

UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN CLUJ-NAPOCA
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RECURRENCES OF THE NOCTURNAL ORDER IN PAINTING

PhD THESIS SUMMARY

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The doctoral thesis entitled *Recurențe ale regimului nocturn în pictură* (*Recurrences of the Nocturnal Order in Painting*) tracks the emergence and path of the nocturnal in art, particularly in painting, starting with the Medieval period all the way to present day. From the dawn of human civilization, the night represented a tool of constant reflection, and the myriad of different cultures, religions and ideologies charged it with symbolic connotations. While being a time fit for rest, the night nonetheless stimulated the imagination of man, and emerging cultures started seeking answers to existential questions, reflecting the entire universe in their own personalities and myths. For the Greek, night was a daughter of chaos and mother of death and sleep, while for the Mayans it hinted to what was going on below ground. Other peoples, such as the Celts, charged the night with more optimistic imagery, seeing it as a new beginning, a rebirth of the day.¹

Seen as a primordial source of uncertainty, of nightmares and dark ideas, the night held a perpetual double connotation by being at the same time a precursor of day and the time when nascent ideas grow before materializing at daybreak, representing a time of gestation and of freeing the unconscious.²

Darkness is defined by its complementary relationship with light, and many cultures interpret this duality as a recursive cycle on all cosmic levels. Same as day and night succeed each other, any dark and decadent historic era driven by death and chaos is followed by an age of light and regeneration. The same idea is reflected in Ancient Chinese philosophy, where the Yin and Yang, although separate, also contain each other's trace. As such, night is an integral part of the day, of the 24-hour cycle. While the primordial chaos encompassed both, the two elements get separated through cosmogonic action. As such, the return to the roots in some religions can be defined as a cancellation of this duality and reestablishment of the primary unity. From this standpoint, mystical symbolism sees the dark standing behind the light, which can be intimately experienced only when helped by reason. This context also reveals a dark side of God, the creator of both light and darkness. Looking at it psychoanalytically, darkness is linked to the descent, to gloom and fear, reflecting a state of anxiety or depression.³

The night can also evoke the world's primary axis, which pierces the two poles and which, for people such as the Aztecs, Algonquin or Chinese, symbolizes the link with the

¹ Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbreant, *Dicționar de simboluri*, Polirom, Bucharest, 2009, p. 342.

² *ibidem*, pp. 342-343.

³ *ibidem*, pp. 236-238.

underworld and the inferno. For the chthonian world, however, the dark centre of the Earth symbolizes the renewal of the diurnal plane and the regeneration of life.⁴

For the Greek-Roman mythology, the night comes after chaos, birthing Aether together with its brother, Erebus. In this case, the complex and twofold connotation of the night, same as in other cultures, on one hand talks about the source of the universe's creative light, and on the other about the source of all things bad, of calamities and death. Despite the dramatic view, the Ancient Greek still saw the night as a trusty guide generating good advice.⁵

According to Gilbert Durand, the nocturnal order is the expression of a continuous metamorphosis, but also of a euphemism. Some cultures, starting with the Greek or Scandinavians and all the way to Australians or several South American peoples, did not perceive the night as a territory of gloomy darkness, but rather as one of awe and profound tranquillity. For the Egyptians, night was also known as the lower sky, being a mirror of the day. For the Tungus, the night is the day of the dead, an inversion of the living world. While some dogmas interpret the land of the dead as dominated by horror and the inferno, Egyptian eschatology starts to look at it as a mirror of life under the reigns of Osiris.⁶

Starting with the 16th century, Christianity brought attempts of defining nature in a mystical manner through works such as those of St. John of the Cross and Saint Therese, with the symbolism of night hovering between positive and negative connotations, some of which were contradictory. At times, the night represented an allegory of the exiled soul overcome with desperation, chained and blinded by the thick veil of darkness, while in other cases nocturnal evolution became a transcendental *locus*, a place of reaching a communion with nature, where the soul would quench its thirst with the help of the eucharistic fountain. This mystique substitutes previous interpretations of the night through ineffable and mysterious values, which allow faded memories to return and manifest from the plane of the unconscious. The night, however, is also linked to the cult of the dead, a metaphor of the intimate descent facilitated by boundless darkness.⁷

One of the topics defining the nocturnal order across the centuries describes the cosmogonic moment as the origin of the world, and human action can repeat this act of creation. Nocturnal art has been perpetually perceived as an alternative way of creation because both the

⁴ *ibidem*, p. 335.

⁵ *ibidem*, pp. 334-338.

⁶ Gilbert Durand, *Structurile antropologice ale imaginarului*, Univers, Bucharest, 1977, pp. 269-271.

