

METAMORPHOSES OF ČIURLIONIS' ORIENTALISM

Summary

A genuine recognition of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis' (1875-1911) art, the Lithuanian painter and composer, is impossible without researching the mythological symbolism, art aesthetics, and artistic traditions of the great Eastern civilisations. Therefore, this concise study based on the principles of comparative methodology discusses the connections between the paintings of all three main stages of the artist's pictorial evolution and the different art traditions of Eastern countries. The main focus will be on the comparative analysis of Čiurlionis' sonata painting phase and East Asian traditional painting, prioritising the famous landscape painting. During the research, similarities and differences in solving the problems of his worldview, thinking, perspective, compositional, artistic space, artistic time, plastic, colour and colour palette will be highlighted. Based on the iconographic and stylistic analysis of Čiurlionis' aesthetic views and his paintings, the argument still continues that significant impact on the formation of a mature musical painting style of the sonata period and in solving the problems of the interaction of painting and musical language was acquired by his acquaintance with the traditions of East Asian painting, which helped the artist to create a unique style of "musical painting".

Probably, Čiurlionis' unique intuition and insight can explain his ability through his knowledge and study of the compositional, spatial, and linear structures in Japanese classical engravings to reveal the achievements of much more sophisticated Chinese landscape painting and use them creatively in magnificent works of his late sonata period. In this respect, Čiurlionis, along with P. Klee, was one of the first representatives of the Western art tradition not only to realise the unique aesthetic value of

Chinese landscape painting but also to use its principles to implement his “musical painting” idea creatively.

Čiurlionis was a personality of universal interest who was surprisingly receptive to various ideas and innovations, whose volatile imagination and cultivated intuition quickly “captured” aesthetic, artistic achievements, and socially relevant ideas of civilised Eastern worlds that were invisible to others. We cannot find many other great masters of the art *who are so open to various layers of the culture of Eastern civilisations and, at the same time, have not grown so profoundly from the colours and intonations of folk songs of their rain-washed Lithuanian landscape*. It is no coincidence that he has become a particular symbol of Lithuanian identity for artists of later generations, an unattainable ideal on which Lithuanian artists of later generations will constantly focus.

Some studies by Viacheslav Ivanov, Valerian Čiudovsky, and Ichiro Kato dedicated to Čiurlionis' work ascertain the connections of the Lithuanian artist's work with the art traditions of various Eastern nations, list the symbols and iconographic elements of his paintings borrowed from Egypt, Mesopotamian, Indian, Japanese civilised worlds often without a more thorough comparative analysis of formal means of artistic expression and stylistic features. In fact, it is usually a general reflection of the undoubted influence of images from the Middle Eastern, Indian, biblical and, for example, Hokusai or other Japanese woodblock carvings. However, only Aleksis Rannit and Antanas Andrijauskas' texts address the more critical problem of the relationship between Čiurlionis and the great traditions of Chinese landscape painting, which has been outside academic art research for a long time.

In Čiurlionis' letters, paintings and testimonies of his contemporaries, we find many allusions to different worlds of Eastern and other non-European civilisations. There is nothing remarkable here because Orientalism and Weltanschauung universalism were integral to his worldview and strongly influenced aesthetic, artistic tastes, and creativity. His closest friends and family members testified for Čiurlionis' attention to the traditions

of religion, philosophy and art of non-European nations, his immersion in theosophical visions of cosmic universalism, and his passion for the ideas of Orientalism. Józef Markiewicz, the artist's friend, points out that after returning from Leipzig, Čiurlionis read a lot and that "one area emerged from this flow of reading – Persian, Egyptian, and finally Indian philosophy". Jan Brzeziński, the other friend from his studies at the Warsaw School of Art, stated that "Čiurlionis was particularly interested in the world of Indian and Egyptian philosophy". The friend was also supported by the artist's brother Stasys Čiurlionis, who, speaking about Orientalist influences, noted that "he began to study the religious works of ancient Indian philosophy in this field, read the works of Nal and Damayanti, Ramayana, the legend of Krishna, and later Rabindranath Tagore".

At the beginning of his path to painting, in the period of "literary-psychological symbolism", in search of the uniqueness of the style in artistic expression, Čiurlionis did not stay away from neo-romantic (symbolist) orientalism, in which symbolic pictorial, mythological and religious motifs and iconographic elements inherited from the civilisations of the Middle East and India prevailed. Religion cultivated in a family environment associated him with the Hebrew Old Testament, and consequently, the Christian biblical tradition emerged out of this. Traces of the Hebrew and Christian cultural influence can be seen in the stained-glass triptych *Yahuwah and Moses* [*Jahova ir Mozė*] sketches, in the paintings the *Flood* [*Deluge*], *Christ* [*Kristus*], *Joseph's dream* [*Juozapo sapnas*] and others.

