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FINE ARTS

1. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN RENAISSANCE PAINTINGS

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Abstract: *Art, the language of ideas and concepts, comprises a multitude of means of manifestation through sound, word, color, gesture, etc., between which there is often an interconnection. This article highlights some aspects of the aesthetics of the Renaissance period in which artists, starting from Italy, focused on realism and human emotion in art, but also on the interconnection between two arts - painting and music. In this sense, we turned our attention to identifying the symbolic role of the musical instruments of that period represented in paintings by some notable masters from Italy, Flanders and Germany.*

Key words: *musical instruments, masters, art, Renaissance*

1. Introduction

Art represents "the language by which the human being communicates his ideas, his conceptions of himself, his fellow humans and his universe¹⁸⁹." It is therefore a means of communication, but also of shaping personality, of developing receptiveness that allows access to the genuine esthetic and moral values of society. The language of the arts is different (word in literature, sound in music, color in painting, gesture in dance, etc.), but there are also common features that 'confine' the arts, such as harmony (audible/coloristic), rhythm (musical/literary), balance (compositional in painting/music), shape (in music, literature, painting, dancing), dynamics, etc.

If musicians want to create emotion and stimulate the listener's imagination through sounds, the same will have the painters who create a work of art using the colour drawing, textures, shapes, etc., in order to obtain a balanced composition on a surface (cloth, paper, wood, glass, etc.) that can be admired, contemplated, in accordance with aesthetic principles. "The aesthetic feeling could be defined as an attitudinal feeling of the contemplation"¹⁹⁰, and in front of a painting, "we first record - at least roughly - the significance of the objects represented and the theme that unifies them, then there are the feelings."¹⁹¹

The purpose of this article is to highlight a few points of the aesthetic of the renaissance period in the interconnection of the two arts - painting and music -

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¹⁸⁹ W.Fleming, *Arts and ideas, vol I*, Ed. Meridiane, Bucharest 1983, page 11

¹⁹⁰ Alexandru Dima, *Domeniul esteticii. Privire sintetică introductivă*, Ed. Universității Al.Ioan Cuza, Iasi,1988, page 156

¹⁹¹ Alexandru Dima, *op. cit.*, page 156

identifying the symbolic role of musical instruments from that period, represented in paintings by some high-level masters from Italy, Germany and Flanders.

2. Discussions

As a socio-cultural movement, the Renaissance¹⁹², an era of great spiritual effervescence, characterized by a resuscitation of ancient humanism, debuted in Tuscany (center of Italy), with the first artistic and literary events initially centered in Florenza, one of the few "city states"¹⁹³, possessing a huge wealth generated by local traders and bankers who controlled the banking operations of the papacy, but also granted credits to the European monarchs. Later on, Venice, which was the heart of a Mediterranean empire controlling the trade routes with the East, became another powerful center of the Renaissance, followed by the Papal States and Rome.

The "Italian Renaissance" phenomenon, as expected, has deeply affected the intellectual and cultural life in the early modern period, spreading up to the 16th century into the rest of Europe. The influence of Italian art was felt in literature, philosophy, art, music, politics, science, religion, as well as in many other fields of research in which humanist methods of study were adopted, based on realism and human emotion in art. The fields of the time such as painting, architecture or sculpture will blossom in France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, due to the circulation of artists, requested by Europe's sovereign or rich commanders of these countries.

The era of triggering the "phenomenon of renaissance" is not just a return to the artistic models of Greek-Latine antiquity, but above all, the beginning of the affirmation of humanist values against the school dogmatism of the Middle Ages, by proclaiming freedom of thought and the spiritual nobility of human being "who has regained his consciousness as an individual, after a long period of philosophical annihilation of personality"¹⁹⁴. The ideal of a "man of renaissance" is promoted, the embodiment of a new concept of humanity, endowed with freedom and spiritual autonomy, adversary of scholasticism and dogmas, placing it in the centre of attention in scientific studies and artistic creations. There are changes in mentality and social and economic attitude that lay the foundations for a new image of the universe and of the man. The scientific and technical discoveries, which take place not only in the Italian area, but in Western societies, are accompanied both by geographical discoveries and by stylistic and artistic vision innovations.

It should be noted that during the Renaissance period the painting represents a chapter in which art excels, being approached both in painting on canvas and in fresco. The Florentine masters, for example, perfect cartoonists, thought that the power of expression was to evoke forms, in the direction and quality of the line.

¹⁹² The concept of "Renaissance" was used for the first time on the beginning of the 19th century by the French historian Jules Michelet, from whom it was taken over by the Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt.

