

Antanas Andrijauskas

GRAŽINA VITARTAITĖ: THE POETICS OF THE OPEN LANDSCAPE

Creative Origins



„Tėvui Stanislovui – 100“ skirtame plėnere Paberžėje (Gražina Vitartaitė ir Aleksandras Vozbinas), 2018
During plein air „Father Stanislovas is 100“ in Paberžė (Gražina Vitartaitė and Aleksandras Vozbinas), 2018
En plein air à Paberžė dédié au centenaire du Père Stanislovas (Gražina Vitartaitė et Aleksandras Vozbinas), 2018

Gražina Vitartaitė is one of the most prominent representatives of today's Lithuanian colourist painting school with a unique world of cheerful images, subtle colour choices and expressive plastic shapes like no other. This world shows her eager attempts to create a cohesive style, harmonious plastic structure, and a sensitively nuanced melodious colour palette. We see a very peculiar mix of diverse sources that feed her art: filled with traces of ethnic culture, French and Japanese art traditions, and the beautiful nature and historical past of her native land. “To me painting is music and poetry and philosophy,” says Gražina Vitartaitė. “First and foremost it is the feeling you can find in the beauty of a moment, in the rhythm of music, in reflections, in your relationship with human, his environment and existence” (Gražina Vitartaitė 2007: 7).

In many landscape paintings of Vitartaitė, likewise in the tradition of landscape art of M. K. Čiurlionis as well as in East Asian landscape painting which influenced her artistic creation, we encounter two main types of composition: a *closed* one and an *open* one. The former is static, rational, regular, symmetrical, creating a state of tranquillity, while the latter, on the contrary, is dynamic, expressive, pulsating with the spirit of spontaneity and improvisation. From her youth, Vitartaitė used to pay special attention to the depiction of various forms of nature and like Čiurlionis, she realised that *there is no absolute symmetry in nature*, but that it is usually dominated by various flexible and dynamic forms. Therefore, in her landscape paintings there unfolds the *open composition*, better reflecting her worldview and spontaneous nature as well as revealing to the perceiver not only vast spaces but also a stunning variety of natural forms which defy symmetry in her canvases.

If you look at the world of artistic images she creates deeper, free of any stereotypes, you immediately see her motifs celebrating the beauty of Lithuania's nature and its historical past. She seems to prove with her personal example that the way an artist sees the world and the systems of images prevalent in their art are shaped by the landscapes and internal experiences lodged in the subconscious in childhood years, as argued by Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine and Gustave Flaubert. Indeed, the picturesque valleys surrounded by the wooded banks of the river Nevėžis and shrouded in mists, almost full of mystic secrecy, seem to have become the main starting point of her later creative path, a symbolic guiding light of her stylistic evolution, and the dominant feature of the endlessly changing beauty of nature she captures on canvas. The poetics of her soulscapes, rich with lyricism and melodiousness, was indeed strongly affected by her native landscapes, lodged deep in her subconscious since childhood, that regularly appear in the motifs of her native river painted at different times such as

Nevėžis, the old river bed (1990), *Metamorphosis by the Nevėžis* (2000), *Evening by the Nevėžis* (2005), *Mysterious Nevėžis* (2010), *Nevėžis by Krekenava* (2012) and in others that sensitively reflect the key stylistic turns and transformations of her creative path.

After her studies in Kaunas Art School and Vilnius Art Institute surrounded by ethnic ideals, Gražina Vitartaitė became very active in exhibitions. In her early artistic evolution, she paid what was due to many trends that prevailed in our art back then. She started, in parallel, from thematic painting, figure composition, portrait, still life and other painting genres popular at that time. But the highway of her artistic evolution distinctly shows her consistent move away from the principles of realistic painting that prevailed in our art in the 1960s towards a unique system of images capturing the charm of an impressionistic moment. Gražina Vitartaitė grew up surrounded by stunning nature and, over time, the genre of landscape painting became closest to her spirit. That genre was *gradually evolving from traditional realistic motifs towards more subtle sensitive, psychologised introverted “dreamscapes” full of internal spiritual experiences with a touch of impressionism, Japanism and Čiurlionesque poetic and melodious spirit.*