Traces of the influence of Middle Eastern art, especially of the architectural forms of the Mesopotamian region and Egypt, can be seen in all the main stages of Čiurlionis' creative evolution, even in the paintings of the late sonata period and the paintings of the metaphysical period closely related to sonata period. The most striking examples of the influence of the architectural forms of the Mesopotamian civilisational space are the paintings *Sacrifice* [*Auka*] (1909) and the *Altar* (1909) [*Aukuras*], which in their colossal architectural forms resemble the impressive

Sumerian pyramidal sacral ziggurats temples with places for religious rituals and sacrifices.

Čiurlionis' last seventh pictorial sonata, the *Pyramid Sonata* [*Piramidžiu sonata*], differs from the paintings *Sacrifice* [*Auka*], the *Altar* [*Aukuras*] and other related drawings by its characteristic stylistic features, and which in comparison with these paintings, stands out with its unique musicality of artistic forms, warm colour palette and harmony of plastic forms. This cycle of paintings elevating the beauty of the Egyptian pyramids under the bright Egyptian sun crowns the artist's famous pictorial sonatas, which stand out with their unique musicality of interactions among plastic forms and breathe a sense of cosmic harmony.

Čiurlionis' deepening acquaintance with the perspective, compositional, and spatial principles of unusual Japanese painting aesthetics served as a *fundamental shift from the literary characteristics of early paintings of the literary, psychological symbolism period to search for the problem-solution of qualitatively new soft painting typical to the second stage of experimentation*. Furthermore, the growing influence of the *Japanese* and closely related *Chinese* art traditions also explains Čiurlionis' new approach to the beauty of ever-changing nature and its interpretation of the themes of its seasonal metamorphoses.

When discussing the impact of other Orientalist influences emanating from East Asia on Čiurlionis, it is impossible to bypass the wave of admiration of Japanese art and crafts in the West in the late 19th century, called Japonisme, which has left a deep incision in the history of Western art, constantly finding itself under some modernisation. The effects of Japonisme are noticed in the artworks of Monet, Whistler, Klimt, and many others painting in Impressionism, Postimpressionism, Symbolism, Secession, *Art Nouveau*, and various other modernist genres.

In search of his distinctive style of artistic expression, Čiurlionis could not stay away from the Japonisme influence, which became widespread in Europe at the beginning of the century. From the 20th-century Polish

cultural and art publications, we learn about the exhibitions of Japanese woodblock printing taking place in Warsaw at the same time as Čiurlionis' studies. The first reliable and clearly documented testimony of acquaintance with Japanese art in Čiurlionis' letters can be found from his trips to the cultural centres of Western and Central Europe in 1906. In a letter dated September 1, 1906, sent from Prague to his patron and close friend, Ms Bronislawa Wolman, the artist mentions Japanese 'panneaux', vestments and fabrics, referring to works seen in the city's museums. This allusion to the Japanese 'panneaux' is vital in explaining the uniqueness of the experienced influences, as the most popular genre of ink and full-colour ink Japanese screen painting was the landscape painting.

Deepening acquaintance with the spiritually close tradition of Japanese painting, which elevates the beauty of the changing nature, affected Čiurlionis' manner of painting, the means of his artistic expression and the innovative spatial, compositional, plastic and colour treatment of symbols and motifs gradually working their way into his canvases. Therefore, in 1906 returning from a study trip to the cultural and artistic centres of Central Europe, Čiurlionis became less and less interested in the Middle East and Indian art traditions, and more so in East Asia.

Then, starting with the paintings *Butterflies* [*Drugiai*], the cycle *Daybreak* [*Rytmetis*] and *Flowers* [*Gėlės*], new tendencies of colour temperance and decorativeness in the treatment of the central motifs of the natural world, which were related to the stylistics and concept of Japanese art, emerge. Another important factor that testifies the growing influence of the East Asian tradition of coloured ink painting during the mentioned period was *the transition from the previous fragile pastel technique to a more stable and transparent tempera technique* that reminds Chinese and Japanese coloured ink paintings.

