

UNIVERSITETET  
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Master thesis

**The Sublime in Nature as Seen in the Modernist Paintings  
by Frits Thaulow and Konstantin Korovin between  
1880s-1890s.**

*Norwegian landscapes, represented in the modernist paintings in Naturalist and Impressionist manner, seen in the light of the aesthetic theory of the “sublime” in nature, as a form for painterly response to modernity.*

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The Sublime in Nature as Seen in the Modernist Paintings by Frits Thaulow and Konstantin Korovin between 1880s-1890s.

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University of Oslo



Konstantin Korovin, Russian Impressionist painting of a Northern Norwegian landscape, *Polar Lights*, 1896. Oil on canvas. 425 \* 350 cm. The State Tretyakov Gallery of Art, Moscow (Russia).

*"What a wonderful land, the wild North! There is not a drop of malice here from people. And what a life is here, ... and what a beauty! .. I would like to stay here forever..."*, - Konstantin Korovin in his diaries, on the journey to Northern Norway.

## Acknowledgements

This essay is a result of my art historical research of two modernist painters, Norwegian Frits Thaulow (1847-1906) and Russian Konstantin Korovin (1861-1939), which I implemented throughout the two years on the master program in Curation, criticism and the cultural heritage of modernism (KKM) at the UiO. The essay became the continuation of the hypothetical exhibition project “*The Painterly Singers of the North*”, which I formulated during my curatorial internship at the National Museum of art, architecture and design in Oslo (Nasjonalmuseet for kunst, arkitektur og design) in fall 2022.

I would like to thank my supervisor at the university, professor Øystein Sjøstad, for guiding and supporting me throughout the writing process, and my supervisor at the National Museum, senior curator and researcher Ellen J. Lerberg for inspiring me and for sharing my engagement in the chosen research topic during the internship. I also thank the head professor at the KKM-master program, Espen Johnsen, and my classmates for giving me useful tips and responses during the seminars that we had. I would also like to thank Svetlana Adaksina, the deputy chairman of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and Ilya Doronchenkov, the deputy chairman of the State Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, for providing me with the relevant historical information on the topic and for helping me with developing the idea of the thesis. Last, but not least, I thank my family in St. Petersburg for supporting me throughout the writing of the thesis.

**NB!** As a Russian citizen and as a master’s candidate at the University of Oslo, I would like to note that I totally do not support the current war happening in Ukraine, after the Russian invasion on February 24th 2022. Neither do I support Vladimir Putin’s political regime in Russia. I deeply condemn all the inhuman and sinister war crimes which Putin’s army has committed on the territory of Ukraine. I therefore demand an immediate withdrawal of the Russian troops from Ukraine and all the war criminals to be held legally accountable for their atrocities against Ukrainians on international level, according to the common juridical laws and procedures. I also demand freedom and justice for Alexey Navalny and for all the other political prisoners in Russia. / June 2023, University of Oslo.

## **Abstract**

In this master essay I explore how the modernist landscape paintings of two chosen artists, Norwegian Frits Thaulow (1847-1946) and Russian Konstantin Korovin (1861-1939), reflect this period of time both in art historical and historical contexts during the 1880s-1890s. Since the two main paintings, which are in focus in the thesis, illustrate Norwegian landscapes, it is appropriate to compare the painterly style developments of the two painters in the transnational context, regarding common cultural and historical bonds, as well as reciprocal cultural interest between Norway and Russia, that has been through years. Thaulow was much oriented in being an international artist, rather than strictly national. Korovin also obtained much artistic inspiration during his trips to Europe, including Paris, where he was highly influenced by French Impressionism and then became one of the pioneers in Russian Impressionist painting. In addition, the fact that some of the Russian modernist artists, including Korovin, traveled to paint to Norway while seeking for inspiration might be seen as an interesting historical point, when looking at the common cultural heritage of the two countries.

The aesthetical theory which I have chosen is the concept of the “sublime” in nature, regarding its representations in visual arts, suggested by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). I discuss how it is possible to characterize the modernist landscape paintings of the end of the 19th century as the modern version of the sublime, compared to the early paintings of Romanticism in Europe. In addition I will also discuss some more contemporary versions of the sublime in order to achieve a broader theoretical and critical discussion in the thesis while applying the theoretical approach to the chosen artworks.

Combining this aesthetical theory with other landscape theories in painting while using of comparative analysis, based on empirical observations of the chosen paintings, will allow me to figure out whether the Norwegian landscapes of Thaulow and Korovin can be looked at as the form for a painterly response to the age of modernity and industrialisation in Europe, while bearing some intrinsic symbolic meanings in their painterly formal properties.

I therefore hope that this essay, partly based on some previous art historical publications, concerning the Norwegian-Russian cultural relations, can be a useful contribution in future research in the field and hopefully help to re-establish these relations between the neighbors in the future historical perspective.

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**1. Introduction.** In this master essay I would like to explore the art historical development of the modernist painting in Norway and Russia as a response to industrialization in Europe during the 1880s-1890s, using the two chosen painters of the period, Norwegian Frits Thaulow (1847-1906) and Russian Konstantin Korovin (1861-1939) as examples. The aim is to compare the artists' painterly styles, to discuss the role of nature as the source of painterly inspiration in their oeuvre, in light of the aesthetic theory of the sublime, according to which nature can be seen as something "bigger" than human beings, as the source of "the sublime".<sup>1</sup>

I would like to discuss how the aspect of the sublime in nature can be interpreted as seen in the Northern landscapes, depicted in the form of water or a waterfall and in the form of aurora borealis (the Northern lights). These two phenomena of nature were depicted as the key elements in the two chosen artworks by Thaulow and Korovin, and I will discuss possible theoretical perspectives on the phenomena through the prism of Burke, Kant, Varnedoe and Malmanger's understanding of the aesthetic theory of the sublime, applied in the visual art. In addition to the concept of "the sublime" I will also look at some landscape theories, which may help me find more unexpected answers to the chosen problem of modernist painting in Norway and Russia during the 1880s-1890s, compared to the French painting at the time.

The chosen theoretical approaches will allow me to better understand the development of the modernist painting in the given period, regarding the painters' artistic response to modernity, resulting in the landscape paintings in certain painterly manners. Furthermore it seems quite important to discuss the stylistic similarities in Thaulow and Korovin's painterly strategies and styles, remembering that their painterly paths were quite alike, since both artists studied in Paris and were fascinated by depicting plein-air urban and rural motives. It may also be new and interesting to juxtapose these two painters in the research, because they were meant to be the pioneers in French Impressionist painting in their countries. I will in addition include their Parisian urban landscapes in my analysis, as I also think it can be interesting and new to compare them, regarding their resemblance in the painterly techniques and means of expression, while looking at the concept of the "urban sublime", which also became of current interest during the last decade of the 19th century. Last but not least, I chose to focus on Thaulow and Korovin in my art historical research, since there is not as much material on them (especially considering Konstantin Korovin) as there are on other more famous painters of the chosen period either in Norway or in Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> Blair, Hugh "Art and Sublime" in "A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Oassian (1763)." In *The Sublime*, 207-12. Cambridge University Press. 1996: 118-119;

In the chosen historical period artistic ideals in art shifted rapidly and often collapsed with each other. By the 1880s there was a return from a heroic interpretation of Nordic nature towards more realistic and subjective emotional interpretations of the local nature, moving away from “the sublime”. Due to this new artistic thinking in painting there became popular painted studies from nature, emphasizing a closer engagement of painters with reality.<sup>2</sup> The painters whom I am going to focus on in the essay among all were interested in depicting Nordic *plein air* landscapes during the 1880s-1900s. But at the same time the chosen art works in the essay contain certain dynamic phenomena of nature such as waterfall and northern lights, which capture the sight and give the impression to the spectator of something sublime, rather than just a regular enjoyment of any other idyllic scenery.

As the art historical research method I will implement the comparative analysis of the two chosen canvases, painted by Thaulow and Korovin, “The Waterfall Haugfossen” (1883) (ill.1) from the collection of Nasjonalmuseet in Oslo, and “Northern Light. Hammerfest” (1894-1895) (ill.2), belonging to the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. By comparing painterly techniques and means of artistic expressions of these two art works, I will try to find out whereas the paintings can be read as modernist versions of conveying the sublime in nature through painting. Such empirical research method as the comparative analysis of paintings, combined with the chosen theoretical grounds will allow me to analyze and to ponder how Thaulow and Korovin chose to reflect the given historical period of modernity through their paintings, regarding the techniques, palettes and painterly principles which were common during the 1880s-1890s (see ch. 5.3).

These canvases were displayed as the two main artworks in my hypothetical exhibition project for Nasjonalmuseet in Oslo in KUN4900 during fall 2022. I chose exactly these two particular paintings, because the motifs are different both regarding the color palettes, the geographic locations and performed in different artistic styles, showing Norwegian nature in all of its forceful and dynamic beauty, interrupted by the human presence in the form of boats and houses, laconically integrated in the landscapes. Therefore it seems interesting for me to track personal stylistic developments of Frits Thaulow and Konstantin Korovin, since the painters worked approximately during the same historical period. Their art works can also be looked at as a good example of the Impressionist and

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<sup>2</sup> Gunnarsson, Torsten, Ahtola-Moorhouse, L., Haverkamp, Fr., Ateneumin Taidemuseo, Statens Museum for Kunst, Nationalmuseum, Nasjonalmuseet, and Minneapolis Institute of Arts. *A Mirror of Nature: Nordic Landscape Painting 1840-1910*. København: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2006;



Naturalist “peripheral” art historical development, compared to Paris, and which caused local public reactions as the newer artistic styles in painting at the time.

*Historical background.* Northern Norway as the Far North was always romanticized among Russians as the place, unbothered by the Western modernization around the shift of the centuries. It was especially Norway which Russian painters were interested in both as the painterly destination and in obtaining contacts with the Norwegian painters during the 1890s. The countries seemed familiar to each other due to the same climate, common border and common history, as well as being alien at the same time. Although it is important to note that Russians already knew Ibsen, Bjørnson and Swedish composer Strindberg, they were soon to discover Grieg and Hamsun as well. While Russian painters always were eager to understand and to commune with the “Northern soul”, impulses of which seemed mystical and fascinating enough to be converted into art through their artistic activities.<sup>3</sup>

As the sources in my research I will refer to some exhibition catalogs of the past, for instance *A Mirror of Nature: Nordic Landscape Painting 1840-1910* (Nasjonalmuseet, 2006) and *The Swan Princess: Russian Art 1880 - 1910* (Munchmuseet, 2019). During the search of the relevant literature resources I also found a master thesis, delivered at the UiO as well by Åshild Norhus in spring 2012, called: “*NASJONALE MARKØRER I NORSK NATURALISTISK MALERI. En empirisk studie med hovedfokus på utvalgte verk av to sentrale kunstnere*”.<sup>4</sup> It was a useful example for my work since the candidate also had written about the plein-air national painting in Norway during the 1880s, where she mentioned Haugfossen waterfall and how Frits Thaulow chose to depict it during that historical period as the national marker. The thesis provided me with more relevant sources on the topic regarding the Norwegian landscape painting and the sublime (in waterfalls), which absolutely matched the problematic, taken up in my research, and enabled me to add more of the critical discussion regarding the chosen theory and empirics, applied in my thesis. Moreover, reading an already existing thesis on a related research topic was useful when thinking about how it was possible to come up with newer and alternative perspectives on the subject, without repeating some of the already existing findings in the field.

I will also use certain Russian literature sources, including diverse articles on Konstantin Korovin and on local peculiarities of Russian Impressionist painting, such as a monograph *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th - in the Beginning*

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<sup>3</sup> Brandtzæg, Kari. J., Schjønby, N. and Munchmuseet. *Grenseløs Modernitet i Svanepriinsessen: Russisk Kunst 1880 - 1910. The Swan Princess: Russian Art 1880 - 1910*. Oslo: Munchmuseet, 2019: 166;

<sup>4</sup> Norhus, Åshild V., *NASJONALE MARKØRER I NORSK NATURALISTISK MALERI: En Empirisk Studie Med Hovedfokus På Utvalgte Verk Av to Sentrale Kunstnere*, masteroppgave. Universitetet i Oslo. 2012;

*of the 20th Century in Impressionism in Russian Prose of the Silver Age* (2012), Ph.D. thesis *Genesis of the Russian Impressionist Painting* (2007) and some historical texts, written by the contemporaries of the painters during the 1890s-1900s, combined with regular art historical literature on the history of the genres and on the chosen artists. In my opinion it is important to combine contemporary sources with more scientific art historical texts written in different countries and in different languages, together with the earlier authentic historical periods. This also may be useful in tracing the genre's art historical development and in tracing how the view on this development might have changed throughout history.

*Which findings can be new in my research?* Albeit there already had been written several research papers on the crossings between Norwegian and Russian cultures, particularly regarding painting in the chosen period of the 1890s, in my research I open up a new theoretical and art historical perspective on similarities between exact painters, Frits Thaulow and Konstantin Korovin, as they both are represented in their countries as pioneers of the French Impressionist painting, applying the genre with their personal artistic touch. Furthermore, there is not much scientific research done concerning Thaulow and especially Korovin. In the Norwegian art historical field there primarily are Christian Krohg (1852-1925) and Erik Werenskiold (1855-1938) who were at the focus of art historical research. Whereas in the Russian there are also written relatively few sources on Konstantin Korovin, despite his significant role in the development of the Russian modernist painting during the shift of the centuries. Such scarcity of the literature on Korovin was one of the difficulties which I faced while working on this thesis, when it came to the search for literature regarding Konstantin Korovin, since I unfortunately wasn't able to travel to Russia in order to obtain more authentic sources on the painter. Nevertheless my research on these two chosen artists might be new and interesting for the local Norwegian art historical milieu, and also as the continuation of the earlier research of the modernist painting development in transnational context.

While applying the theory of the sublime in nature in more contemporary painting of the 1880s-1890s can illustrate how we can perceive the chosen paintings through this theoretical perspective as the form of response to the historical period of modernization in Europe, as seen in Norway and Russia, with respect to their geographic peripherality towards Central Europe. Since the main research topic was taken from my virtual exhibition project at Nasjonalmuseet for KUN4900, which was met as a promising and fascinating exhibition idea at the museum, I decided to further develop it to the complete research essay for the 2nd part of my master thesis at the KKM.

**2. Theory. The sublime and the beautiful.** This aesthetic approach was first described in philosophical writings by Irish political writer and member of the English parliament Edmund Burke (1729-1797).<sup>5</sup> He explained the opposition between beauty and sublimity on a physiological level by using the aspects of “pleasure” (deriving from beauty) and “pain” (deriving from the sublime). This implies that beauty or sublimity can be experienced by the beholder through the process of perception and thus have a certain effect upon him/her.<sup>6</sup> For instance when we look at something which is beautiful in our perception, this causes the relaxing feeling of *pleasure* and *delight*.