¹⁹³ The Northern and Central Italy were divided into many city-states, the most powerful being Milan, Florence, Pisa, Siena, Genova, Ferrara, Mantua, Verona and Venice / https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renașterea_italiană

¹⁹⁴ <https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renașterea>

The topics covered are inspired either by antiquity, mythology, or are historical or biblical topics, or daily in a totally new technique and form of manifestation.

Important to note is the fact that real artistic schools are being created, each school developing a certain style printed by local painters, a style that will be influenced by the recipients of the Renaissance art. By the end of the 15th century Florence remains the main center of the Italian artistic Renaissance, due to the charming of the merchants and rich bankers who, following the example of the Medici family (protectors of arts), ask the artists to decorate the sumptuous palaces, public monuments or churches. "The Renaissance was for the artists one of the great technical ages they learned in the workshops of the masters in which they had their apprenticeship: the isolated artist, who would work alone for him, does not exist ... first of all he was a craftsman in the service of a clientele who precisely formulated his demands."¹⁹⁵

3. Results

Working for the court of Montefeltro family, **Giovanni Santi** (approx. 1435-1494), the father of the famous Raffaello Sanzio, participates in the decoration of the chapel of the Muses in the ducal Palace, painting some panels with Apollo and Muses, works in the spirit of the era, but eclectic, without being deprived of any charm and grace. *The Muses* (1480-1490) painted in the Corsini Palace in Florence by Giovanni Santi are represented by Polimnia which holds a small organ in her hands, Terpsihora a viola da braccio, Erato a tambourine, Calliope a trumpet, and Melpomena a horn (hunting), their author suggesting that the musical instruments were used on different occasions, for example: the horn for the success of the hunting, the tambourine for the rhythmic accompanying of the dance, viola da braccio in the moments of rest and delight, etc.

Together with the fine arts, musical creation will also play a special role. Although during the Renaissance, the preferences of the composers are mostly right to vocal music (because of the state of development of the construction and the instrument interpretation technique¹⁹⁶), the most significant changes in determining the role of musical instruments have gradually taken place toward the end of the 16th century (with the emergence of major Italian violin makers). Instrument manufacturers have paid special attention to materials and workmanship. Thus, from the objects serving the accompaniment of singers and dancers, the instruments have gradually been given a solistic role. The lute, instrument with pinched strings, as well as guitar, very beloved in the Renaissance due to its soft and melancholic sonorities¹⁹⁷ or the viol, were preferred by the 16th-century musicians, playing a primary role in the blossoming of the accompaniment in the vocal-instrumental genre and, by extension, appeared most often in paintings of the masters of the Renaissance. In Spain, for example, during the

¹⁹⁵ Ovidiu Drimba, *Istoria culturii și civilizației, vol.4*, Editura științifică, Bucharest, 1994, p.483

¹⁹⁶ The instruments had less vocal expression possibilities

¹⁹⁷ The lute is a 6-string musical instrument with pinched double strings, the neck bent and the very convex sounding box, with a deep and rounded bottom, like the kobza

Renaissance period, the vihuela was present¹⁹⁸, an equivalent of the lute, replaced by guitar in the 17th century (Baroc).

Another instrument that is increasingly appearing in plastic representations is the organ, admitted to the western liturgic service in churches that have become cathedrals. Therefore, in religious paintings, the organ often appears either next to a choir of angels or in the hand of a saint, such as in the composition of **Rafael**, *The ecstasy of Saint Cecilia* (1514-1516, Pinacoteca from Bologna). Saint Cecilia is often illustrated by playing a viola, a small organ or another instrument, representing the protector of musicians. The group composed of St. Pavel, John the Evangelist, Saint Cecilia, Augustin and Magdalena is configured between two dimensions: the celestial one - with angels singing in the azure sky and the earth dimension where instruments (viol, flutes, tambourin), lying dismembered at the bottom, "seem to refer to the abandonment of the earthly pleasures, which resulted from the commitment of Cecilia to the sacred"¹⁹⁹. The two dimensions represent the symbol of celestial love in opposition to the terrestrial love.



In the opinion of Venetian artists such as Domenico Veneziano (1405?-1461), Giovanni Bellini (1430?-1516) and Giorgione (1477/8-1510), who established the distinctive venetian school of italian renaissance painting and became famous by the shining of the oil colors used, Venice climbed, in the 16th century, to the rank of the artistic capital of the new times with architect Palladio, the musical dynasty of the Gabrielli family and, above all, a plead of great painters: Giorgione, Tiziano, Tintoretto, Veronese, Lott.