Since 1906 under the influence of Japanese painting, changes in Čiurlionis' painting style became visible and developed in several main directions. They were associated with fundamental changes in colour and colour palette, the growth of the influence of spontaneous creative tendencies,

the abstraction of plastic language, and the gradual establishment of new compositional and spatial solutions. When searching for an individual painting style, Čiurlionis' paintings gradually departed from the material and naturalistic treatment of the painted motifs and the sharp, bright colours prevailing at the literary and psychological symbolism stage.

The diptych *Daybreak* [*Rytmetis*] and *Sadness* [*Liūdesys*], as well as two different variants of the painting *Silence* [*Tyla*], created in 1907 and 1908, in which the unfilled empty spaces typical of East Asian paintings acquire a unique power of emotional impact on the perceiver, can be considered as almost chrestomathic examples of the strengthening of new painting tendencies influenced by Japonisme. In their temperance, colour culture, soft drawing, the emotional impact of unfilled spaces, and minimalist means of artistic expression, these paintings remind the landscapes by Japanese painting masters under the Zen aesthetics influence.

During the transition from the second stage of the search for formal means of artistic expression to the sonata painting style, the most popular scenes in Čiurlionis' paintings were the change of seasons in the Japanese and Chinese painting traditions and various images of the natural world, mostly vegetation, trees, floral motifs, ornamental birds and butterflies. Various motifs in the interpretation of the natural world characteristic of Japanese art appeared in his paintings: reflections of ornamental plants, flowers, birds, mountains, deep gorges, streams of water, and images of different parts of nature on a level like a mirror surface.

Manifestations of the spread of these Japanese tendencies can be seen in the works *Flowers* [*Gėlės*], in two paintings with the same name *Etude* [*Etiudas*], *Spring* [*Pavasaris*], *Summer* [*Vasara*] and other works. Here, Čiurlionis, like Chinese and Japanese artists, seeks to convey the inner "flight of the spirit", its resonance colliding with amazing demonstrations of the beauty of the natural world. Adopting the integrity of the visual system, the decorativeness of the details, the freedom of the spontaneous manner of painting, the empty spaces and the natural flow of paint, which are characteristic of the Japanese art tradition, he painted sonata cycles

full of vibrant rhythms and exaltation, vibrating with their own energy and musicality, for example, the triptych *Summer* [*Vasara*] (1907) that paved the way for his famous pictorial sonatas. The individual paintings of the mentioned period with their emotionality are close to the manners of Japanese landscape painting masters Tenshō Shūbun, Sesshū Tōyō and Sesson Shūkei and the masters of Rinpa Painting School like Hon'ami Kōetsu, Tawaraya Sōtatsu, their colour scheme and occurring motifs.

The growth of the influence of Japanese pictorial aesthetics in the sonata period is definitely confirmed by the reinterpretation of the dominant motif of Katsushika Hokusai's painting *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* (*The Great Wave*) from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* in the final part of the *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonatos*] – the *Finale*. It shows that Čiurlionis valued more the moderate colour palette, the sophistication of form, the faint tones, the mastery of plastic expressions musical effect of the Chinese and Japanese landscape painting traditions than the sharpness of the drawing and the intensity of the colours, which are characteristic of *ukiyo-e* woodblock printing.

Comparing Hokusai's *Wave* and Čiurlionis' *Finale* from the *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonata*], it stands out that the Lithuanian artist is more poetic and lyrical but, at the same time, gives a more dramatic interpretation of the chosen story, which conveys the spirit of musicality. Hokusai, who adored the Japanese landscape painter coryphaeus Sesshū's paintings, guided by Confucius's statement that a man of wisdom delights in water as water reveals the change, felt a special attraction to the depiction of water elements and their association with intense blue colour when the various shades of green were spiritually closer to Čiurlionis.

In our eyes, the direct contact with the unique tradition of Japanese art has become to Čiurlionis like a key, opening the door to a qualitatively new painting style of his mature sonata period. Having seen the works of Japanese artists, he was able to observe here the profound layers of the majestic aesthetics of Chinese landscape paintings, which were associated with the most refined achievements in painting in the world.

The deepening influence of Chinese landscape painting in the sonata period first helped Čiurlionis to understand the problems of perspective, composition, artistic space, artistic time, plastic language, art interaction, colour and colour palette culture. But, on the other hand, it assisted him in breaking away from the naturalism, ballast of materiality, and literariness characteristic of the previous stage of literary and psychological symbolism to realise the possibilities of new spatial solutions, subtle lines, calligraphic drawing, musical rhythmic and arabesque structures, and artistic expression of empty space.

