the picturesque and exotic landscapes, but also in the majestic forces of nature. Volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, storms, thunderstorms, floods, and other natural hazards were new motifs for artists of that time. Romantic artists were inclined to exaggerate the power and destructive forces of natural phenomena they portrayed, elevating any event of this kind to the rank of a natural disaster. Often, they portrayed the rather ordinary storm, thunderstorm, flood as a universal natural catastrophe, comparable, perhaps, only to the biblical flood. What to say about really extraordinary events. Most vividly, the theme of the turbulent, dramatic landscape was developed in the works by Aivazovsky who quite realistically showed the sea element in various stages of its manifestation - from complete calm to the strongest storm. Being in Italy, Russian artists could not disregard such an extraordinary event as the violent eruption of the volcano Vesuvius, which occurred in 1822; many have captured it in their landscape images.

Thanks to the rapid development of scientific knowledge and discoveries in the field of geosciences, including meteorology, artists were encouraged to observe various atmospheric phenomena and weather conditions. Gradually, the sky ceased to be depicted simply as a smooth blue background, as was customary in the tradition of classicism; carefully traced clouds of various types, shapes and shades began to appear in pictures. In addition, various evaporations, fogs, haze, etc. became objects of the landscape image. Romantic artists were little interested in depicting winter and snow, despite the fact that the cold season with a steady snow cover continues in Russia for almost half a year from November to early April. The painting “Russian Winter” (1827) by Nikifore Krylov became perhaps the first winter landscape image in Russian painting. Krylov depicted a somewhat naive, but quite real, winter landscape on the bank of the Tosna River in the vicinity of St. Petersburg, which he painted from life. He was able to reliably convey the atmosphere of the Russian winter: a valley covered with snow, a frozen river, a dark strip of forest in the distance and the peasants with their daily affairs on the road down to the river in the foreground. The first bright and joyful snow-covered landscape image was created, apparently, by Alexey Savrasov in his famous painting “The Rooks Have Come Back” (1871). The spring snow melting and sparkling in the sun became later the favorite motif of the Russian painting. Comparative analysis of landscape pictures can be an important tool, in addition to scientific methods, in studying the nature and dynamics of various hazardous natural processes and phenomena, including hydrological and meteorological ones in conditions of changing climate.

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