Burke claimed that the strongest effect that the sublime can have on our mind is *astonishment*. *Astonishment* is the state of mind when all activities of our mind become repealed due to a certain degree of fear, when we are faced with something big and sublime in *nature*. The reason for this is that our mind is filled with the big object and therefore it isn't able to either reflect over other smaller things or over the object itself. By the total control of our attention and anticipating our reactions, the sublime's power thus lies in embracing us in its irresistible power, leaving us with the feeling of *astonishment*. Further Burke wrote that there also exist weaker forms of the sublime's effects on the mind, such as admiration, reverence and respect.<sup>7</sup> Colors also can be contributing to the effect of the sublime on the mind, if these colors are strong, bright and preferably dark, which can be used in magnificent motifs. This way, a picture of a gloomy and dark mountain or gray cloudy skies, appears as painterly more magnificent than of blue sky or a green mountain, painted on a clear sunny day. Therefore night is more sublime and solemn than day, according to the Burkean logic.<sup>8</sup>

*The Kantian Sublime.* Burke's contemporary, Idealist German Philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), is also mentioned as one of the first thinkers to properly explore the aspect of the sublime, besides from his critique of the opposition between empiricism (“Critique of Pure Reason”, 1781) and rationalism/moral actions in everyday life (“Critique of Practical Reason”, 1788). While, in the 3rd volume on the “Critique of Judgement” Kant discusses our ability to judge things, apart from his writings on understanding and reason, where the philosopher focuses on the so-called “aesthetic judgment”.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Burke, Edmund, Hume, D., Baumgarten, Al. G., Bø-Rygg, Ar. and Bale, K. *Estetisk Teori: En Antologi*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2008: 32;

<sup>6</sup> Landow, George. P., *Edmund Burke's On The Sublime. The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*. Princeton University Press. 1971 (1988). Source: <https://victorianweb.org/philosophy/sublime/burke.html> (viewed: 10.02.2023);

<sup>7</sup> Burke, Edmund, et. al. *Estetisk Teori: En Antologi*. 2008: 35;

<sup>8</sup> Burke, Edmund, et. al. *Estetisk Teori: En Antologi*. 2008: 38;

<sup>9</sup> Shaw, Philip, *Kant: The 'Analytic of the Sublime' in The Sublime*. The New Critical Idiom. London: Routledge, 2006: 72, 75-76;

The “aesthetic judgment” is understood as the most challenging concept in Kant’s paradigm of possible judgements that we apply regarding different aspects of life, because it isn’t determined by either reason or understanding. “Aesthetic judgment” implies judgment of taste, with which we decide whereas an object such as for instance a piece of art that we look at is beautiful or not. This statement is based on the beholder’s personal aesthetic taste, which somehow implies that this statement functions as if it is a statement of fact. Therefore someone else would rather agree on the fact that the artwork is beautiful (though it is still possible to disagree about).<sup>10</sup> In other words, this means that the judgment of taste is pure since it is liberated from either understanding, reason or even from our sensuous intuition.

This way Kant had introduced a new account of meaning and value of art, which is neither metaphysical in the traditional understanding, referring to the Platonic logic, nor merely subjective, by officially rejecting Plato’s relatively old association of aesthetic experience with truth. Instead Kant cautiously suggested that while experiencing the beauty, the beholder is able to imagine how freedom and nature can be reconciled. This implies that even if the ‘aesthetic intelligibility’ of nature in this case might be ‘affective and mostly sensible’, it is still ‘uniquely determined’ and thus is not a simple ‘reactive response’.<sup>11</sup>

Kant’s understanding of the sublime is reminiscent of Burke’s, since Kant also refers to its psychological and physiological influence on our perception. The sublime, according to the German thinker, causes a pleasure that arises in us indirectly, by facing a phenomenon which causes the feeling of the sublime in our mind. When a spectator inhibits vital forces (for instance in nature), his imagination evokes an emotion which is closer to seriousness than play in imagination’s activities.<sup>12</sup>

**2.1. Kantian vision of the sublime in the forces of nature.** Kant came up in his thinking with a certain distinction between the ‘mathematical and dynamical sublime’. The mathematical sublime means that our imagination is overwhelmed by the spatial or temporal magnitude of a phenomenon, which is too great for it to be perceived as the whole at once. This feeling can come to our mind when we for instance think of the vastness of the Milky Way or of the infinity of the universe. It is not even necessary to face the phenomenon itself, since the imagination can reproduce the concept on its own, based on *a priori* (= universal) knowledge<sup>13</sup> about the phenomenon, and we can experience the feeling of the overwhelming

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<sup>10</sup> Shaw, Phillip, *Kant: The ‘Analytic of the Sublime’ in The Sublime*. 2006: 76;

<sup>11</sup> Rudd, Anthony, *Painting and Presence: Why Paintings Matter*. Oxford Academic. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022: 41-42;

<sup>12</sup> Shaw, Philip, *Kant: The ‘Analytic of the Sublime’ in The Sublime*. 2006: 78;

<sup>13</sup> Shaw, Philip, *Kant: The ‘Analytic of the Sublime’ in The Sublime*. 2006: 73;

power of the mathematical sublime from thinking of how physically small a person is, in comparison to the Milky Way. Because infinity cannot be grasped in our sensible intuition and therefore we think of it as an idea of reason, based on the given knowledge.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the dynamical sublime, like the mathematical, also blocks the ability of the imagination to keep up with the faculty of understanding, only by enabling the emotional contours of the experience, not the reason.<sup>15</sup>

Yet again, Kant doesn't mean that the dynamical sublime refers to some inherent features in itself, which seem attractive. It is the spectator who perceives it so. The more fearful the object is, the more attractive it becomes for our sight (if we observe it from a safe place or from afar). Then the dynamical sublime becomes a source of delight. We have an ability to appreciate our weakness (in terms of our physical size) in the face of nature, but at the same time we are able to understand that this fear of the forces of nature such as for instance the boundlessness of the ocean primarily appears only in our minds. Therefore, according to Kant, nature has 'no dominion' over us.<sup>16</sup>

Thus the sublime is not an attribute of nature, but again rather of our mind. With the encounter of the vastness of nature, our mind discovers the faculty that exceeds the realm of sensible intuition. The same happens when we experience the dynamical sublime in nature. Then our mind realizes the rational idea of *freedom* of this kind of the sublime, both from nature and from the faculty of imagination. Because when we see some dynamic forces of nature, demonstrated from afar, a pure 'idea' of totality or freedom comes to our mind, which somehow doesn't refer to the empirical conditions of nature, which, according to Kant, again arises on the basis of an initial failure in our ability to perceive what we see as a whole.<sup>17</sup> Therefore we can conclude that since the sublime is the product of our mind, we have capacities to transcend the limitations of our finite phenomenal existence, and sublimity lies in human capacity to think beyond the bounds of the given.<sup>18</sup>

**2.2. "Nordic sublime" in Scandinavian landscape painting.** The sublime in painting (particularly - in landscape painting) came into the spotlight during the Pre-Romantic and Romantic periods, in the form of different artistic and philosophical trends which were popular with cultured European elites, especially around the 1800s. The "sublime" was a concept with roots in the rhetoric and poetry of Antiquity, where it referred

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<sup>14</sup> Shaw, Philip, *Kant: The 'Analytic of the Sublime' in The Sublime*. 2006: 80-81;

<sup>15</sup> Shaw, Philip, *Kant: The 'Analytic of the Sublime' in The Sublime*. 2006: 81;

<sup>16</sup> Shaw, Philip, *Kant: The 'Analytic of the Sublime' in The Sublime*. 2006: 82;

<sup>17</sup> Shaw, Philip, *Kant: The 'Analytic of the Sublime' in The Sublime*. 2006: 82-83;

<sup>18</sup> Shaw, Philip, *Kant: The 'Analytic of the Sublime' in The Sublime*. 2006: 83;

to “great in literature” or to “greatness in style”.<sup>19</sup> Among Norwegian painters of the 19th century it was Johan Christian Dahl (1788-1857) whose dramatic landscape paintings were the purest examples of expression of the sublime in painting, as Dahl preferred to closely study nature on the spot, in order to gain the most realistic painterly representations of nature through his art. An important aspect here is that for Dahl the sublime wasn’t something to be found only in mind, as Kant suggests, but in the outer world, as he was eager to return to Norway to depict native landscapes as the sources of the sublime, when he was finishing his painterly education in Europe.<sup>20</sup> One of characteristic examples of the sublime landscapes among Dahl’s paintings is for instance canvases “Shipwreck on the Coast of Norway” (ill.3).

Further in the 18th century there were more discussions on if the sublime could be seen as an attempt to determine one particular kind of poetic or artistic excellence. Malmanger also notes here that aesthetic value is not one of a kind and it may depend on different kinds of experience, as seen from a psychological perspective. Thus this way of reasoning led to the distinct aesthetic categories, which was a big contribution, among all by the two already mentioned thinkers like Burke or Kant, to the 18th century aesthetic theory.<sup>21</sup>

The nature and the character of art had been thoroughly studied and speculated on since the Italian Renaissance, considered in relation to *beauty*. Because of such relation to the concept of beauty art was called “fine art”, in order to secede from other human activities around the 1700s. As a result, the concept of beauty became more circumscribed and there appeared a necessity for more words such as *picturesque*, describing aesthetic values of phenomena, which somehow weren’t sufficient enough to be categorized as *beautiful*.<sup>22</sup>

Malmanger claims further the same point which already was mentioned in chapter 2.1 that the sublime as a theoretical category isn’t bounded only by our empirical limitations: “*Empirical truth is hardly an important concern of the sublime*”<sup>23</sup>. Thus he is persuaded that “nordic sublime” as its own category doesn’t make much sense. But it definitely can be looked at as part of the grand history of “the sublime” and the characteristics of the “Nordic sublime” are partly empirically derived<sup>24</sup> (for instance, one can look at a Nordic landscape and catch the feeling of the sublime, which is purely empirical).

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<sup>19</sup> Malmanger, Magne. *Nordic Sublime* in Gunnarsson, T., et. al. *A Mirror of Nature: Nordic Landscape Painting 1840-1910*. København: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2006: 42;

<sup>20</sup> Malmanger, Magne, *Nordic Sublime*. 2006: 40-41, 46;

<sup>21</sup> Malmanger, Magne, *Nordic Sublime*. 2006: 42, 43;

<sup>22</sup> Malmanger, Magne, *Nordic Sublime*. 2006: 43-44;

<sup>23</sup> Malmanger, Magne, *Nordic Sublime*. 2006: 44;

<sup>24</sup> Malmanger, Magne, *Nordic Sublime* 2006: 45;

Both during the 18th and the 19th centuries nature was called the ‘original’ sublime by writers, referring to its vastness, dizzying heights and depths, which one can find in its deserts, galaxies, oceans, canyons or mountains. These phenomena, as well as nature’s mighty forces like thunder and lightning, hurricanes, waterfalls, waves, volcanic eruptions or avalanches, represent the dynamical sublime (see also chapter 2.1) as they appear as nature’s tremendous forces.<sup>25</sup>

While we look at such forces of nature we become emotionally overwhelmed and even start feeling anxious, which Burke called “the fear of pain”. But at the same time this dramatic emotional experience again brings us delight or the feeling of pleasurable excitement. We can thus assume that such emotional experiences might also have inspired some of the painters of the 19th century to create landscape paintings, in which they tried to depict this feeling of the sublime on the canvas, since sublime places became more accessible and people started experiencing less fear for such places in the wild.<sup>26</sup> But this however might be a problematic artistic task, according to Hugh Blair<sup>27</sup>, which I am going to discuss further in chapter 2.3.

Fine Arts professor at the university of New York Kirk Varnedoe (1946-2003) introduced the concept of “*Nordic-ness*”, when speaking of the historical development of Scandinavian painting from the 1880s. This aspect became a characteristic feature of Scandinavian landscape painting of the 1880-90s, though it was already moving beyond Naturalistic topographical description towards the genre of Symbolism. The main theme in the genre was conveying the gloomy mood of the forest or the Nordic night with its erotic overtones, the atavistic and the cosmic, which is one of the key topics of the local Symbolism. Here the fatal power of nature is being shown as something superior over the artifacts of modern civilization, together with the cycle of the seasons, folk rituals and the sensuousness of the ephemeral Nordic nights in paintings.<sup>28</sup>

Thus by the 1890s Scandinavian Symbolism was not a peripheral artistic style, but a mixture of the central tendencies, reflecting the reaction against modernity in Europe in the end of the 1800s. Many of the period’s works are also seen both as Realistic and Symbolic, as they either can be descriptive and abstract, objective and expressive or retrograde and avant-garde.<sup>29</sup> This can also be seen as a subjective painterly expression of the Nordic

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<sup>25</sup> Blair, Hugh, “*Art and Sublime*”. 1996: 117;

<sup>26</sup> Blair, Hugh, “*Art and Sublime*”. 1996: 117-118;

<sup>27</sup> Blair, Hugh, “*Art and Sublime*”. 1996: 118-126;

<sup>28</sup> Varnedoe, Kirk, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting 1880-1910*. [exhibition]. New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1982: 18-19;

<sup>29</sup> Varnedoe, Kirk, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting 1880-1910*. 1982: 18-19;

sublime in the late 19th century, when painters started depicting local Nordic landscapes as the subject of their admiration and as motifs, which nation-affirm Nordic identity. Simultaneously this also was their *painterly response on the industrialisation in Europe*, by emphasizing nature's superiority over human beings.<sup>30</sup>

**2.3. Why pictorial art is not sublime, unlike nature.** Some vast areas in nature were gradually discovered while they still were wild, they had much greater impact as the sources of the sublime in nature due to their essential wildness, which was insubordinate to human beings. Simultaneously, human-invented phenomena like arts and architecture, moral principles and mathematical ideas were also considered sublime, but nature was seen as the paradigm of the sublime, as it yet had the greater emotional effect in this regard, primarily due to its vastness. Such categories of arts as music, poetry and painting were also considered as immediately sublime by some writers, but theoretician Hugh Blair claimed that arts in general are not originally sublime,<sup>31</sup> which I consider as an interesting critical point to discuss in the light of the Nordic landscape paintings can be characterized as sublime.

The key qualities of the sublime, as mentioned, refer to the feeling of *overwhelming vastness* or *power*, which causes a strong emotional response as excitement and delight, often paired with fear and anxiety. Whereas most works of art in one or another lack a combination of these qualities and following reactions to them, therefore art can not be sublime in the way nature is. Simultaneously this doesn't mean that art can not be seen as sublime at all, since it still can be associated with it, even if an artwork isn't sublime in the original sense.<sup>32</sup> For instance, a painting illustrating aurora borealis isn't sublime in an equal sense as the phenomenon itself when seen in the wild, but the painting still refers to it as to the source of the sublime, thus the motif can be associated with this aesthetic category.

Blair named the 5 reasons for why art can not be sublime (considering it on the same terms as nature can be). First, most works of art can not be qualified as sublime, since they don't possess the scale of the sublime, namely the size and scope, which means that they are limited regarding the vastness of nature which is one of the key criteria of the sublime. Artworks can not convey it due to the physical limits of their actual size.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Varnedoe, Kirk, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting 1880-1910*. 1982: 18-19;

<sup>31</sup> Blair, Hugh, "Art and Sublime". 1996: 118-119;

<sup>32</sup> Blair, Hugh, "Art and Sublime". 1996: 119;

<sup>33</sup> Blair, Hugh, "Art and Sublime". 1996: 119;



Second, artworks are unable to convey the boundlessness of the formlessness of the sublime as we can see it in nature, also because art has certain various forms, frames and conventions, limiting the scope of the sublime's artistic expression.<sup>34</sup>

Third, art isn't capable of reproducing all the 'visceral' wild and 'disordered' character referring to the dynamical sublime or the forces of nature, where nature's essence lies, creating the feeling of its sublimity. Furthermore, artworks are unable to evoke heightened emotions, referring to the feeling of physical vulnerability and fear of pain or death, which are typical while experiencing the sublime in the wild, according to Burke's logic (see chapter 2). Finally, as Blair claims, the artworks can not convey the more metaphysical aspects of the Kantian and Romantic sublimities as such<sup>35</sup> (I assume here that the author refers to the categories of reason, imagination and regarding our analytical ability to judge things, which particularly Kant emphasized in his considerations about the sublime<sup>36</sup>).