Susceptible to beauty and having seen the works of East Asian artists full of intoxicating spaces and unspeakable poetics, Čiurlionis had to understand the spiritual kinship and the potential possibilities of artistic expression in these paintings to realise the closer interaction of painting and music. Unlike many of his predecessors and contemporaries, whose Orientalist attitudes focused on the externally effective aspects of East Asian art, Čiurlionis looked deeper and sought to make creative use of the perspective, compositional, rhythmic, and plastic possibilities of artistic expression.

The only one of the previous generations of Čiurlionis' researchers, in whose works we find argumentative allusions to artist's connections with traditional Chinese landscape painting, was Rannit, who, in search of connections between the Lithuanian artist and Chinese painting, appealed to the thoughts expressed by the masters of Daoist aesthetics and great Chinese landscape painting and to the "spiritual harmony" with the creative energies of the Universe characteristic of both Lithuanian artists and Chinese painters.

Rannit also rightly pointed out the similarity of the principles of the perspective used in the Chinese landscape painting in the landscapes of the *Song* epoch leading artist Li Cheng to the ones we see in Čiurlionis' *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonata*]. There is a grain of truth in the fragmented but undeveloped insight of the latter. Perspective solutions characterise Li Cheng's spectacular landscapes, an educated sense of composition, laconic

nature of the means of artistic expression and the compelling juxtaposition of empty spaces, asymmetrical compositions, different spatial planes, the use of the possibilities of artistic expression that are close to the paintings of Čiurlionis' sonata period. Like Čiurlionis, he is familiar with asymmetrical musical composing principles of different planes and the motifs of the visual system of the main paintings and their accompanying details.

How these stylistic features found their way into the paintings of the Lithuanian artist and remained strong is still a mystery. Perhaps these fundamental principles of the aesthetics of East Asian painting were established after the perception of the paintings of the Japanese landscape masters, which he indeed saw and where earlier mentioned principles of classical Chinese landscape painting unfolded. Consequently, considering these problems, *we cannot rule out Čiurlionis' journey into the perception of the basic stylistic features of the older Chinese landscape tradition via the bypass of Japanese art.*

In the absence of reliable documented sources, sometimes it is difficult to say precisely which of the Chinese or Japanese landscape painters was the main source of inspiration for one or another of Čiurlionis' paintings that influenced such compositional, colour scheme, and plastic decisions close to East Asian art. The interpretation of the last part of the *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonata*] – *Finale* (1908) is a more straightforward task as it shows absolutely obvious insinuations of the Hokusai painting. However, when the focus shifts to the *Allegro* (1908) of *Summer Sonata* [*Vasaros sonata*] and other sonata period paintings, this task becomes much more difficult, as similar motifs were painted by Chinese painters Xia Gui, Ma Yuan, Japanese Sesshū, Hokusai, Hiroshige, and many other representatives of influential Chinese schools like *wenrenhua*, Japanese *Sumi-e*, *bunjinga* (*nanga*), *ukiyo-e*, *Tosa*.

The painting *Summer Sonatas. Allegro* (1908) confirms the undoubted influence of the aesthetics of East Asian landscape painting, created under the influence of the Orientalism aesthetics and which background depicts a typical East Asian landscape, and so far, it has not been discussed in detail

by any art critic. The silhouettes of steep mountains and towers are in its foreground, and islands and floating junk boats scattered across the water are in the background. Boats or tiny fishing boats on the vast stretch of water were a favourite motif of the Daoist, Chan and Zen aesthetic ideals of Chinese and Japanese landscape painting, symbolising a break away from the commotion of society and escape to the refuge of nature.

In this picture, we see the motifs of many other mountains, footbridges over the gorges painted in their nonconformist outsider spirit close to the famous Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen landscape painting traditions that have existed for many centuries. In their paintings, these masters loved to depict small figures of wanderers appearing on the mountain ranges and deep gorges of the natural world or small fishing boats surfacing in vast expanses of water, creating a unique atmosphere of mysterious silence, inner accumulation, which is close to many of the best works of the sonata and metaphysical period of the late Čiurlionis. Here Orientalism organically intertwines with the esoteric elements of theosophy, as evidenced by the *Summer Sonatas* [*Vasaros sonata*]. The pyramid-shaped altars depicted at the bottom of the *Allegro* are emblazoned with esoteric signs, between which the initials of the artist MKČ can be spotted at the bottom of the right-hand side altar. Currently, a delicate colour palette of the *Summer Sonata. Allegro* [*Vasaros sonata. Alegro*] painting has considerably faded compared to its older, previously published reproductions, so the many motifs of landscape painting full of its symbolic meanings are not always clearly visible. The painting is distinguished by a perspective solution, typical of East Asian landscape painting, the landscape from the bird's eye view, a play of different spatial planes, soft yellowish-green colour and a sensitive graphic drawing. *Summer sonatas. Allegro*, as discussed earlier, the *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonata*], inspired by Hokusai's *The Great Wave*, is signed with the artist's initials MKČ. Even the signature ideogram is stylised according to the stylistics of hieroglyphic characters, and it is signed precisely in the usual place for Chinese and Japanese artists. Is this a coincidence?

