



4 Elements in Arts: Stories about WATER



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4 ELEMENTS in arts

**Improve the foreign language learning and
intercultural competences of adults through e-
learning**

The project

The Erasmus+ KA220 project “4 Elements in Arts” helps educators of adults with specific learning needs and talents. These adults have specific talents but they also have to cope with specific difficulties and challenges. The project explores how the four elements — common images in European culture— influence thinking processes, creativity and arts. The exploration comprises analysing stories depicted in visual works of art such as paintings and sculptures, as well as cinema. The project aims at improving the skills of educators in the field of arts, cultural heritage and English language teaching. It engages adult learners in lifelong learning and education aiming at improving their linguistic, digital and artistic skills as well as their European awareness.



Introduction

The "**4 Elements in Arts**" project focuses on the exploration of concepts related to the fine arts and non-formal education. The project aims to facilitate English and intercultural learning through the visual arts, specifically through paintings/images depicting the four elements: **Water, Fire, Air and Earth**. The following carefully selected artworks serve as **teaching tools for adult learners**, including those with specific learning needs.

In addition, the project aims to contribute to the creation of a **European identity by exploring the cultural significance of the visual arts**, particularly painting, in the European consciousness. It recognises the role of art in shaping national and transnational identities and aims to promote cooperation and understanding between Europeans through cultural exchange.

The importance of the four elements is rooted in both the universal and poetic imagination, emphasising their symbolic meaning and cultural significance throughout history (Gaston Bachelard, 1972). For this reason, the 4 Elements in Arts project emphasises **the importance of exploring these elements through art and literature** in order to understand their deeper meaning and influence on the human imagination.

To summarise, the project, and this document in particular, aims to **promote creative and inclusive non-formal educational approaches through the exploration of art, culture and identity**, focusing on the four elements as depicted in European paintings.



What you will find ...

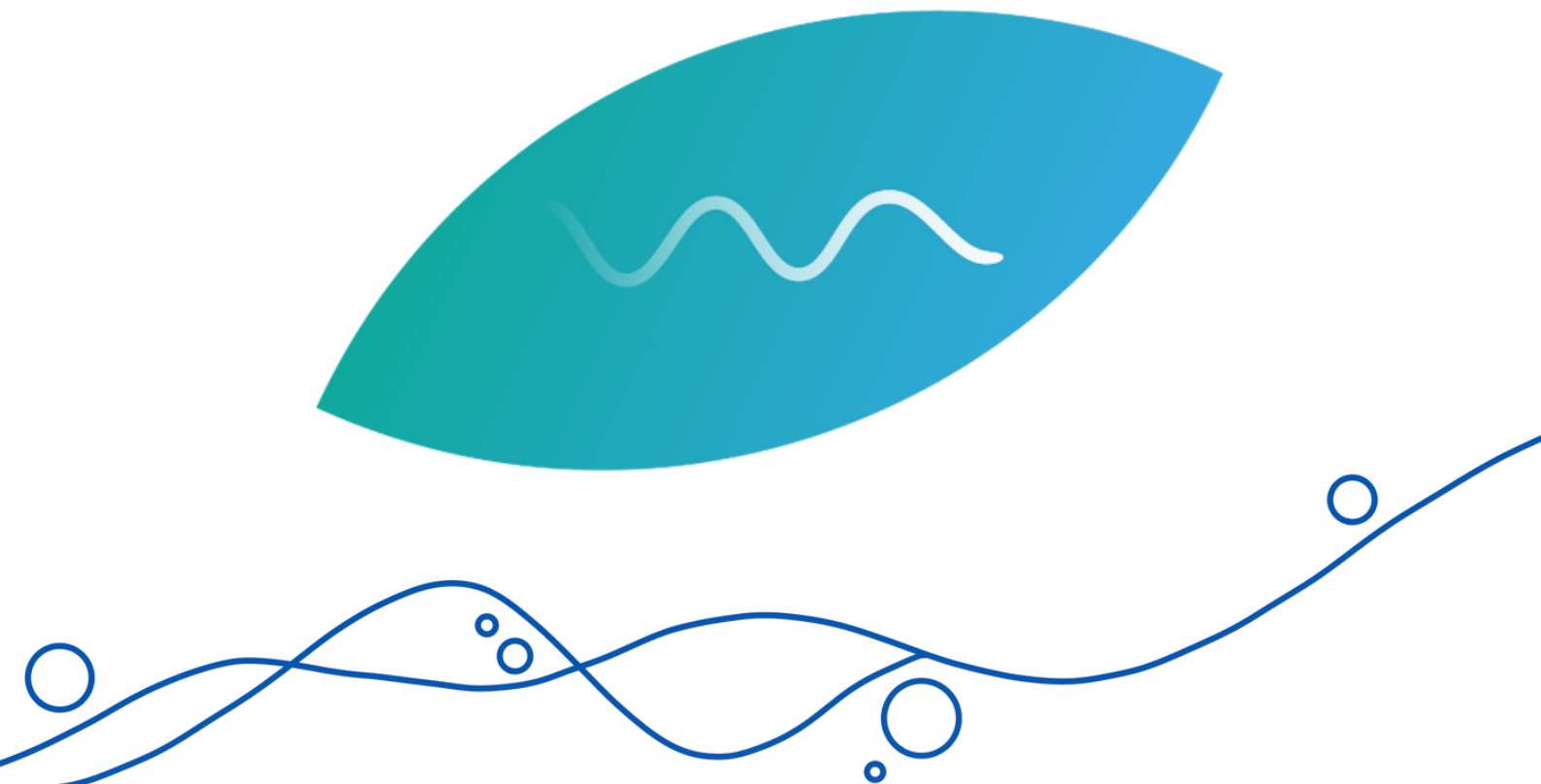
In this document you will find a collection of artworks on the fourth element - **water** - from various European countries. Take a look at the artworks selected by the partners and read the stories based on the artworks.