To sum up, the main point of why art in general fails to capture the sublime as it is experienced in nature is due to artworks' inability to convey the multi-sensory experiences of facing forceful dramatic manifestations of nature, such as storms, thunder, avalanches, etc, even though artists may really be eager to convey the emotional effects that such phenomena can have on our psyche.<sup>37</sup>

**2.4. The modern sublime: the sublime of electric lights and of darkness.** With the advent of the modernity during the massive electrification of the bigger cities in Europe and in the US between 1880s-1920s there appeared a new subcategory of the *unintended artificial sublime*, manifested by the electric lights of skylines (especially in the case of New York) and urban nightscapes, amazing our imagination with its picturesque beauty and simultaneously superseding and conquering the essential darkness of the skies.<sup>38</sup> Simultaneously the discourse had opened up the new critical visions on the urban "nightscapes", creating more contemporary versions of the sublime.<sup>39</sup>

The so-called light pollution from the urban nightscapes resulted into the competition with the starry skies' darkness, what Stone refers to as the opposition between new modern types of the sublime, the *technological* or *electric* sublime, created by humans, and the paradigmatic categories of the sublime suggested by Kant (with natural phenomena such as

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<sup>34</sup> Blair, Hugh, "Art and Sublime". 1996: 119;

<sup>35</sup> Blair, Hugh, "Art and Sublime". 1996: 119-120;

<sup>36</sup> Shaw, Philip, *Kant: The 'Analytic of the Sublime'* in *The Sublime*. 2006: 72-75, 84-86;

<sup>37</sup> Blair, Hugh. "Art and Sublime". 1996: 120;

<sup>38</sup> Nye, David E., *American Technological Sublime*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994: 152, 173;

<sup>39</sup> Stone, Trevor W., "Re-envisioning the Nocturnal Sublime: On the Ethics and Aesthetics of Nighttime Lighting." *Topoi*, 2018: 481-482;

mountains, waterfalls, thunder, night skies).<sup>40</sup> The theoretical framework of “the sublime” can thus also be used as a tool for expressing a range of emotional responses to the overwhelming beauty of night skies or city lights and to explain why we historically tend to endow these appearances with certain symbolic or mystical meanings. What is crucial here is that the sublime highlights the crossing between moral and aesthetic judgments of the contemporary nightscapes and landscapes, especially when looked at from the environmental perspective.<sup>41</sup>

Thus we can notice an interesting tendency in the discourse of how during the industrialization in the Western world humans began conquering nature not only in materialistic terms by founding different industries and building railway systems, but also on the metaphysical level, when it comes to the meeting point between the classical Kantian sublime in nature and the more contemporary versions of the concept such as *electrical sublime*, which emerged from the technological progress of modernity.

**3. Painterly style development in Norway and in Russia during the 1880s-1890s.** Norway. I would like to start this chapter by taking a closer look at the Norwegian Naturalist and Impressionist painting’s development as painterly genres. Historically Impressionism overtook Symbolism in Scandinavia as a genre around the 1900s. But it is also important to note here that Scandinavian Impressionism was different from the classical French Impressionism, due to the local stylistic peculiarities, which occurred while the local painters were adapting the French impulses to the local painterly manners in Scandinavia.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the bigger part of the 19th century Norwegian painters chose Germany as the destination for their painterly education. They studied in Munich, Dresden, Dusseldorf and Karlsruhe. But in the 1880s the majority of the Norwegian painters moved to Paris, where the contemporary French painting had a pivotal influence on general impulses in the Norwegian painterly art. Exactly at this time there appeared the “golden age generation” of the Norwegian painters such as Erik Werenskiold, Frits Thaulow, Christian Krohg, Gerhard Munthe and Harriet Backer. But according to Messel it is hard to define any particular impulses in the French painting that influenced the Norwegian painters in their expressions.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Stone, Trevor W. "Re-envisioning the Nocturnal Sublime". 2018: 482;

<sup>41</sup> Stone, Trevor W. "Re-envisioning the Nocturnal Sublime". 2018: 482;

<sup>42</sup> Helleland, Allis in Hedström, P., Gunnarsson, T., Statens Museum for Kunst, Nationalmuseum, and Impressionismen och Norden. *Impressionismen og Norden: Fransk Avantgarde i Det Sene 1800-tal og Kunsten i Norden 1870-1920: Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, og Statens Museum for Kunst, København*. København: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2003: 7;

<sup>43</sup> Messel, Nils in Hedström, P., Gunnarsson, T. *Impressionismen og Norden: Fransk Avantgarde i Det Sene 1800-tal og Kunsten i Norden 1870-1920*. København: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2003: 207;

Well known Norwegian art historian Andreas Aubert (1851-1913) considered for instance Impressionism not as an artistic aim in itself, but rather as a helping facility for Norwegian painters to convey Norwegian nature. He argued that Impressionism could have diverse tasks, depending on place and cultural premises. Therefore, in Paris it could be read as a form for painterly protest, while “up here, on Europe's edge” it would be looked at as Naturalism’s continuation in “conquering” the local reality.<sup>44</sup>

Realists or Impressionists like Monet og Renoir discarded the academic principle of painting in studios in order to capture immediate sensations of natural light and color outside.<sup>45</sup> Aubert thus considered artists, practicing plein-air Naturalism and Impressionism in France, as much closer to nature and freer in their painterly expression, compared to those who studied painterly techniques in Germany, where the local Romanticism was seen as “an obstacle” to learn newer painterly techniques. Nevertheless French Impressionism helped perfectly in depicting Norwegian nature by expressing it in its pure colors. When French Claude Monet visited Norway to paint the local winter landscapes<sup>46</sup>, Aubert got truly excited and wrote an own short column in *Dagbladet* magazine (Norway), where he solemnly thanked and praised Monet for “educating” the new ‘fresh’ generation of Norwegian painters, who got inspired by his new impressionistic established formula for modernist painting, which was missing in the Norwegian painterly and aesthetic traditions.<sup>47</sup>

In the article “*From Today's French Painting*” (“*Fra Det Franske Nutidsmaleri*”, 1884, Nor.), Aubert wrote that 1880’s contemporary painting in France was strongly criticized at the Salons for the lack of system of the common classical rules for painting and for the lack of defined contours. Artists became able to decide on their own what was important to paint. They thus became “the sculptor” of the painting, departing from their own subjective life experiences and impressions, emerging from the painters’ relationship with life and nature.<sup>48</sup>

In Scandinavian countries the open-air Realism in the 1880s brought also some significant changes in pictorial compositions. Like the French painters of the time, Scandinavian and particularly Norwegian painters also chose to focus on plain everyday subjects, which was the key feature of the period. Swedish art historian Torsten Gunnarsson gives as an example regarding Nordic plein-air Realism a painting by Frits Thaulow, one of

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<sup>44</sup> Messel, Nils, *Impressionismen og Norden*. 2003: 208-209;

<sup>45</sup> Varnedoe, Kirk, *A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern*. New York: Abrams, 1990: 13;

<sup>46</sup> Messel, Nils, *Impressionismen og Norden*. 2003: 245-246;

<sup>47</sup> Messel, Nils., *Impressionismen og Norden*. 2003: 208-209;

<sup>48</sup> Aubert, Andreas, *Fra Det Franske Nutidsmaleri*. Stockholm, 1884: 8;

the main painters in my essay, called “Rocks at Kragerø” (1882) (ill.4). Thaulow depicted a sharply cropped perspective on a Norwegian rocky slope with some local wooden houses in the foreground. All the objects were painted with a high degree of clarity, together with, as Gunnarsson named it, “fidelity to nature”, implying the highly realistic manner of painting by Thaulow in this case. It was significant in how informal and unconventional the choice of the motif was, since the painter chose to depict a random mechanically reproduced cropped piece of landscape from reality, which symbolized the break with the traditional norms in landscape painting, particularly regarding the compositional formal contents.<sup>49</sup>

Another important feature, which made the Nordic plein-air painting different from the French in the 1880s, was inventing the use of a cooler color palette. Scandinavian landscapes were painted with a high degree of clarity of daylight, in order to reach a more realistic rendering of harsh Nordic nature. The use of the cooler colors highlighted this harshness, as well as less moisture-laden atmosphere, so typical for the Northern climate. This aspect became pivotal in distinguishing the Nordic Realist painting from the French one<sup>50</sup>, and Thaulow was one of the crucial Norwegian painters in the genre (see ch. 4, 5.1).

Norwegian painters were especially inspired by the French naturalists from the Barbizon-school, which are called Impressionism’s precursors. The naturalistic landscapes by Corot, Courbet, Rousseau, Daubigny and Millet were seen as the examples of mastering the naturalistic and credible depiction of nature also among Norwegian artists. Norway’s first art history professor at the University of Christiania (from 1875) Lorentz Dietrichson (1834-1917) wrote that “the new realistic-coloristic” painterly style came to the spotlight of European painting. Dietrichson had been in opposition to the young Norwegian naturalists on the local art scene, which was relatively narrow with scarce resources, though he didn’t have anything against European Naturalism and Impressionism. For instance it was Dietrichson who helped the National Gallery in Oslo with the purchase of Claude Monet’s Impressionist canvas “Rainweather, Etretat” (1886) (ill.5).<sup>51</sup>

By the 1890s more European and also American artists started practicing open-air painting in order to capture the “realness”, rooted in the materiality of nature, as the painters found interest in nature’s mundane objects through the direct experience of them via self-presence in a landscape. This partly happened due to the shift among artists by the end of the 19th century, which led to the more realistic and unidealized representations of nature in

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<sup>49</sup> Gunnarsson, Torsten, *Nordic Landscape Painting in the Nineteenth Century*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1998: 163;

<sup>50</sup> Gunnarsson, Torsten, *Nordic Landscape Painting in the Nineteenth Century*. 1998: 163;

<sup>51</sup> Messel, Nils, *Impressionismen og Norden*. 2003: 210, 213, 215;

paintings, which was against the painterly academic norms. Such a “phenomenological turn”, as Gonnén calls it, was the artists’ protest against being dependent upon sales of their artworks in capitalist society. Because of such transformation, materiality thus became the new subject matter in modern landscape painting, while “the real” became “the ideal” and vice versa, during the 1890s.<sup>52</sup>

The concept of “*Northern Light*” in Scandinavian art during the 1880-90s describes first the influence of European Realism and Naturalism in art, including images of the working class, scenes of modern life and *plein-air* landscapes. Younger Scandinavian artists went to art schools in Europe, mainly in France. In the 1890s the 2nd major shift happened in Scandinavian art. Namely when all these artists returned back to Scandinavia, driven by a strong nationalist and isolationist resentment. They then started painting specifically native-Nordic themes, while abandoning the rules of the French Realism that was typical for their earlier canvases. Norwegian artists returned back home before other Scandinavian artists and started going from Realism and internationalism towards nationalism and Symbolism in their paintings, being clear, consistent and common in their paintings.<sup>53</sup> Norwegian landscape painting as a genre therefore reached its peak in painterly development during the 1880s-1890s, as it was seen as one of the important vehicles for defining the national identity, several years before obtaining independence from Sweden in 1905.<sup>54</sup>

**3.1. Art historical development of Russian Impressionist painting.** When speaking of art historical development in Russian painting during the 1880s-1890s, it is especially important to look closer at the genre of Impressionism, since it was the central artistic direction at the time and since one of the two main painters, discussed in the thesis is Konstantin Korovin (1861-1939), known as one of the first Russian Impressionist painters.<sup>55</sup>

By the middle of the 19th century the classic and romantic tendencies within the Russian visual arts gradually became obsolete, while there were forming the notion of “the national scenery”, simultaneously with the movement towards more realistic depiction of reality, independently of the motif’s painterly value<sup>56</sup> (such a shift in painterly stylistic

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<sup>52</sup> Gonnén, Noam, "Grounding the Landscape: Epistemic Aspects of Materiality in Late-Nineteenth-Century American Open-Air Painting." *Arts (Basel)* 12, no. 1 (2023): 3-4, 6;

<sup>53</sup> Varnedoe, Kirk, *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting 1880-1910*. 1982: 13-15, 18;

<sup>54</sup> Gunnarsson, Torsten, *Nordic Landscape Painting in the Nineteenth Century*. 1998: 2;

<sup>55</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of the Russian Impressionist Painting. Ph. D. Thesis for the Degree of Candidate of Art History*. Moscow: Moscow State Academic University of V. Surikov. 2007: 12, 29;

<sup>56</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th - in the Beginning of the 20th Century in Impressionism in Russian Prose of the Silver Age*. Monograph. Nizhniy Novgorod: Nizhniy Novgorod State University of Kuzma Minin. 2012: 73;

representations in Russia happened simultaneously with the appearance of the innovative Realist paintings by Gustave Courbet at that time in France<sup>57</sup>). The notion of “Russian Impressionism” in painting directly related to the painters Konstantin Korovin and Valentin Serov (1865-1911), who had already demonstrated the first Impressionist artistic impulses in their works during the 1880s. The painters were especially focused on the subject of nature in the motifs, particularly regarding representations of light, color and air in their sceneries.<sup>58</sup>

Russian painters of different generations and genres have always paid notable attention to nature and its artistic representations in their oeuvre. They were eager to poeticise the “mundane” in Russian nature as the source of life, which painters as human beings would also be able to experience in themselves by trying to capture this “liveliness” on canvas, while observing nature.<sup>59</sup> Russian realist painter Alexey Savrasov (1830-1897), while teaching at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture during the 1870s, according to the memories of Korovin, who was Savrasov’s student at the time, always prompted the idea of love for nature in quite a lyrical way, telling that nature was the primary source of beauty and of the genuine artistic inspiration.<sup>60</sup>

Impressionist painting as a genre had spread to other European countries from France, including Russia, in the 1890s-1900s. The French influence on the local national development of the visual arts and on Russian culture in general was also undeniably significant in the second half of the 19th century, as it was in Norway. But the French Impressionist tendencies in painting weren’t just blindly copied by the Russians. These tendencies had gone through the complex process of creative assimilation among Russian painters, which gave the Russian Impressionism its unique national “flavor” and peculiarities, which distinguish it from other variations of Impressionist painting in other places. Still, the French influence was notable, since Russia and France had always been interconnected both politically and culturally, especially during the shift of the 18th and 19th centuries, which influenced the further development of Russian art and culture during the 1800s.<sup>61</sup>

It is also important to note that the time’s Scandinavian painters such as Thaulow or Swedish Anders Zorn (1860-1920) had a great influence on Russian painters in the end of the 19th century. This happened among all thanks to Russian ballet impresario, Sergey Diaghilev (1872-1929), who arranged the first exhibition of Scandinavian painters in St. Petersburg in

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<sup>57</sup> Goldman, B. “That Brute”. *Courbet and Realism. Criticism* (Detroit) 9, no.1 (1967): 23, 22;

<sup>58</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T., *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th*. 2012: 73;

<sup>59</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th*. 2012: 75;

<sup>60</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th*. 2012: 75-76;

<sup>61</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism*. 2007: 14-15;

fall 1897<sup>62</sup> (which I wrote more specifically about in my exhibition report in KUN4900). The aim of Diaghilev, who among all, was a friend of Frits Thaulow, was to introduce the newer European and Scandinavian visual art to the local audiences, including Impressionism, which was gradually introduced “to the Russian soil” through the Scandinavian works. As a result, there emerged a great interest for the Nordic painting of the time among the Russian painters, because of proximity in the artistic perception of nature among Russian and Nordic painters, which was based rather on figurative thinking, according to Dzhumaniazova (I assume that the author implied here certain tendencies towards Symbolism and Expressionism in Scandinavian and particularly in Norwegian painting, which appeared in the 1890s).<sup>63</sup>