⁷ *ibidem*, pp. 269-272.

eye of the painter and the eye of the viewer are forced to adapt to the liminal conditions of optical perception. Thus, the edges of the visible are pushed to the limit, with a specific type of visual sensibility coming into play.⁸

Artistic perception varied across time, whether artists were pursuing to convey the genuineness of the night or, on the contrary, relied on effects and artifice. Even so, the art of each century was directly influenced by ideologies and topical events on a social, political, economic or cultural level. The nocturnal order was defined by constant mutations, reflecting the manifestation of the dark spectres across ages.

The first chapter of the thesis presents the nocturnal order during the Middle Ages. This mega-period can be defined as an historic night, mostly due to its direct and deeply rooted relationship with death. Even when taking out of the equation the effects of plagues and famine, we are presented with an extremely high mortality rate, sometimes three times the ones recorded by developed countries nowadays.⁹

Influenced by Plato, the Medieval culture of the 13th century attempted to define the universe as a fusion of the four main elements, while man was defined by a fifth, immutable and undying element, the soul.

The entire Middle Ages were deeply influenced by the philosophy of Saint Augustine, with the distinction between spiritual and corporeal inspiration building a base for Christian theology for several centuries. The duality of ideal and real has been often also associated with the duality of the diurnal and nocturnal orders; the former elevating through the discipline of the senses, the latter, a dark, descending one, associated with death and the intimate descent.¹⁰

As the Occidental perimeter was almost completely subject to Catholic dogma, death represented the beginning of eternal life, with the purpose of life seen as a preparation for this journey. The terror brought by the plague reinforced the interest of parishioners for repentance, and the role of art became clear during the period. Artefacts of the times, of the 13th and 14th centuries, representing the Last Judgement aimed to present variations of Heaven and Hell.

⁸ Hélène Valance, *Nocturne: Night in American Art, 1890-1917*, Yale University Press, 2018, Kindle edition, location: 506-518/7684.

⁹ Eleanor Townsend, *Death and Art. Europe 1200-1530*, V&A Publishing, London, 2009, p. 8.

¹⁰ Martina Bagnoli, *A feast for the Senses. Art and Experience in Medieval Europe*, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 2016, p. 19.

Prayer books would utilize illustrations of saints acting as *memento mori* triggers, reminding the faithful of life's fleeting quality.¹¹

While theologians had been working on mapping the afterlife, a form of consensus was only achieved during the 13th century. In this context, the nocturnal order is associated with absolute passivity and the death of the soul, same as black, which reflects absolute mourning. While white mourning is linked to a spiritual rebirth, black mourning reflects an eternal night, evoking the world's abyssal side, or the inferno. The white-black duality, or light-darkness, is a persistent aspect of most religions.¹²

The geography of the afterlife received a strong vector through Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* in the 14th century, where the Heavens are above, while the circles of Hell are underground, progressing to the centre of the Earth.¹³

The visual canons of the Middle Ages started depicting the Garden of Eden as an earthly Paradise, the one of Adam and Eve, which is separate from the celestial Paradise, where God is present.¹⁴ The late Middle Ages separated sacral iconography from the profane one, which used to cohabit in a rather confusing formula, and reformulated the duality of Heaven and Hell based on the biblical depiction of the Book of Revelations.¹⁵ Here, Heaven is seen as the New Jerusalem, while Hell stimulated artistic imagination through representations evoking the damnation and agony of pale, naked bodies of sinners, mutilated and consumed through an endless variation of diabolical tools of torture.¹⁶

Hieronymus Bosch was one of the time's most visionary painters, his works defying the organizational laws of nature, presenting a nocturnal and repugnant chaos. Bosch depicts the recurrent medieval theme of the Last Judgement in his gloomy and menacing triptych whose central panel of the apocalyptic scene is accompanied by the two extremities of human existence: To the left, Adam and Eve's banishing from the Garden of Eden, together with the angels fallen from the celestial Paradise; to the right, the dark and eternal Hell that awaits after

¹¹ Eleanor Townsend, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

¹² Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbreant, *op. cit.*, pp. 334-339.

¹³ Eleanor Townsend, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁴ *ibidem*, pp. 50-52.

¹⁵ *ibidem*, pp. 12-15.