I can emphasise that these are the ONLY two paintings signed by Čiurlionis, which show clear quotations from East Asian art, and eloquently speak of new, significant aesthetic orientalist landmarks in the sonata period. Moreover, the fact that he puts his signatures on only two works clearly testifies to the fact that he considered the turn of his painting style toward the direction of understanding the traditions of East Asian art to be extremely important for his creative evolution.

Of all the Eastern aesthetics and art areas, the Chinese Chan and a closely related Zen landscape painting tradition were the closest to Čiurlionis in their intimate exaltation of natural beauty, emotionality, delicate psychologism, meditative nature, high colour palette culture and conciseness of artistic style. As the masters of landscape painting in Chan and Zen, the Lithuanian artist *considered the landscape a natural all-encompassing system closely related to the structure of space and the natural world.*

The reflection of the diversity of the natural world's forms of beauty was one of the most striking features connecting Čiurlionis with the Chan landscape painting tradition. From the outset, its proponents have paid particular attention to the genre of landscapes that elevates the charm of nature, which they associate with the practical implementation of ideas that heighten spiritual values. Wang Wei, an influential creator and painter of Chan landscape painting, said that “the artist must first follow the idea (Yi) when painting a landscape”.

Čiurlionis was close not only to the attitudes of “painting the ideas” but also to the meditative approach of Chan artists to the painting as a particular prayer, a deep suggestive concentration and the spontaneous release of inner spiritual attitudes. It was also related to the artist's interpretation as a thinker delving into the essence of the processes of existence and the natural world inherent to the Chan tradition. The meditative approach and the poetisation of loneliness brought Čiurlionis closer to the artists who professed the aesthetic ideals of Chan and Zen. According to him, “solitude is a great teacher and companion”. In the aesthetics of Taoist,

Chan, and Zen paintings, solitude has been associated with the ascetic way of life chosen by a true artist and philosopher, the refuge of nature, which is treated as the most favourable spiritual environment for the creator to give birth to new meaningful ideas and works of art.

The first reliable allusions to the tradition of Taoism, Chan and Zen aesthetics and art are found in the *Drawings of Men and Mountains* [*Vyrų ir kalnų piešiniai*] painted by Čiurlionis in 1905, depicting motifs very reminiscent of Laozi, the inspirers of the abovementioned trends, and various patriarchs of Chan Buddhism. In the right corner of the drawing, there are motifs of mountainous woody areas that are characteristic of East Asian landscapes directly related to the calls by Taoist, Chan, and Zen ideologues for creators to flee from outer life to the refuge of natural creativity to foster creativity.

Later, in the paintings of the Lithuanian artist's sonata period, many elegant moods, melancholic motifs, and previously unusual empty spaces appear, which are close to the painting of the Chan landscape. In Čiurlionis' diptych *Daybreak* [*Rytmetis*], *Silence* [*Tyla*], the *Winter Motif* [*Žiemos motyvas*], born of the perception of natural beauty, an exclusive role is put on the empty, unfilled areas emphasised in the aesthetics of Chan, which is often, but not always, the central segment of the pictorial system. In the aesthetics of the emphasis on emptiness characteristic of the Chan tradition, Čiurlionis, following the paths drawn by the Chinese landscape painters Liang Kai, Ma Yuan, and Mu Qi, develops unique compositional schemes of natural washed-out forms in which emptiness sensitively interacts with other natural world motifs depicted in the paintings.

Čiurlionis can be closely associated with the masters of *Southern Song Landscape Painting*, especially with the paintings of a prominent painter Ma Yuan through the principles of composition, the emotional impact of empty spaces and delicate colour balance. The empty space in the painting acquires the aforementioned symbolic meaning in the aesthetics of the landscape and becomes an important starting point for the compositional system created in the painting. Similar functions can be performed by

analogues of emptiness in poetry, music, and theatrical process, where silence and pause are linked to the powerful potential of existence.

