

INTRODUCTION

My comparative study focuses on the representation of the Dolomites mountains in the artworks of Tiziano Vecellio "*The Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple*" (fig.1), Oskar Kokoschka "*The Bride of the Wind*" (Fig 2) and Renato Balsamo "*La nascita delle Dolomiti*" (Fig. 3).

Different periods and different views but the beauty of the Dolomites mountains in these works is a constant presence. The reasons besides this work resides in my origins since I was born and raised in the heart of the Dolomites and those shapes and colours belong to me as part of my personal heritage. When I visit a museum or I consult an art book my eyes are soon attracted by those familiar lines.

The selection of the artworks came natural for the Titian's and Balsamo's whereas more based on research for the Kokoschka's one. Titian was born 30 km from my hometown and he worked in Venice where I could admire this impressive work at the Gallerie dell'Accademia where it first was painted.

Balsamo died few years ago but I had the chance to know him in person and I was familiar with his works from the very young age when he also portrayed me.

More difficult has been finding the third artwork but I wanted the Dolomites to be represented by a non-italian artist and Kokoschka's intense expressionism was exactly what I was looking for.

After the Dolomites appeared in Titian's artworks there's a gap in their representation till the half of '800 when british victorian travellers ventured out in the Dolomites trying to see and visit in person the mountains they saw in Titian works. From this moment on the Dolomites became a place of elective tourism and several artists visited or even resided here to contemplate and fix this beauty through their art. Titian's background landscapes were not mere shapes but pragmatic, precise and geographically recognizable¹. In my investigation I will work on this specific aspect and see how accurate he was in drawing and painting his birthplace Dolomite mountain. As W. Bainbridge asserts «Details confined to neglected corner of canvasses slowly emerged as figurative signposts to lead travellers on a journey able to transcend time and space, and to project them into a scenery painted centuries before»².

The Balsamo's artwork was chosen because it's a powerful surreal view of my beloved Tofana di Rozes. Walking in his studio and having the chance to touch and see his works was so important for me and I was helped in this by Balsamo's daughter Maia, who is now the curator of her father's work. Maia and I largely discussed on this work and she helped me to understand the nature of it and the artistic process which lead at this beautiful scene.

In Kokoschka artwork I was immediately attracted by the shape of my favorite mount Tofana di Rozes and here I want to demonstrate how this suggestive background has been so important for Kokoschka experience giving birth to this specific artwork.

In this research I want to make an investigation on how the Dolomites have enchanted and mesmerized these three artists in different ways from Titian passing through Kokoschka right to the current days of Balsamo. How this majestic landscape emerging from the backgrounds of Titian works, becomes part of the narration in Kokoschka work and it gets to occupy the whole canvas of the Balsamo's artwork wiping out any human presence .

I will find out how the different constraints of the day have changed in the representations. How surging from Titian's nostalgic landscapes in the back of his artworks, the Dolomites, become a new symbol in Balsamo's work actualizing the secularization of art passing through Kokoschka's voluptuous and tormented lines.



1 Tiziano Vecellio "*The Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple*" 1534 -1538 oil canvas 335×775 cm, [Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venezia](#)



2 Oskar Kokoschka "*The Bride of the Wind*", 1914, oil canvas 181cm × 220 cm Basel, Kunstmuseum



3 Renato Balsamo "*La nascita delle Dolomiti*" 2004 gouache 50X70cm Private Collection

1 W. Bainbridge/ Journal of Historical Geography 56 (2017)- Titian Country p.23

2 W. Bainbridge/ Journal of Historical Geography 56 (2017)- Titian Country p.23

The Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple By Tiziano Vecellio

Identification and analysis of formal qualities



Tiziano Vecellio "The Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple" 1534 -1538 oil canvas
335x775 cm, [Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venezia](#)

This oil canvas measures 335 x 775 cm. for its huge dimensions it is therefore called «teler». It's one of the biggest ever completed by Titian and it took four years (1534-1538) to finish it. The artwork is visible in Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice where first it was painted. Titian was the most successful exponent of the glorious Venetian '500 art. The quality of his art was excellent and it reached its pinnacle in the religious and historic picture together with his portraits.

COMPOSITION: The subject is immediately recognizable as a religious subject more precisely a religious scene. The articulated architecture of the Temple occupies the right side of the canvas while on the left side there is a wide and detailed landscape view where the mountains are immediately recognizable as the Marmarole in the Dolomites. This landscape gives sense of depth to the whole scene. On the left an unusual pyramid structure stands at the end of a colonnade. A group of people are gathered at the left- centre in the lower part of the canvas. Some of the figures, perfectly portrayed in Titian's style, are recognizable as real venetian citizens.¹ The lower part of the canvas has been cut to create two door frames and it's evident that it has been done after the artwork has been completed since, specially on the left, the group of people have been mutilated. In the foreground the relevant marble stone stair is the stage where the little Virgin figure stands alone.

COLOURS: Colours are something special for Titian's art and so it is his technique made of stratifications of colours² and contrapositions of dark and light. The scene is dominated by yellow tones giving a warm sensation to the whole.

The yellow light of the Virgin halo seems to flood the whole scene The attention is captured firstly by the intense red of the vest of the figure on the left which is a bit misleading since the real subject is the little Mary but the sight of the man drive us to the right direction. The light blue of the Mary's vest is of course connected to his celestial and holy meaning and it is connected with the blue sky and the blue haze enveloping the mountains in the back and Also with the blue marble of the colon in the centre of the canvas. White is another leading and symbolic colour. The headscarf of the old lady in the foreground and the striking white of the eggs in her basket capture our attention and make us meditate on the significance of this particular figure. The white clouds in the back open the view and illuminate the landscape which lies on a different plan and could be easily separated from the rest. The light created with the use of contrasting colours and tones is probably the most intrinsic characteristic of Titian's art and of the new born Tonal painting.

SPACE AND FORMS: At first glance we immediately realize how forms are very important in this artwork. All the scene is framed by architectural structures: from the basic geometrical stair in the foreground to the significant volume of the three different buildings on the right, up to the surprising pyramid on the left which is completing the arcade and recalling the shape of the mountains in the background. These square columns are in striking contrast with the round forms of the columns on the opposite. Different architectonic styles and their peculiar forms are displayed in this canvas. Again the smooth and sinuous forms of the figures on the left are in contrast with the rigid and straight figures of the priests at the top of the stairs waiting for the Lady to walk up. Although the architectural forms are definitely dominating the scene it's the alternance of the full and empty to give movement and depth to the whole.

TEXTURE: Although we already said how Titian used to cover his canvas with multiple layers of paint, the texture results smooth and soft and all the elements are perfectly natural. The figures are absolutely real and perfectly portrayed as it is the architectural structure dominating the scene.

LINES: There is a clear and complex alternation of vertical and longitudinal lines in part due to the structure of the inherent structure of the buildings and in part due to the artificial juxtaposition of them. The horizontal lines are the most consistent because they form the structure of the imponent stair which occupies the great part of the right side of the canvas. The vertical lines are created by the columns and by the vertical walls of the buildings but also by the vertical posture of the major figures in the canvas, above all the Virgin. There is also a very strong connections of diagonal lines driving the attention to the majestic landscape in the background. However, this landscape looks separated from the main scene. The heads of the crowd attending the event form an horizontal line of separation with the background and the wall of the third house on the right and the pyramid profile on the left complete the cut-off.

EMPHASIS: The viewer attention is almost immediately catch by the brightest point in the artwork which is focused on the little figure of Mary and her halo. All the light comes from there. Even though the body of the Virgin is very tiny and undersized compared to the other children portrayed here, her symbolic figure and magnitude are enhanced using the effect of the light.

Here again the second point of attraction is the background: those white clouds create a silhouette effect on the mountains whose shapes are very particular and intriguing. So basically there are two point of bright light creating emphasis on two different point and subjects of the canvas like it was two separate artworks.

BALANCE: This artwork is completely asymmetrical and unbalanced. It's almost possible to divide it in two parts. The part on the right is dominated by the complex architecture and the human presence consists in single figures well delineated but standing alone. On the other side of the canvas the situation is capsized: the human figures are all together, although well recognizable in their individuality, they form a compact crowd where the architecture is minimized to an end of a colonnade and a pyramid.

MOVEMENT: All the scene is animated by the movements and gestures of the agitated crowd and attendants which drive the viewer sight to follow the Virgins's steps. Although she's standing still we have the impression to have followed her walking up the stairs. The discontinuous structure of the stairs, with a landing in the middle where Mary stands, forms a kind of rampant weave giving a sense of ascendent movement pushed by the gestures and poses of the animated crowd.

UNITY: The scene looks composed by two different subjects: the big theatrical scene happening in the foreground and the separated landscape in the background. Both are not essential to each other. This is probably an interesting consideration since, until the seventeenth century, the landscape was confined to the background of portraits or paintings dealing principally with religious, mythological or historical subjects⁴ as it is here but finally something looks different: The Marmarole group, so accurately portrayed with his surroundings together with the sky and clouds could be easily cut off and separately framed as a superb landscape paint.

1 Filippo Pedrocchi Tiziano, Rizzoli 2000 p. 164

2 Lorenzo Lazzaini Note su alcune opere comprese tra il 1510 e il 1542 in Tiziano Marsilio Editori 1990 p380

The wind's bride, by Oskar Kokoschka - Identification and analysis of formal qualities

This artwork is held in the Kunstmuseum Basel. Oskar Kokoschka was an artist, poet and a playwright. He is known for his expressionistic portraits and landscapes.