The pupil of Giorgione (1477/8-1510) and Bellini, **Vecellio Tiziano** (1488/90-1576), assimilates the concepts of neoplatonism and surpasses his masters through the color vivacity of his works, this being a reference point for the artists of the coming centuries. The greatest Italian renaissance painter and the most important representative of the Venetian school, Tiziano has established himself as one of the best colorists, whose creations are distinguished by the freshness and charm of the tones. In it, the effect of color is not achieved by applying many strong shades, but by combining several tones/colors that were

¹⁹⁸ Vihuela, a Spanish stringed instrument from the 15th century, in guitar form, but granted as a lute. The term Vihuela became "Viola" in Italian, "Viole" in French, "Viol" in English/ Cf. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vihuela>

¹⁹⁹ [https://ro.qaz.wiki/wiki/The_Ecstasy_of_St._Cecilia_\(Raphael\)](https://ro.qaz.wiki/wiki/The_Ecstasy_of_St._Cecilia_(Raphael))

sufficient to give the impression of richness and variation in shades. The combination of red and golden is a characteristic feature of his style: the regular tone, the basic note, around which color arrangements are created. Toward the end of his life, Tiziano's colour palette is changing, with the artist opting for silver gray, associated with blue, as a dominant tone, which made critics divide his activity into two distinct periods: The golden period and the silver period.



In the *Concert in the Open-Air* painting (1509-1510), which is at the Louver Museum in Paris, Tiziano elects the difference between the social classes, by the typical form of the contrast between the city and the village. The painting enacts the agreement between the lute touched with elegance by a young citizen and the flageolet in the hands of a nude woman, representing the allegorical image of a higher dimension (it can be assumed to be a Muse). "The Flageolet is inobilated as an instrument and task by the Harmonic Muse, in agreement with the lute, of noble nature. The usual practice of representation in connection with the musical theory consists in the glorification of the stringed instrumental music and human voice as erudite and citadine music, good and orderly, as opposed to the rejection of the music of the wind or percussion instruments, considered illiterate and peasant, ugly and disordered music."²⁰⁰ The peasants, shepherds and satyrs were painted on the fields and in the forests playing from the whistles.

In conclusion, harmony and contrast, agreement opposed to dissonance and, with many socio-political consequences, order against disorder, following a platonic theory caused little by the broad acceptance of inferior instruments in practice.

Vittore Carpaccio (c. 1460 – 1525/1526), italian painter of the venetian school, is known for the red and white tones of his works. Lazzaro Bastiani's pupil, Carpaccio was also influenced by the style of Antonello de Messina and the early Dutch art through the mixture of romantic, intimacy and decorative play created by Hans Memling in Flanders.

Between 1501 and 1503 Carpaccio painted for Scuola Dalmata di San Giorgio degli Schiavoni from Venice two big canvas representing Saint George in

²⁰⁰ Augusto Gentili, *Tiziano's life and work*, Editura Adevărul Holding, Bucharest 2009, page 48

the fight against the Dragon. His paintings have been designed for long-term perception, considering not only the overall contemplation but also in detail, and have a narrative character that creates various states/moods. Carpaccio's attention to detail is constant, as is his interest in light. In the *Triumph of St. Gheorghe* on the chained Dragon, for example, we notice the admiration of the Italian artist also for what was coming from the Orient (costumes, fabric, jewelry, warm tone harmonics). The triumph is honored in the background and by a group of musicians of the Ottoman fanfare (mehteri) who play the Turkish instruments davul (oriental drum) and zurna (funnel fluier).

Another outstanding work of Vittore Carpaccio's creation is the *Appearance of Jesus at the Temple* at the San Giobbe Church in Venice. The marble niche illustrating the scene of the appearance is monumental, reflecting space, color, light and shadow, and the figures are well balanced in their movements, including those of the three angels, represented in the lower part, who intend to play their instruments - lute, transversal flute and viol.

The influences of the painting school in Florence and of the school in Padova have also been felt in the Umbria province in central Italy, which also knows a great economic prosperity and artistic flair. Here are also powerful protective families, ordering art in major cities such as Urbino, Perugia, Assisi, Arezzo, etc. The Umbrian School is born, whose defining features are grace, charm, freed by the creations of painters such as Piero della Francesca, Luca Signorelli, Bernardo Pinturicchio, Pietro Perugino.

In **Piero della Francesca's** creation (ca. 1415/20-1492) entitled *Nativity*, the poverty and the humility of Christ's birth are represented with grace and suavity. Virgin Mary set her robe on the bare ground in front of the poor stable to protect her newly born baby and contemplates him in prayer. There are two shepherds behind the Virgin, while Iosif, her husband, is on the side of the donkey. On the left-hand side, a group of five angels, two of them with lutes offer a celestial soundtrack for this scene, which has a rustic character.