On the other hand, Gražina Vitartaitė has been focusing on the plastic aspect of her paintings and adoption of chromatic and technical possibilities of artistic expression since her youth. This is the source of her connection with modernist art, in particular with the means of artistic expression characteristic to fauvism, poetic surrealism and lyrical abstraction. Her inability to be satisfied with things already achieved and her relentless search for a unique path, her aim for novelty and professionalism, her push forward to improve her senses and means of artistic expression, colours, colour palette and other plastic means of artistic expression are some of her most striking traits. For that reason, pedantic study of stylistic transformations seen in different periods of evolution, important in the artistic development of many other Lithuanian painters from her generation, is less important when we speak about her.

Unique Traits of the Artist’s Potential and her Creative Process

The starting point to look at the specific features of Gražina Vitartaitė’s artistic potential and her creative process is her powerful imagination, fantasy, dynamic subconscious activity, associative and metaphorical thinking, her subtle sense of composition and colour palette, and her drive towards perfection. It is safe to say that she sees the authentic impressionist capture of this specific moment in man’s existence and cheerful representation of the beauty of nature’s forms and shapes as a very important part of her creative process. This is the source of the spontaneous relationship with the object of art characteristic to her mature creative style, and of her inclination to emphasise artistry, playfulness and musical improvisation when colours, lines and shapes combine so naturally to capture the beauty of constantly changing nature (*Still life in bright colours* (2000), *White Christmas game* (2000), *Neringa* (2004), *Metamorphosis* (2005), *Dunes of the evening* (2011)).



Prezidento sode, 2018, drobė, aliejus, 70 × 100
In the President’s garden, 2018, oil on canvas,
70 × 100
Dans le jardin du président, 2018, huile sur toile,
100 × 70



Joninės, 2018, drobė, aliejus, 100 × 70
Midsummer Day, 2018, oil on canvas, 100 × 70
La nuit de la Saint Jean, 2007, huile sur toile,
 82 × 100

Her creative path shows her endless search for new refreshing sources to inspire her creative process, the constant polishing of her individual style, upgrades in her means of artistic expression, and its enrichment with more new images, colour decisions and plastic shapes. In her spontaneous manner of painting, she moves between broad free elemental brushstrokes and tiny ones; to capture real views from nature, she often uses diverse means of artistic expression, flexible rounded lines, decorative colour spaces, amoebic shapes with their sole role to balance the main elements in her painting's composition. "When I paint", she admits, "I'm looking for my own compositional intrigue and try to provoke my viewer to think. Each painting usually has one accent, its most important, strongest element, and everything else revolves around that accent, kind of serves it" (www.lazdijai.lt/lit/Veisiejuose-atidaryta-g-vitartaites-darbu-paroda---/26093848).

Hers is a refined, emphatically subjective painting aesthetic where an important role falls to many different means of artistic expression and technical aspects of work with paintbrush, used subtly and taken from impressionism, fauvism, Japanese landscape painting, poetic surrealism and lyrical abstraction. Though her art always shows a strong influence of the aesthetic approaches characteristic to lyrical abstraction, she usually never steps into the space of abstract painting but rather seems to stop at its doorstep. She focuses on playing with emotional or calm decorative colour patches and the improvisational principle. Indeed, the plastic language of her best paintings from her mature period stands out with the striking variety of means of artistic expression and her skilled technical use of paintbrush characteristic to her spontaneous style of painting. The uniform elemental flight seen in her creative process combines the most complex linear structures, emotional brushstrokes, expressive colour patches, diverse textures, unexpected colour spills, and interactions between semi-abstract musical shapes and rhythmic structures.