¹⁶ Walter Bosing, *Hieronymus Bosch. The complete paintings*, Taschen, Köln, 2012, p. 34.

the Last Judgement.¹⁷ Bosch's sobering and dark images dominated the late Middle Ages, up until the emergence of the Purgatory and the rise in popularity of indulgences.¹⁸

The Middle Ages showcased a strong link between the tomb and the nocturnal order. Through euphemizing, the tomb becomes a place of rest and intimate living, compared to the maternal womb. In mystical language, the dark of the tomb brings a silent night, so picking a place of eternal rest requires specific care.¹⁹ This has brought the practice of funerals in the yards of churches and even monasteries, which, in the 14th century, generated steadily growing competition for the most coveted lots churches had to offer. Subsequently, the practice also generated the emergence of commanding funeral monuments, reflecting the social status of the deceased and stimulating prayers for the person's soul, while at the same time acting as a *memento mori* for the viewer.²⁰ Starting with the 16th century, Reformation condemned many aspects of Christian practice related to the interpretation of death through art, and a significant part of funeral rites saw mutations across large swaths of Europe.²¹

The multisensorial aspect of the Middle Ages spurred the appearance of flowery decorative imagery that evoked the Garden of Eden or other mythical scenes as a way of evading the quotidian.²² Based on religious themes, of mystical hunts or depictions of love, tapestry as a medium offered, with its dark background, a propitious space for significant encounters and mystical journeys. The medium provides a testament to the technical and stylistic complexity of the times.²³

The second chapter of the thesis offers a brief summary of the nocturnal order's evolution while also showcasing several of its general traits by analysing it in the context of European painting. The journey starts from Southern Europe, where the tenebrous side of the night is presented in Caravaggio's works, and then travels north, where Rembrandt's dark engravings speak of divine intervention. Night scenes did not mark a particular artist or another, but rather began manifesting as a response to the struggles of those growing apart from the

¹⁷ *ibidem*, p. 34.

¹⁸ *ibidem*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁹ Gilbert Durand, *op. cit.*, pp. 300-301.

²⁰ Eleanor Townsend, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

²¹ *ibidem*, p. 91.

²² Martina Bagnoli, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

²³ *ibidem*, p. 69.

diurnal.²⁴ Artists working predominantly in the nocturnal order were attributed this nocturnal as an internal engine, a driving quality.²⁵

The paper's third chapter analyses the shadow in the context of Renaissance painting and the development of the *chiaroscuro*. Ever since the *trecento*, painting evolved based on the contrast between light and shadow, and starting with the implementation of the linear perspective, artist such as Masaccio started using effects brought by shadows to underpin the three-dimensionality of characters and even of whole compositions.²⁶

Although Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer formulated theories of the shadow, it took the emergence of the baroque for painters to really stop shying away from its use. When artists stopped limiting themselves by only depicting nature, the dramatic effects brought by the shadow's contrast with bright light gained a strong role. Bringing volume forward through shadows, and then through *chiaroscuro*, created the effect of a real presence, bringing the subject and the observer closer together.²⁷

One of the most important artists of the Western world that related with *chiaroscuro* through the filter of a gloomy existence, dotted with suffering, is Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. In his case, the artist's human condition has been linked to alienation and constant interior fretfulness, a feat which brought comparisons with Homeric heroes defeated in gruesome battles.²⁸ Artist of the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Caravaggio had a major influence on European art of the time, the fame of his works and multiple interpretations leading to a whole artistic movement dubbed Caravaggism. The effect of Caravaggio's *chiaroscuro* is nearly ethereal, conveying strong emotions through a new type of narrative.²⁹

While growing as an artist and being active in Rome for more than two decades, the Caravaggio style was influenced by the triumph of the baroque, which helped its dissemination abroad. The painter's main artistic heirs were Bartolomeo Manfredi, Jusepe de Ribera, Cecco del Caravaggio and Spadarino. Manfredi, in turn, approached Caravaggio's works in an interpretative manner, a style that was subsequently called Manfredian, which grew the range

²⁴ William Chapman Sharpe, *New York Nocturne. The city after dark in literature, painting and photography, 1850-1950*, Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford, 2008, p. 15.

²⁵ George Banu, *Nocturne*, Nemira, Bucharest, 2013, p. 13.

²⁶ Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, *Scurtă istorie a umbrei*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 53-55.

²⁷ *ibidem*, p. 144.

²⁸ Andrea Pomella, *Caravaggio*, ATS Italia Editrice, Rome, 2004, p. 3.