From Italy, the Renaissance also spread in other countries in Western Europe. Unlike the latin art, in which the proportion and beauty of the human body, the harmony of the composition, the volume ratio, the combination of the tones are appreciated, in the german art is especially appreciated the expression power of the faces, details capable of suggesting a deep feeling. The primary interest of the German artist is not the replay of objective life, real life, but, above all, of the idea he has about life. Outside Italy, the source of inspiration for the painters on the continent, the German space was also able to count a range of brilliant and highly original painters, such as Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), Matthias Grünewald (c. 1470 - 1528 - also known under the name of Neithart) or Hans Holbein (1497-1543).

Hans Holbein, called the "young man", is distinguished from his compatriots by the fact that he does not consider himself German, but European, belonging to an international circle dominated by the ideas of humanism. His travels to Switzerland, Italy and his subsequent establishment in England is reflected in his natural and balanced style. A German painter and printer who

worked in a northern Renaissance style, considered one of the greatest portraitists of the 16th century, was hired at the court of Henry VIII of England, where he had as duty the execution of the portraits of the royal family and nobles, which were ordered to him, integrating the models into the environment that was familiar to them and giving the impression of reality, of life. He has also made festive decorations, as well as drawings for jewelry, plates or other precious objects.

The Ambassadors (1533, National Gallery, London) Jean de Dinteville and Gerges de Selve were painted by the young Hans Holbein on a ten-panel assembly in oak. The painter seems to glorify here the new leaning of the Court toward heredity, by reproducing its distinctive features on the central shelf. But in the lower part, anamorphosis gives birth to the shape of a human skull, which is visible only by means of a conical mirror, a thing whose purpose is to remind the man of his precariousness. Among the objects on the lower shelf there are even more flutes and in the centre, the lute, which symbolizes the ephemeral nature of music and, by extension, of any sensory pleasure.



In Flanders, the influence of Italian art is stronger as a result of the travel of Flemish painters, but also of the connections that the monarchs here had with the ruling families in Italy and Spain. The characteristic of the Flemish painting school is the specialization of artists in the development of a certain category of subjects that they do not leave all their lives (portraitists, landscape practitioners, interpreters of the scenes of morals, of still life motives, etc.)

For the 15th century, in the Netherlands, the creations of the brothers van Eyck who have perfected the oil painting, have imposed. The Flemish painter Jan van Eyck (ca.1390-1441) is considered the founder of the Renaissance painting in Flanders and in the Netherlands. As for his style, van Eyck has reached an incredible perfection in the drawing of shapes, in the rendering of materials, as well as in the representation of human faces.

In *The Altar in Ghent*, a great and complex polyptyc altar in the 15th century (conceived between 1420 and 1432), which is located in the St. Bavo Cathedral in Ghent, Belgium, the Flemish artist Jan van Eyck painted in the panels organized in two vertical registers. Besides Christ the King, Virgin Mary and John the Baptist and a gathering of saints, clerks, sinners and assaults to a worship of the Lamb of

God, there are also two groups of angels singing both in the choir and in the organ, in the viol and in harp.

Peter Bruegel the Old (c. 1526-1569), also called **Bruegel of the Peasants**, is a Flemish painter of the 16th century, especially appreciated as a landscaper. In his works *The Peasant Wedding and Country Dance* he draws attention to the bagpipe singer, who appears in both paintings. The bagpipe was painted much less frequently, being considered an instrument of the peasant, otherwise this attribute is specified in the title of the painting.



Other artists who have painted instruments in their paintings are: **Anibale Carracci** - *Polifem and Galatea* (1598-1601), the Farnese Palace Gallery, in which Pan's flute appears; **Orazio Gentileschi** (1563-1639) - *Saint Cecilia with an angel* (small organ), Galleria Nazionale dell' Umbria, Perugia; *Violonist Young Woman*, *Lute singer (lute, violin)* (apr. 1612-1620); **Rosso Fiorentino** - *Angel with mandolin*, etc. Each of the plastic artists took a personal, different approach in style, color, compositional treatment, social and artistic messages.

4. Conclusions

Therefore, by concluding the information on the plastic artists and analyzes of the selected painting(s) for example, it can be argued that the following have been considered in order to carry them out:

- The historical context.
- The features characterising the style of the period.
- The message of the author.
- The compositional handling.
- The influence of other painters.
- Attraction of form (especially of musical instruments).
- The choice of colors.
- The importance of symbolism.
- Brightness/how light falls;
- The position of the figures in space and the distance between them.

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