Whereas between the 19th and 20th centuries there happened some significant changes in the social and in the political spheres in Russia, when the future development of the country started concerning public minds. This caused an increased interest among local painters for the three national European schools in painting: French, German and Scandinavian. It is important to note here, that a relatively rapid development of knowledge exchange between Russian and Scandinavian, German and French groups of contemporary painters had a significant impact on the development of Russian Impressionist painting, with its own features and “path” in the local art history.<sup>64</sup>

But in contrast to France, Russian Impressionist painting during modernity was developing gradually and almost imperceptibly from the outside. The essence of the Russian understanding of the genre lies in painters’ contemplation of sceneries, implying the new thinking of nature and of the presence of man in it, shown in plein-air painting. Unlike the Western European landscape painting, the Russian scenery illustrated the philosophical dedication of knowledge about the picturesque, by animating on canvas the reality, conveyed by the painter’s thought and feeling. Such understanding of the meaning of sceneries was a key feature of Russian scenery by the end of the 19th century. Simply speaking, Russian landscape painters were eager not only to mechanically record the scenery as it was, but they wanted to show their own lyrical feelings towards the sceneries, making them personal by adding to the compositions their own manners of painting like a signature. Crucial feature of Russian Impressionism in painting can therefore be characterized as *a deeply conscious fusion of the object (painter) and the subject of perception (nature, landscape)*.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Doronchenkov, Ilya. *West by Northwest. The Scandinavian Exhibition of Sergey Diaghilev. The Strategy and Choice of the Art Works. History. Exhibitions.* (Part 1). 2019: 172;

<sup>63</sup> Dzhumaniazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism.* 2007: 66;

<sup>64</sup> Dzhumaniazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism.* 2007: 6, 9;

<sup>65</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th.* 2012: 77-78, 79;

In general, the attraction to the landscape in Russian painting at the time meant the intention of the local painters to affirm the idea of the highest values of being, through the comprehension of the beauty of nature. Conveying of this beauty through the lyrical Impressionist motifs was the form of an aesthetical definition of life and a man, expressed by the artists. Therefore we may conclude here that by the end of the 19th century the Impressionist painting in Russian culture could be identified as the new kind of visual arts, which pursued the new educational purpose, with the task of conveying the value of life and beauty of nature, where aesthetics should be understood not as just a medium of ethics, but rather as a direct expression of it.<sup>66</sup> To sum up we can see the clear function of Impressionism in Russian painting as the genre which was bearing deeper philosophical meanings, conveyed at the same time through such simple medium as landscape, which may be seen as a kind of response to the global and local economic, political and social changes, including industrialization in Europe and in Russia at the time.

When speaking of lyricism and colorfulness of the Russian Impressionist painting, it is exactly these two aspects which make the genre different from the original French version of it. If we look at the Parisian motifs by Konstantin Korovin from the 1890s-1900s, among which there are “Paris Cafe” (1890) (ill.6) or “Paris. Boulevard des Capucines” (1911) (ill.7), we can immediately notice how dynamic, colorful and almost theatrical they are performed in technique, because of the organic fusion of decorativeism and Impressionism in compositions, applied in order to convey the poetic charm of the French capital (see also ch. 5.4). Korovin managed to capture the moments freely and easily and then paint them mischievously and casually. This can probably be the reason why Korovin’s urban motifs from Paris may seem more colorful and joyful than the ones painted by Monet and Pissarro. Namely because of its colorfulness and picturesqueness Russian Impressionism is different from French.<sup>67</sup>

If we look closer at the art historical development of Russian painting before Impressionism, Zakharova suggests two leading painters in the 1st half of the 19th century, Sylvester Shchedrin (1791-1830) and Mikhail Lebedev (1811-1837). During this period of time, when there was the establishment of the national Realist school of painting, these particular artists already focused on the topic of nature in the motifs, especially regarding the problem of air, lightning and coloring in their scenery techniques. Long before the French Impressionists Shchedrin had started experimenting with repeating the same motifs of one

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<sup>66</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th.* 2012: 81-82;

<sup>67</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism.* 2007: 31-32;



particular scenery in Sorrento, where the painter was testing out its different appearances on canvas, depending on the light changes. Painting “Terrace at Sorrento” (ill.20), belonging to the Louvre Museum’s collection nowadays, is a good example of the colorful play of light and shadow, and airiness, delicately applied on the canvas. These two painters, according to the writer, were the starting point of the turn from classic-sentimentalist portraits of the 18th century towards depicting more “full-blooded” expressions of life in the form of plein-air sceneries, which still wasn’t very popular among genres of painting.<sup>68</sup>

It is also important to note, while trying to analyze the historical colorfulness and theatricality of Russian painting, which contrasted the Western schools, that the intensive color use had always been a typical feature of Russian artists, who achieved this deep sense for colors also thankfully their close attachment to nature. Even if we look back at the old Russian masters, creating orthodox icons, we can notice that they especially could recognize many different shades of blue hues while depicting skies in their religious works or gold hues, since the representation of the sun and the stars also was pivotal for most icon painters. Russian 19th century philosopher Evgenii Troubetzkoy (1863-1920) assumed that such precise knowledge of different hues and natural colors of the skies, as well as variations of representations of the sun was important, since these aspects of nature played a special symbolic and mystical sacred role in creating icons.<sup>69</sup>

Although, one might think it may seem paradoxical and historically ambiguous to link old Russian icon painting and late 18th century Impressionism to each other in terms of resemblance of color expressions and their references to nature, since the historical gap between the genres is vast. We can still track some common features between these genres in Russian visual art. Through icons the painters conveyed the joy of life, combined with “high” spirituality, hidden in nature, with the use of expressive bright colors. Thus we may assume that the tradition of using bright joyful colors moved on also through the establishment of plein-air 19th century painting in Russia. It is therefore fair to say that Russian Impressionist painting developed gradually, almost imperceptibly<sup>70</sup>, since it had already been typical to see the use of bright expressive color combinations in the local painterly manners long before the genre was established in Europe.

To sum up, Impressionism in Russia appeared as a result of interaction between older and newer tendencies within painterly techniques during the 1890s-1910s.<sup>71</sup> Some of its

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<sup>68</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th*. 2012: 74-75;

<sup>69</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th*. 2012: 75;

<sup>70</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th*. 2012: 75, 76, 94;

<sup>71</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism*. 2007: 9,

stylistic features were distinctly seen in the works of such great Russian painters of the time as Konstantin Korovin, Ilya Repin, Valentin Serov and Isaac Levitan, who tried to achieve the legitimacy of the new vision, through which painters could subjectively express man's relation with nature shown in landscape paintings. Despite this fact the notion of Russian Impressionist painting and its niche in the global art history remains vague, since it is hard to scientifically identify its art historical painterly properties. While being compared to French, German or Scandinavian Impressionism, the Russian version of the genre seems unexpressed in any specific stylistic frameworks, since it was influenced by many separate tendencies and historical aspects, which are hard to be given a common particular definition.<sup>72</sup>

**4. Frits Thaulow (1847-1906): The Christiania-painter.** Frits Thaulow was a clear example of a contemporary European painter in the 2nd half of the 19th century, who combined the modern tendencies within painterly techniques with a hint of the national Norwegian character, which always awakened interest among art enthusiasts. Although he never characterized himself as a true patriot of his home country as seen through Thaulow's paintings, but rather as the European artist, with cosmopolitan views on contemporary life (since he could speak several European languages, therefore the painter could easily live in the majority of Europe's biggest capitals).<sup>73</sup>

While his fellow young Norwegian painters went to study realistic painting technique in Munich, in 1874 Thaulow arrived in Paris, where he like the majority of the Scandinavian painters in the 1870s got highly inspired by the Barbizon school of outdoor painting, which entirely changed his painterly genre preferences. The characteristic pastose-technique with the great sense of light effects and sensuousness of nature became the crucial elements in Thaulow's landscape paintings. Though he didn't have any interest in French modern painting, which among all confused his brother-in-law Paul Gauguin.<sup>74</sup>

In 1947 at the 100 years anniversary of the artist, Thaulow's widow, Alexandra Thaulow, told that the artist among all got inspired by French painter Eugene Delacroix's (1798-1863) diary, where it was written: "*The color was made for the eye, like the tone (of music) was made for the ear!*" She claimed that this was the absolute definition of Thaulow's

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<sup>72</sup> Khomich, Elena. *Impressionism in Scenery Paintings of K. Somov. Terra Humana*. 2012. (140-143): 143. Source: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/impressionizm-v-peyzazhnoy-zhivopisi-k-a-somova> (viewed: 28.03.2023);

<sup>73</sup> Thaulow, Fr., Poulsson, V. and Kristiania-maler i Verdensformat. *Frits Thaulow: Kristiania-maler i Verdensformat*. Oslo: B.A. Mathisen Forl, 1997: 9;

<sup>74</sup> Tschudi-Madsen, Stephan, and Knut Berg. *Norges Kunsthistorie: 5: Nasjonal Vekst*. Vol. 5. Oslo: Gyldendal, 1981: 154;

oeuvre. “*The aim of my art is to rejoice the eye.*” - this expression of her husband “directly reached Alexandra’s heart”, as Mrs. Thaulow shared this in the conversation with conservator Henning Gran at the National Gallery in Oslo at that time.<sup>75</sup>

Like most of the young Norwegian painters in the 1880s, Thaulow came to Paris as he also got inspired by the time’s French Naturalist and Impressionist painting, which demonstrated both painterly impulses of the new artistic philosophy, the new motifs, new techniques, new forms and radical color use. Nature’s beauty as a motif became genuine in itself and equal to Madonna. The painters were eager to record nature on canvases with its whole joy of colors, where the beauty was prior to the truth, and the picture would seem as an illusion, as a hole on the wall because of the motif’s illusionist expressive forms and colors.<sup>76</sup>

Thaulow personally was highly influenced by the naturalistic tendencies, typical for the Barbizon-school artists such as Corrot or Millet. But the major role model became French Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848-1884), whose clearly defined technique, consisting of short parallel brush strokes and clear colors, had inspired the Norwegian painters in Paris.<sup>77</sup> Thaulow therefore returned back home to Christiania as a devoted Naturalist and as an excited European painter, and started to agitate other young painters to adopt these new painterly genres in opposition to the old norms within painting. “*Naturalism was a religion, and we were its fantastic confessors.*” - as Thaulow wrote later.<sup>78</sup>

The painter was deeply convinced that art should exist for art’s sake, for only to be true, rather than for servicing the national identity, so that all the painters could freely express their true feelings through their works, while also having the opportunity to exhibit them and be noticed on the national art scene.<sup>79</sup> During the autumn 1883 Thaulow arranged the plein-air academy at Modum (Norway) for contemporary artists, including young Edvard Munch (1863-1944), where Thaulow wanted to create a free painter community, without any strict pupil-teacher relations.<sup>80</sup>

An interesting detail here is that the new French painting was strongly criticized at the time, especially the French Impressionism which was seen as an artistic deviation, breaking

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<sup>75</sup> Thaulow, Frits, et.al. *Frits Thaulow: Kristiania-maler i Verdensformat*. 1997: 9;

<sup>76</sup> Østvedt, Einar. *Frits Thaulow: Mannen og Verket*. Oslo: Dreyer, 1951: 35;

<sup>77</sup> Messel, Nils in Hedström, P., 2003: 208;

<sup>78</sup> Østvedt, Einar. *Frits Thaulow: Mannen og Verket*. 1951: 36;

<sup>79</sup> Together with painters Christian Krohg and Erik Werenskiöld, Thaulow had arranged artists’ strike in opposition to the conservative Kunstforeningen in Christiania, which resulted into establishment of such important local art institutions as Kunstnerforbundet and the annual Autumn Exhibitions (“Høstutstillingen”) in 1882. Source: Varnedoe, Kirk, *Northern Light: Nordic Art at the Turn of the Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988: 252;

<sup>80</sup> Gunnarsson, Torsten, *Nordic Landscape Painting in the Nineteenth Century*. 1998: 163-164;

all the classical canons of the “great French art”. Professor Dietrichson, mentioned in chapter 3, called Thaulow *the Impressionist* in the article for “Aftenposten” newspaper (15th Dec 1883), while criticizing the Modum academy for spreading “the spirit of Impressionism”. Painter Erik Werenkiold came to the defense of Thaulow, claiming that Dietrichson completely didn’t either have any understanding of Impressionism as a genre, or that he barely knew anything about Thaulow’s painterly development and thus wrote the wrong assertions. Werenkiold also added that Thaulow’s painterly manner was refined, with the delicate mixture of gorgeous colors, which didn’t resemble the impulsive and expressive manner of Impressionists, whose motifs rather were dynamic and raw in painterly expressions, in contrast to Frits Thaulow’s relatively laconic means of expression.<sup>81</sup>

*Thaulow in Russia.* According to the writings by Ukrainian scholar Volodymyr Kudlac, Thaulow even traveled to St. Petersburg in Russia presumably in the end of the 19th century, to teach Russian landscape painter Herasym Golovkov (1863-1909), whose oeuvre Thaulow and also Edvard Munch (though in a lesser degree) had a certain influence on.<sup>82</sup> Supposedly, Frits Thaulow taught his Russian disciple the ground principles of French Impressionist painting, while living permanently in France from 1892 till his death in 1906.<sup>83</sup> But the palette of Thaulow was either in neutral or darker colors, compared to the French painters of the genre, except for brighter shimmery depictions of the body of waters in Thaulow’s landscapes with rivers. Golovkov followed his Norwegian teacher closely in his painterly techniques.<sup>84</sup>

*The love for the urban-scapes.* During the later years Thaulow became more fascinated by the urban landscapes in his oeuvre. He also painted some industrial sceneries containing factories, factory chimneys, smoke, mills and telegraph poles, which symbolized modernity with its technical progress, which conquered Western landscapes. While factory smoke was typical for Impressionist landscapes, starting from Claude Monet’s depictions of

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<sup>81</sup> Østvedt, Einar. *Frits Thaulow: Mannen og Verket*. 1951: 64-65;

<sup>82</sup> Baker, John, H, "Light and Darkness in Landscape Paintings by the Wolf Man." *American Imago* 76, no. 4 (2019): 485-512: 502;

<sup>83</sup> During the research process I also discovered that there was a reciprocal interest in Russian Modernist painting as well in the beginning of the 20th Century. Norwegian businessman and traveler Jacob Whist (1885-1967) worked at the Swedish Nordiska Resebureauen’s department in St. Petersburg during the 1910s, presenting Norway as “the world’s most beautiful destination” for the upper class Russians. Whist was introduced to the local elites and took active part in Petersburg’s cultural life. He was also interested in local contemporary paintings and even was lucky to purchase some, which were then shipped to Norway around 1914, due to the WW1 and social instability in St. Petersburg before the revolution in 1917. What is also important, that these historical facts had never been published anywhere in the art historical or historical academic circles in Norway, which might be an interesting discovery for the field. Source: Høeg Whist, Kristin, *Af Visti. Familieskift*. Haslum, March 1979: 43-48, 53-55;

<sup>84</sup> Baker, John, H, "Light and Darkness in Landscape Paintings by the Wolf Man." 2019: 502;

factories in the late 1850s.<sup>85</sup> Thaulow was definitely inspired by this new aesthetic shift in painting, particularly during his visit to Pittsburgh in the end of the 1890s, where the painter took part as the jury member for the international exhibitions at the Carnegie Art Galleries in 1898. The trip inspired Thaulow to create more motifs with factories, where air pollution was the key element of the city's scenery and of its cultural representation.<sup>86</sup>