COMPOSITION: This painting represents Oskar Kokoschka and his wife to be. They seem to be floating in swirls of colour, it is known that he was obsessed with her. They are in the centre of the art work with their faces positioned slightly to the left. They seem to be both sleeping, they both are not fully dressed. There is not a strong sense of depth in this work. In background you can see what seems to be a moon, over a mountain chain. The art work is a meditation on his tormented affair with Alma Mahler¹. It is therefore also known as "Tempest". It is considered in this artwork that he is in bed with her.²

COLOUR AND BRUSH STROKES : Most of the painting is a aqua (bluish-green) with quite a bit of white, some red, a little brown and Prussian blue. The colour gives a feeling of the sea with sparkling lights and waves swirling around the couple expressing tremendous calm, he uses multiple colours to paint the skin for example. The colours create harmony in the work making it feel very complete. We can see the brush strokes clearly, very typical of expressionistic painting, the paint is applied very heavily and you can really see the artist marks. It is almost like you can see the process of the painting taking place and it seems very spontaneous and expressive. The bright Alma's skin tone is highlighting her figure above the rest which remains sombre. White, light blue, light purple with yellow and green graduations, together with softer brushstroke make the figure more heavenly like angel feathers.

TEXTURE AND PATTERN: The surface of the artwork is very texture because of how the paint is heavily applied. Even the skin is applied as if it has a texture, it is not smooth. A similar texture is applied on the sea, mountains and sky. Because he has used textures so heavily, you would have to stand back from the artwork to take in the whole picture because the texture breaks up the picture plane. This is typical of Kokoschka and shows his style of painting. In his broad gestural strokes of thick colour, he combines the impressionistic technique with distortion of colour and form, creating a sense of movement and emotion. The result is a particular kineticism of his art. Through his coarse brushstrokes he obtain the *embodiment* of the soul as himself says "There is an outpouring of feeling into the image which becomes, as it were, the soul's plastic embodiment" (*On the Nature of Visions*)³.

LINE AND SHAPE: The art work is full of wavy curved lines and shapes, with no hard edges or angles. This enhances the feeling of floating and calmness. The curved lines enveloping the two bodies create a kind of barrier like a shell separating the two lovers from the background which remains thereby isolated like a beautiful landscape.

SIZE: This is a very large art work, it is 180.4x220.2cm. Therefore the figures are almost life size, and when you observe the work you are completely absorbed by the painting, almost engulfed by it's movement. It's known that Kokoschka took the exact size of Alma's bed⁴. The life size representation of Alma has been very important for Oskar and this obsession ended with the creation of the famous Kokoschka Doll: Alam's fetches. While Kokoschka was painting the canvas, the poet and friend Georg Trakl visited him daily and described his studio as: completely empty a part for the big canvas occupying the space and a barrel where he sit for painting. The walls were painted black "to highlight colours" as Kokoschka said.

1. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/oskar-kokoschka-the-bride-of-the-wind-windsbraut>

2. https://arthive.com/oskarkokoschka/works/339067~Bride_of_the_wind

3. http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/thinking_pictures/berland.htm

4. https://arthive.com/oskarkokoschka/works/339067~Bride_of_the_wind

5. <https://ita.calameo.com/read/001006493a470555a9380>

<https://kunstmuseumbasel.ch/en/collection/masterpieces#&gid=1&pid=52>



Oskar Kokoschka "The Bride of the Wind", 1914, oil canvas 181cm x 220 cm Basel, Kunstmuseum

MOVEMENT, HARMONY AND RHYTHM: The painting is full of movement from the swirling brush strokes to the placing of the objects, everything seems to be moving. It looks definitely harmonious because the curved lines give a sense of smooth swinging and the lovers seem to be lulled by the sea and rhythm comes along. Curved lines highlight a sense of comfort and are cosier than the straight lines.

As Piet Mondrian says "curved lines may be the most emotional of all."

EMPHASIS, FOCAL POINT: The artwork emphasizes the faces of the two lovers, which are painted more detailed, using clearer brushes than their bodies and the overall painting. However Alma's body, with her brighter complexion, is for sure emphasized and it occupies the central part of the scene. It's a tribute to her.

BALANCE: The two bodies and the space around them occupy almost two third of the canvas. The rest is occupied by a the nocturn beautiful landscape which we know to be real⁵. Is therefore clear that the balance of the scene is particularly concentrated on the left where the visual weight of the two lovers is absolutely prominent leaving the upper right side collapse in the distant landscape.

Nascita delle Dolomiti (The Birth of the Dolomites) by Renato Balsamo - Identification and analysis of formal qualities

This artwork is a gouache (opaque watercolour)¹ on light blue cardboard 50X70cm. It is part of a series of gouaches set in Cortina Dolomites my birthplace and now belonging to a private collection. Renato Balsamo was born in Naples and it arrived in Cortina to teach at the local art school². The mountain landscape immediately captured his imagination and, as a prolific artist, he portrayed these mountains and landscapes in different ways with different techniques.

COMPOSITION: In this artwork the majestic shape of the mountain occupies the centre and degrades to the right exactly how it is into the reality. On the foreground we can see a stormy sea with its waves lapping the rocks. The background consists in a clear endless sky enlivened by few evanescent clouds. Three plans are very clear: foreground, mid-ground, background have three different scenes nevertheless still entangled both on the side of the composition and on the side of the technique.

COLOURS: Blue colour, its shades and nuances dominates the artwork. White is the second visible colour. The gouache technique offers great opportunities and the specially when it's necessary to transmit sense of transparency, of evanescence and inconsistency through the watercolours adding the white tempera pigments for the light³. The colours show degrading tones from the blue of the waves in the foreground to the dominant and quite ureal light blue tempera in the background giving a sense of depth to the whole. However the colour is never solid, robust; it looks evaporating and fragmenting in the clashing waves and in the rising clouds covering the hole picture with a veil of mist which is very typical of the mountain and seascapes in the special "blue hours".

SHAPES AND LINES: The massive natural pyramidal shape of the mount in the centre occupies the most part of the artwork.⁴ We can observe similar shapes in front of it, between the waves, and in the back on the left, together with the attached triangular rock on the left, a sort of "replica" of the main subject. It's like looking through a kaleidoscope where a subject it duplicated several times all around it. The lines are pretty harsh how the rock can be and the weaves too are not created from smooth lines but from nervous and straight lines till they get fragmented in the white foam of the splashing weaves. Balsamo perfectly reproduced the particular geological conformation of the Dolomites and the movement of the sea giving a touch of realism to the surreal scene.

MOUVEMENT HARMONY AND RHYTHM: Paradoxically, even though the subject is a majestic rock massive which implies immobility in itself, the artwork gives a sense of movement to the viewer attention through the movement created by the waves and by the ascending clouds close to it. The title of the artwork is "Naissance of the Dolomites" and naissance means bringing into the world and involves the sense of movement like here: the waves are bringing, pushing the mount into this world. The movement is complex and troubled and the regular rhythm of the waves is interrupted by the breaking weaves in the front.⁵ Although the artwork movement looks tormented and dramatic, as a birth could be, is nevertheless permeated by a discreet sense of harmony which affects the vision at the first glance.



Renato Balsamo «*La nascita delle Dolomiti*» 2004 gouache
50X70cm Private Collection

EMPHASIS: The majestic mount in the centre, it's the subject: essentially it's a portrait. The central image of the mount occupies the most part of the artwork. The movement of the waves looks going right but it suddenly stops and explode driving the viewer attention to the main subject. The empty sky is not interesting and again the view is diverted to the mount.

VARIETY: This artwork has not so many elements in it like it has not so many colours. Basically here we can see three elements: water, rock (earth) and air which are also three of the four essential elements the ancient Greeks considered everything was made up of. Looks like Balsamo wanted the viewer to concentrate on the meaning of the scene and not exactly on the practical representation of it. Reduced to three elements, the work takes us back to ancient times when the Dolomites raised from the sea and when no human presence was expected yet.

BALANCE: The movement of the troubled sea seems to displace all the objects to the right side of the artwork like it was washed away. The extreme left side is almost empty both on shapes and colours. Here a strong white light coming from outside dominates and dissolve the shapes. Here again the foam of the broken waves seems to continue in the white of the evanescent clouds. The action take place from the centre to the right side where the waves, the rocks and the sky are more consistent⁶. However the equal space given to the three elements of the sea, rock and sky gives a nice sense of balance to the scene at first glance.

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/art/gouache>

² Daniele Danza, Renato Balsamo 1937-2016, Eizioni Marcora, 2020 p.49

³ Roberto Pappacena, Renato Balsamo e gli abissi della coscienza, ed. Grimaldi 2000 p. 4

⁴ Dino Buzzati, "Corriere della Sera" 25 Aprile 1971, p.3

⁵ Forese Carlo Wezel, La Luce nelle due dolomite di -Renato Balsamo, ed Trentadue 1997 p. 14

⁶ Giuseppe Marchiori, Presentazione Mostra Personale, Renato Balsamo, Cortina 1963

The Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple

By Tiziano Vecellio **Analysis and comprehension of function and purpose.**

In 1534 the members of the confraternity of the Scuola Grande di Santa Maria della Carità in Venice commissioned this work to Titian. It took him, four years to complete it. The Sala dell'Albergo where the canvas is set is also the location where the more important members would meet and where the confraternity's precious documents and relics were preserved¹.

It's a huge rectangular canvas intended to cover the wall in front of the altar in the Albergo chamber. The canvas is still where it was originally positioned and it wasn't moved even when during the first half of '800 the Scuola della Carità became home of the Galleria dell'Accademia.