²⁹ Patrice Marandel, *Caravaggio and his Legacy*, Museum Associates, Los Angeles Country Museum of Art, Prestel Verlag, Munich, Berlin, London, New York, Los Angeles, 2012, p. 138.

of depicted subjects by adding tavern scenes, among others, ending up being adopted by other artists as well.³⁰

From a stylistic and iconographic standpoint, the four artists built the basis of the Caravaggisti school, displaying countless figurative possibilities and a range of naturalist emotions.³¹ At the same time, Caravaggio's circle included painters that had direct contact with the master's works, such as Orazio Gentileschi, Giovanni Baglione, Guy François, Pensionante del Saraceni, Orazio Riminaldi and Carlo Saraceni.³²

Spain governed Naples during the 17th century, and this helped several Spanish artists, such as Jusepe de Ribera, set base there and be inspired by some of Caravaggio's late paintings. The Caravaggisti influence on Ribera later turned into its own influence on other Spanish artists, such as Diego Velasquez or Francisco de Zurbarán, who both reacted to his paintings to a certain extent.³³ The relationship between Velasquez and Caravaggio can only be understood with Ribera as a linking element. A similar resemblance can be observed by the personal relationship between Georges de La Tour and Caravaggio's works. Both La Tour and Caravaggio used powerful contrasts between light and shadow, although La Tour's paintings are in no way unoriginal and are independent from Caravaggism.³⁴

Rome also benefitted from an influx of Dutch artists active in the 17th century, including Direck van Baburen, Gerrit van Honthorst or Matthias Stom. These painters picked up many religious elements from the works of Caravaggio, subsequently adapting them to their personal style.³⁵

The fourth chapter of the paper follows the development of nocturnal landscape starting with the 17th century, from Aert van der Neer to Peter Paul Rubens, artists that used the moon as a main source of light. This manner of discourse was later complemented by the moon's reflection on water, present in the foreground. This reflection also has a technical component, in that it brings an additional source of light into the scene to reveal more of the landscape. At times, the two are joined by a third source, a fire placed close to the edge of the water.

³⁰ *ibidem*, pp. 25-26.

³¹ *ibidem*, p. 29.

³² *ibidem*, p. 29.

³³ *ibidem*, p. 95.

³⁴ *ibidem*, p. 106.

³⁵ *ibidem*, p. 111.

The modern nocturnal landscape of the early 19th century mostly manifests itself as a result of historic deceptions, through the symptom of melancholy, and builds a direct rapport with the artist's interior reality.³⁶ As a reaction to the rational and objective view of the 19th century, Romanticism took form as a direction emphasizing the irrational, the mystery, the unexplained. In this context, German painter Caspar David Friedrich emerges as a strong voice of the new vision, fleshing out his own searches and spiritual stances in the context of a changing world.³⁷

The romantic perception of nature shows an infinite force that pierces through the horizon of rationality. The romantic genius is consumed by pathos and by the idea of death, the moderator of a continuous evolutionary process.³⁸ This romantic spirit met ideal conditions for dissemination in Germany and Friedrich's works were a value declaration of the new in the evolving context of the late 18th century. Fascinated by ancient oak trees, Friedrich's nocturnal landscapes are shrouded in moonlight and pagan cemeteries, his paintings displaying hints of the loneliness that worked as a catalyst for the development of his spiritual and aesthetic endeavours. The romantic view on life and nature focuses more on the internal interpretation rather than on external manifestation. From this point of view, Friedrich underlines the importance of seeing the world through the eyes of the spirit, and not of the body.³⁹

The moon became one of Romanticism's main motifs, its importance underpinned by astronomic discoveries of the times, namely a more complex mapping of Earth's satellite. While the moon had its fair share of attention even back during the Renaissance—looking for example at Jan van Eyck's depiction in his *Crucifixion*—the veritable veneration of the moon became pervasive in German poetry, literature and philosophy during Romanticism.⁴⁰

Friedrich's series of characters contemplating the moon was placed in both a pagan *locus*, of a mystical night, but also within the context of an exclusively Christian vision that also left room for contemplation. His *Two men contemplating the moon*, painted in Dresden in 1819, which is the most dramatic in a series of three, and also the most well-known, denotes profound introspection.

³⁶ George Banu, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

³⁷ Clifford West, *Caspar David Friedrich: The Spirit of German Romanticism in Art*, Kindle edition, 2018, location: 24/317.

³⁸ *ibidem*, location: 41/317.

³⁹ *ibidem*, location: 216-220/317.

⁴⁰ Sabine Rewald, *Caspar David Friedrich: Moonwatchers*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Yale University Press, New York, 2001, p. 6.

Nocturnal themes, and characters contemplating the moon more specifically, were adopted by the proponents of Romanticism, who invested in them symbolic valences tied to the journey of time from birth to death.⁴¹

Later, during the 19th century, a whole series of artists that were either directly influenced by Friedrich, or continued his style, emerged. The list includes Johan Christian Dahl, who utilized the Academy of Dresden's Nordic landscapes, as well as Christian Friedrich Gille, August Heinrich or Martinus Rørbye. Friedrich's influence, however, was not limited to Germany or the immediate geographic area. The whole of Spanish Romanticism, for example, starting with Francisco de Goya, was influenced by Friedrich's symbolism-heavy works.