Partners

The project was coordinated by CVO EduKempen (Belgium). The partnership also included DomSpain Consulting (Spain), Zini Foundation (Latvia), Les Apprimeurs (France), Istituto dei Sordi di Torino (Italy), Slovenian Third Age University (Slovenia) and MyArtist (Greece).

The partnership of the "4 Elements in Arts" project wrote these stories between 2022 and 2024.



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Belgium



Neptune at the Old Fish Market (“Neputunus bij Vismijn”)

Artus Quellijn, J.B. van Helderbergh and Rombaut Pauli (1689)



Statue of the Roman god Neptune with trident above the entrance to the Old Fish Market in the city of Ghent.

The gatehouse was built in 1689 in baroque style and decorated with three statues of sea gods. It was severely damaged by a fire in 1872. Only the statue of Neptune could be saved.

Story

Cities have always longed for a direct connection to the sea because it provides a golden transport route for trade, which can make a city much richer.

Ghent is naturally connected to the sea by the Scheldt but this route is an expensive connection to the sea. Besides the many tolls, the meandering Scheldt is a long waterway that requires 140 km to get to the sea. So, the history of Ghent has always been a story of finding a direct connection to the sea.

From 1251 to 1269, the 'Lievekanaal' was dug, a connection that was only 45 km from the sea.

However, it could not be used by large ships.