Titian's composition, is the corroboration of the venetian tradition of religious narrative paintings in the period and it has therefore a religious function. The "Presentation of the Virgin" theme takes origin from the apocryphal gospels and described in the thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* written by Jacobus de Voragine. In the Legend Mary is said to be just three years old when her parents offer her to the Temple. Fifteen steps were to be walked on, but "the virgin child was set down at the lowest step and mounted to the top without help from anyone, as if she were already fully grown up" (Ryan, II, 152)². Painters like Giotto, Tintoretto, Carraccio, worked on this theme and influenced Titian. Like all the religious paintings also this canvas has a symbolic function which in this case is to celebrate the holy figure of the Virgin.

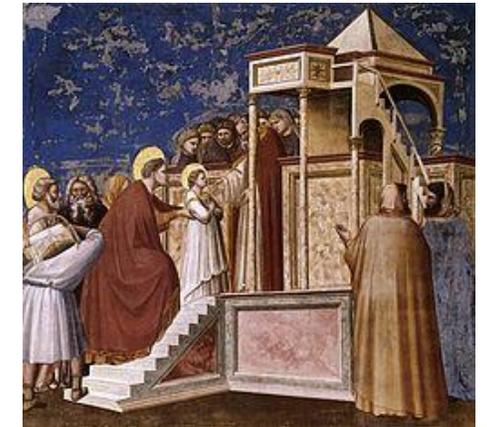
Another purpose is the one of Christian *Caritas* as the Scuola Grande of Santa Maria della Carità was entitled. The figures of the old egg seller in the foreground and the beggar with the infant and kid are particularly enhanced with white tones and light.

However there is not only the religious or symbolic function but there is also a historical narrative function as well. The architecture Titian paints is very rich and some of the structures represent real venetian buildings. Although the Temple itself has no counterpart in Venice Titian age, it seems however to derive from the architectural theories of Sebastiano Serlio who was a Titian acquaintance³. In the 1568 Vasari recognized in the procession "heads of every genre, naturally portraied"⁴ the faces of the real venetian personalities among them the senior members of the Scuola and even some public personalities such as chancellor of the Venice Republic Andrea dé Franceschi (with the red vest) the senator Lazzaro Crasso but also the painter Aretino and the cardinal Pietro Bembo together with Titian himself leaning from a window and his daughter Lavinia. For these reasons it could be considered a sort of historical narration and testimony.

Special mention has to be reserved to the descriptive function of the Landscape in the background. This is the representation of the Marmarole group in the Dolomites, the view Titian had from his hometown in Pieve di Cadore. The description is so accurate precise and realistic to inspire, in the late '800, the entire adventurous Victorian travellers who adventured through these "unfrequented valleys and untrodden peaks"⁵ to discover the landscape Titian painted.



Byzantine Icon [XVI sec.]. The arrival of the God's Mother at the temple— Icon from Moscow school



The Presentation of the Virgin Mary at the Temple
AUTHOR Giotto
DATE 1304-1306
Fresco
Padue Cappella degli Scrovegni



Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple
AUTHOR: Vittore Carpaccio
DATE 1502 - 4
Oil on canvas
Pinacoteca di Brera



Presentation of the Virgin Mary at the Temple
AUTHOR Tintoretto
DATE 1548 and 1551.
Oil on canvas
Venice Chiesa della Madonna dell'Orto



Examples of The Religious function of the Presentation of the Virgin at the temple in others artists and other periods.

¹ <https://www.christianiconography.info/Edited%20in%202013/Italy/maryTempleAccademia.html>

² <https://www.christianiconography.info/Edited%20in%202013/Italy/maryTempleAccademia.html>

³ Filippo Pedrocchi Tiziano, Rizzoli 2000 p. 164

⁴ G. Vasari, La Vita de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti, ed Gaetano Milanesi Florence 1878 vol. 7 P 440

⁵ Amelia B. Edwards, Untrodden Peaks and Unfrequented Valleys, Lennata Publishing London 2018

The wind's bride by Oskar Kokoschka

Analysis and comprehension of function and purpose.

"I must have you for my wife or my genius will self-destruct. You must resuscitate my soul, each night, like an elixir"¹ these words have been written by Oskar Kokoschka to his lover Alma in one of the thousands of letters he wrote her during their insane and troubled relationship.

This oil canvas was created with a specific and absolutely outstanding reason: Alma promised Oskar to marry him only if he was able to paint an absolute masterpiece. Kokoschka painted it in the 1914 after the couple had a vacation in the Dolomites and specially near Cortina d'Ampezzo on the Tre Croci Pass². However Alma never married him and Oskar sold the canvas to buy the war outfit and volunteered in World War I.

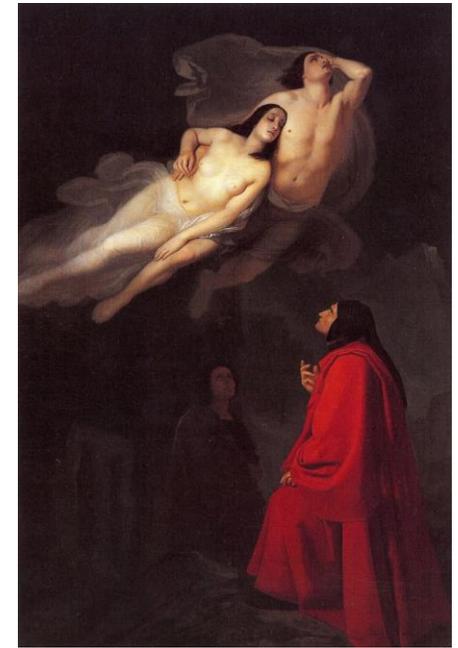
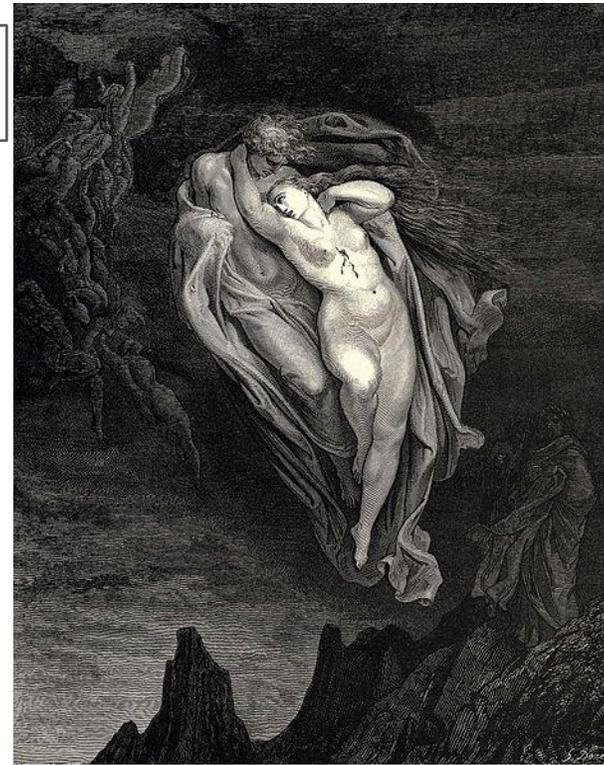
So the artwork, that was created to eternize their love, that was his vow to her bride to be, was exchanged with his sacrifice for the country.

Of course this artwork has a powerful expressive function. All Kokoschka's feelings are violently scattered on the canvas where they are displayed, naked, like the two bodies. We feel pretty embarrassed as Kokoschka throws open his intimate doors and we assist to what is happening inside. However we feel that the painter doesn't invite us to participate to his tormented moment or feel empathetic, it's purely the private representation of a complicated moment of his life in precarious balance between ecstasy and foreboding³.

The couple floating at the mercy of the winds become the symbolic image of the crazy, powerful love obsession. It reminds me Dante's "*Inferno*" and their tormented love narrated by Dante in the V Canto of his *Divine Comedy* and so similarly represented by Gustave Doré⁴ and other artists like Frasccheri, Scheffer and Watts. Paolo and Francesca are considered the emblematic symbol of the insane love. In all the representations here cited we can see how lover's bodies are entangled in the same way. In all the canvases the female character is abandoned in her lover's arms while he holds her tight since they are twisting in the wind. However in Kokoschka's work this is not happening. Oskar holds his hands dramatically folded and Alma is just lying on Oskar's body like it were an unanimated comforter. Obviously this tells us how he already knows that, differently of what happened to Paolo and Francesca, they are not going to share the same tragic destiny, it will be just reserved to him.

The artwork has a second title which is *The Tempest*. This is very symbolic and implies the sense of helplessness and submission to something out of control and almost unbearable like their passion was: the wind of passion sweeping away the two unconscious bodies. The curved waves, nestling the two bodies, look like a floating shell and the ones all around the characters are like waves. The connection with the image of a tragic shipwreck is immediate and of course is the metaphor of the sinking of their love affair.

Alma and Oskar like Paolo and Francesca expression of tormented love



Ary Scheffer, Dante and Virgil Encountering the Shades of Francesca de Rimini and Paolo in the Underworld, 1835, Oil canvas 172,7x 238,8 Wallace Collection



George Frederic Watts, Paolo e Francesca 66.1 x 52.5 cm Oil Canvas Manchester Art Gallery Manchester UK

¹ <https://lewisartcafe.com/kokoschkas-alma-mahler-doll/>

² <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/tre-croci-dolomite-landscape-oskar-kokoschka/XgFsN2GvI6K8jg?hl=en>

³ <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/kokoschka-oskar/artworks/>

⁴ <https://www.stilearte.it/paolo-e-francesca-perche-con-questa-incisione-dore-batte-tutti-gli-illustratori/>

Nascita delle Dolomiti (The Birth of the Dolomites) by Renato Balsamo

Balsamo Analysis and comprehension of function and purpose.