But despite such visual signs of modernity as smoke and chimneys in the urban modern landscapes, painted during the 1890s, there are still some compositional features, filled with painterly conservatism of the Barbizon school, as Sjøstad points out, since many of the avant-garde French painters eventually returned to paint plein-air countryside compositions. This may be explained with the painter's inherent resistance for the new industrializing world through the search of authenticity in the roots or national geographic peculiarities. In the 1890s Thaulow demonstrated some anti-realist tendencies in his art, often using Neo-Romanticism, Symbolism and Art Nouveau, which can be seen as an attempt to escape the new urban reality of the dynamic industrializing world, contrasting with the painter's signature earlier idyllic and nostalgic landscapes of Norwegian winter rivers and of French villages.<sup>87</sup>

In this regard I want to discuss the painting "View of Amerikavej in Copenhagen"(1881)(ill.8). Though the artist claimed that he as a Naturalist painter, first and foremost sought to depict representations of nature, his choices of the motifs never were accidental, but rather meticulously calculated. While the *color* was much more important than the depiction's accuracy of the chosen subject. The Oslo public met the painting "View of Amerikavej"(ill.8) quite skeptically and even outraged, since the motif seemed very prosaic and simple, despite being performed quite carefully and naturalistically in forms. But for Thaulow it was a triumph to be able to persuade the beholders that such a casual and dull urban motif as a cabbage field with a mill and smoking factory chimneys in the background also contained certain artistic value and beauty, like a classical landscape or an atmospheric interior also would do.<sup>88</sup> Namely this painting manifests Thaulow as a modern landscape painter, depicting suburbia where the rural and the urban exist next door to each other.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Sjøstad, Øystein. *Pollution Pittoresque. Representation of Smoke in Frits Thaulow's Landscapes* in Claustrat, Fr. and Pellicer, Fr. (ed.). *The Internationalisation of Landscape Art. Then and Now*. Le Faune Editeur, 2020: 69, 72-73;

<sup>86</sup> Sjøstad, Øystein, *Pollution Pittoresque*. 2020: 73, 75-76, 77;

<sup>87</sup> Sjøstad, Øystein, *Pollution Pittoresque*. 2020: 73-75;

<sup>88</sup> Østvedt, Einar. *Frits Thaulow: Mannen og Verket*. 1951: 36-37;

<sup>89</sup> Sjøstad, Øystein, *Pollution Pittoresque*. 2020: 79-80;

During the 1880s there were several pupils of the painter, influenced by Thaulow's painterly techniques and of general views of art. Therefore Frits Thaulow had a dominant influence on the Norwegian Naturalist landscape painting, while working at home in Norway in the given historical period.<sup>90</sup>

*Later Impressionist impulses.* It is also important to note that Impressionist features came rather later in Thaulow's oeuvre, in comparison with Konstantin Korovin. If we look at the artist's later works such as for instance "From Pittsburgh" (1898)(ill.13), we notice that Thaulow demonstrates pollution from the factory chimneys in Pittsburgh as an important visual part of the city's urban landscape. Here we can observe more abstract brushstrokes, defining the contours of the houses and the pavement in the foreground, as well as the factory smoke, which is being slowly blended into the cloudy gray atmosphere in the skies and the vanishing gray bridge in the background. Thaulow was truly fascinated by the industrial side of modernity such as factory chimneys, smoke, modern urban dwellings and even as the city dirtiness, caused by the industrial pollution.<sup>91</sup>

**4.1. Konstantin Korovin (1861-1939): The pioneer of Russian Impressionist painting.** Russian painter Korovin is often called in Russian art historical circles as one of the pioneers and early representatives in Russian Impressionist painting.<sup>92</sup> The artist studied *plein-air* landscape painting under Aleksey Savrasov and Vasily Polenov (1844-1927) at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture in the 1870s, where he also was the member of "the Union of the Russian painters", established at the School. He entered the already named Abramtsevo circuit,<sup>93</sup> and became its leading artist among the most innovative Russian artists and stage designers at the time. Unlike Frits Thaulow who wasn't directly interested in French Impressionism,<sup>94</sup> Korovin was massively influenced by it during his trips to Europe in the 1880-90ss.<sup>95</sup>

Not less important is the fact that through his acquaintance with Vasily Polenov Korovin met art patron and railway tycoon Savva Mamontov (1841-1918). Mamontov had a great influence on the cultural life in Russia during the 2nd half of the 19th century. With some connections in the slavophile wing of the Russian spiritual circles, he was inspired by

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<sup>90</sup> Østvedt, Einar. *Frits Thaulow: Mannen og Verket*. 1951: 36-37;

<sup>91</sup> Sjøstad, Øystein, *Pollution Pittoresque*. 2020: 76-78;

<sup>92</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th*. 2012: 73, 82;

<sup>93</sup> Busygin, A., et. al. og Norsk Folkemuseum. *Norge-Russland: Naboer Gjennom 1000 år*. 2004: 83-84;

<sup>94</sup> Tschudi-Madsen, Stephan, and Knut Berg, *Norges Kunsthistorie*. 1981: 154;

<sup>95</sup> Volodarsky, V. and Burleigh-Motley, M. "Korovin Family." Oxford Art Online, 2003: 2. [Korovin family | Grove Art \(oxfordartonline.com\)](https://www.oxfordartonline.com/entry/korovin-family) (viewed: 11.11.2022);

the idea of promoting Russian culture and national values to Europe, so that the Russian state could recommend itself there as an independent industrial and cultural nation in the Western world. Mamontov surrounded himself with young painters, musicians, actors and architects in his idyllic atelier, called the Abramtsevo colony, 75 kilometers North from Moscow. Among all Mamontov sponsored the art historical magazine “Mir Iskusstva” (“The World of Art”) about contemporary European art, established in 1898 in St. Petersburg by Sergey Diaghilev (1872-1929). He also funded Korovin’s trip to the North, including Norway, which I will discuss in chapter 5.2. Finally it namely was Mamontov who invited Swedish Anders Zorn (1860-1920) to Moscow when he met the painter in Paris<sup>96</sup> (Zorn had the greatest influence on the young Russian painters, including Konstantin Korovin, during the shift of the centuries, which was even called “Zornism” in Russian painter circles<sup>97</sup>). It becomes obvious that this new acquaintance with Mamontov was crucial for Korovin as a painter.<sup>98</sup>

*Konstantin Korovin’s Impressionism.* During the 1880s-90s Korovin traveled extensively in Europe, where he was greatly influenced by French Impressionism. While staying in Paris he created a series of urban sceneries, which were clearly demonstrating the latest tendencies within the French Impressionist paintings (which I already have mentioned in the chapter 3.1). In this series Korovin tried to convey Edouard Manet’s painterly strategies regarding the tilted perspective and the use of bright colors<sup>99</sup>, which made Korovin’s representation of Paris’ urban routine seem dynamic and truly expressive (see also ch.5.4). The painter traveled to Paris for the first time in 1889, though Korovin had already shown some Impressionist features in his earlier works. This way “The Portrait of the Chorus Girl” (1883) (ill.14) is known to be the first Impressionist paintings in Russia.<sup>100</sup>

During the 1880s-1890s the painter strived to transfer the harmonized state of mind in his sceneries and portraits, in which people were shown as being in harmony with themselves

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<sup>96</sup> Tschurak, Galina. *Inntrykk fra en Reise: Konstantin Korovins Monumentale Veggmalier* in Brandtzæg, K. J., Schjønby, N. and Munchmuseet. *Grenseløs Modernitet i Svanepriinsessen: Russisk Kunst 1880 - 1910*. 2019: 14, 16, 35, 40, 91, 112;

<sup>97</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism*. 2007: 72;

<sup>98</sup> Konstantin Korovin is also known for making public designs. At the Paris Exhibition in 1900 Korovin participated in designing the Russian pavilions. The artist worked also as scenic painter for Savva Mamontov’s private opera in Moscow in the 1880s-1890s, where the painter’s departures from Realism and the free use of color in decorations were acknowledged as outstanding at the time. After almost 20 years of teaching at the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture and at Svomas (Free Art Studios), Korovin emigrated to Paris in 1924, where he continued to work at the theater. Although there wasn’t much success in this period of his painterly career as the scenic designer, the painter created decorations for sets of Russian composer Nicolay Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera “The Snow Maiden” (“Snegurochka”). Source: V. M. Volodarsky and Burleigh-Motley, M. "Korovin Family." 2003: 2. [Korovin family | Grove Art \(oxfordartonline.com\)](https://www.oxfordartonline.com/entry/korovin-family) (visited: 11.11.2022);

<sup>99</sup> Volodarsky, V. and Burleigh-Motley, M. "Korovin Family." 2003: 2;

<sup>100</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism*. 2007: 30;

and with nature. Thus the “educational” task of Korovin’s paintings laid in demonstrating the priority of aesthetics not as means of ethics, but rather as means of showing the beauty and “poetics” of life and simple aspects of it, such as nature and people’s relations to it.<sup>101</sup> As Norwegian art historian Andreas Aubert, mentioned in ch.3, wrote on Impressionism: The genre “cancels” a line as such, in order to strengthen its painterly effect of illusion. And a line is an abstraction, on which the world’s painterly arts have grown great and which has an endless psychological effect on our mind through our sight.<sup>102</sup>

Although as mentioned in chapter 3.1, Russian Impressionist painting had never been identified as an independent art direction, it thus never had any clearly formulated organizational and aesthetic strategies. Nevertheless Korovin is probably one of the most prominent and acknowledged representatives of the genre in Russia. His works had become the affirmation of the constancy and inescapability of the sun and light as the sources of cheerfulness. Justification of light, air and color, which many artists were already busy with at that time, also fascinated Korovin, which we can see for instance in his later Impressionist canvases such as “On the Seashore in the Crimea” (1909)(ill.16) or as “Flowers” (1913)(ill.17) or “Female Portrait in the Interior” (1922)(ill.15). According to himself, the aim of his oeuvre in painting was in conveying the beauty and the joy of life, the love of the surrounding world. Under the process of painting he was able to observe the beauty of the world, in the essence of painting itself,<sup>103</sup> which is quite alike with the basic principles of observation and subjective sensations of the outer world, based on the personal experiences of artists in Impressionist painting. This aspect also resembles Frits Thaulow’s artistic strategy of painting landscapes while being right in the place which the artist then painted.<sup>104</sup>

After discovering the Impressionist painting in 1884 Korovin absolutely admired the genre and recognized that the Impressionist features of the French painters were the features which he was scolded for in Moscow during his younger years of experimenting in painting. Finally the painter found the proof that his experiments weren’t pointless. In other words, Impressionism wasn’t just a theory for Korovin. Rather it was a part of his temperament, as he was eager to poeticise the joy and beauty of life as the essence of his paintings, which coincides quite precisely with Impressionistic artistic principles.<sup>105</sup> Korovin focused on the “intrinsic” artistry and hidden beauty of the ordinary things, which in their simplicity helped

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<sup>101</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th.* 2012: 85, 95;

<sup>102</sup> Aubert, Andreas. *Norsk Malerkunst, Dens Kaar Og Kamp: (efter Den Norske Kunstutstilling i Kjøbenhavn Høsten 1906): To Foredrag.* Kristiania, 1908: 30;

<sup>103</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th.* 2012: 82;

<sup>104</sup> Thaulow, Frits, et al., *Frits Thaulow: Kristiania-maler i Verdensformat.* 1997: 16-17;

<sup>105</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th.* 2012: 83;



to produce and follow the new meanings, by seeking and applying the new means of artistic expression of the painting.<sup>106</sup>

Nevertheless Korovin's modernist painting wasn't in favor among Russian critics due to its intuitive technique, which wasn't taken as a serious artistic style due to its "emotional" and blurry performance. But the artist claimed that it was exactly the emotional side coming from his love for people, whom he didn't want to preach but rather to entertain as *an artist*, both in his literary texts and in the paintings. The use of intuition was crucial for depicting nature as according to Korovin nature was painting's inexplicable mystery, based on the artist's own unconscious and sensuous experiences of it. At the same time the painter didn't deny either scrupulous and detailed research and knowledge of the object that he painted, apart from the intuitive feelings of it.<sup>107</sup> The painter himself claimed that he preferred to work easily, quickly, by grasping and conveying the main features of the model without specifying the details. Korovin noted in his diary: "*It is necessary not only to copy nature, it is necessary to re-give deftly, lovingly, without wasting too much time - just tell right away*".<sup>108</sup>

In 1905 Korovin was criticized in the Russian presse for painting too impressionistically and was called for a meeting in The Ministry of Interior. There Korovin was asked why he brought up Impressionism simultaneously with the spread of socialist ideas (which the Tsar regime in the Russian empire was fighting at the time).<sup>109</sup> Korovin's Impressionism wasn't in favor due to its intuitive technique, which wasn't taken as a serious artistic style.<sup>110</sup>

For Korovin, as well as for Thaulow, it was more fascinating to depict regular countryside objects like old bridges, muddy rural paths, abandoned mansions, wooden barns or just forest. These objects or places, surrounded by landscape and nature, attracted the artist by their essential ugliness or unadorned roughness, since it appeared much more picturesque to recreate on a canvas than all those luxurious mansions, architecturally delightful churches or perfectly mowed gardens, despite his fascination with the Parisian urban motifs.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Subbotina, Natalia. *Konstantin Korovin's Expression in His Literary Heritage. Heritage. Hudozhestvennaya kul'tura* [Art & Culture Studies], 2022, no. 3, (pp. 64–85): 73-74;

<sup>107</sup> Subbotina, Natalia. *Konstantin Korovin's Expression in His Literary Heritage*. 2022: 77;

<sup>108</sup> Zakharova, Victoria, T. *Impressionism in Russian Painting of the 2nd Half of the 19th*. 2012: 82;

<sup>109</sup> Subbotina N. M. *Konstantin Korovin's Expression in His Literary Heritage. Heritage*. 2022: 77;

<sup>110</sup> Subbotina N. M. *Konstantin Korovin's Expression in His Literary Heritage. Heritage*. 2022: 77;

<sup>111</sup> Subbotina, Natalia, *Konstantin Korovin's Expression in His Literary Heritage. Heritage*. 2022: 73-74;

**5. Comparative analysis. Discussion.** Although Frits Thaulow and Konstantin Korovin also painted some urban motifs, nature was the crucial aspect in their oeuvres, which gives them some common features regarding the compositional contents. Both artists also insisted on the autonomy of art. As it was mentioned in chapter 4, Thaulow saw art as *l'art pour l'art* (art for art, French) and was defending the artists' right of self-determination<sup>112</sup>, while for Korovin it was important to allow painters to follow their individual artistic intuition rather than stick to the strictly rational principles of depicting "the beautiful" idealized objects.<sup>113</sup> This aspect also unites the painters ideologically in their artistic views, which makes their works similar in their purpose and in painterly expressions. I will therefore further discuss the two central artworks from my KUN4900 exhibition report, Korovin's "Northern Light. Hammerfest" (1894-95) (ill.2) and Thaulow's "The Waterfall Haugfossen" (1883) (ill.1). I will also discuss if it is possible to apply the chosen theory of the sublime, discussed in chapter 2, to the compositions by explaining whereas these chosen landscape paintings can be perceived as *sublime* in modernist interpretation by the beholder (it is unknown if the painters themselves implied the concept of "the sublime" in their works). But first I would like to introduce the canvases to the readers before comparing them.