Contact with Impressionism, Japonism and Traces of Čiurlionis' Influence

The difficulty to trace the source of the unique painting style characteristic to her mature works lies not only in the fact that her interviews and texts include few direct references to specific artistic trends and painters she admires or builds on in her creative path. *She is an ambitious painter who sees the art of her predecessors and contemporaries only as auxiliary material to be processed in her artistic imagination.* However, as her stylistic metamorphoses show, her direct *museum experience* and the things she experienced upon her contact with art from specific trends and artists in biggest museum centres made the greatest impact on her developing artistic style. The biggest influence on her art was the tradition of French art on its path to modernity, first of all the aesthetic dictated by impressionism, neo-romanticism (symbolism), fauvism and lyrical abstraction with their characteristic colour palettes of fresh colours. Her unconditional preference is plein-air painting, the landscape painting genre that celebrates the beauty of nature colours, tints and shades seen in her birthplace. "Nature",

she says, “seems to provoke images and I take ideas from it. I like still life and landscape painting driven specifically by nature. Nature draws you with its mystery and beauty, both its details and its entire whole and harmony” (Gražina Vitartaitė 2007: 7).

Freed from the influence of realistic tradition, her paintings radiate with the admiration for the variety and fragility of the forms of nature’s beauty characteristic to impressionist painters. She gives special importance to ephemeral reflections of the sunlight, atmospheric effects, plant patterns, and various shapes and states of the water surface. She seems to try to reflect the volatility of the impression-based reality around humans, to stop the beauty of a specific moment of existence that will never repeat, to restore to painting the power of colour phenomenon ignored in the West for hundreds of years. The impressionist line of fresh colour palette celebrating the beauty of nature and the shimmer of colours blends with the deliberate point to see beauty as transient and ephemeral that made an impact on impressionism and is characteristic to refined Japanese aesthetic.

The change in Vitartaitė’s painting style was greatly influenced by her trip to Japan in 1974, during which she travelled to various regions of the country together with a small delegation of artists and had the opportunity to become better acquainted with the country’s unique culture and the works of art preserved in its temples, monasteries and museums. She was captivated by the beauty of Japanese nature, the Shinto religion that praises it and that influences the sense of aestheticism in all aspects of everyday life and environment. She was also strongly impressed by the aesthetic and artistic education system that has been consistently developed in the country’s schools from the very first grades, and by the exceptional attention paid to the cultivation of various arts. After her return to Lithuania, she confessed in her diaries that during her trip to Japan, she was most impressed by the specificity of the beauty of nature and colours of this unique world of civilization “which was associated with the most delicate feelings and experiences”. Everywhere there was a sense of connection with nature – the living environment was embellished with exquisite miniature forms by touching very respectfully the surface, the plant and, of course, the human being. “It seemed to me that the Japanese relationship with nature was close to the spirit of the Balts’ faith. This trip had a profound effect on the new concept of bright, vibrant white, silver, yellow colours and sensitive tones, unusual to Lithuanian painting, which eventually became established in her paintings.

The effect of the light colour system typical of the Japanese decorative painting schools is reflected in Vitartaitė’s painting “Fragile Whiteness After the Passing of Father” (1991), and even more vividly seen in “Still Life” (1996). It is clearly visible in her paintings “Still Life in Spring II” (1997) and “Silver” (2004), where decorative light colours with elements of calligraphy of sensitive plastic lines already prevail, which is unusual to the Lithuanian painting tradition (the only exception is another painter Vytenis Lingys, who is close to it in terms of colouring, and who was strongly influenced by Japanism). This tendency, associated with various shades of silver, white and yellowish beige, has gradually taken root in her paintings of various genres. However, the most distinct traces of the influence of the bright decorative Japanese



Paberžės plenere. Iš kairės: R. Zdanavičius, G. Vitartaitė, Algimantas Kliuga, 2018
 In the plein air of Paberžė. Left to right: R. Zdanavičius, G. Vitartaitė, Algimantas Kliuga, 2018
 En plein air à Paberžė. De gauche à droite: R. Zdanavičius, G. Vitartaitė, Algimantas Kliuga, 2018

colour system can be seen in her canvases “Wind, Sea, Shore” (2000), “The Silver Edge of Our Land” (2004), “Light” (2010) and many other paintings in light, transparent colours, which praise the beauty of the Curonian Spit nature.