This gouache is part of a group of artworks having the Dolomites as main subjects. This personal exploration of the mountain landscape, in particular of the Dolomites, lead him to reach particular expertise in the representation of the mountain ranges.

Balsamo was born and raised in the south of Italy by the sea. When he moved to Cortina for work he found a completely different landscape he had to discover. But in this Balsamo's artwork, it was not a question to choose between the two, the seascape or the mountainscape, he just combined them together¹.

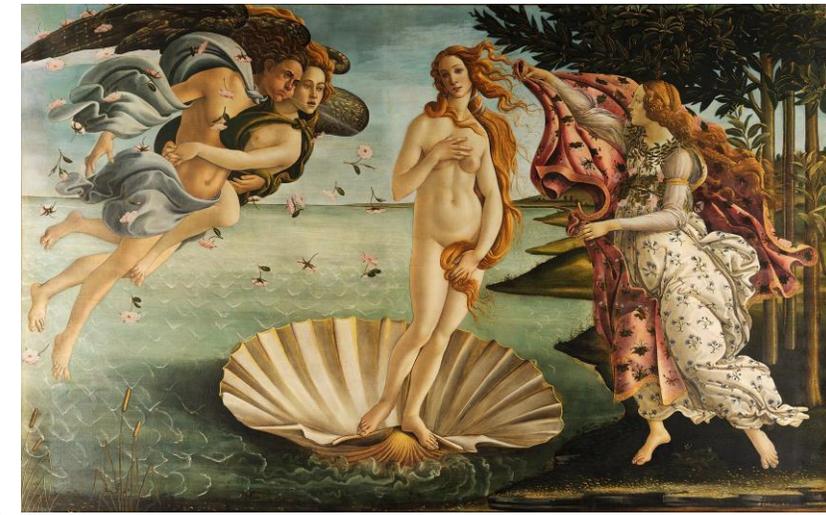
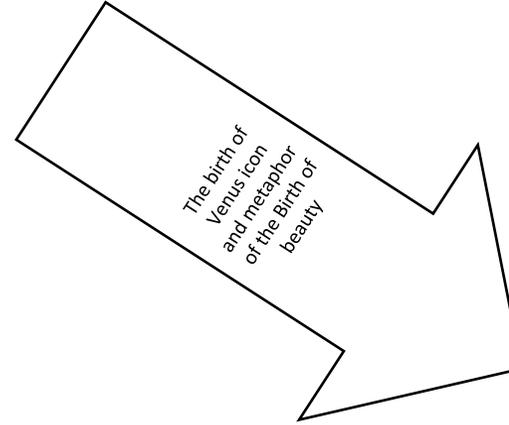
The subject itself is the symbolic representation of the naissance of the Dolomites here portrayed in the moment they are emerging from the waters like a rock Venus. It's clear that this is a symbolic celebration of this moment. It immediately reminded me the Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* I saw at Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence (Fig 1).

The orogeny of the Dolomites happened 228 millions of years ago the dolomite region was submerged by a warm sea but almost 65 millions of years ago the African continent pushed on the Europe platform so violently giving birth the Alps and to the Dolomites with its special conformation². Here Balsamo wanted to recreate this moment which of course in nature took millions of years, and transformed it into something symbolic, emotional and personally connected to his own life.

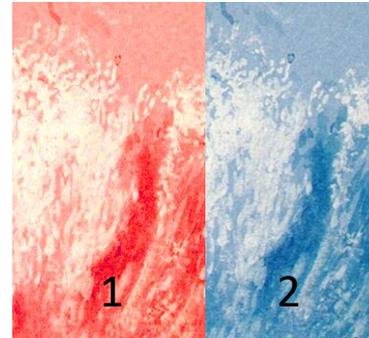
This amazing artwork is clearly an exploration between two worlds: the ancient world of the sea, to which Balsamo belongs to and the powerful world of the mountains, from which he has been welcomed.

Three out of the four essential components of matter are here represented: Water, Earth and Air. All the three are here well outlined but at the same time confused under the same tones. The Fire element looks absent however to a closer look we can see flames disguised as splashing water Fig 1-2. All the elements together all connected to Balsamo personal life: the Sorrento's waters, the Cortina's mountains, his passionate love for his wife and work and finally the thin air symbol of his profound mysticism⁴.

Balsamo lived out of his art and he could maintain his family with his works. In this specific case the function of this gouache is decorative and intended to be sold. Therefore it has a direct commercial function. He wanted to make a profit and appeal to the taste of the viewer. To make a beautiful rendition of nature.



1 *The Birth of Venus*, by Sandro Botticelli Tempera on canvas 72.5 x 278.5 cm Galleria degli Uffizi Florence



Renato Balsamo «*La nascita delle Dolomiti*» 2004 gouache 50X70cm Private Collection

¹ Giorgio Soavi, Le dolomie di Balsamo in Renato Balsamo, Le due Dolomie, Appiani Arte Trentadue p11

² <https://www.dolomitiunesco.info/?reti-funzionali=rete-del-patrimonio-geologico-e-geomorfico&lang=en>

⁴ Vittorio Sgarbi Il Mare d'amore di Cortina , In Renato Balsamo ed Marcora 2020 p.20

The Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple By Tiziano Vecellio Analysis and evaluation of cultural significance.

CULTURAL

Titian's was born in 1473 in Pieve di Cadore (this date is not so sure) and he died in Venice in 1576 aged 103. A long and successful life. In very young age (9) he moved to Venice to learn the art. It's impossible to think at Venice without Titian but it's also true the contrary: a perfect alchemy¹. Here, in the vibrant atmosphere of the Serenissima during the XVI sec, Venice was powerful and the centre of Europe's commerce. It was the connection between the East and West of the known world. Venice wanted to celebrate this "Grandeur" and did it through the artists works. All commissions were intended to do magnify Venice along with venetians economical, religious, political artistic power and Titian was one of the main performers. Titian has been the most appreciated painter of the Venetian Renaissance² and the future Mannerism. He obtained this important commission from one of the most prominent venetian institutions Scuola della Carità and it was especially intended to glorify the magnificence of Venice 1400 paint assisted the revolution of the perspective law explained by the Italian architect Brunelleschi and afterwards coded by another Italian architect Leon Battista Alberti in his treaty *De Pictura* (1436)³. Titian widely applied the laws specially on the architecture of the buildings opening the window on the landscape in the background.

The town is represented in this artwork as well as the people living it. We already said how Vasari recognized in the procession "heads of every genre, naturally portrayed" the faces of venetians personalities among them the senior members of the Scuola and even some public personalities such as chancellor of the Venice Republic Andrea de Franceschi, the senator Lazzaro Crasso but also the painter Aretino and the cardinal Pietro Bembo together with Titian himself leaning from a window and his daughter Lavinia.

The popular Palladio architecture is visible in the architecture of the buildings (fig. 5-6) although is very weird the view of the pyramidal obelisk, as Lupo⁴ assert, it was in the Palladian style to put on the buildings chimney in the shape of obelisks with orbs on top recalling the roman obelisks (Fig. 3-4). However in Titian it's not only Venice to affect his work but he always remained attached to his birthplace dolomitic landscape. The window opened by the new perspective laws, introduces us in the mountain world of the Dolomites which he portrayed with outstanding precision in several of his artworks. Flemish landscape painters apported big innovations in the venetian paint, they were often called from the north just to paint the background landscapes.

The Marmarole mountain view is not a mere background but it's the glorification of the majesty and light for the Dolomites (Fig 1-2). His intriguing and beautiful landscapes attracted the Victorian travellers during the second half of the '800 giving the input to the naissance of the golden age of mountain tourism in the Dolomites starting with Josiah Gilbert and Amelia Edwards who adventured and described the Dolomites and who remapped the geography of the Dolomites through the map of Titian's works⁵. Still today Titian landscape is considered something special and deserving separate attention.

Fig. 3-4 Venice's Palazzo Papadopoli still has obelisk chimneys topped by metal orbs

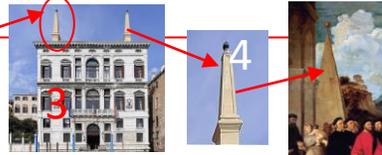


Fig. 5-6 Palladio Loggia del Capitaniato in Vicenza

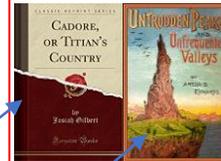
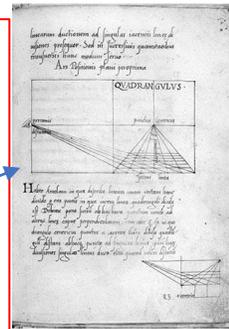


Fig. 1-2 Marmarole group



CONCEPTUAL:

As we already enhanced, the religious purpose and significance is the main message this artwork want to narrate to the audience.

This work was commissioned by the confraternity of Scuola Vecchia di Santa Maria della Carità which was also one of the main charity institutions in Venice. There were seven Great Schools/Confraternities in Venice during the XV-XVI sec⁶. Although they were originally Founded in the Middle Ages with devotion and solidarity purposes, these Schools were not only religious institutions, but they were also home of the laic institutions called Scuole whose members were key socio-political figures in the Serenissima society⁷. Is in this optic, that besides the religious Marian message dedicated to Santa Maria, there is also the charity message highlighted by the Beggar character on the right and of the old egg seller in the front.

However special mention deserve the old egg seller in the foreground which is considered a pagan symbols⁸ but beyond it there is also a charity message in the social symbol of the poor and old egg seller.

MATERIAL

One question comes eventually to our mind: why Titian used an oil canvas to paint such a big artwork? Wouldn't it have been more logic to fresco the scene? The answer is relied on a very simple and practical reason. Venice has a very humid climate and therefore the buildings walls were not suitable for frescos, they will deteriorate very fast⁹.