Unlike in Western art, in the paintings of Čiurlionis' sonata period, as in Chan's landscape paintings, the horizon line usually was stretched unusually high, so the panoramic view of the world was presented from a bird's eye view. Therefore, in the vast expanses of wide horizons that open up to the gaze down below in Čiurlionis' paintings, as well as the great Chinese landscape painters of the *Song* and *Yuan* epochs, spectacular panoramas of mountains, rivers, forests and deep gorges spread in front of the perceiver's eyes.

The Lithuanian painter is also associated with a refined tradition of landscape painting, a desire to depict cosmic nebulae, morning haze and various mists, which, like Chinese landscape painters, allowed him to highlight different planes for painting nature, to remove strict boundaries between reality and volatile imagination and the worlds of fantasy-created unreal visions.

In the sonata period paintings of the Lithuanian artist, when the bright colours disappeared, and the restrained lighting soon prevailed, as if the light was shining through the fog or haze, the unfilled areas, full of symbolic meaning, and the development of themes in a subtle range of several restrained tones appear. These stylistic and plastic language shifts that prepare the harmony of his famous sonata paintings can be seen in the laconic *Winter Motif* [*Žiemos motyvas*], enchanting the delicate colour balance and playful drawing of fragile trees and in other paintings of a similar minimalist style.

Regarding the Lithuanian artist's connections with the aesthetics of Chan's painting, it is worth remembering not just Čiurlionis' desire for the restrained beauty of muted colours but also the aesthetic value of ascetic naturalness and inadequacy. The sonata paintings of the Lithuanian artist are dominated by the search for great poetics of the ordinary. It is directly related to another characteristic feature of his pictorial aesthetics: the

search for the essence of the underlying phenomena hidden under the outer layer of visibility. This longing for depth, certainty, and the desire to break out of the canonisation of external creation promoted Čiurlionis' tendency to unexpected perspective decisions, asymmetrical compositions, improvisational forms of creativity, and playfulness.

Čiurlionis, like the painters of the Chan and Zen tradition, is also characterised by a focus *on the simplest and the most minimal means of artistic expression made available to the artist*, distancing himself from the external brilliance and richness of forms. Supporters of the concise and ascetic artistic style, Chan and Zen artists, are represented by unfilled spaces, a beauty of simplicity, and aristocracy. The ordinary objects, materials they are made of, and textures show the exceptional beauty of the aesthetic value of naturalness. Therefore, the artist does not have the opportunity to disguise his thoughts under any external things in the creative process but must expose the true power of his talent.

Thus, on the way to the mature sonata period of Čiurlionis' pictorial evolution, the influence of East Asian art traditions became more and more diverse. The motifs typical of Chinese and Japanese landscape paintings gradually penetrated Čiurlionis' paintings: steep mountains like towers, graceful high wooden bridges, smooth mirror-like water surfaces, boats, nets, magnified trees bent under the storm with expressive branches, and a lot of other images typical to screen or room dividers' painting like mountains, rocks, gorges, rivers, water streams, trees, bushes, flowers, flying stylised birds, dragonflies, butterflies. Čiurlionis, who had a sense of authentic art and developed intuition in the sophisticated East Asian painting tradition enhancing the beauty of untouched nature, saw the ideas and means of artistic expression that helped him implement the long-matured idea of the "musical painting".

So, the Lithuanian artist has many similar features to Chan's tradition of landscape painting, first of all, ecstatic love for nature, its seasonal changes, meditative creativity, seriousness, poetics of muted beauty, ascetic grandeur, elegance, emphatic restraint in the search for the beauty of a

mysterious alien exterior. As the tradition of Chan art, his paintings are also characterised by the avoidance of symmetry, balance, and straightforward repetition. Asymmetrical composition and active emphasis on an aesthetic hint in Chan's aesthetics are considered signs of good taste. The artists of the Chan tradition remind the perceiver that *there is another profound inexpressible essence beyond the sight that can only be gradually approached*. Landscape painting affected by such aesthetic ideals has a philosophical implication. Therefore, artists seek *to involve the perceiver of their works in the creative process itself, to help him recreate what is thought, felt, but not shown*. The Chan art tradition's other main stylistic features are serenity, naturalness, conciseness of style, abandonment of form sophistication, close connection with poetry, calligraphy, love for asymmetry, drastic manner of stroke, and pale colour spots, and *dramatic, often breaking lines and virtuosity*.

