

Dear Readers!

As many may observe, the cover illustration serves as an epigraph to the primary theme of this issue. The current edition opens with a remarkable work by E.K. Vakhter, titled “Portrait of the Artist Jan Frantsevich Ciagliński.” He is widely recognized as both a distinguished painter and a gifted, innovative pedagogue who mentored a generation of artists, many of whom have achieved prominence both in Russia and internationally. The profound and significant artistic theme of teacher and pupil once again takes centre stage in our journal. We are grateful to our contributors and are confident that our readers will find much of interest within these pages.

The articles written by our contributors feature masters who have made significant contributions to the development of various artistic movements. These masters not only impart their knowledge to their students, but also continue the creative tradition by being students themselves. However, the subject of these articles extends beyond just the influence of these masters. Other aspects of their lives, such as their biographies and body of work, also play a crucial role in understanding their impact on the art world. For example, a master may refine a particular technique or create remarkable works that pave the way for new and vibrant paths in art, which are then followed by equally gifted artists. A well-known example of this can be seen in the art of antiquity, where the works of great masters provided a profound impetus to the Renaissance over a millennium later. This influence can still be seen today in art schools, colleges, and academies, where shelves and instructional arrangements are adorned with casts of Greek statues and classical sculptures from the Renaissance. The canons established in antiquity continue to resonate today, as seen in the extensive and unique cycle, “Ghosts of Hellas”, created by the Russian painter V.D. Polenov, who was inspired by these very principles.

This represents a pivotal current, yet there are others, no less compelling, where a practitioner strikes a new “chord” that resonates continuously, to be taken up by subsequent artists. In this regard, the legacy of C.-J. Vernet, featured in our “Forum” section, is particularly noteworthy. In the eighteenth century, landscape painting was significantly subordinate to history painting and portraiture. Today, however, a survey of contemporary exhibitions reveals its dominance. It has emerged as a leading genre through popular acclaim, with landscape artists receiving high critical praise and prestigious awards. Returning to Vernet, he was a seminal figure who introduced extraordinary innovations to the genre. He insisted on a realistic approach, steering the landscape away from artificial composition and mere invention. Vernet established the foundations of what is now fundamental to every landscapist: en plein air practice, the endeavour to capture atmosphere, space, and depth, as well as subtle valeurs of colour and expressive composition. His canvases, such as those depicting the ports of France, are large-scale works that bisect the space between the sky and the bustling maritime life below. Notably, the sky typically occupies the greater portion of the composition, serving not merely as a formal device but as the emotional dominant. Vernet was both a painter and a theorist; his writings initiated a distinctive tradition in art theory — the creation of instructional manuals by masters that have guided aspiring artists worldwide. Thus, the concept of a “school” transcends the traditional studio setting, where a senior teacher instructs pupils, and instead acquires a truly boundless character.

The Kunstakademie Düsseldorf played a crucial role in the advancement of landscape painting, with its legacy closely intertwined with the renowned Achenbach brothers, Andreas (1815–1910) and Oswald (1827–1905). These talented artists had a strong connection to Russia, and their works can be found in numerous museums, serving as both a source of inspiration and a didactic example for Russian painters.

Art can be seen as a combination of individual works, museum collections, and private collections. However, it can also be viewed as a continuous process of becoming and renewal. Within this dynamic, there is a coexistence of masters, students, schools, and traditions, with their development ranging from peaceful and fluid to tumultuous, sometimes causing division and other times bringing unity. These radiant currents permeate all aspects of life — past, present,

and future — captivating the hearts and souls of humanity. For what purpose? Perhaps for the sake of that which the poet and prophet Nikolay Gumilev wrote of:

But what can we do with the pink sunset
over the cooling heavens
where there is silence and an unearthly peace,
what can we do with immortal poems?
<...> So age after age — how soon, O Lord? —
under nature and art's scalpel
our spirit screams, our flesh is exhausted,
giving birth to the organ of the sixth sense.

Arguably, this sixth sense is precisely what is required today to bring an end to the “Age of the Feuilleton” (Das Feuilletonistische Zeitalter), as Hermann Hesse termed it — or, more accurately in today's realities, the “Age of Fakes”. It is needed so that people might read not of oil prices and exchange rates, nor of “celebrity news”, but of poetry and painting, of the burgeoning talent of a pupil under a particular Master, and of Spirit and Nature. This is why great artists have, for millennia, nurtured this sixth sense within humanity.

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