Infusing emotion into the landscape became a main staple of European Romanticism during the early decades of the 19th century, well beyond German borders, with John Constable and Joseph Mallord William Turner just two examples of artists transposing the Romantic expression into a different, unique national context.

The onset of the great industrialization era and the instauration of modernity brought a new relationship for the modern man when it came to history and the surrounding world, a relationship negotiated through a novel subjectivity. The traditional view is set aside and replaced with a scientific approach informed by the Enlightenment. This shift permanently altered all aspects of everyday life, from industry and commerce to leisure and consumption. At the same time, the invention of public street lighting brought a decisive shift in the perception of the nocturnal. Thus, darkness was no longer a barrier for human activity, becoming an incentive even. The city's ingenuity in going beyond the natural cycle, of banishing the night through sheer technical boldness, stands as a pure symbol of the essence of progress.⁴²

The paper's fifth chapter analyses the Impressionist night with a focus on Paris as a proponent. Van Gogh becomes here a prime example, a huge artist that took advantage of night's aesthetic potential and, unlike many of his peers, preferred to paint outside instead of the comfort of the studio. Following his work on *Café Terrace at Night*, the artist confesses his special relationship with night time, as well as his passion for its shades, stating that the night has more colours to offer than daylight.⁴³ In the iconic *Starry Night*, the artist's wide palette,

⁴¹ *ibidem*, p. 40.

⁴² William Chapman Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴³ Mari Pictori, no. 1, *Vincent Van Gogh*, Publishing service SRL, Bucharest, 2000, p. 18.

which blends shades in a vertigo of colours, is a depiction of the painter's interior storm.⁴⁴ The result is a unique night, one that arouses otherwise latent energies which carry the specificities of the author's turmoil, his suffering.⁴⁵

Van Gogh's works have often been labelled as having a cosmic side, and the turmoil that links the matter in his paintings can be seen as an externalization of the anger within the personal microcosm. Through the process of microcosm-ing, the entire universe manifests and blends into the small canvas of Van Gogh's works.⁴⁶

During this time, the Parisian aesthetic was influenced by the popularity of the cabarets, of prostitution, of dance halls and amusement parks. Artists such as Edgar Degas and Henri de Toulouse Lautrec were inspired by the Les Ambassadeurs café, conveying the sensorial depth of Parisian nights in their works. These painters captured the life and leisure of the city's elites, at concerts, the ballet, the opera and even peeking in the backstage of shows, cabarets and bordellos.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Camille Pissarro captured the nocturnal atmosphere of Paris' streets, evoking the debauchery of the city that now had public electric lighting to reveal its nightlife.⁴⁸

Even so, the magical symbolism of the night continued to attract some artists, such as Postimpressionist Douanier Rousseau, who forged a peculiar world, embraced by a silent and dreamy atmosphere under the light of the moon, in pieces such as *The Sleeping Gypsy*. While Rousseau never travelled outside France, his paintings represent a mode of escaping the everyday life, and the simple yet sincere vision of the artist announced one of surrealism's main principles.⁴⁹

Chapter six briefly tackles nocturnal influences in Romanian art, starting from the melancholic landscapes of Ion Andreescu. Andrei Pleșu compares Andreescu's genius with that of Mihai Eminescu due to the painter's manner of conveying the metaphysical pictural space, which manages to synthesize the process of both closeness and distance in relation to the painting.⁵⁰

Next, the paper tackles the artistic context that took roots after the First World War, following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in relation to the works of Corneliu Baba and the painter's influences.

⁴⁴ Paul Trachtman, *Van Gogh's Visions*, Smithsonian Magazine, 2008: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/van-goghs-night-visions-131900002/>, accessed on 07.08.2020 at 13:40, paragraphs 21-22.

⁴⁵ George Banu, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

⁴⁶ *ibidem*, p. 344.

⁴⁷ Mari Pictori, no. 6, *Edgar Degas*, Publishing service SRL, Bucharest, 2000, pp. 13-21.

⁴⁸ William Chapman Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ Mari Pictori, no. 10, *Douanier Rousseau*, Publishing service SRL, Bucharest, 2000, p. 15.

⁵⁰ Andrei Pleșu, *Pitoresc și melancolie*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1992, p. 99.