A more thorough comparative analysis of the systems of images and compound formal and compositional elements characteristic to her mature paintings shows that many of her most characteristic paintings share similarities with impressionist, symbolist and certain modernist art elements, but also with the famous East Asian tradition that influenced these trends, first of all Japanese landscape painting with its prevalent inclination towards panoramic thinking, different relationships between spatial planes, and the world of nature untouched by human hands with endlessly changing exotic colours full of metaphysical depth.

With their melodious colour palette and scheme, the motifs of surrounding nature painted, in a refreshing impressionist manner, by Claude Monet for many decades in his later years when he lived in his Giverny homestead with a pond and a Japanese bridge are close to Gražina Vitartaitė. Water lilies are his most famous images from this period exhibited in a separate space in the famous Musée de l’*Orangerie* in Paris. The colour palette of Gražina Vitartaitė’s paintings also shares similarities with the striking emotional search for dramatic and lyrical colour relationships seen in Gustave Moreau and his fauvist pupils. This is the source of her intense desire to highlight the beauty of playing with pure colours and her growing distance from the sharp outlines characteristic to her earlier paintings.

The French and Japanese influences mentioned before merge in her romantic poetics of dreamscapes with the colour palette and features of “music-like painting” characteristic to Čiurlionis’ works during his second experimental period and late period of ‘sonatas’. Čiurlionis is a certain Rubicon in the tradition of Lithuanian modern art; almost any Lithuanian artist who is more sensitive to romantic ideals and incorporates the magic, poetics and musicality of colour palette encounters him and then inevitably tries to understand his or her personal relationship with him. Like Algimantas Švėgžda, Gražina Vitartaitė, when she focused her attention on Čiurlionis, was drawn deep into the origins of ethnic culture defined by this great Lithuanian genius and into his favourite nature spaces of his native land. “On a visit to Druskininkai”, she recalls, “I went to the valley of Raigardas. I was driving right until the end of the road. Then I left my car in the shrubs and continued my journey alone. And suddenly I see in front of me the Čiurlionesque panorama of Raigardas everyone finds so familiar. A valley in emerald greens with a stream winding down it as a silver grass snake that seems painted on a map. I experienced a peculiar feeling that I would only have been able to express in colours, the shimmering of light and darkness, a play of shadows (www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/kultura/interviu/paskutine_pagone...).

Like the sonatas painted by Čiurlionis in his late period, her best paintings of that period combine harmoniously poetic, musical and metaphysical levels to interpret the beauty of nature; these levels influence her associative style of painting, often full of mysterious symbolism. As she moves away from sharp outlines towards thriving

amoebic forms without clear contours, the boundary between the *real world* and the *fantasy world* seems to disappear. These two Čiurlionesque cuts that interpret the *realistic world* and the *fantastical world* merge harmoniously in the melodious and poetic world of Gražina Vitartaitė's imagination. What also links her to the concepts of landscape painting characteristic to Čiurlionis, Monet and East Asia, is her inclination to paint mountainous motifs uncharacteristic to the Lithuanian landscape that open wider spaces to see the world and interactions of different spatial planes, her keenness to paint series of paintings linked by a single object, motif or theme, and her focus on diverse metamorphoses seen in water. Another link that connects all these traditions is the fondness for soft colour schemes; the remarkable attention to symbolic images, the magic of vibrating colours and the metaphysics of light and radiance; and the focus on harmonious approaches in composition.

Like the landscapes by Čiurlionis or East Asian painters, an extraordinary sensitivity to colour palette, the line of horizon painted high, rhythmic dynamic structures of vertical lines, vibrating flashes of refreshing cheerful images or water reflections, the bizarre misty world of subdued colours, and the effects of ripples moving across mirror-smooth water surfaces dominate in many of Gražina Vitartaitė's paintings best in terms of plastic shape, composition and colour palette, such as *Druskonis* (2006), *Midsummer's Day I* (2009), and *Morning symphony* (2011). Very important is her skill in modelling hues and shades, and her dynamic temporal principle to explore abstracted musical images saturated with abundant rhythmic repeating structures. Clear, light colours usually prevail, a subtle warm colour palette, compositional cohesion of her system of images, almost translucent transparency of her manner of painting, and sensitive drawing.