**5.1. "Haugfossen in Modum".** "The Waterfall Haugfossen" (ill.1) was presumably created by Frits Thaulow during the period when he arranged the artist academy in Modum (see ch.4). not so far from Christiania (Oslo) in late 1893, after a long stay in Paris in 1892/93.<sup>114</sup> Thaulow painted the series of Oslo winter sceneries in this period, using the local naturalistic color range. It is important to look at these sceneries regarding Thaulow's understanding of painterly strategies. The painter claimed that the crucial circumstances for his manner of painting were the changing weather and light conditions outside (assuming that Thaulow was working outdoors). By learning how to depict changing light and weather conditions he namely managed to acquire the Impressionist method of painting a motif at once, when the light is "correct" for a given landscape, at a given time.<sup>115</sup> Therefore we can assume that "The Waterfall" was painted at a certain time of the day, with certain light conditions so that the painter managed to depict the waterfall in the certain way, as we can see it on the canvas.

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<sup>112</sup> Gunnarsson, Torsten, et al., *A Mirror of Nature: Nordic Landscape Painting 1840-1910*. 2006: 297;

<sup>113</sup> Subbotina Natalia, *Konstantin Korovin's Expression in His Literary Heritage*. 2022: 73;

<sup>114</sup> Thaulow, Frits, et al., *Frits Thaulow: Kristiania-maler i Verdensformat* 1997: 18;

<sup>115</sup> Thaulow, Frits, et al. *Frits Thaulow: Kristiania-maler i Verdensformat*. 1997: 18;

The painting was exhibited at the annual Autumn exhibition in 1883 where it immediately drew attention. Painter Erik Werenskiold claimed that it was the best waterfall he had ever seen and that it was an excellent art work. Whereas Norwegian writer Gunnar Heiberg (1857-1929) noted that Thaulow had reached a certain technical skill in painting and that the waterfall in the motif was beautiful, while the spectators could see how forceful and full of fizz the waterfall was, bordered with the wet huge stones on the sides. But despite the rich and almost tactile painterly expression of the chosen motif, the composition seemed as “heavily” painted and little Impressionist in its painterly forms.<sup>116</sup>

Such a realistic painterly manner in which Thaulow depicted both the stones around the Haugfossen and the stony slope at Kragerø (ill.5) in the motif, discussed earlier in chapter 3, reminds me of the theoretical ideas suggested by John Ruskin (1819-1900) who in younger years was overwhelmed and inspired by experiencing the sublimity of the Alps and the beauty of European and British landscape.<sup>117</sup> Ruskin claimed that an artist who works on landscape paintings should incorporate the science of geology into his painting, in order to create faithful and ‘true’ to nature representations of landscapes in paintings, in the form of mountains, rocks and other geological formations. The drawing, based on both empirical and scientific observation (rather with reference to the knowledge of geology and mineralogy), would look “scientifically accurate and reflecting the work of God”. Such an artistic trend appeared during the first half of the 19th century, with the particular theoretical term “artistic geology”, which was manifested in 1847,<sup>118</sup> at the same time with Courbet's revolutionary materialism in French painting, following up the revolution in France in 1848.<sup>119</sup>

Nevertheless Ruskin still believed that the essence of landscape was beyond science, which may seem contradictory to his principle of incorporating scientific approach and certain knowledge into the drawing process. He prioritized the “lived” experience of a landscape as a natural phenomena. Thus the direct engagement of putting a self into a landscape was a central approach for Ruskin’s geographical studies, where the phenomenological approach to landscape via empiricism combined with scientific facts was more preferable, rather than only applying the scientific one, strictly based on theoretical

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<sup>116</sup> Poulsson, Vidar, and Modums Blaaifarveværk. *Fritz Thaulow i 1880-årene: Stiftelsen Modums Blaaifarveværk 28. Juli-1. Oktober 1979*. [Blaafarveværkets Kunst- Og Kulturhistoriske Skrifter]. Åmot: Stiftelsen, 1979. 92;

<sup>117</sup> Cosgrove, Denis E. "John Ruskin and the Geographical Imagination." *Geographical Review* 69, no. 1 (1979): 43-62: 44;

<sup>118</sup> Lubowski-Jahn, Alicia. "A Comparative Analysis of the Landscape Aesthetics of Alexander Von Humboldt and John Ruskin." *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 51, no. 3 (2011): 321-33: 323, 325;

<sup>119</sup> Desbuissons, Frédérique. "Courbet's Materialism." *Oxford Art Journal* 31, no. 2 (2008): 251-60: 253-254;

grounds.<sup>120</sup> In my case I can not be sure whether Frits Thaulow also considered it necessary to study the peculiarities of local geology of the places which he painted. But as written earlier, the given local weather conditions and personal presence in the landscape for observation were pivotal in Thaulow's painting, regarding the color use in his plein-air compositions. The waterfall as a motif also was quite unusual for Thaulow, who was mostly known for depicting the still waters of the rivers, peacefully flowing in the rural landscapes in Norway and in French Normandy.<sup>121</sup> Whereas here we see the forceful waterfall, shown up close to the beholder on the human-sized canvas, so that the observer can instantly feel as if he or she is being drawn into the landscape and can almost feel the freezy freshness of the falling water cascades, diffusing in small cold drops and rebounding from the flow onto the skin.

Speaking of the painterly expressions regarding the color use, Thaulow was quite an arrogant and pretentious painter, who like nobody else had a great respect for the pure art and who stayed true to his love for *the color*. "*Art is gourmanderie!*" - this was Thaulow's almost "cynical and candid formula" for his understanding of painterly techniques, while art's aim and tools implied the same. Because of such aristocratic and slightly snobbish treatment of the color in his paintings, Thaulow mocked critics and art historians, who struggled with finding the words for describing their color experiences in his paintings. But according to Einar Østvedt the painter handled it that way not because of his own artistic arrogance, but due to his unconditional respect for the irrational and undefinable values in the visual arts such as treatment of color in this case.<sup>122</sup>

When it comes to waterfalls as motifs, seen in the light of the theory of the sublime in nature, it is important to look back to the epoch of Romanticism in the first half of the 1800s. Painter Johan Christian Dahl, as already discussed in chapter 2.2, who was concerned about depicting the aspect of the sublime in Norwegian nature, based his paintings also on observations<sup>123</sup>, like Thaulow used to do. After returning home to Norway from Europe, Dahl started depicting local waterfalls and mountains, and these new tendencies within the choice of the motifs for Dahl's paintings attracted more painters from other European countries to come and paint in Norway as well. But even before Dahl, as Magne Malmanger notes, there were some Danish painters starting from the 1750s, who painted Norwegian "falling waters"

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<sup>120</sup> Cosgrove, Denis E. "*John Ruskin and the Geographical Imagination*." 1979: 45;

<sup>121</sup> Moe, Ole H., and Ann C. Zwick. *Sangen om Norge: Natur og Naturfølelse i Norsk Malerkunst fra 1814 til idag. The Song of Norway: Norwegian Landscape Painting from 1814 to the Present*. Ny Utg. ed. Oslo: Grøndahl Dreyer, 1994: 46;

<sup>122</sup> Østvedt, Einar, *Frits Thaulow: Mannen og Verket*. 1951: 187;

<sup>123</sup> Malmanger, Magne. *Nordic Sublime*. 2006: 40-41, 46;

including “Haugfossen” at Modum, “Tistedalsfossen”, “Hønefossen” etc., as they got inspired by the waters’ sublime overwhelming forces, which made the waterfalls a part of the Norwegian national landscape.<sup>124</sup> Therefore Thaulow wasn’t the first painter who depicted “Haugfossen”, but his later version from the 1880s, created much later than the ones from the early 1800s, also seems forceful and thus sublime due to its overwhelming dynamic waters, coming down the stony slope depicted in the colder, brown-green-gray tones. Thaulow presumably was interested in depicting the water in motion as the subject.<sup>125</sup>

The painting also matches with Varnedoe’s concept of the “*Nordic-ness*”, (ch. 2.2),<sup>126</sup> because it meets its criterias as it is not only seen as a simple Naturalistic topographical description, but the canvas truly conveys the gloomy mood and harsh coldness of the pouring cascades of the waterfall, full of the dynamic waters in late Norwegian autumn. “Haugfossen” can thus be characterized as a monumental (regarding canvas’ physical dimensions) modernist manifestation of the dynamic sublime, showing the forces of nature in the powerful waters, rushing down the hill at Modum area, painted in the Naturalist manner.

**5.2. “Northern lights. Hammerfest”.** During the trip to Northern Norway in the 1890s, Russian Konstantin Korovin admired the harsh beauty and the greatness of Nordic nature, among other European artists traveling to the region by the end of the 19th century. The painter could trace the silent motions in its stillness as well as the diversity of the possible motifs, hidden in the landscapes of Northern Norway, filled with breath and life.<sup>127</sup>

In the summer 1894 painters Korovin and Serov were invited by the art patron Savva Mamontov, mentioned in chapter 4.1, who was involved in the building project of the railways, connecting Moscow, Yaroslavl, Kostroma and Arkhangelsk in Northern Russia with Northern Norway. Korovin and Serov were then given a commission from Mamontov to create some monumental canvases, which would be used as the public decorations at the train stations built along the railway. In order to obtain inspiration, the painters traveled to paint aurora borealis (Northern lights) to Hammerfest (Norway), where Korovin created the motif “Northern lights. Hammerfest”(ill.2) and some other monumental canvases such as for

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<sup>124</sup> Malmanger, Magne, et al. and Baroniet Rosendal. *Levande Vatn: Fossen Som Natur Og Symbol*. Rosendal: Baroniet Rosendal, 1999: 14;

<sup>125</sup> Malmanger, M., et al. *Levande Vatn: Fossen Som Natur Og Symbol*. 1999: 23-24;

<sup>126</sup> Varnedoe, Kirk. *Northern Light: Realism and Symbolism in Scandinavian Painting 1880-1910*. [exhibition]. New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1982: 18-19;

<sup>127</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism*. 2007: 76;

instance “Fishing on the Murmansk Sea”(1896)(ill.18) and “Walrus Hunt”(1896)(ill.19),<sup>128</sup> rather resembling art nouveau in their slightly theatrical painterly features, which then were displayed at the industrial and art exhibition in Nizhny Novgorod (Russia) in 1896, where Mamontov wanted to show the hidden treasures and potential attractivity of the North-Russian areas, including partly Northern Norway.<sup>129</sup> (more of Korovin’s paintings from the expedition are possible to find in my exhibition report, written in KUN4900).

This journey to the Northern areas was *pivotal* for Korovins artistic development. Right before the trip the artist had returned to Moscow from his 1,5 year stay in Paris, where he got filled with the energy of the big city. The contrast between busy Paris and bare, unbothered and “vulnerable” Norwegian nature inspired Korovin to create a new color spectrum in his technique, including the silvery-gray and brown hues of the local landscapes, which also resembled the color palette used by Swedish painter Anders Zorn.<sup>130</sup> The sketches made by Korovin and Serov delighted even the strictest painters in their artistic circle at home, including first and foremost the artists themselves.<sup>131</sup>

In the Northern motifs, including “Northern Lights”, there can constantly be felt the sublime power and silence, delicately highlighted by the polar mystical light. Namely this minimalist vibrant color use with its visual delicacy precisely conveys the magnifying still beauty of the northern landscapes in the painter’s works from this region during this period. By looking at these series of his works the spectator can be persuaded that Korovin was deeply charmed by the local harsh nature and had made a great effort in painting it in such a delicate manner, which could open up the essence of the sceneries in full scale.<sup>132</sup>

The painting “Northern Lights. Hammerfest” (ill.2) is a monumental vertical canvas in the size of 175,6 \* 106,7 cm, which Korovin finished in the studio in Moscow after returning from Norway (it is not specified whereas the artist rapidly sketched the scenery while being at the place or took a photograph which he then finished the painting back in Moscow). The painter wanted to convey the national character of the small harbor town in

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<sup>128</sup> During the expedition Korovin greatly admired the local Northern nature and wrote the following about the impressions: “*What a wonderful land, the wild North! There is not a drop of malice here from people. And what a life is here, ... and what a beauty! .. I would like to stay here forever.*” Source: The State Tretyakov Gallery of Art. “*Walrus Hunt*” (1896). *Konstantin Korovin (1861-1939)*. The online gallery collection. Moscow: 2023. <https://my.tretyakov.ru/app/masterpiece/10912> (viewed: 07.06.2023);

<sup>129</sup> Tschurak, Galina in Brandtzæg, Kari et al. 2019: 166, 112, 120;

<sup>130</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism*. 2007: 75;

<sup>131</sup> Tschurak, Galina in Brandtzæg, Kari et al. 2019: 112-113;

<sup>132</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism*. 2007: 75-76;

Northern Norway, by adding the typical wooden fish cabins in the left and in the foreground of the composition, in warmer and darker brown hues. There are many different representations of lights in the painting, including the natural light in the skies in the form of aurora borealis and as artificial lights, coming from the houses.<sup>133</sup> But it is clear that the natural Northern lights dominate over the artificial ones, glimmering in the small windows of the houses (not sure if these lights come from electricity or from candles), which implies for the spectator the sublimity of nature over the human activities, evoked by industrialisation.

In Korovin's motif there is a presence of the fishing boats, referring to the fishing industry, which flourished in Northern Norway between 1890s-1900s (namely the fishing of the Atlantic cod). Depicting traditional fisheries, integrated in the Arctic landscape, also adds some ecological narratives in the painting. So that the artwork can be characterized as well from the ecological and postcolonial theories, regarding the local fishing industry and cultural traditions of the area. In this regard I remember Swedish painter, Anna Boberg (1864-1935), who also depicted Arctic plein-air Impressionist marine-scapes of Lofoten islands 10 years after Korovin's journey to Norway. For instance her study "Boat with Net" (ca. early 1900s) (ill.8) also illustrates a fishing harbor, full of moored fishing boats resting, performed in fainting illusionistic lines of Impressionism and showing the rise of industrialization in the region, surrounded by the bleak and rugged mountains of the Northern landscape.<sup>134</sup>

*The meeting of the two sublimes.* The motif thus illustrates the sudden meeting of the two categories of sublime, the Kantian *natural* or *dynamic sublime* (shown in form of the Northern lights) and the human-made contemporary version of the *technological sublime* (in form of the small lights in the windows of the fishing cottages), as discussed in chapter 2.4. While watching this meeting of the two different forms of the sublime we notice that the natural one is clearly dominating over the modern human-made version of it, as the Northern lights are spreading throughout the whole surface of the skies, seen in the composition and shimmering in the silvery spectrum of the colder tones. While the lights in the narrow windows of the houses below can hardly be seen and due to their warmer hues seem therefore inferior to the enchanting fire of the Northern lights seen both in the skies and also reflecting on the surface of the harbor's waters.

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<sup>133</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism*. 2007: 76;

<sup>134</sup> Burns, Emily C., and Alice M. Rudy Price, *Mapping Impressionist Painting in Transnational Contexts*. Routledge Research in Art History. New York, NY: Routledge, 2021: 90-91;

Thereby it is possible to assert that “Northern Lights. Hammerfest” can be considered as a sublime artwork, despite Blair’s arguments that artworks, namely paintings, lack either physical or pictorial capacity in conveying the feeling to the spectator.<sup>135</sup> In this case the lack of the overwhelming vastness or power doesn’t cancel the excitement for the astonishing visual power of the Northern lights, since the phenomenon is depicted quite realistically and appears as magnifying and stealing attention of the viewer once one looks at the painting.