One of the most exclusive features of Čiurlionis' mature painting, which brings him closer to the tradition of Chinese landscape painting, was related to Wang Wei's invitation to painters *to follow the idea* in the process of artistic creation. Such attitude was not foreign to Čiurlionis, as the desire to "paint an idea" had evolved and spread in the earlier stages of his pictorial evolution. It is evidenced by the book cover project *Thought [Mintis]* in paintings *Danger [Pavojus]*, *Thought [Mintis]*, *Truth [Tiesa]*, *Friendship [Bičiulystė]*, *Sadness [Liūdesys]*, and others.

Like the Chinese painters, Čiurlionis *did not paint a true reality but an ideal reality born of subjective visions of conscious, subconscious, and volatile imagination*. In his works, he, like the Chinese painters, unlike the representatives of the Western landscape, gave an unconditional preference not to the urban world but to the exaltation of the beauty and harmony of the primordial natural world untouched by human hands.

In landscapes, Čiurlionis, like Chinese and Japanese scroll painters, often used moving focus, preferred asymmetrical composition, and often avoided symmetry (although there are symmetrically composed paintings too) and precise compositional axes. The paintings of the Lithuanian artist

are related to the East Asian landscape paintings by using the bird's eye view and a desire to convey the impression of vast spaces. It appears in the cycles *Zodiac* [*Zodiakas*], *Spring* [*Pavasaris*], triptych *Raigard* [*Raigardas*] and the first two paintings of the *Summer Sonata* [*Vasaros sonata*] – *Allegro* and *Andante*. In these compositions conveying the infinity of spaces, the relationships between different spatial planes are essential, which gives a special persuasiveness to the depicted elements of the landscape. The emphasis on the vertical upward stretching lines not only emphasises the priority of spiritual origin in theosophy and the philosophy of the peoples of the East over the material beginning but also conveys the idea of orientation to the Absolute.

The painting cycles of the sonata period can also be characterised by employing a flexible, visionary angle, allowing the preceptor to roam freely in the visible landscapes and move over hills, forests, roads, and paths. This basic principle of landscape painting, closely related to the presentation of the image from the bird's eye view, is no less pronounced in Čiurlionis' cycles than in the East Asian landscape painting, where majestic overgrown mountains carved with gorges, rivers and streams are depicted. Although the flat smooth, horizontal Lithuanian landscape levels the depiction of the world from a mobile viewing angle from the heights of a bird's eye view, in the paintings, the *Hymn* [*Himnas*], *City* [*Miestas*], *Angel. Prelude* [*Angelo Preliudas*], *Sonata of the Pyramids. Allegro* [*Piramidžių sonata, Allegro*], the *Altar* [*Aukuras*], the artist removes the limitations of space created by the frames of the paintings; therefore, the paths of the perceived imagination stray further beyond the landscape space defined by the frames of paintings.

In Čiurlionis' paintings, like in East Asian landscape paintings, the problem of conveying the illusion of the depths of space and its infinity, which was first addressed by the great Chinese masters of landscape painting, becomes especially important. *Jin* dynasty era landscape painters Zhong Bing and Wang Wei first marked and later his namesake, *Tang* era painting coryphaeus Wang Wei established new principles of spatial perspective and achieved much to create the illusion of the depths of space. Together,

they outlined the later tradition of painting landscape in Chan and Zen, expressed by the idea of wandering in the space of a painting, with the illusion of infinite space extending beyond the frame of that particular painting.

Characterised by the versatility of artistic self-expression and rich experience in musical creation, Čiurlionis, like the great masters of Chinese and Japanese landscape painting (Ma Yuan, Sesshū), sought to connect the pictorial and symbol systems of painting to the natural rhythms of nature. Therefore, in Čiurlionis' cycle paintings of the sonata period, the visual structures consistently unfold not only in the panoramic space but also in a time when the gaze moves in a horizontal scroll of the landscape.

The dissemination of the central motifs here is constructed on the basis of the main principles of the dynamic dramaturgy of contemporary arts. The only difference is the direction of the development of motifs – in Chinese and Japanese landscape paintings, the visual structures of the work roll from right to left, and in Čiurlionis' paintings is the opposite. In both cases, however, the perceptual process relates to the fact that *the field of perception of a part or fragment of the cycle is limited only to a certain space and time covered by the gaze and the meditative process of perception.*

In Čiurlionis' paintings, like in his works of music and literature, we encounter various, sometimes complex, compositional solutions to enhance the effect of musicality when more playfully interacting climactic moments emerge. An eloquent example of such musical dramaturgy is *Sonata of the Grass Snake* [Žalčio sonata], with its characteristic change of static and dynamic vertical and horizontal linear structures over the passing time. In the specific paintings of the discussed cycle, the diffusion of artistic visual systems in *Allegro*, *Andante*, *Scherzo*, and *Finale* takes the form of an intensifying, soothing, but obviously undulating *drama* of time with an intense energy charge.