Enigmatic Metaphysics of Colour and Colour Palette

In the Western art tradition, the phenomenon of colour notably grew in importance after the impressionist revolution when its supporters moved painting to plein-air sessions and focused their work on portraying the shifting nature of the impression that the world that surrounds people is colourful and beautiful, and on the possibilities of artistic expression offered by pure emotional colours and the picturesque play of light. Having come to admire impressionism's achievements in letting colour free, Gražina Vitartaitė started to use colour and colour palette as the main means to convey moods in her painting aesthetic; these means also help her handle issues with composition and convey physical features in a spontaneously painted work of art. After she radically distanced herself from the principles of realistic painting, the issues of colour and colour palette took the centre stage in her aesthetic for many years. Her understanding of colour gradually moves into the realm of ever more radical transformations, and little by little light colours start to dominate in her palette to convey impressions of vibrating atmosphere, air and water characteristic to impressionist paintings.



Pavasaris Belmonte, 2019, drobė, aliejus, 80 × 90
Spring in Belmontas, 2019, oil on canvas, 80 × 90
Le printemps à Belmontas, 2019, huile sur toile, 80 × 90

Indeed, her noticeably greater focus on the phenomenon of colour and very sensitive colour choices in her mature works gets a specific aesthetic meaning, because it blends with growing influence of Čiurlionis' musical poetics expressed in paintings, complemented with the green, blue and yellow shades and sparkling water spray and bubbles rising from the depths of water characteristic to Japanese masters of painting. These key shifts in her search for unique artistic path, her attempts to break free from the influence of sombre colours, and her increasing focus on the soft colour palette of warm colours and transparent painting techniques gradually became obvious in her best still lifes and landscapes painted after 1995. There the principles of impressionist aesthetic transform into fauvist ones with increasing frequency, because the influence of the colour relationships between pure, and sometimes unnatural, expressly emotional and contrasting, colours is growing. Among these of her paintings worth mentioning are, above all, *Still life* (1996) and *Still Life by the sea* (1997), and her landscapes *Yellow in spring* (1998) and *Orchard* (1999). As she was moving towards her unique style of painting, a new leap in terms of quality became apparent a bit later, in her paintings of qualitatively new style with increasing influence of the aesthetic of poetic surrealism and lyrical abstraction. Her best works from this period are *Amber bay* (2000), *Vision* (2001), *Autumn day* (2004), *The Spit* (2004), *Yellow time* (2005) and *Raigardas today* (2006); they are witnesses of her already discovered unique path as a painter full of sensitive lyrism and musicality.

Her paintings discussed here, on the other hand, fascinate not only because of her developed sense of colour, but also because of her sense of composition; they usually show sensitively balanced light, transparent colours, sometimes deliberately subdued. Their aim is to create a cohesive colour scheme of a specific painting or their cycle with harmonious interaction between hues, tints and shades of yellow, ochre, brown, blue and green. The colours and colour palettes she uses in her paintings stand out with their power to move emotionally and with specific technical possibilities of artistic expression. The energy charge, intensity and saturation of a colour have become her specific means of artistic expression that rely on optic sensations and express the diversity of nature's beauty. Authentic colour choices help her create 3D spaces in her landscape paintings, while the intensity and energy charge seen in the phenomenon of colour influence the viewer's temperament, mood and other emotional states, and also help either move the objects portrayed to the foreground or push them back into the background.