It is fascinating to see how almost photographically precisely Korovin managed to depict the Northern lights. He captured the color play in the air, shimmering with lilac, blue, pearly-gray, green and delicate pink hues, reflected also in the sea waters below. Such color play makes the rural Norwegian fishing village seem enchanting and magnifying. Because of such delicate and precise painterly combination and expression of the colors this canvas was seen as the source of the Impressionist thinking in Korovin’s oeuvre, which influenced other painters, interested in this genre. Therefore the color palette of Korovin always meets the exact chosen scenery, independently of where the painter was, while working on a painting.<sup>136</sup> The artistic idea of representing Northern lights in this motif reminds me of some earlier graphic representations of aurora borealis also from the 19th century, like one which was made by Peder Balke (1804-1887) ca. during the 1870s (ill.12), from the collection of Nasjonalmuseet. But Korovin’s representation seems to be closer to reality in its painterly expression, due to the color use and due to the Impressionist illusions, gained through the game of colors, in comparison to the gray graphic versions of his Norwegian predecessors.

**5.3. Comparative analysis of Thaulow and Korovin’s chosen motifs.** As mentioned, I chose to implement the comparative analysis of the two paintings, which were central in my exhibition project in KUN4900, Frits Thaulow’s “The Waterfall Haugfossen” (1883) (ill.1) and Konstantin Korovin’s “Northern Lights. Hammerfest” (1894/95) (ill.2). Albeit the motifs are different regarding their formal contents such as painterly genres, depicted landscapes and geographical locations, they both illustrate Norwegian nature conveyed through the modernist painting of the 1880s-1890s. Both artworks seem quite realistic because of the vivid natural colors and due to the radiant play of light, which creates the illusion of the vibrant airiness in the landscapes, filled with humidity and coldness of the waters (Thaulow painted a forceful waterfall at Modum not so far from Christiania (ill.1), while Korovin depicted Hammerfest harbor up in the North of Norway, (ill.2)).

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<sup>135</sup> Blair, Hugh, “*Art and Sublime*”. 1996: 119;

<sup>136</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism*. 2007: 76;



Such empirical approach as comparison of the painterly techniques in the artworks, combined with the theoretical framework of the Kantian “sublime” and of more contemporary visions of “the sublime” in painting, added some thoughts on the landscape theory in painting and on the paintings’ expressive, disclosive and formal properties, will help me to analyze how these two modernist painters reflected the historical period of industrialization and whereas their paintings can be seen as “sublime” due to their compositional details, bearing certain intrinsic messages that the artists might have hidden in them.

Both Thaulow and Korovin can be considered as the painters born mid-century and who achieved professional maturity during the 1880s-1890s. For the Western painters of this generation it was important to create landscape paintings which on the one hand were based on their personal experiences of nature and which weren’t “idealized” by the classical painterly norms on the other. As their predecessors these younger painters also worked outdoors, in *plein-air*. But they had adjusted this well known painting strategy to the new painterly principles of Naturalistic rendering of nature, representing it as less majestic, less divine, less spectacular, but more intimate and tranquil.<sup>137</sup> Indeed “Haugfossen” and “Northern Lights” may seem as realistic and mundane representations of Norwegian landscapes, showing the captured realness and materiality of the natural phenomenon as the forceful waterfall cascading down the hill and the intimate, but still breathtaking, glittering of aurora borealis over the little Norwegian harbor. But due to the physical largeness of both canvases which reinforces the impression over these spellbinding and magnificent manifestations of nature, these monumental paintings may seem to the beholder as “sublime” and “poetic”<sup>138</sup>, as they convey a kind of personal spirituality of the painters in the way which they chose to depict the landscapes.

A certain degree of tactile sensuousness, flashing on the surfaces of both paintings together with the relatively large physical dimensions of the canvases, thus creates the feeling of bodily involvement in the compositions, reached by applying the combination of fragmented brushstrokes and lighter colors, based on the observation of the painted places, according to how the French *plein-air* artists like Monet and Pissarro also would have painted. Besides, we can assume, while scrutinizing the canvases, that both Korovin and Thaulow

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<sup>137</sup> Gonnen, Noam, "Grounding the Landscape". 2023: 6;

<sup>138</sup> Gonnen, Noam, "Grounding the Landscape". 2023: 6;

preferred to rely on color, rather than on modeling the objects first to define the contours, as both motifs illustrate a particular moment in time, capturing nature in the sceneries.<sup>139</sup>

While paying attention to the fact that Thaulow had painted his landscape 12 years before Korovin's creation of the "Northern Lights", it is again important to note that Thaulow depicted the Modum waterfall in the genre of Naturalism, which flourished in Norwegian painting during the 1880s and while also remembering that he, as many other painters at the time, was highly influenced by French Bastien Lepage.<sup>140</sup> "Haugfossen" thus differs from "Northern Lights", which was performed in a more Impressionist manner, both regarding the picturesque forms and the color use. Thaulow's palette seems a little bit colder and refreshing, as the landscape also represents the day time in the area. Whereas Korovin's motif, illustrating the marine-scapes of the Hammerfest harbor at night, was performed with the use of brighter and more lyrical expressive pearly colors despite illustrating night time. As it was mentioned in the ch. 3.1, Korovin pursued conveying the personal lyrical experience of joy of life and the beauty of the surrounding nature, while using more vivid, expressive and cheerful colors, which differed his color use and the Russian Impressionist painterly manner in general from the French one. This difference between the color palettes of Korovin and of the French Impressionists such as Monet or Pissaro is seen more evidently especially in Korovin's Parisian landscapes, painted before his trip to Northern Norway.<sup>141</sup>

As Gunnarsson points out, admiration for wild landscapes has varied across different epochs and historical contexts, which proves that our perception of nature is culturally determined. This implies that we respond to a certain phenomena while we are mentally prepared for it. A certain type of landscape may seem as lacking any aesthetic relevance at one time, while at another the same image will seem as a beautiful, satisfying and refreshing discovery for a painter's eye.<sup>142</sup> French philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) looked at art as a revelation of things' intrinsic "invisible depths" and their secret meanings. According to Maritain, artistic imitation of a thing or a landscape doesn't appear as it's true and natural appearance, but rather as an intrinsic transparent reality, which only can be seen by the beholder through the communication between his/her inner Self and the artwork's inner

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<sup>139</sup> Jaffé, Hans L.C., and Hammond Incorporated. *The World of the Impressionists ... the Artists Who Painted with Delight in Being Alive*. Maplewood, N. J: Hammond Incorporated, 1969: 23-24;

<sup>140</sup> Østvedt, Einar, *Frits Thaulow: Mannen og Verket*. 1951: 142;

<sup>141</sup> Dzhumanyazova, Natalia, *Genesis of The Russian Impressionism*. 2007: 31-32;

<sup>142</sup> Gunnarsson, Torsten, *Nordic Landscape Painting in the Nineteenth Century*. 1998: 79;

being, which according to Maritain, is a kind of divination.<sup>143</sup> But in order to read such intrinsic meanings of objects one should have developed a certain cognitive and creative “poetic knowledge” of things. Such knowledge implies knowing things or places by being exposed to or by knowing them, by being closely related to them or by being spiritually transformed by a phenomenon. The author further comes up with French painter Cezanne’s quote, elucidating the principle in the following way: “*The landscape thinks itself in me ... and I am its consciousness.*”<sup>144</sup> The principle of “poetic knowledge” reminds us as well of Goppen’s notion of a “poetic” and “sublime” painting, earlier discussed in this chapter (p. 40), which also implies that there is a part of a painter’s personal spirituality in his painterly strategies, based on subjective impressions experienced in nature.<sup>145</sup>

If we apply this theoretical approach to Thaulow and Korovin’s artworks, which are the crucial subjects of this essay, we remember that the painters also tried to “live” and be present in the landscapes that they depicted, in order to render inner meanings and hidden being of nature, which they painterly encrypted on the canvases. While remembering that both Thaulow and Korovin preferred to work outdoors and adored nature, using their own painterly intuitive approaches in depicting it (see ch.4), we may see that their intrinsic meanings, hidden in “Haugfossen” (ill.1) and in “Northern Lights. Hammerfest” (ill.2) could manifest nature’s dominating over humans, illustrated in the forms of the given natural phenomena, during the era of modernity and industrialisation in Europe.

The dynamic forces of nature such as the waterfall or as the aurora borealis which we see on the canvases, may be read as complete manifestations of the dynamic sublime in nature. This aspect of inner meanings of nature and the feeling of presence in a landscape may especially be obvious and clear to the majority of Norwegian audiences, who are relatively familiar with the local landscapes. Therefore, such “embodied” depictions of the Norwegian landscapes, as Maritain insists, may only result from the painters’ insight into the nature of the given landscapes (we should keep in mind that both motifs illustrate real places), expressed through the painters’ subjective experience of the locations. The beholders then might relate themselves to the painters’ subjective experiences of Haugfossen and of

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<sup>143</sup> Rudd, Anthony, "*Painting and Presence: Why Paintings Matter.*". United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2022: 133;

<sup>144</sup> Rudd, Anthony, "*Painting and Presence: Why Paintings Matter.*" 2022: 133-134;

<sup>145</sup> Goppen, Noam, "*Grounding the Landscape*". 2023: 6;

seeing the Northern lights upon the Hammerfest harbor as shown in the paintings, with the use of the “poetic knowledge”, based on their own experiences of exploring nature.<sup>146</sup>

Both paintings, as said, represent Norwegian nature during the 1880s-1890s, which, due to the realistic manner of depiction, do not seem as too embellished, dramatic or romanticized at the first glance, rather day-to-day. The only objects that delicately remind us about human existence here are the regular local houses, depicted on the background above the waterfall in Thaulow’s motif. While Korovin placed some fishing rorbuer-houses and a fishing boat in the foreground. But the objects are hardly seen compared to the Northern lights above and which simultaneously are reflected in the waters beside the boat, since both the houses and the boat are painted in the darker hues, pretending almost to vanish in the marinescape. Such painterly integrated placement of the objects, constructed by a man, in local sceneries and nature seems interesting and quite intended by both painters, as if hinting on nature’s sublimity over humans independently of how far the progress of industrialisation would come. At the same time these man-made objects such as boats and houses are perceived as not only the signs of the human presence, but as the signs of modernity, which indicate historical time and space. This distinguishes these two modernist paintings from for instance the classical pastoral landscapes of Romanticism and therefore challenges the idea of the beautiful and the picturesque in modern landscape paintings.<sup>147</sup>

We can therefore see traces of modernity in both landscapes represented in the form of the fishing boats, referring to the fishing industry in the country, as well as the houses in “Northern Lights. Hammerfest” (discussed in chapter 5.2). While in “Haugfossen” we see the traces of modernity in the form of the smaller houses, placed in the background as if they are floating over the waterfall, as well as in the form of the waterfall itself. Because historically it has been the junction point for the last 300 years, surrounded by production facilities that were in use at Blaafarveverket in the area.<sup>148</sup> “Haugfossen” was exploited as the power source and as a separate water chute, which went into the Blaafarveværket factory, where the water was used in the smelting processes.<sup>149</sup> Therefore in this case Thaulow also depicted the dynamic forces of nature in the form of the waterfall, which, in contrast to Korovin’s

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<sup>146</sup> Rudd, Anthony, "Painting and Presence: Why Paintings Matter." 2022: 134;

<sup>147</sup> Sjøstad, Øystein, *Pollution Pittoresque*. 2020: 70-71;

<sup>148</sup> Blaafarveværket, *Haugfoss*. 2023. Blaafarveværket. Source: <https://shorturl.at/esGP8> (viewed: 24.04.2023);

<sup>149</sup> Blaafarveværket, *Haugfossen Rundt*. 2023. Blaafarveværket. Source: <https://shorturl.at/sxyJ0> (viewed: 24.04.2023);

unachievable aurora borealis, was taken in use by humans for their needs in the local handicraft industries.

Thus the observation of landscapes, as in our case - in painting, can lead the beholder towards understanding the operations of authority, the flow of capital or distribution and manipulation of natural resources. Landscapes also can contribute in shaping our culture, since it can be seen as a symbolic system, showing relations between nature and humans through history. And landscape therefore is a matrix for conveying ideologies and a way of collecting knowledge.<sup>150</sup> As a conclusion here, this implies the idea, formulated by Sjøstad, that *landscapes are never neutral* regarding some features of human economic and other activities, caused by the technological progress, which were encrypted in landscape paintings especially during modernity in the Western world in the end of the 19th century.<sup>151</sup>

But when we compare Thaulow's "Haugfossen" (1883) and Korovin's "Northern Lights"(1894/95), as modern representations of "the sublime" in painting to the classical sublime landscapes painted by J. C. Dahl during the Romanticism, we again notice that during modernity it was no longer necessary to depict landscapes embellished with colors which seemed brighter than reality (see also ch.3). Rather there were in use new unromanticized and realistic palettes, which appeared bold in their straightness.

If we look at a landscape as at a prism of any ideological interpretation, subjectivity of the painter plays an important role in this regard. In the painting we see the particular landscape as "framed" or as "composed" from the artist's own sensory experiences of the given place. Thus landscapes in painting can be understood as a form of articulating the painter's sense of "self" while being at the place.<sup>152</sup> Instead of creating the highly finished and varnished surface of the canvas, the painters rather preferred to create an impression of textured matt objects, performed in darker natural colors, complementing the harshness of Norwegian nature, in order to reach the feeling of materiality in the landscapes.<sup>153</sup> There is thus no doubt in, that the two chosen artworks illustrate the subjective interpretations of the given sceneries, as Thaulow and Korovin rendered the territories, where nature demonstrated its essential powers, despite human progression in conquering it and converting its capacities into the means of their modern existence in the form of industries. These two canvases might

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<sup>150</sup> Harris, Diana, *Assessments* in DeLue, Rachael Ziady, James Elkins, and University College, Cork. *Landscape Theory*. Vol. 6. The Art Seminar. New York: Routledge, 2008: 190-191;

<sup>151</sup> Sjøstad, Øystein, *Pollution Pittoresque*. 2020: 71;

<sup>152</sup> De Lue, et al., *Landscape Theory*. 2008: 103;

<sup>153</sup> Gonnen, Noam, "Grounding the Landscape". 2023: 8;

therefore be read as the artists' painterly response to modernity and industrialization in Europe at the time, and as the manifestation of nature's sublimity over humanity's progress.

#### **5.4. Similarities in some of the Thaulow and Korovin's urban European motifs.**

**Modern sublime.** Konstantin Korovin is often called the first Russian Impressionist. The painter's earlier Impressionist works were among all inspired by French impressionist Edouard Manet, since Korovin also applied titled perspective and brighter colors. Typical examples of his later Impressionist works of Korovin are "Paris Cafe" (1892-94) (ill.6), or the later canvas "Boulevard de Capucines" (1907) (ill.7), mentioned in chapter 3.1.<sup>154</sup>

These French motifs by Korovin remind us stylistically of the two European motifs by Thaulow, "Street in Venice" (1894) (ill.10) and "View from Paris near the Madeleine Church" (1897) (ill.11). Both Thaulow-canvases were purchased by another Russian art collector Sergey Schukin in the 1890s. Nowadays the artworks belong to the collection of the State Pushkin Museum in Moscow. According to Russian art historian Anna Poznanskaya, Schukin became interested in Thaulow after seeing his paintings during the exhibition of the Scandinavian paintings, arranged by Sergey Diaghilev in St. Petersburg in October 1897.<sup>155</sup>

If we take a closer look at Korovin's "Boulevard de Capucines" (1911) (ill.7) and at Thaulow's "View from Paris near the Madeleine Church" (1897) (ill.11), we see the resemblance in their Impressionist techniques, expressed in applied staccato brushstrokes, creating visual illusions of movement in the busy streets at day and night time, shown from high points. The vanishing points in the form of disappearing ends of the long prospects in

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<sup>154</sup> Volodarsky, V. and Burleigh-Motley, M. "Korovin Family". 2003: 2;

<sup>155</sup> In opposition to curator at the State Pushkin Art Museum in Moscow Anna Poznanskaya, Beverly Kean wrote that Schukin first saw Thaulow's painting "Winter Landscape" (?) (ill.?) in Paris (alas I didn't find it anywhere, as it may have been lost like other Norwegian paintings after the revolution in Russia in 1917, since it was the first Western painting that he purchased. The winter motif was seen as too trivial even for the conservative muscovites. Sergey's son Ivan for instance found it boring, as the painting only showed Norwegian houses covered with snow, being always the same. Then Schukin bought "The Lysaker River" and the two named canvases painted in Italy and in Paris. But namely this particular feature of the conservative Parisian salons of Thaulow's landscapes would inspire Schukin to purchase the artwork, which somehow might also accelerate the process of altering the course of Russian painting, while it was displayed on exhibitions. Source: Kean, Beverly Whitney. *All the Empty Palaces: The Merchant Patrons of Modern Art in Pre-revolutionary Russia*. 1983: 137-138, 142.