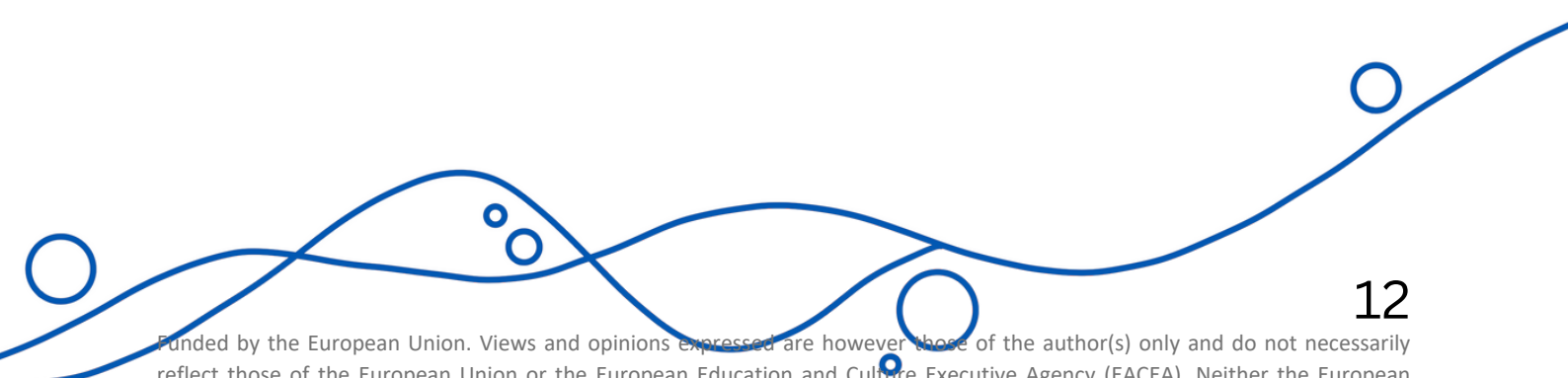
In the 16th century there was too much sand and other possibilities had to be sought. In 1563 another canal was completed, but here too there were problems, first because of the 80-year Spanish war and then because of the blockade by the Dutch. For the connection to the sea, the people of Ghent now had to make do with the Bruges Canal, the Ghent-Bruges Canal.

From 1825 to 1827 the Ghent-Terneuzen canal was built. The canal was widened and deepened to accommodate large ships. In 1827, Ghent finally had its direct connection to the sea, after a struggle of almost 600 years!



Links for more information:

<https://visit.gent.be/en/see-do/old-fish-market>




“Red Star Line Company”

Morley (1927)



Poster with a picture of the passenger steamship Belgenland at the quay and the words 'Red Star Line'.
Size: H75 x W50 cm.

Story



The Red Star Line was a Belgian shipping company with regular service between Antwerp and New York or Philadelphia. It operated from 1872 to 1935 and fell victim to the stock market crash of 1929.

The Red Star Line was officially called Société Anonyme de Navigation Belge-Américaine, or SANBA for short. Its main activity was transporting oil from the United States to Europe, and passengers on the way back. Later, the American government banned the transport of oil on passenger ships, so the Red Star Line began to focus on passenger transport.

Passengers gathered to board one of the Red Star Line's 23 ships (or one of the more than 150 ships chartered by the shipping company). The third-class passengers first had to have their luggage disinfected and then go to the doctor to be examined.

At first, the examination was conducted outdoors; only after many complaints did the Red Star Line build an additional building. By 1913, the line had reached its peak: in that year alone, it carried 70,075 third-class passengers. In total, between 1873 and 1934, about two million emigrants travelled to America on the Red Star Line. Many of them came from Eastern Europe and about a quarter were Jews. One was Albert Einstein.



Links for more information:

<https://redstarline.be/en>





France



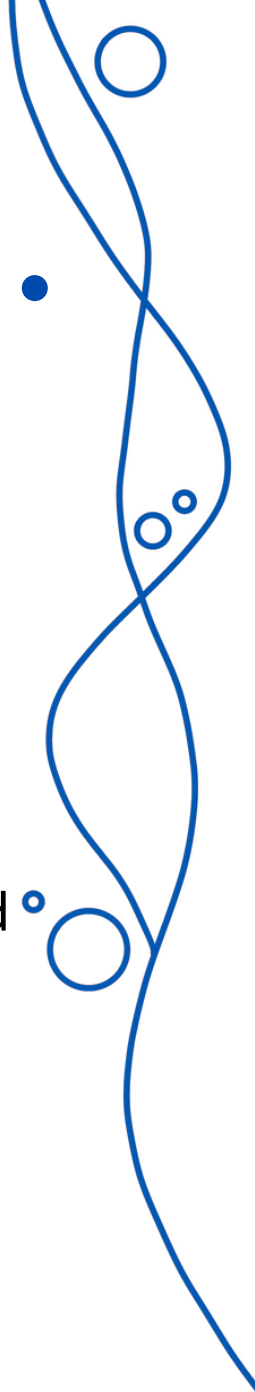
The Raft of the Medusa ("Le Radeau de La Méduse")

Théodore Géricault (1818-1819)



A shipwreck, during a storm.