Her paintings also show links to the paintings by Vladas Eidukevičius, another passionate fan of Čiurlionis' works and the master of Lithuanian colourism. His paintings stand out in the Lithuanian art tradition by their refreshing sparkle of colours and shades. Like V. Eidukevičius and A. Petrulis, Gražina Vitartaitė makes effective use of the possibilities of artistic expression offered by the colour palette of warm iridescent colours in her landscape paintings. She usually emphatically demonstrates her ability to create a score and play music with emotional colours, and sometimes, affected by the restrained poetics of Čiurlionis' late period with his 'sonatas', she seems to retreat into herself and deliberately repress the energy radiated by full colours, revealing then

her artistic ideas through interactions of various very sensitive tones, tints and shades. The paintings painted by this artist who discovered her own poetic and musical style stand out with their freshness and clear transparent, watercolour-like colours, with amber and yellowish tints and shades very uncharacteristic to Lithuanian painting of recent decades and only characteristic to Čiurlionis in his period of 'sonatas'. Colour interacts closely with musical play of generalised semi-abstract shapes and rhythmic lines. Her subdued, sensitively nuanced colours and her subtle sense of colour palette create a peculiar, mysterious atmosphere. Clear cheerful pastel colours prevail in her paintings, they look transparent, watercolour-like and seem to imitate individual motifs seen in Čiurlionis' paintings done in tempera during his 'sonata' period. The celebration of light and radiance in the beauty of nature is one of the key distinctive features of the poetics seen in Gražina Vitartaitė's landscape paintings.

Relationship with the History of Lithuania and the Beauty of Nature

As we examine the unique artistic phenomenon of Gražina Vitartaitė's mature period and the most typical features of her poetics in paintings, the first thing to note is her decision to distance herself from the realistic principles characteristic to her early works and to filter her visions through expressly subjective romantic understanding of the world. In analysis of her most characteristic artistic traits, her close relationship with Lithuania's past and the nature of her native land comes first. Her studies in Kaunas Art School and the architectural look of the 'interim capital' reminded this girl hailing from a small town of the period of regained independence at each step she took, while her direct interactions with this school's ethnically-minded teachers undoubtedly left a deep mark in her worldview. This led to her special focus on the source of Baltic and Lithuanian pagan culture and the worldview of ancient Lithuanians that mandates to respect nature and its deified vital forces. "As I watch the eternal nature from the tops of mounds, I sense very clearly that I am temporary and fragile", admits the painter. "Then I want to cherish my days and hours even more" (<https://www.lrt.lt> Kultūra 2017 07 18).

No wonder then that after Lithuania regained independence, Gražina Vitartaitė dived deep into diverse relics of the country's history and sought to learn as much as possible about various historical monuments of the past seen in spiritual light and the natural phenomena related to them. From then on, mounds, and the rivers, lakes and trees that surround them ever more often appear in her paintings as spiritual symbols full a grand metaphysical meaning. This explains her specific focus on her country's historical locations shrouded in legends and full of picturesque mounds. Her intimate personal relationship with the history of Lithuania is clear from her words: "I hope to visit many more historical locations. As I was painting in Kernavė, I experienced a peculiar state. Pagan time seemed to flow through me. The information was different than the one we find in history books. It is one thing to know, but quite another to process it inside. Looking down from these mounds I believed I

understood the language of the signs left to us. Lithuanian is full of such places that speak in clear language about the movement of time and eternity” (www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/kultura/interviu/paskutine_pagone...).

The things we see in her best cheerful paintings, most often landscapes, are influenced by her expressly personal relationship with the objects she paints. The primary well that has been feeding her works and her main source of inspiration has been the constantly changing world of nature striking with its variety of shapes and colours that has surrounded her since childhood; this world still is the prevailing leitmotif of her art. The originality of her painting aesthetic primarily comes from her unique perception of the beauty of nature revealed in her colour palette of cheerful clear colours and the great variety of the means of artistic expression she uses in specific paintings. The system of her artistic images is clearly dominated by the beauty of Lithuania’s nature, primarily the banks of her native Nevėžis, outlines of various mounds or motifs of the subtle sand-coloured dunes, plants, water and blue sky from the shores of the Curonian Spit. Poetics in these paintings is closely intertwined with various philosophical subtexts, susceptible symbols, metaphors, the poetics of image systems and the music-like quality of her rhythmic lines and semi-abstract shapes.