Chapter six, entitled *Noapteă scandinavă (The Scandinavian Night)*, analyses the phenomenological uniqueness of the area's landscapes. Here, the winter's long night favours isolation and depression, while the summer's nearly inexistent night becomes a prolonged twilight. This context became an important source of inspiration for artists such as Edward Munch, Harald Sohlberg, Eilif Peterssen and even Arnold Böcklin. And while symbolist art and poetry had a strong hold on Scandinavian painting, the clarity of summer nights of the far north acted as a counterbalance to the continued darkness of winter.⁵¹

The surrealist nocturnal order, covered in the eighth chapter, is analysed using the works of René Magritte and filtered through events of the 20th century. Magritte, whose style was underlined by depression and took shape through mania, was the artist that determined the apparition of the artificial inflection in painting.⁵²

While Magritte tackled the night in many of his works, we can see the most obvious manifestation of the nocturnal order in his series of 17 paintings and gouaches entitled *L'empire des lumières (The Empire of Light)*. This set became one of the most recurrent series of the painter's career, with Magritte considering the iterations a unitary corpus due to the resemblance of the images, which submerge the viewer into the tranquillity of the landscape.⁵³

In opposition to many of Magritte's landscapes, the series is extraordinarily subtle due to the dark contrast and the consistency of displaying fragments of a bourgeois neighbourhood in contrast with the sun-lit yet cloudy sky. The artist makes use of the day-night duality, generating a series of images that no longer link to the physical world, but reveal an internal reality.⁵⁴

Although the works in this series can be considered landscapes, Magritte underlines the antagonistic juxtaposition between the nocturnal urban scene and the diurnal sky, thus uniting opposing forces—not only the day and the night, but also the natural and the artificial, the specific and the universal.⁵⁵

The ninth chapter follows nocturnal art across the United States of America, starting from the second half of the 19th century, which marked the transition from the idyllic landscape of the Hudson River school to a more intimate and mysterious nocturnal landscape, which

⁵¹ George Banu, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁵² Caitlin Haskell, *René Magritte. The Fifth Season*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, 2018, p. 20.

⁵³ Sandra Zalman in Caitlin Haskell, *op.cit.*, p. 43.

⁵⁴ *ibidem*, p. 43.

⁵⁵ *ibidem*, p. 44.

began to dissimulate and dissolve nonessential details.⁵⁶ We can assert that modern American painting has its roots in German artist Oswald Achenbach, who painted nocturnal landscapes of the Gulf of Naples, or in Camille Corot and Théodore Rousseau, French painters that perceived a more intimate aspect of light, or James McNeill Whistler, who influenced the fundamental shift of perspective when it came to nocturnal landscapes.⁵⁷

Whistler adopted an almost monochromatic style, developing nearly abstract images. His method revived the nocturnal style of the great artists of the 17th and 18th centuries, whose compositions give the moon a leading role. Whistler borrowed the term “nocturne” from Frédéric Chopin’s music, which had a major influence on a whole generation of painters.⁵⁸ The arrival of public lighting in the U.S. at the end of the 19th century annihilated the dark of night, which to that point represented an unmovable barrier. The sudden landscape changes stemming from this brought a return to the obscure for the painters of that age, which manifested as a profound scepticism toward modernity. As such, a goal of many nocturnal landscapes of that age was to offer a refuge into the night’s nostalgia.⁵⁹

The U.S. became the new epicentre of modernity, which stimulated artists to push back against the rapidly changing city. In his attempt to fight back against the electrified city, Whistler managed to reveal an almost abstract side of the night. European symbolism, which helped nocturnal art spread across the U.S., represented another important influence for American painting at the beginning of the 20th century.⁶⁰

Henry Ossawa Tanner, a fundamental cornerstone of American painting when it comes to nocturnal art, developed a complex and intricate link between visible and representable in his works. The spectral light in Tanner’s paintings seem filtered by the darkness in the form of an interior vision, but well anchored in the physical subject. At the same time, George Inness who revealed the qualities of a tonalist, was highly regarded by nocturnal painters, tackling in his works an angle that is part scientific, part religious.⁶¹ The visual perception of the night can also be interpreted as the vision of a world beyond the visible, and this idea is well illustrated in the paintings of Winslow Homer.

With mechanical reproductions taking off and photography gaining ground rapidly, nocturnal painting began to reconfigure what vision was, and artists used the medium as a

⁵⁶ Joachim Homann, *Night Vision. Nocturnes in American Art, 1860-1960*, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Prestel Verlag, Munich, London, New York, 2015, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Hélène Valance, *op.cit.*, location: 96-105/7684.