Beggar, Detail

Egg seller, detail

Virgin Mary detail

Titian, San Cristoforo, 1523, Fresco, 300x179 cm Palazzo Ducale Venice

Titian, Venus blingfolding Cupid oil on canvas, cm 116 x 184 Galleria Borghese Rome

Titian *The Rape of Europe* oil canvas 178 cm x 205 cm Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

Fig. 7: Detail of the beggar in the foreground.

Fig. 8: Detail of the egg seller in the foreground.

Fig. 9: Detail of the landscape in the background.

Fig. 10: Detail of the landscape in the background.

Titian *The Virgin and Child with the Infant Saint John and a Female Saint or Donor* 1530 oil on canvas 100.6 cm x 142,2 National Gallery London

¹Gino Benzoni, Venice at Titian's age, in Titian, Ed Marsilio Ficino 1990 p. 29

²<https://www.hisour.com/venetian-renaissance-33175/>

³<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/renaissance-reformation/early-renaissance1/beginners-renaissance-florence/v/how-one-point-linear-perspective-works>

⁴Lupo, Giulio. "La forma 'all'antica' del comignolo veneziano: l'obelisco." *ArchHistor* III (2016), 4-31

⁵W. Bainbridge/ Journal of Historical Geography 56 (2017)- Titian Country p.35

⁶<http://www.gallerieaccademia.it/en/scuola-vecchia-della-misericordia>

⁷<https://www.misericordiadivenezia.it/the-misericordia/heritage/>

⁸David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, 1997 p.67

The wind's bride, by Oskar Kokoschka

Analysis and evaluation of cultural significance.

CULTURAL

Oskar Kokoschka was one of the major exponents of the Viennese Expressionism.

On the 22nd August 1913 Kokoschka and Alma Mahler, his lover, are celebrating her birthday in Cortina d'Ampezzo at Tre Corci Hotel¹. The landscape is immediately recognizable and the Tofana di Rozes shape is matching the view we have from Tre Croci pass (Fig.1) Alma Mahler wrote in her memoirs that in Cortina their life together had been "all about work": "In the morning, we would go into the dense forest, looking for the darkest green spots, and, when we reached a clearing, we found young horses at play; that fascinated Oskar Kokoschka. We had his sketchbook and coloured pencils with us – despite his fear of being alone, he remained by himself and created uniquely beautiful drawings."² Another beautiful artwork was inspired by this bucolic landscape (Fig. 2) but the view is on the opposite valley the one heading to Auronzo di Cadore. At that time Cortina was a very popular summer travel destination and Alma knew it very well. Gustav Mahler, her dead husband, had a house in Toblach where he composed in his famous Ninth Symphony³. Far from the world and immersed in the nature, the two lovers, seems to get lost in their *amour fou* but a *Tempest* (the second symbolic name of the artwork) was to come. A double tempest: the one regarding the disintegration of their passion and the one perceiving the hints of the First World War.

Kokoschka had the chance to enjoy the vibrant atmosphere of the beginning of the XX century soaked in liberty, opportunities and adventures. Alma herself represented the "new woman", emancipated, aristocratic, high cultured, beautiful and so brilliant that everybody loved her. However she was the inspiration MUSE of several artists such as Klimt, the musician Gustav Mahler, the popular architect Walter Gropius and the writer Franz Werfel.

However the audience was not prepared yet and when he first exposed his artworks with the Viennese Secession in 1908 the critics were severe and apostrophized his exhibition room as a "cabinet of horrors" and disturbing. It was his friend, the prominent architect Adolf Loos to introduce him into the vibrant Viennese world of Art⁴

¹ Florian Illies, 1913 The year before the Storm, The Clerkenwell Press, London, 2012 p.170

² <https://www.leopoldmuseum.org/en/collection/highlights/139>

³ <https://www.kulturzentrum-toblach.eu/en/gustav-mahler-music-weeks/gustav-mahler-in-toblach/>

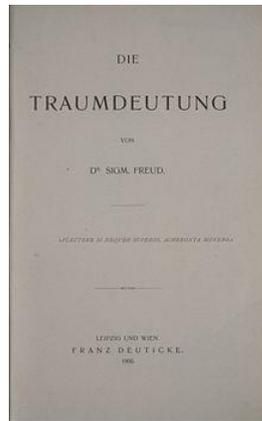
⁴ <https://www.egon-schiele.net/biography.html>

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sigmund-Freud/Psychoanalytic-theory>

⁶ <https://craace.com/2019/07/02/oskar-kokoschka-expressionist-migrant-european/>

⁸ <https://www.marcchagall.net/over-the-town.jsp>

⁷ <https://lewisartcafe.com/kokoschkas-alma-mahler-doll/>



Sigmund Freud
The Interpretation
of Dreams 1900



Tre Croci/Cortina View

Oskar Kokoschka Dolomite
landscape: Tre Croci 1913 Oil
Leopold Museum, Vienna,
Austria



Bride's
detail



5

Marc Chagall, *Over the Town* 1918
Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, Russia

CONCEPTUAL

This work is not only symbolic but its expressionism is brutal. All artist's feelings are violently scattered on the canvas. The puritan audience fin de siècle was not yet prepared to this and it remained shocked by the unconventional outcomes of Kokoschka's artistic experimentations. At the beginning of the XX Century Sigmund Freud opened the doors of the unconscious and like a flood it invested all arts which ventured in the avant-garde experience⁵.

All the literary-philosophic streams of the 20th century were therefore heading to the introspection and enhancement of the subconscious.

On the wave of this particular atmosphere this work represents Oskar's troubled thoughts and concerns externalized not only in the lines of his paintbrushes but specially in his self-portrait. He represents himself with open eyes looking into void and probably foreseeing the end of his relationship with Alma and probably also foreseeing the coming horrors of the World War I. His face and cheeks are hollow and his hands are so contracted and having an unnatural position. The fingers are so twisted to look disrupted. It's obviously a body devastated by his own soul. Egon Schiele's bodies (Fig. 3-4) had the same vibe both were trying to paint their deep inner sorrow and the catastrophic vision of the world and of the future that characterized the Expressionism. Kokoschka's intense psychological portraits have been considered as the works of a 'soul slasher' ('Seelenaufschlitzer') portraitist, by his contemporary critic Alfred Ehrenstein⁶.

"The Bride" influenced Chagall, few years later (1918), who had the same vision in *Over the Town* (Fig 5). Chagall portrays himself floating in the air with his wife Bella. Here is what Bella says *I suddenly felt as if we were taking off. You too were poised on one leg, as if the little room could no longer contain you. You soar up to the ceiling. Your head turned down to me, and turned mine up to you... We flew over fields of flowers, shuttered houses, roofs, yards, churches*" and the connections with Alma's written words is immediate: *"On a stormy tormented day when he passionately, but entirely selfishly loved me, the world melted away suddenly, and I have since been convinced of an outer-worldly existence."*⁸

MATERIAL

Kokoschka choose oil paints because of its density and bulkiness. Blue colour is dominant and all the blue shades could suggest a sense of spirituality and serenity like a calm sea but the spasmodic brushstrokes transform the scene into a tormented sequence. However blue and green are the dominant colours remaining in the eyes of everybody who adventures in those places. August in Cortina can only be blue skies and green meadows and woods.

EGON SCHIELE, Self-Portrait with
Raised Bare Shoulder, 1912
Leopold Museum,



Egon Schiele Study of
hands 1913 sketch

9

CULTURAL

Balsamo was born and raised in Naples 1937 but in 1961 accepted the direction of the School of Arts in Cortina d'Ampezzo. His natural landscape was the sea but in Cortina he found new inspiration and a new family. He married Mina and lived in the house where her aunt Rachele received and hosted the most vibrant artists of the period. Rachele's "salotto" was a sort of "Caffè d'artiste" where doors were always opened for art and culture. So strange to see such a great cultural movement in one of the oldest houses in rural Cortina. It's the period of the Art Galleries trying to collect as much contemporary unknown artworks as they could.

Cortina had Mario Rimoldi as gallerist and art advisor and he collected so many pieces to create a Modern Art Museum in Cortina¹ and Renato Balsamo's artworks are exposed amongst those of Giorgio De Chirico, Renato Guttuso, Morandi, Sironi, Severini, Music, Kokoschka, Leger, Villon, Zadkine... Balsamo passed through complex artistic phases but the mountain landscape has been one of the more prolific. The mountains and specially the dolomites strike his imagination and he painted them with obsessive precision.

He was very appreciated for his portraits and he was asked to portray prominent peoples like members of royalty, politics, critics, musicians, orchestra directors who stormed the house day and night. He was very accurate in capturing, stealing the soul of his subjects and with the same precision and perspicacity he stole the soul of the Dolomites. His artworks and hanging on the walls of the most beautiful houses in Cortina.

Comparison between a picture of Tofana di Rozes and Balsamo's representation.