Opolės (Lenkija) tarptautiniame plėnere
In the international plein air of Opole (Poland)
En plein air international à Opole (Pologne)

Landscape Painting as the Embodiment of Pagan Deities and the Mirror of Human Soul

Her growing nostalgia for the world of nature she has experienced living in Vilnius has elevated the themes and motifs that make that beauty poetic to the position of the central object of her art over time. Landscape painting has gradually taken the centre stage among her favourite genres of painting, and her inclination since her young days to emphasise the beauty and harmony of nature has helped landscape painting to get this position. This is the source of the universal, almost cosmic sense of the intimate and mysterious contact with nature characteristic to the landscape paintings prevailing among her works. As she matured, this feeling has been growing stronger and has become dominant in her perception of the world and all her senses. “When I face nature”, she admits, “I face the eternal secret that no human can guess and can only sense intuitively. And be thankful for this incredible privilege. When I take my canvas and easel to nature I never know what I will find, where I will stop, what motif is waiting for me. As if a force is drawing me to make a few more steps, to take another turn – And then suddenly I stop: I found it!” (www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/kultura/interviu/paskutine_pagone...)

Her early landscape paintings and the radical shifts in the way she sees plastic shape, composition, colours and colour palette that emerged in the last years of the last millennium show substantial differences. Despite uniform colour palette, even her best early paintings in this genre, such as *Nevėžis, the old river bed* (1990), show in the manner of painting an obvious ballast of the previous painting tradition char-

acteristic to symbolists and the “Ars” group. And she leaves that ballast behind in less than a decade. *Orchard* (1999), *Spring by the sea* (1999), *Shore* (2000) and other works skilfully painted in a spontaneous manner with fresh, clear colours attest to this shift. A qualitatively new leap in her evolving landscape aesthetic and diverse composite segments of composition, colour palette and colours emerges in her later paintings such as *Alaušas island near Sudeikiai* (2005), *Island IV* (2006), *Light* (2010), *Dunes of the evening* (2011), *Morning symphony* (2011), and others.

From then on she sees landscape painting as “a reflection of the unity between man and the surrounding grandness of the cosmos and the connection between man and fulfilling existence”, rather than a realistic capturing of the beauty of nature that surrounds humans. This understanding of the genre of landscape painting and skilful plastic implementation of this concept has put Gražina Vitartaitė among the grand masters of our colourist painting. To be sure, her mature concept of landscape painting is alien to the expressionist understanding of this genre related to the aesthetic of the “Ars” group that dominated Lithuanian painting for many decades. Compared with the landscapes painted by our other great post-Čiurlionis painters such as J. Vienožinskis, A. Samuolis, A. Galdikas, A. Gudaitis, and A. Savickas, Gražina Vitartaitė’s landscape paintings of the period stand out with their more powerful romantic Čiurlionesque metaphorical charge and clearer associative connections with poetry and music. Compared to the said painters, her paintings are full of stronger playfulness and keenness on musical improvisation with semi-abstract dematerialised shapes, and have more distinctive poetic and meditative charge. In landscape painting, she is uniquely developing the romantic and symbolistic poetry of impressionists and the late landscape paintings by Čiurlionis and joins it with elements of the plastic language characteristic to fauvism, poetic surrealism and lyrical abstraction.

It is not by accident that Algis Uždavinys, one of the most insightful of our art critics, pointed out this exceptional role of landscape painting in Gražina Vitartaitė’s works and has aptly remarked that “*even though landscape painting is often only a prerequisite to convey the subtle vibrations of soul, and thoughts and emotions looking for a way to be expressed, she preserves her intimate relationship with the external reality and cherishes that relationship avoiding to slip into the domain of disconnected mental abstractions. She wants to experience the aesthetic unity between nature and the subject observing nature, a unity that is not monotonous, but is full of diverse details, colour nuances, romantic sensing*” (<https://www.15min.lt>, Kultūra Vizualieji menai 2019 04 25).