⁵⁸ *ibidem*, location: 105-119/7684.

⁵⁹ Joachim Homann, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁰ Hélène Valance, *op. cit.*, location: 317-324/7684.

⁶¹ *ibidem*, location: 900/7684.

strategic means of repositioning in the context of a new, expanding economy.⁶² Frederic Remington was one of the first artists to assume this commitment in nocturnal art. The personality of Remington's nocturnes can find a correspondent in the charm of night found in the art and literature of the 19th century.⁶³

The technique used by these nocturnal artists was based on the dialectics between opacity and transparency. At the same time, the generally small size of nocturnal paintings offered an extra incentive to delve on the internal vision of the landscape. This duality, of the landscape situated between the interior and exterior, is cleverly suggested by the works of Edward Steichen.⁶⁴ Remington's method is also reflected in the works of Andrew Wyeth, mainly as a means to move away from the illustrative populism of his father, Newell Convers Wyeth.

Meanwhile, the similarities between nocturnes and mental visions became a template in the paintings of Ralph Albert Blakelock, while the specifically blurry images of nocturnal art harmonized with the psychological take on the night in Alexander Harrison's works, the latter's paintings taking the form of visions filtered by the inner eye.⁶⁵

Even in the age of the streetlight, the moon remained a symbol of creativity and a source of inspiration. Modifying their visual discourse, artists such as Winslow Homer, George Inness, Albert Pinkham Ryder, Marguerite Zorach or Charles Burchfield used the perennial motif in their paintings as either a symbol or an abstraction.⁶⁶ Each of them responded to different aspects of the night. Inness was interested in the spiritual vision, while Homer meditated on life and death. Ryder expressed his personal visions, while Zorach was interested in the night's feminine connotations and Burchfield explored infinite and mysterious possibilities.⁶⁷

Another central aspect addressed in the ninth chapter is the link between nocturnes and the issue of race. From this standpoint, the paper explores Remington's recurrent theme of the disappearing Native American, but also looks at Tanner as the era's sole prominent painter of colour fascinated by the night. Through his oeuvre, Tanner clearly expressed objections to racial preconceptions, which not only spoke of the disenfranchised, but also affected his path as an American artist. Even so, for Tanner, the night also symbolized a space of negotiation, adaptable to any identity.⁶⁸

⁶² *ibidem*, location: 1083/7684.

⁶³ Joachim Homann, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁴ Hélène Valance, *op. cit.*, location: 1611-1618/7684.

⁶⁵ Joachim Homann, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁶⁶ *ibidem*, p. 21.

⁶⁷ *ibidem*, pp. 21-22.

⁶⁸ Hélène Valance, *op. cit.*, location: 3235/7684.

Urban sprawl interested a series of artists that depicted the nocturnal atmosphere of New York's periphery. These highly dense areas, populated by Eastern or Southern European immigrants, were marked by poverty. Artists like Everett Shinn, George Luks or John Sloan revealed the distressed, dramatic and dark side of this socio-geographical *locus*. While Sloan depicted the metropolitan life at the dawn of the 20th century, Edward Hopper, through his human subjects usually placed under indoor lighting, gave viewers a preview of the rich future of American cinematography.⁶⁹

The hidden glance of these artists reveals the nocturnal atmosphere of the city through a vision that is nearly metaphysical in its attempt to permeate the stories of their characters. This dramatic vision is also supported by the strong contrast between artificial light and the dark of night that usually surrounds it. Martin Lewis, another important observer of urban nightlife, marks off with precision, in his engravings, the limit between light and the shadows that describe the city's commercial buildings.⁷⁰

A significant share of subsequent modern American painters of the 20th century attached new visions to the theme. The influence of light dominated the urban territory from dusk until dawn, bringing new symbolic and metaphorical charges to the arena of nocturnal art. Responding to the times, painters steadily moved into the territory of the abstract, sometime to the edge of perceivable, challenging the viewer's visual intelligence. Georgia O'Keeffe and Arthur Dove, for example, extended their visual horizons beyond the visible world, exceeding the canons of abstraction and representation through extremely personal visions.⁷¹ While O'Keeffe was influenced by the great New York metropolis, she also sought to find some distance, a distance that brought us *The Lawrence Tree*, which she painted in New Mexico.⁷² Later on, artists such as Joseph Stella and Mark Rothko took the abstraction of the nocturnal farther while also conveying more direct emotions, thus opening new paths for the art of the 20th century.

The 10th chapter analyses the nocturnal order in contemporary European context, focusing on several influential factors in recent history, both political and social, that catalysed the works of influential artists of the first decade of this century.