Story



This painting depicts an episode from the sinking of the French frigate Medusa, sent to colonize Senegal in June 1816. She had 400 people on board. Due to the incompetence of the captain, the ship ran aground and soon took on water. They decided to abandon the ship; 150 people found room on a large raft, with a little water and wine for provisions. Thirteen days passed before they were found. Starvation, drowning, suicide and violent confrontations caused the deaths of most of them: only 10 people survived this nightmarish journey.

This painting deals with a 17th century theme: mankind in the grip of the forces of nature, floods, storms and shipwrecks.

From today's perspective, this painting may also remind us of the shipwrecks which occur during the illegal immigration of Africans and Middle Easterners to Europe.

An ironic parallel, since in 1816 it was the Europeans who left for Africa, and today it is the Africans who come to Europe. What remains, however, is the uncertainty of whether they will arrive safely.



Links for more information:

<https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl01005919>

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The Seine at Poissy (“The Seine at Poissy”)


Pierre Léopold Albert Marquet (1908)



A painting of Paris and its river Seine in the 20th century, on a sunny day.



Story



The Seine is a French river with a length of 774.76 km. It is a river that is entirely part of the Parisian landscape, since Paris was built along the meanders of the Seine. The area was first settled in Roman times.

Geographically, Paris is divided in the middle by the Seine: on one side the left bank and on the other the right bank.

This division is not only geographical, but has many other aspects. The "left bank" refers to the part of the city south of the Seine, often associated with culture: its historical heart (Quartier Latin), its libraries, high schools and universities (BNF, Sorbonne, Lycée Henri IV).

The "right bank" is the part of the city north of the Seine, often equated with wealth and known for its former royal residence (Louvre Museum),

its department stores (Avenue Montaigne, Haussmann, Opera...), its private mansions (Hotel Matignon, Palais de l'Elysée ...) and its business districts (Opera, Bercy, La Defence).



Links for more information:

<https://www.parismuseescollections.paris.fr/fr/musee-d-art-moderne/oeuvres/la-seine-a-poissy#infos-principales>

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seine_%C3%A0_Paris





Greece



The Dionysos cup (“Κύλιξ”)

Attic black-figure potter Exekias (540–530 BC)



Photo by: Egisto Sani

The bowl is 13.6 cm high and 30.5 cm in diameter. It is complete and composed of only a few large fragments. The inner image occupies almost the entire interior of the cup. The colors are very simple, natural pigments that could have been easily found in nature and used by the ancient Greeks.

Story

It is commonly suggested that it is a reference to the seventh Homeric Hymn, in which it is explained how Dionysus was kidnapped by Etruscan pirates, who were unaware of his identity.

The god confuses their thoughts and causes them to jump into the water, where they transform into dolphins. Dionysus personified man's earthly passions. He was the ancient Greek god of wild and fertile nature, vines and wine.



Links for more information:

<https://www.ancientartpodcast.org/blog/dionysus-and-the-pirates-exekias-90/>



The Siren Vase (“Ο Οδυσσέας και οι Σειρήνες”)

The Siren Painter (480-470 BC)



It is a stamnos, a type of Greek pottery used to store liquids. It is painted and it is a red-figure pottery. Ulysses' ship is depicted, with the latter tied to the mast and his men rowing with their ears plugged; on either side are rocks and swooping above the ship are three winged mermaids.

Story



It depicts the myth of Odysseus tied to the mast of his ship to resist the enchanting song of the Sirens. The episode occurs during the hero's long journey to Ithaka after the end of the Trojan War.