Tofana di Rozes

Nascita delle Dolomiti (The Birth of the Dolomites) by Renato Balsamo

Analysis and evaluation of cultural significance

CONCEPTUAL

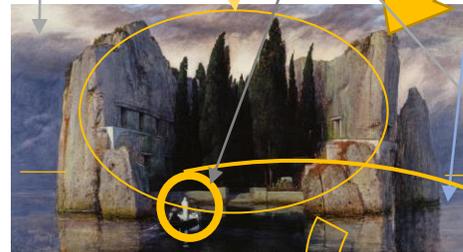
In a recent interview to Giorgio Soavi, Balsamo affirmed that when he arrived in Cortina he immediately smelled the scent of the sea and those mountains for him where just like ocean's stones². It was, of course, a Proustian reminiscence he afterwards developed in his art with these impossible juxtapositions. The vision is obviously symbolic and we know how Balsamo's work was deeply influenced by the symbolism of the swiss painter Arnold Böcklin and his *Island of the deaths*³. In Balsamo the Dolomites are transformed in floating islands. The composition is the same: the island/mountain in the centre, the sea beneath the horizon line and the sky above. Böcklin human figure in the ship is transformed in a cliff maintaining all the elements. However in Balsamo the symbolism goes hand in hand with the surrealism. This representation is clearly unexpected, uncanny, unconventional, unreal, exactly all the "UN's" the surrealist movement has been based on. Another surrealistic concept Balsamo "stole" from the surrealism is the dreamy vision emerging from the subconscious and actualized in this whimsical landscape. The juxtaposition of two antithetical landscapes gives birth to an impossible vision which was one of the most appreciated and rewarded aspect of Balsamo's art.



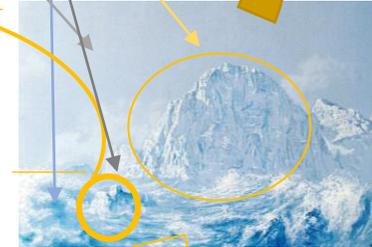
Art Collector Mario Rimoldi portrayed by Renato Balsamo 1971/74
Tempera on canvas
80x70 Museo d'Arte Moderna Rimoldi



This is me portrayed by Balsamo 2006



The Isle of the Dead, 1883 Painting by Arnold Böcklin

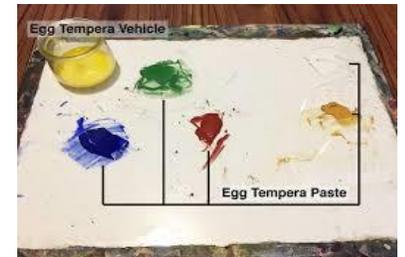


MATERIAL

For this artwork Balsamo used the gouache technique, a type of paint made from pigments blended in water-soluble gum, it's similar to the watercolour but with the addition of a white pigment in order to make it opaque. More quantity of binder is used compared with watercolour, and various amounts of chalk is added to enhance the opacity. Unlike watercolours, gouache forms a thicker layer of paint on the paper and it is also used to create highlights in watercolours⁴. Balsamo used tempera colours to make this gouache and he used a special old formula, like a special medieval "recipe": the so called Egg Tempera which is composed of egg yolk, powdered pigment, and distilled water. The egg yolk serves as the binder that holds the pigments together. Eva Reinkowski-Häfner in her *Tempera: narratives on a technical term in art and conservation* explains how in the most important source on tempera painting, the *Trattato della pittura* by Cennino Cennini (c.1390), the term 'tempera' was used in particular for egg paint, for which Cennini provided two recipes: the first 'tempera' consisted of the whole egg mixed with the milky sap of the fig tree, while the second was a mixture of pure yolk added to pigments which had been ground with water⁵.



Egg Tempera



¹ https://musei.regole.it/Rimoldi/index_en.php

² Giorgio Soavi, *Le dolomie di Balsamo in Renato Balsamo, Le due Dolomie*, Appiani Arte Trentadue p11

³ Daniele D'Anza Renato Balsamo, il pensiero, la vita, le opere. In Renato Balsamo ed Marcora 2020 p.20

⁴ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/g/gouache>

⁵Eva Reinkowski-Häfner *Tempera: narratives on a technical term in art and conservation in Tempera Painting 1800–1950 Experiment and Innovation from the Nazarene Movement to Abstract Art Edited by Patrick Dietemann, Wibke Neugebauer, Eva Ortner, Renate Poggendorf, Eva Reinkowski-Häfner and Heike Stege* Archetype Publications Ltd London 2019



- Religious purpose
- Contemporary architecture and contemporary people
- Renaissance art example

- Landscape is in the background
- Self portrait of the artists is present in both artworks
- Vibrant Colours
- Oil canvas
- Both are Big size canvas

- The Dolomites Mountains are present in all three artworks
- The Blue Colour and it's shades dominates
- Symbolic function

- Narrative purpose
- Clouds in the sky are consistent and help to delineate the mountain shape



- Portrait as main subject
- Expressionism

- Mouvement
- Portrait of Same Mount Tofana di Rozes
- Expression of particular feeling
- Personal experience
- Subconscious



- Technique Gouache
- Surrealism
- Just three colours
- Small size

Formal Analysis Comparison



1 Tiziano Vecellio
"The Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple"



2 Oskar Kokoschka "The Bride of the Wind"



3 Renato Balsamo «La nascita delle Dolomiti»

- ❖ Titian artwork has a classical composition with a foreground, a middle ground and a background which is something we can see also in Balsamo and in Kokoschka. However the sense of depth is just visible in the first two since Kokoschka's artwork looks pretty flat.
- ❖ In Titian the architecture of the buildings is remarkable and particularly complicated leading to the focal points. We could also talk about architecture looking at Balsamo's artwork. The Dolomites are very often compared to Gothic Cathedrals and in his works he captures this feature. Architecture is completely absent from Kokoschka work.
- ❖ Colours are one of the most appreciated and striking elements in Titian's art. On this point we can compare it to Kokoschka since Titian technique evolved abandoning the initial draw and ended up in giving shape to the elements by juxtaposing brushstrokes. In Balsamo Colours are still important, however they do not have a technical implication, they are just reproducing the natural haze sometimes the real landscape.
- ❖ The Presentation canvas offers an outstanding variety of the elements: the viewer's attention is captured and guided through and around the artwork. In Kokoschka's and Balsamo's there are very few described elements with a bigger one occupying the great part of the scene.
- ❖ Titian's lines drive the viewer eye to the focal areas: horizontal to Mary and diagonal to the majestic landscape while Kokoschka curved lines are enveloping the two bodies and twisting the whole scene and the viewer get engulfed in it. Renato's lines are a mix of straight lines for the edgy rock and heading high and curved wave movement heading right.

- ❖ The Lack of sense of depth in this work is highlighted by the prominence of the central figures put in the foreground. The prominence of the mount in Balsamo's work is mitigated by the fact that this element is positioned in the midground giving the whole a natural sense of depth.
- ❖ Although heavy texture is typical of Kokoschka's style it's something Titian also used while depositing several different layers of paint to obtain his sophisticated nuances. Balsamo's watercolour tempera is completely different, soft, delicate, transparent, evanescent.
- ❖ Kokoschka's brushstrokes are nervous and heavy. Balsamo's brushstrokes are much more like Titian's pretty impressionistic.
- ❖ Emphasis is particularly concentrated on the lovers faces in Kokoschka while in Titian special emphasis is given to Mary whose tiny figure stands like a Cameo in the scene. Special attention is however also distributed between the old egg seller and the chancellor of the Venice Republic Andrea dé Franceschi (with the red vest). No special emphasis is given to any of the elements in Balsamo's artwork.

- ❖ Just 3 elements: the sea, the mountain, the sky are part of Balsamo's composition. Just natural elements and no human presence. Although in Kokoschka our attention is captured by the two lovers, special mention goes to the background and the Tofana di Rozes mount along with the moon which are part of the composition. Titian canvas is definitely more complicated: the scene is crowded and the composition filled with countless details.
- ❖ 3 colours: Blue, light blue, white
- ❖ Amongst the three artworks, Balsamo's work is the more proportioned and balanced. The sea, the mount and the sky occupy a similar space in the scene and like in nature it looks particularly well balanced. Balance and proportion is not exactly what we can find in Kokoschka's work. All the visual weight is positioned on the foreground which occupies three quarter of the canvas. If at a first sight Titian work looks balanced and equilibrated but we soon realize how the complex architecture is too prominent, Mary figure undersized while the egg seller is oversized.
- ❖ In Balsamo's work there is complete harmony between the elements. The passage is smooth and natural from one level to the other. Also Kokoschka artwork transmit a feeling of unity which is given by the enveloping lines. On the contrary no feeling of harmony is perceived in Titian. It looks all the elements are separated and narrating separate stories. Landscape, crowd, Mary, priest, egg-seller, architecture.. Each could be extrapolated to create a new work.



➤ Titian and Kokoschka trace the same silhouette of the mountain but specular.

➤ The same mountain: Tofana di rozes is represented in Balsamo and Kokoschka and in both the same movement of the waters form a shell or cupped hands.

○ A single massive Dolomite mountain is recognizable in each of the three compositions.
 ○ All the three artists use blue colour and it's shades to represent something celestial, spiritual holy. For Titian is Mary, for Kokoschka is the deep blue of the "sea of passion" sweeping the lovers and in Balsamo the spiritual blue haze enveloping everthing.
 ○ A wavy like movement of lines is a pattern recognizable in all the works as well as the triangular shape of the Mount



Comparing Function and Purpose



Titian himself, Cecilia his wife and daughter Lavinia



Osakar and Alma



- ❖ Along with the more evident religious function of Titian's work we can perceive the conceptual function of Charity underlined by the beggar's scene and the political one with the portrait of prominent Venetians. Those functions are all social functions while Kokoschka's and Balsamo's are mainly expressive of the intimate feelings. The three eventually share the descriptive function nestled in the landscape representation.
- ❖ Titian portraits are considered unique and have been an example for the artists to come here he portrays some real people he knows but there is also his self-portrait leaning out of a window together with his wife's while his daughter portrait is at the bottom of the stairs. He wanted to eternize also his beloved ones, his family as Kokoschka does when he portrays him with Alma.
- ❖ There is a very eloquent language in the movements of the hands of the audience and Titian talks the language of hands. Hands showing protection, invitation, argumentation, begging, indexing are very eloquent in Titian but Oskar hands position is definitely revealing as well.