Consistent exposition of the main themes and leitmotifs in the various paintings of the cycle enables the perceiver of the art to prepare psycho-

logically and be able to “read” the work as a whole, unfolding in the passing time, evaluate aesthetic qualities, symbolic meanings, unexpected twists of thought, the entrance of new motifs and expert plastic solutions.

This temporal principle of musical composition (since the importance of plot in the mature works of Čiurlionis of the sonata period fades away compared to the early paintings of the literary, psychological symbolism period) gives the artist an opportunity seamlessly involve the perceiver in the process of understanding art. Using various accelerations and decelerations of the rhythm, depending on the persuasiveness of the depicted motifs, the significance of the development of the main themes and leitmotifs, and the accumulation or easing of their effects, he reveals to the perceiver the most secretive spirits and invites him to a dialogue with the artist's thoughts, moods, emotional experiences. Empowering the temporal dynamic process of diffusion of the image systems in the cycles of the sonata period, Čiurlionis presents a coherent sequence of development of musical themes and motifs, requiring the perceiver to experience a dynamic process through various intermediate tempo development phases starting from the beginning, development, culmination to the end.

Čiurlionis successfully realised his aspirations to create a “musical painting” when he found an adequate graphic-plastic form corresponding to the specifics of the plot or idea. Mature Čiurlionis did not give in to the superficial charm of colour. Like the East Asian masters of landscape painting, he rolled out his ideas extensively using the possibilities of perspective, composition, creative space, artistic time, the subtle tones of symbolic language, and the artistic expression of halftones. Due to the influence of East Asian painting aesthetics, Čiurlionis' sonata painting in Orientalism in the first half of the 20th century stood out with the special sophistication of the art form, its musicality, and the sensitive relationship between colours and forms. In this respect, the *Sea Sonata* [*Jūros sonata*] is undoubtedly one of the perfect examples of the interaction between painting and music in the history of the world's art.

Thus, in his search for a unique style of artistic expression, Čiurlionis did not stay away from the various manifestations of Orientalism that had spread in the West, starting with the biblical tradition, Egyptomania, Indomania, Japonisme, and ending with the elements of magnificent Chinese landscape painting. According to the comparative analysis, it strongly influenced the development of Čiurlionis' artistic style, which changed significantly during the three main stages of creative evolution, constantly including new segments of Eastern, esoteric doctrines and artistic traditions. In the first stage of the psychological literary symbolism of creative evolution, the Lithuanian artist experienced the influence of the images of the civilised worlds of the Middle East. In the second stage of the search for new means of artistic expression, after the farewell to symbolic naturalism, Čiurlionis immersed himself in complex compositional and formal plastic solutions influenced by the tradition of landscape painting, which was directly related to the increasingly significant influence of Japonisme.

In the third already mature sonata period, the formation of Čiurlionis' musical painting style was greatly influenced by the acquaintance with the painting of the landscape influenced by the East Asian Chan aesthetic ideals. Few stylistic features of the earlier sonata period remain from earlier manifestations of Orientalism, as the refined tradition of East Asian landscape painting style gradually establishes a new approach to perspective, composition, principles of change of rhythmic structures, colour palette culture, arabesque forms, sensitive graphic drawing and other formal features of the musical, artistic style.

Čiurlionis is connected with the East Asian landscape painting tradition by *pantheism, cosmo-universalism, meditateness, a tendency to philosophy, the interaction of art, the poetics of simplicity and the symbolic nature of painting*, the focus on ever-changing beauty, attraction to the relationship of spatial planes, unfilled areas, attempt to go beyond the picture, depiction from a bird's eye view, usage of calligraphic elements in the painting, highlighting and stylisation of arabesque forms, the supreme culture of the colour palette, craving for time-evolving motifs, spontaneous warped lines and

emphasis on rhythmic repetitions, *non finito*, i. e. the principle of non-utterance, aesthetic allusion. Many of the late sonata period paintings stood out because of the perfection of plastic language, the subtle gradation of tones and halftones. However, the essential difference between the colour system of Čiurlionis' paintings and the works of East Asian landscape artists is determined by the predominance of green tones in many of the paintings of the Lithuanian artist, which has arisen due to the predominance of coniferous forests in Dzūkija landscapes.