The vase shows a mermaid descending into the sea, perhaps in reference to the legend that the Sirens would die if any sailors managed to escape their clutches.

The work tells the story of Odysseus or Ulysses' journey, which is one of the fundamental texts of Western classical culture and is still commonly read around the world in both its original version and its many translations.



Links for more information:

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1843-1103-31





Italy

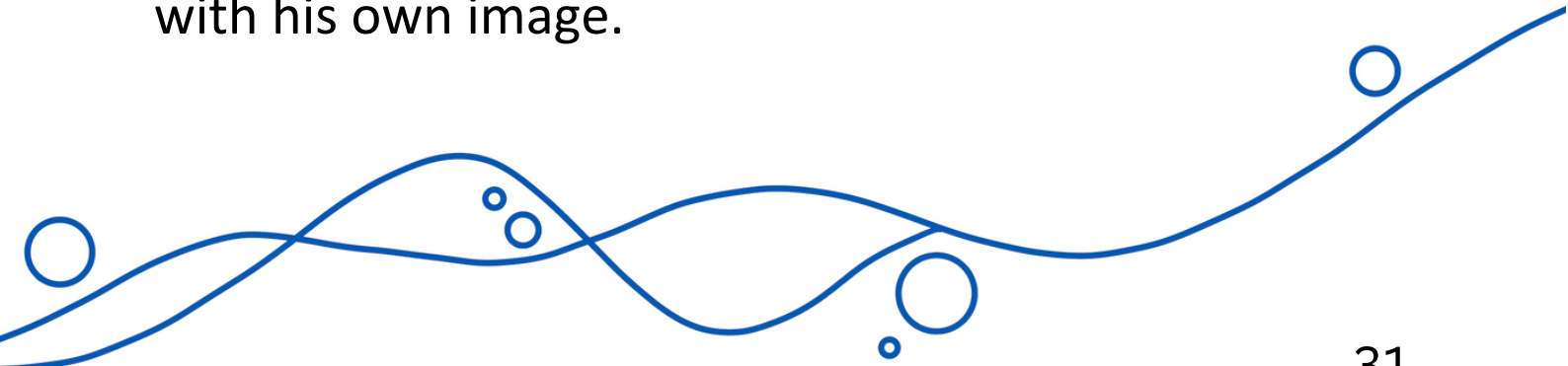


Narcissus (“Narciso”)

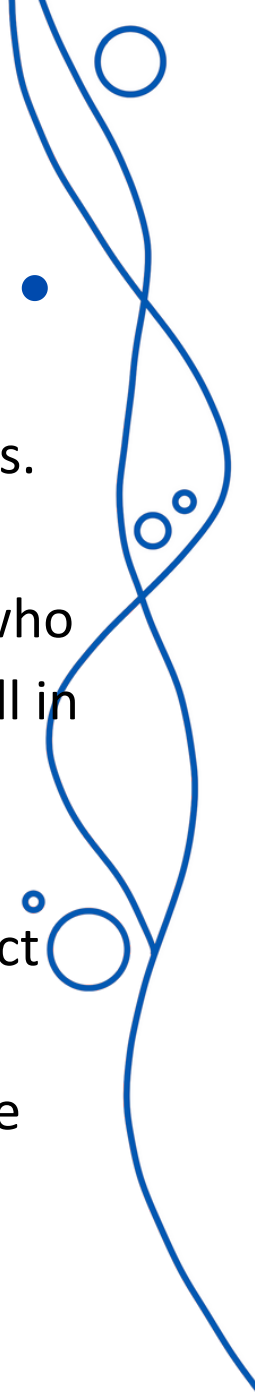
Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1597 - 1599)



Caravaggio painted the character of Narcissus: a self-centred and vain boy, who died after falling in love with his own image.



Story



The artist Caravaggio wanted to paint one of the characters from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Narcissus. According to the myth, Narcissus was incredibly cruel, as he rejected and despised every person who loved him. Because of a divine punishment, he fell in love with his own image reflected in a lake and drowned when leant in to kiss his reflection. In another version of the myth, he realised the object of his desire was himself and therefore he could never have it. So he stabbed himself to death. The narcissus flower was born from his blood.