In a Northern European context, Karin Mamma Andersson's nocturnal landscapes denote both welcoming tranquillity and a disconcerting feeling brought by its dream-like side,

⁶⁹ *ibidem*, location: 4786-4808/7684.

⁷⁰ Joachim Homann, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁷¹ *ibidem*, p. 139.

⁷² *ibidem*, p. 142.

the latter evidently influenced by cinematography.⁷³ Meanwhile, the Leipzig school produced at least three important artists that tackle the nocturnal in original manners: Matthias Weischer, Neo Rauch and Tim Eitel. While Eitel's works are influenced by Caspar David Friedrich or his contemporary Gerhard Richter,⁷⁴ Rauch's surrealism and figurative imagery bring forward eerie landscapes in which the sky's artificiality seems to suggest an electric storm. His paintings seem condensed stylistic messages, generating conflicts between utopic, nostalgic, idyllic or grotesque elements.⁷⁵ The German space also brings us David Schnell, whose works suggest a social lack of balance between nature and urban life.⁷⁶

Meanwhile, Czech artist Daniel Pitin's paintings resonate with a film that unravels itself in front of the viewer as an illusory experience defined by an aggregate of emotions ranging from delight to disillusionment or even a meditation on one's own life experience.⁷⁷ Cinematography marked a strong influence on a significant number of contemporary Eastern European artists, including Zsolt Bodoni, Alexander Tinei, Adrian Ghenie and Mircea Suciuc. At the same time, Victor Man's symbolic works reflect both the sober socio-political reality of Eastern Europe—and Romania specifically—prior to the 1990s and the ensuing transitional uncertainty.⁷⁸ At the western end of the continent, dark backgrounds influenced by cinematic effects brought us a 21st century neo-baroque, well represented by English painter Justin Mortimer.⁷⁹

From Austria, Silke Otto-Knapp is known for her complex and delicate works, generally brought together in monochrome palettes of black, grey or silver. Her paintings resemble solarized photographs, capturing light like a camera using long exposure.⁸⁰

German artist Daniel Richter brings a whole different take on the nocturnal. Highly influential on an international level, Richter's psychedelic and luminous paintings offer an electrifying effect.⁸¹ Scottish painter Peter Doig is a somewhat close artistic relative, his nocturnal works suggesting richness of colour and an illusion of light while also evoking tension between compositional elements, namely between rustic scenes and nearly faded landscapes.⁸²

⁷³ Jane Neal, *Nightfall. New Tendencies in Figurative Painting*, Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague, 2013, p. 12.

⁷⁴ *ibidem*, pp. 13-14.

⁷⁵ Hans Werner Holzwarth, *100 Contemporary Artists*, vol. 2, Taschen, Hong Kong, Köln, London, Los Angeles, Madrid, Paris, Tokyo, 2009, p. 496.

⁷⁶ Jane Neal, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁷⁷ *ibidem*, p. 16.

⁷⁸ *ibidem*, pp. 11-12.

⁷⁹ *ibidem*, pp. 16-17.

⁸⁰ Barry Schwabsky, *Vitamin P2. New Perspectives in Painting*, Phaidon Press Limited, London, New York, 2013, p. 238.

⁸¹ Jane Neal, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

⁸² Hans Werner Holzwarth, *op.cit.*, vol. 2, p. 520.

The same European context brings us Caroline Walker, whose themes range from status, sexuality, wealth, career, family and friendship to the human body itself. For Walker, these themes become symbols that allude to society's patriarchal structures, which have marginalized women, stripped them of their rights and opened the way for labels and abuse. The artist takes a journey within the intimate life of the subjects, not unlike Hopper or Sloan, with the manner of conveying dialogue also resembling that of Hopper at times.⁸³

The final chapter also dives into contemporary American painting, looking at artists such as Alex Katz, Jules de Balincourt, Sayre Gomez, Hernan Bas and Nicole Eisenman.

The paper concludes with the author's personal scientific research section, which states that the nocturnal order has been \and remains a fertile angle of artistic exploration, as both dramatic and dream-related visions of the nocturnal order have been, are and will continue to change in accordance with humanity's evolution. As an unending source of inspiration, the night acts as a constant stimulus of human creativity, an inescapable element that becomes art through the painter's subjective filter.⁸⁴

⁸³ Matt Price, *Caroline Walker: California Dreaming?*, Fused Magazine, fusedmagazine.co.uk, 2017, second paragraph, <https://www.fusedmagazine.co.uk/caroline-walker-california-dreaming/>, accessed on 17.09.2020 at 16:00.

⁸⁴ Joachim Homann, *op. cit.*, p. 158.