Fig 1

Expressing the most hidden and unconscious feelings is the main and clear purpose in Kokoschka's work and so it is in Balsamo where he takes another step forward, surpassing the simple expressionism and landing on the pure surrealism where the unconscious in not only uncovered but it is let free to create himself bizarre combinations. No unconscious feeling or message is expressed in Titian work. Kokoschka's artwork was expressly required to be a masterpiece by his lover Alma in order to marry him which is one of the most unconventional purpose art have ever heard of. Titian canvas was formally commissioned by the School and Balsamo was not asked to produce this specific work however his portraits were very popular.

❖ Balsamo work it's a big allegory of the Birth of the Dolomites, born like Venus, from the ocean foam. Titian also uses allegories such as the old egg-seller and the ancient bust in the foreground which are symbols of the pagan world. The allegory is also present in Kokoschka work where the sea is seen as the representation of their troubled and perilous love affair.

❖ Landscape is the main subject in Balsamo's work while in Titian and Kokoschka is a background. However in both it's not just a mere decorative background but a symbolic one. Kokoschka and Titian had specific reasons to paint exactly that landscape and for both the reason lied in personal experiences. It's so authentic that it could be real Landscape canvas.



Tristi animi signo

Language of hands: it's amazing just going deep in this particular hands are communicating very clearly throughout Titian's artwork and they are extremely meaningful in Kokoschka's: "tristi animi signo" (Fig 1) Image: from Chirologia, John Bulwer; London: Thomas Harper. 1644

In Kokoschka and in Balsamo's works We have the representation of a storm with rough seas and breaking waves. Alma is cradled and sleeps peacefully in the middle of a tempest. In the same way the massive of Tofana looks emerging and rise peacefully, naturally from troubled waters.

Titian's wife Cecilia Soldano was born in Perarolo few kilometer far from Titian's hometown Pieve. (Fig 2)



Fig 2



Fig 3

Shared by all three artworks is the particular meaning the landscape represents in the life of each one. It's not just a bucolic landscape to be represented by them but it's the special Dolomites that have something to tell to the viewer. But what put them together is the fact that all three found their love in the Dolomites.

Kokoschka painted the Tofane because this was the view he had from Tre Croci Hotel where vacationed with his love Alma Fig 3

Balsamo found his love for life in the Dolomites: his wife Mina Fig 4



Fig. 4



Argumentativeness



Indexing

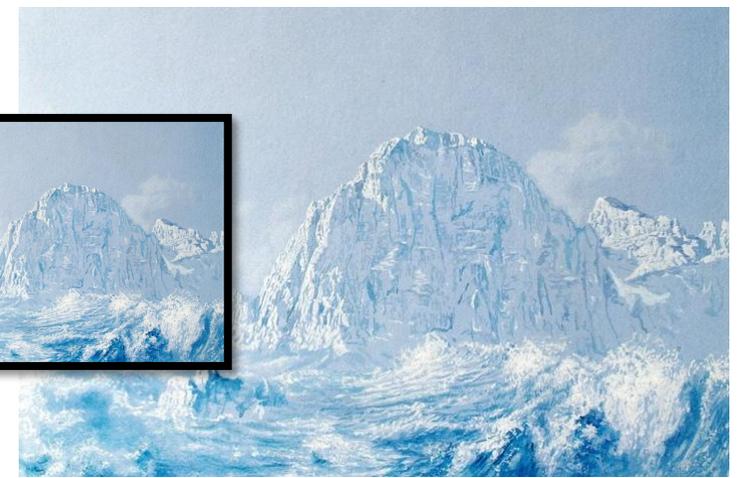


Invite

Dimittit

Perage

Comparing cultural significance of landscape



It's clear how Titian, Kokoschka and Balsamo experienced different historic, social and artistic backgrounds. I therefore would like to compare and analyse how they represented the landscape and what the Dolomites meant to them. These mountains and their peculiar shapes have been a common playground and they were so mesmerized they decided to fix these shapes into their canvases. They experienced the Dolomites in different ways: Titian was born here and left his home in Pieve when he was just 9 years old to go to Venice but he missed them all his life. Kokoschka experienced this mountainous landscape while vacationing at Tre Croci with his lover Alma and remained enchanted by the natural setting, so wild and stormy as their love was. Balsamo, was born in the south of Italy where the sea and the sun are daily bread and arrived in Cortina for work. It wasn't easy for him to get accustomed to the harsh environment however here he fell in love twice: for his wife and for the landscape. Basically the first left, the second travelled to and the last moved in. Three different personal and crucial experiences which are carefully highlighted in the meaning of the landscapes reproduction. Perspective laws have been as revolutionary to Titian as it was the Freudian exploration of the unconscious for Kokoschka. Two new dimensions to discover and experience. Perspective opened the doors for a realistic three-dimensional representation of the reality and specially of the background landscapes and this is so clear in this Titian's work where all the major lines drive the viewer's sight far away in the canvas, back to his mountains in the background of the canvas. As Renaissance perspective studies have introduced the third dimension of the view, the psychoanalysis made the men, of the beginning of the XX sec, eligible for visiting the meanders of the mind and to work on what Freud had unveiled. Here Kokoschka discovered how the feelings could be projected into the real world deforming the reality. Nevertheless Balsamo's surrealism went further: he erased all the dictated and coded laws and broke in the fourth dimension of the impossible. For Titian it was essential to be as close to reality as possible influenced in this by the Flemish meticulous landscape paintings. It's however interesting to see how his famous backgrounds had enormous impact on the Victorian period when Victorian travellers adventured in the Dolomites to find the landscapes they saw in Titian canvases. Not only they explored but they drew and described those places with extreme accuracy introducing also a sociologic portrait of the area. Josiah Gilbert, Amelia Edwards were amongst the precursors of the tourism wave which declared the Dolomites an elective place to visit and to paint and for sure started the artistic trend of Mountain landscape art which is still so prolific and appreciated by connoisseurs and Balsamo's work is part of it. Early XX sec. saw the Dolomite or Titian country, how it was renowned, rise in popularity and fame, and when Kokoschka arrived here it was already a vibrant community hosting kings, politicians and artists. Cortina was the place to be. Kokoschka chose Tre Croci Hotel, few kilometres far from Cortina's lights, to enjoy the nature and be completely overwhelmed by his passion. Although completely representative of the new expressionist "wild" style Kokoschka's Tofana di Rozes is perfectly recognizable. His heavy and tormented brushstrokes didn't affect too much the shape of the mountain which, in his symbolism, is the only witness of Alma's pledge of marriage. In conclusion, in Titian and Kokoschka's artworks, the main scene is not on the landscape, this happens only in Balsamo's work where the background landscape we observed is popping-out in Balsamo's artwork, like it was washed ashore from the Kokoschka's Tempest.



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Titian Presentation detail

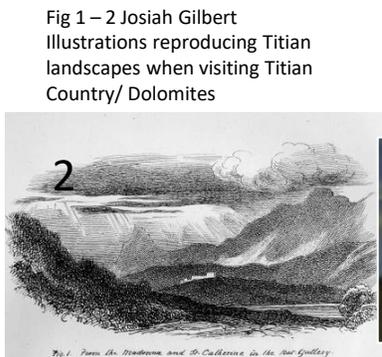


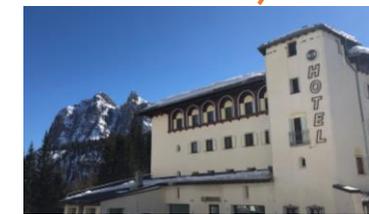
Fig 1 – 2 Josiah Gilbert
Illustrations reproducing Titian
landscapes when visiting Titian
Country/ Dolomites



Titian *The Virgin and Child with the Infant Saint John and a Female Saint or Donor* Detail



Amelia Edwards, illustration of Titian birthplace



Tre Croci Hotel



View from Tre Croci Hotel

Influences on my Work

Outcomes of my investigation

Working on these three different artworks and connecting them helped me to understand how deep it can go the analysis. This was completely unexpected. I was not aware how complicated and intense the research could be.

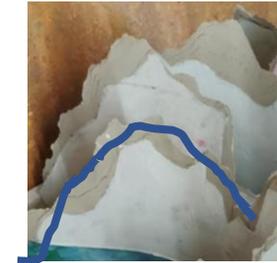
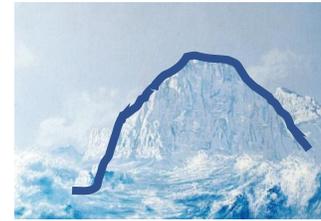
I was used to just have a look to the artwork and it was just important to me the emotional impact it had on me. Going deep in the evaluations and in research I had to plunge into a world I used to pass by. My original idea was to discuss the connection between the representation of the Dolomites by three different artists in three different periods. But I soon realized how basic and simplistic my idea was. The paths branched and I soon started working on different researching plans and comparing them including: historic backgrounds, techniques, meaning, messages, styles, themes, colours, symbols, metaphors, biographies, basically a 360° vision. My art class become a laboratory where “dissection” the artwork with the precious and crucial guide of my art teacher.

As long as I was working on my research I had the chance to visit The Biennale in Venice and Galleria dell’ Accademia, Florence Uffizi and The Galleria dell’ Accademia. In Rome I visited the Cappella Sistina and Vatican Museums. I then realized how my approach to art was definitely changed and how my observations gained in quality and awareness thanks to my work.



I can assume my interest for the mountain representation started with Balsamo artworks. His Cortina studio is filled with canvases representing the Dolomites emerging from waters or clouds. I used to visit his home when I was a kid and I was deeply touched by the concreteness and consistency of the shapes.