Landscape painting is indeed unfolding in Gražina Vitartaitė’s paintings as an inseparable part of the grand world of nature that surrounds us and covers everything – a part included in continuous, almost cosmic, metamorphoses of the processes of being. In this case, this genre is directly linked to the expression of the artist’s spiritual flights and energy bursts, and emphasises that man is connected to the world of nature through internal energy, that a worldview and the means of artistic expression that reflect this worldview are also connected. Gražina Vitartaitė says that landscape painting to her is her desire and possibility to paint the powerful



Žiemos natūrmortas, 2017, drobė, aliejus, 70 × 70
Winter Still Life, 2017, oil on canvas, 70 × 70
La nature morte d'hiver, 2017, huile sur toile, 70 × 70

impression of life she experienced. “Landscape painting, which was my choice to describe the view of nature and life itself”, points out the artist, “is the domain of painting where colour creates space, light, movement and can convey a strong feeling, the multifaceted world of senses with a very thin boundary between abstraction and true life. All landscape around me is full – the depths and the air are full of shapes disappearing and turning into new shapes, new quality” (<https://www.lzinios.lt/kultura-ir-pramogos/grazinos-vitartaites-peizazo.../247691>).

The genre of landscape painting is uniquely expressing not only Gražina Vitartaitė’s aesthetic ideals, but also the most sensitive internal vibrations of her soul. It also tells us about her remarkable focus on the history of her nation, on the nation’s nature, cultural traditions and, at the same time, highlights her own ability to improvise and the artistry of her creative expression. The symbolical spaces revealed by her emphatically subjective soulscapes, therefore, gain both universal and local meaning, because they simultaneously reveal different dimensions and horizons of perceiving the world. On the other hand, her landscape paintings unfold in the real structure of her painting’s composition, as she addresses specific spatial, colour palette, colour choice and other formal plastic problems. Finally, they stand out with particular focus on meditative motifs, subtle gradation of tones, tints and shades, and with the way they convey the endlessness of space and the most sensitive vibrations of soul. These “open”, emotional soulscapes seem to remind the perceiver that beyond the limits of the visualised appearance there lies another deep symbolic core that cannot be expressed in words, the understanding of which one can approach by meditating the constantly changing beauty of nature. Indeed, her best landscape paintings that celebrate the beauty of Lithuanian nature seem to try to engage the perceiver into the creative process, so that he or she can recreate the things the artist thinks and feels through the subtlest emotional experiences...

Conclusion

This means that, having grown up among the picturesque valleys of the river Nevėžis, Gražina Vitartaitė has, even in her later creative path, retained a close connection with the environment of her native place that greatly influenced her style of painting. After Lithuania regained independence, the postmodernist innovations that entered our art even pushed her to “turn back” into the grand traditions of modern colourist painting, into the development of a unique mature style. In this style, and in particular in the genre of landscape painting that came to dominate unconditionally over time, her focus on the poetic expression of the beauty of Lithuania’s nature, musical improvisation, the magic of colour palette, and the play of the most sensitive relationships between light and colours has been constantly growing. By experiencing various spiritual transformations and changes of plastic shapes, she insisted on looking for her unique way to perceive the world and her unique creative style.

Gražina Vitartaitė’s early works full of emotional restraint and structural thinking painted in a realistic manner were gradually replaced by a look with open eyes

at the beauty of the shapes of the natural world around us. Her new synthesis of the search for a unique painting style has combined different influences; among the most important were French art traditions that celebrate the beauty of colour, marked with a stamp of Japonism and stemming from impressionism, fauvism, poetic surrealism and lyrical abstraction. Their advances in the area of plastic shape, colour and colour palette blended in her paintings with the musical motifs characteristic to Čiurlionis in his period of 'sonatas'. These different influences give source to the impression of cosmic universalism that prevails in her best paintings, a view of nature as a living body full of mystic secrecy, and a peculiar maturity of her paintings in their colour palette. Her essence is the deep ethnicity inherited from Čiurlionis, as well as poetic character, musicality, the language of subtle associations, aesthetic hints and abstracted metaphorical shapes, and emphasis on diverse sources of light in the compositional structure of her paintings. It is not by accident that her works in the genre of landscape painting reflect the most important creative achievements of this painter who absorbed the beauty of nature of her birthplace. Light, water, water reflections, sparkling colours of light colour palette and its most sensitive shades have the most important place in her paintings.