Thaulow's winter sceneries played one of the crucial roles in the forming of the Russian contemporary art collections during the 1890s-1900s, since his paintings were purchased by Schukin and Morozov, Russia's most famous art collectors. By this, Thaulow influenced the cultural and artistic milieu in Moscow and St. Petersburg at the time. Source: Poznanskaya, Anna. *Frits Thaulow. "Boulevard de la Madeleine in Paris" (1894)*. Moscow: The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts. 2022. [https://pushkinmuseum.art/data/fonds/europe\\_and\\_america/j/0000\\_1000/zh\\_3343/index.php?lang=en](https://pushkinmuseum.art/data/fonds/europe_and_america/j/0000_1000/zh_3343/index.php?lang=en) (viewed: 18.11.2022);

both canvases are also located in the upper right and left corners, making the compositions seem skewed on the side, which reminds of the classical Renaissance rule for linear perspective, suggested by Alberti. This makes these two paintings appear as dynamic, modern and subjective impressions of the modern city, viewed from above, which became a popular angle to paint and to interpret Paris from during the 1890s.<sup>156</sup> Looking at the urban landscapes from above or on the “bird’s eye” view was at the core of Impressionist representations of the city. Partly inspired by Nadar’s first photography of Paris, taken from a hot-air balloon, it symbolized the growth of overhead surveillance and the progress within engineering photography. But according to Varnedoe, there was not the new Parisian architecture which awakened the interest of the painters at the time, but rather a particular depicted moment of time, as it brought new means of narrative, encrypted in the modern Parisian cityscape.<sup>157</sup>

As Berman admits, elevated landscape views include visual manipulations of distance and scale in order to cause the sensation of grandeur or of *the sublime*. In 19th century landscape painting the elevated perspectives also were associated with desire or possession. While the process of looking up and down towards mountains (typical motif often suggested by Romantic landscape painting), or an elevated horizon, while simultaneously still retaining coherent view of a foreground, was the essence of the “sublime” in the Romantic landscape. Such landscape formulae could thus be applied towards the modern geometric cityscapes in Paris, also seen from an elevated perspective. The sense of vertiginous height reminds of the same one that we may experience in the mountains, when we feel an expansion of spectatorial vision from above, often making our knees tremble. This experience of heights in urban landscapes is also characterized as *modern sublime*, apart from the *technological* and *electric sublime* resulting from industrialization, as discussed in chapter 2.4.<sup>158</sup> And both Thaulow and Korovin also managed to capture this modern phenomena in their later urban Parisian landscapes.

This way we definitely can observe some significant similarities in Korovin and Thaulow painterly manners applied in the given European motifs. We can also assume here

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<sup>156</sup> Berman, Patricia, *The Urban Sublime and the Making of the Modern Artist* in Ydstie, Ingebjørg, Mai Britt Guleng, and Munchmuseet. *Munch Becoming "Munch": Artistic Strategies 1880-1892 : 10 October 2008-11 January 2009*. Oslo: Munch-museet, 2008: 139-140, 141, 142;

<sup>157</sup> Berman, Patricia, *The Urban Sublime and the Making of the Modern Artist*. 2008: 145-146;

<sup>158</sup> Berman, Patricia, *The Urban Sublime and the Making of the Modern Artist*. 2008: 148-149;

that Konstantin Korovin had visited Diaghilev's exhibition in 1897<sup>159</sup>, where he might have seen Thaulow's works and probably could get inspired by Thaulow's European city paintings, since Korovin created some of his Parisian themes later in the 1900s. But this is just a supposition, since this fact is not proven.

**6. Conclusion.** In this way I endeavored to compare two chosen artists, Norwegian Frits Thaulow and Russian Konstantin Korovin, who worked simultaneously in Europe during the shift of the 19th and 20th centuries. Albeit they both equally admired the urban-scapes of the modern cities, such as Paris, Moscow, St. Petersburg and Christiania (Oslo) and considered themselves as modernist painters, both Thaulow and Korovin always stayed true to the open air rural landscapes, which the artists somehow or other returned to in the oeuvre, throughout their artistic careers.

Firstly I discussed the painterly development of modernism in Norway and in Russia during the 1880s-1890s (ch.3), then the key painters Frits Thaulow and Konstantin Korovin (ch.4). The most important part of the essay is chapter 5, where I conduct the comparative analysis of the two chosen paintings as the research method, combined with the relevant theoretical framework, discussed in chapter 2. Although the analysis came later in the thesis, I considered that it was important to introduce both the painters and then the canvases first in chapter 5, in order to prepare the readers for the analysis part.

Paintings "The Waterfall Haugfossen"(ill.1) and "Northern Lights. Hammerfest"(ill.2) are monumental canvases which demonstrate the breathtaking beauty and the magnificent dynamics of Norwegian nature. Even though they were performed in two separate painterly genres, Naturalism and Impressionism, they both clearly convey the sublimity of nature in the form of waterfall cascades and aurora borealis over the night harbor, while also hinting on the modest presence of humans through the houses and fishing boat (and lights in Korovin's composition). While remembering Ruskin's scientific approach to landscape paintings (ch. 5.1) and Maritain's more poetic and lyrical ideas behind the iconographic meanings in compositions (ch.5.3), we can conclude that landscapes are always symbolic, as they bear their hidden intrinsic meanings, independently of the genre that they were depicted in.

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<sup>159</sup> Doronchenkov, Ilya. *West by Northwest. The Scandinavian Exhibition of Sergey Diaghilev. The Strategy and Choice of the Art Works. History. Exhibitions.* (Part 1). 2019: 172.



The paintings illustrate mundane reality of the chosen rural places, reproduced in a realistic, “non-idealized” and intimate modernist artistic manner. Still the magnificent natural phenomena in them make canvases seem majestic, poetic and spellbinding, due to their physical largeness and the vivid vibrant colors, which add extra materiality and sensuousness to the depicted places. Therefore the artworks can be identified as the modernist illustrations of the “sublime in nature”, due to the paintings’ physical dimensions, compositional and formal contents, the certain emotions they might cause (such as admiration and astonishment) and as a form for the painters’ artistic response to modernity, manifesting nature as “sublime” in relation to technological progress and industrialization in the Western countries. While comparing the artists’ urban city-scapes demonstrates the contrast to their rural motifs and shows the compositional universality in the painters’ oeuvre.

Thaulow’s “Waterfall” was acknowledged in the 1880s as groundbreaking in its realistic color use and liveliness, achieved by the advanced technical skills, which simultaneously were freed of the old classical norms since Thaulow created art for art’s sake, the painting again meets the criteria of Varnedoe’s concept of “*Nordic-ness*” (see ch.2.2) due to the painting’s coldness and harshness in colors, which transmit the gloominess of the Norwegian landscape. Whereas Korovin, who was more busy with the lyrical and spiritual side of paintings, rather than with the purely technical, wanted namely to convey his personal emotional admiration of the North-Norwegian landscapes, with the use of more expressive and lyrical palette, while creating the illusion of aurora borealis, performed in Impressionist manner. The Northern lights painted by Korovin can surely be perceived as aesthetically satisfying and beautiful, if not astonishing as the “dynamic sublime” suggested by Burke (see ch.2), but still as “sublime” due to its breathtaking spectacularity, given in the Impressionist manner, with the vivid colors, expressing how much Korovin adored the harsh North-Norwegian nature during his journey.

Speaking of possible disadvantages of this research, asserting whether a painting can be seen as “sublime” might seem too subjective and poorly academic unless this statement is backed up with a relevant theoretical framework, which I tried to demonstrate in the discussion in chapters 5.1-5.3. In addition, as it was mentioned in the introduction, the scarcity of the sources about Konstantin Korovin’s artist biography may lead to the possible lack of diversity in opinions and in discussion concerning the painter’s oeuvre.

I hope that this thesis can be looked at as a successful continuation of the previous research on Norwegian-Russian relations in painting at the end of the 19th century, suggesting a more particularistic focus on chosen paintings by Frits Thaulow and Konstantin Korovin, seen in the light of the Kantian aesthetic theory of the “sublime” in arts and nature, as well as in a global context of the modernist painting in Norway and in Russia at the time. While the comparative analysis of the two particular paintings was useful as the research method for detecting similarities and differences between the two great national painters, who depicted the Norwegian landscapes during the turbulent times of modernity in Europe, which quite might be a much curious discovery for the art historical field nowadays.

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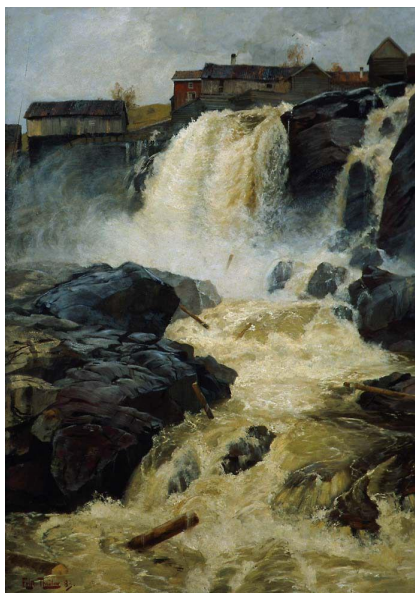
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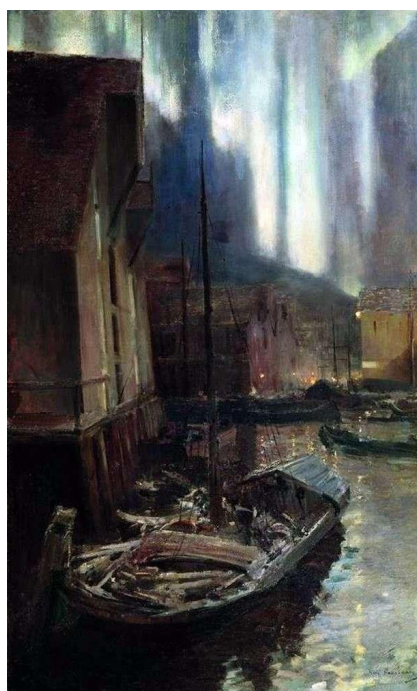
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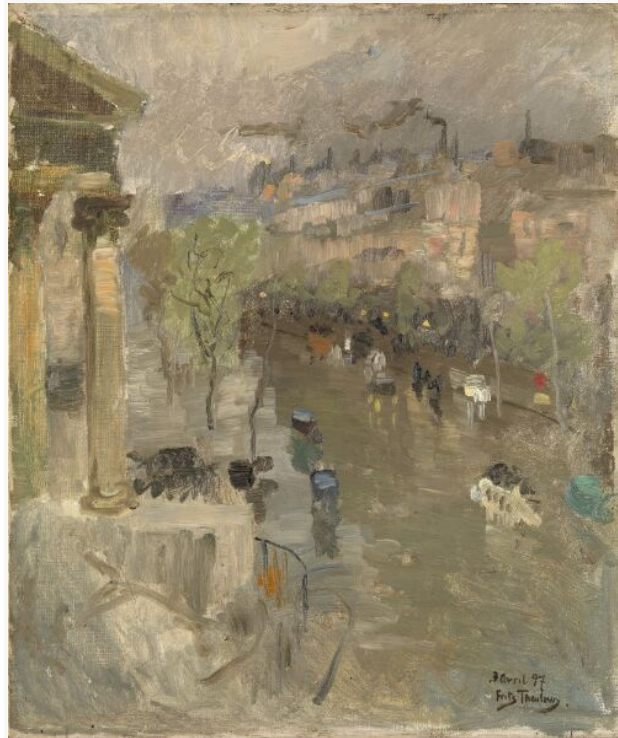
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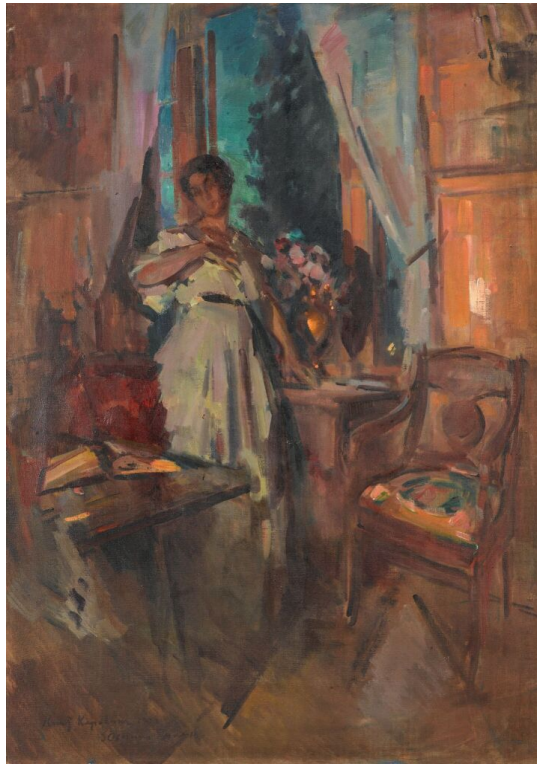
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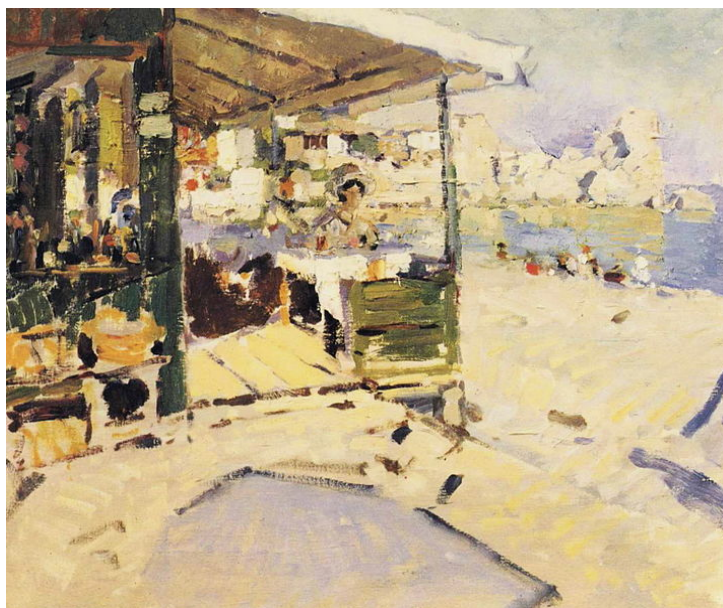
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