It is the realistic view that impressed me the most. The painted massifs look emerging from the canvases and seems to invite you to go and touch them, this gave me the ambitious idea of a 3D work. Studying Renato’s mountains helped me to understand how difficult it is to reproduce the special light, the articulated shape and the texture of the mountain I use to contemplate from my window.



Although Dolomites have a particular pyramidal shape, Balsamo’s favourite peak was Tofana di Rozes as it’s mine. In my artwork I tried to reproduce it’s peculiar shape of imponent massive several times and in different size using it like a pattern.



This peculiar detail of a “sliced” mount helped me to work on the shapes, like every piece of cardboard came out of a slicer.



Colour was another element Balsamo’s work inspired me. While studying his technique I discovered he used tempera and watercolours colours in his gouaches to highlights the particular conformation of the Dolomia. White tempera colour has been widely used by Balsamo to enhance their light. I liked this element so much and wanted in some way to reproduce it into my own work.



Working on Balsamo's artwork helped me to better understand Watercolours and Tempera, the effects of this ancient technique and its mesmerizing alchemy.

In my study I definitely realized how interesting and remarkable watercolours paint could be. Balsamo's "Birth of the Dolomites", the artwork I choose between hundreds of his prolific artistic life, is done with this particular technique. I was specially intrigued by its special soft, evanescent effect I was looking for my work.

When I was enquiring Maia, Balsamo's daughter, about the special technique his father used, she also told me that Renato used watercolours and tempera following the ancient recipe with egg which intrigued me so much.

From Balsamo work I learned how watercolours and tempera have the best results on porous surfaces like cardboard and therefore it can be used also like frescos. I also learned how surprisingly they can change tone once dried but this is completely unpredictable and of course it can give birth to Incredibles nuances. This was exactly what I was looking for.



Details of my work

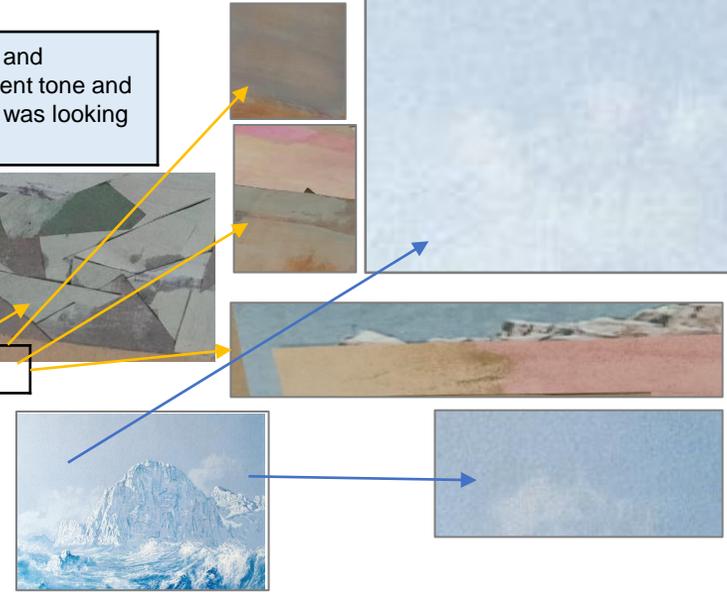


Renato Balsamo working on watercolours and tempera

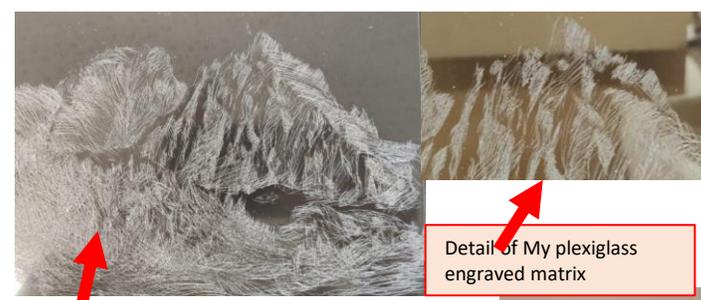


The soft and evanescent tone and texture I was looking for

My work



Balsamo's metal and stone engraved matrix



Detail of My plexiglass engraved matrix

My engraved plexiglass matrix



Detail of Balsamo's engraved metal matrix

My final result and Balsamo's final result



However what I really always desired was to be able to reproduce the Dolomites as more precisely as I could. I've been trying to do that since first grades at school with miserable results and I was so discouraged. However when I choose Visual Art as HL in my IB I was determined to success in this.

Again Balsamo work has been of great inspiration for my work . Going through the pages of the brand new Balsamo's biography Maia, his daughter, gave our family on Christmas last year, I remained immediately impressed by a special technique he sometimes used. This technique is called ETCHING and it's a very ancient process consisting in engraving a surface to create a printable matrix .

I was so intrigued I started studying how it was done and I soon realized that the traditional ancient process Balsamo used implied the use of an acid, mordant or a chemical which was not allowed in our Art class. But searching more deeply I discovered it existed a derivation of this technique which eluded the use of corrosives liquids It's name was DRY POINT ETCHING. That was my way!

Balsamo's etching was outstanding. I was helped by his daughter Maia to discover the how he worked on this technique. We walked in his studio and found old metal matrix and even some engraved in stone. I was amazed and plenty of new ideas for my future artwork

Back to school I asked my teacher to help me in this. He was as enthusiast as I was about the project but of course we were little concerned about my drowning ability on this specific subject. We opted for a plexiglass matrix so I could follow the lines and profiles of black and white picture.

The result of this work gave me so much enthusiasm and self esteem. Through Balsamo's work and particular technique I could accomplish something I thought it was just impossible: reproducing my Dolomite mountains.

Reasoning on lines and patterns

In my working process and in my study I discovered how, as much as personal interpretation can go, there is always a point where things and shapes come to tell something.

Analysing Oskar Kokoschka's work I was captured by the curved lines he used and how those lines shaped the mountain in the background to make it immediately recognizable to my eyes: the Tofana di Rozes, my favourite.

I went deep into the specific detail and focused on it. This gave me the idea to try to apply a geometric straight line to the mountains in the same way Kokoschka used a curved one.

From Kokoschka I learned how to manipulate the reality and how to apply distortion filters in order to transform the original view. Kokoschka did it because this was his way to express his feelings. I just wanted to play with forms.

One of my artworks is a view of the Tofana di Rozes. I wanted to use straight lines as Kokoschka did in his "Dolomites Landscape: Tre Croci".

However what intrigued me in Kokoschka has definitely been the **pattern** he used all over his artwork. I therefore experimented it and "played" with patterns and colours in my own work.

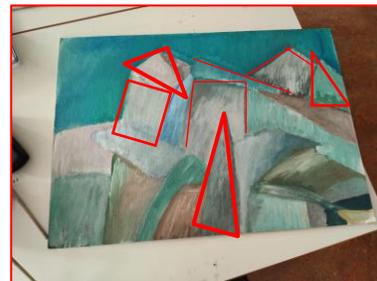
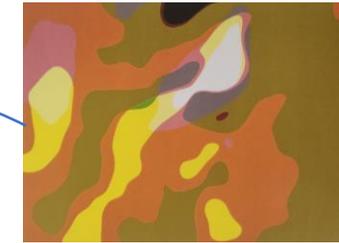
When I was zooming in in the different part of Kokoschka's artwork, my attention was captured by the texture. I started blowing up as much as I could the picture, till the point the good resolution will allow and the canvas under the thick Kokoschka brushstrokes becomes visible. In that moment I got so fascinated by this ancient support that I decided I wanted to experience it paint something on canvas. I wanted to feel how the brush will flow on the canvas and how difficult it was to be accurate in the details working on this "bumpy" surface.



The zoomed image of the canvas texture. In Kokoschka's work and in my work.



My artwork detail



Understanding Kokoschka's personal experimentation with forms and lines has been very important for me. I discovered how the drastic impact of the first part of the XX century avant-gardes was capsizing of the mannerism culture in the figurative art giving birth to all the -isms trends. Sa long as I was understanding this historic moment, the disaggregation and reassembling of the world with curious results was the element that attracted my imagination.

Playing with shapes, patterns and lines, as Kokoschka and the avant-gardes did, has been intriguing and deep enthralling giving me the possibility to experiment new visions and concepts.

Reasoning on Landscape colours

The more I adventured in the analysis of Titian work the more attracted I was by the way he worked on landscapes.

What was interesting for me it was the kind of pre-impressionistic style Titian used for landscapes.

I tried to analyse more deeply this aspect of Titian paintings since all my works had a mountain landscape theme and I wanted to reproduce the effects and the colours I saw in his works.

I was attracted by this particular atmosphere or haze in his mountains and sky which helped me to choose my colours and style.

What was interesting for me was the specific detail and the tone he used. I just zoomed in Titian canvases till the shapes faded and what remained was essentially the colour and the texture of the paintbrushes. I could realize there were no sketched lines behind the subjects and the shapes and subjects were created by the simple juxtaposition of colours and tones. This was very interesting and I tried to do the same on my artworks. The result was so interesting for me and specially when I worked on canvas the result was exactly what I was looking for.

I also questioned Kokoschka's work on this specific matter and what I find out was so deeply interesting for my work as well. Kokoschka too worked on the juxtaposition of colours in this work but not only he juxtaposed similar nuances and tones but he went further and put in his mountains yellow, red, blue, purple, pink and colours which are not eventually perceived by our eyes in nature but it was the same colours I found out zooming in a picture in one of my works. I become confident in using red, yellow, purple, pink to describe a particular chosen point from the landscape picture I took. Kokoschka unconventional view helped me to push my imagination and work on the unforeseen.