Like any myth, the story of Narcissus also aims to teach moral values: humility, kindness, altruism... and to be a warning to those who are not attentive to others and respectful of their feelings.

Links for more information:

<https://www.analisedellopera.it/narciso-di-caravaggio/>

“Desperate crossing”

Paolo Pellegrin (July 2015)



The horror of the migrants' boat-crossing across the Mediterranean Sea, depicted in the photos of the Magnum agency.



Story



A large number of the immigrants arriving in Italy come from Eritrea and many are unaccompanied minors, children under the age of 18.

But why do so many people flee from Eritrea? Mainly because they want to avoid compulsory military service and one of the worst dictatorships in the world. The journey can last years and is really dangerous, but they prefer to risk it than to continue living in such a situation.

In late July 2015, the Magnum photographer Paolo Pellegrin was commissioned by the New York Times Magazine to capture images of migrants fleeing Libya for Europe. He boarded an MSF (Médecins sans Frontières - Doctors without Borders) ship and took his pictures.

The Eritrean migrants usually travel across Ethiopia and Sudan facing high risks: the majority of them are killed by the Eritrean military. When they arrive at the border, they have to pay a huge amount of money to the traffickers. In Libya they get on wooden boats and have to face another risk: the sea.



Links for more information:

<https://www.magnumphotos.com/newsroom/desperate-crossings/>





Latvia



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Bathing boys (“Peldētāji zēni”)

Johans Valters / Johann Walter-Kurau (1900)




The artist makes a rather mundane story - three boys swimming - into an expression of beauty. Turning a seemingly ordinary reality into a poetic experience in which sun, water and man merge as a whole.

Story



Addressing the theme of childhood and early youth as a reflection of spring and also showing interest in biological growth processes in both man and nature, was a characteristic trend in the art of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Together with the impressionistic approach to depicting light and atmosphere, Johann Walter's studio "Bathing Boys" demonstrates an intuitively used combination of the stylistic trends during the era.



Links for more information:

<https://kulturaskanons.lv/en/archive/johans-valters/>

Rowing Race at a Latvian Fishermen's Festival ("Airēšanas sacīkstes Latviešu zvejnieku svētkos")

Jānis Osis (1958)



The dynamics, energy and movement of the composition of the rowing competition express a version of the romanticized Soviet superhuman and show the enthusiasm for a new life.

Story

Painter Jānis Osis stood out against the background of Latvian art with landscapes, especially romanticised paintings of fishing villages and the seashore. In these simple everyday scenes, the artist's ability to capture the short-lived mood of the right moment is revealed. Until then, the theme of a fisherman in a Latvian painting was not depicted, but a carefree event was a rather attractive motif for the painter. The unusual angle, the bright grey tones, which blend beautifully with the green and red colour accents, can vividly reflect the atmosphere and the mood. It is not difficult to notice the effort in the faces of the fishermen caused by the rowing of the boat and the atmosphere created by the race.

Links for more information:

<https://www.facebook.com/100064440319346/posts/1064807516887289/>



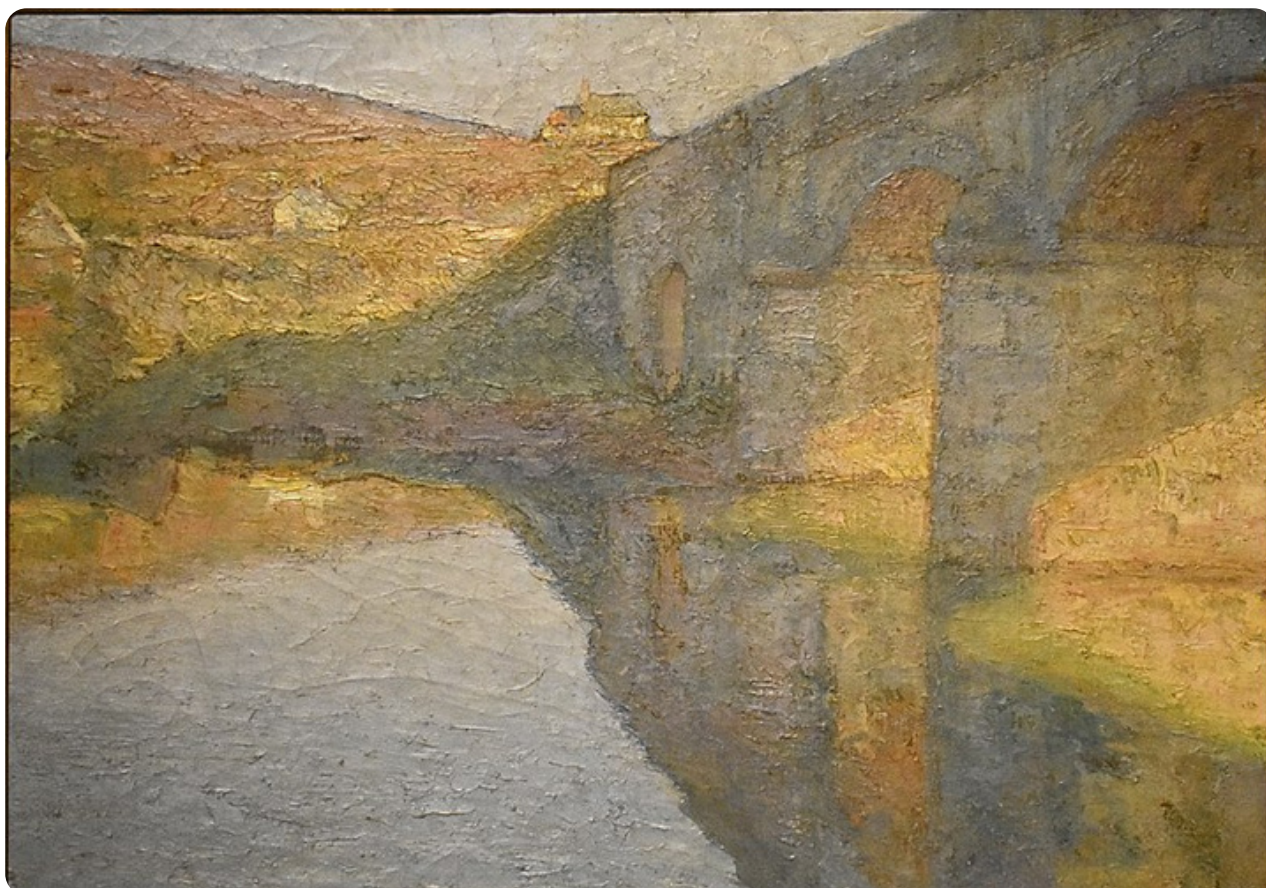
Slovenia



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Bridge on the Dobra (“Most čez Dobro”)

Matija Jama (1907)



From the motive of the bridge on the Dobra and the rhythm of light under the bridge arches, and their mirroring on the water surface, Jama built a complex image of morning light. Everything is painted with brief brush touches.

Story



Matija Jama, a Slovenian impressionist painter, was born in Ljubljana. He lived, studied and worked in Germany and the Netherlands, among other places. In 1897, he enrolled in Anton Ažbe's Art School in Munich (Germany). In 1902, he got married to the Dutch painter Luiza van Readers, who was also a painter. Jama lived and worked across Europe but when World War I broke out, Jama and Luiza bought a villa in The Hague, ran a guest house and sold their paintings. The painting is depicting the bridge on the Dobra River in Puškarić Selo (Croatia) and is exhibited at the National Gallery of Slovenia.



Links for more information:

Rtv Slovenija : Kólo. Pesem za Matijo Jamo

<https://365.rtv slo.si/arhiv/dokumentarni-filmi-in-oddaje-kulturno-umetniski-program/174346495>



The fish square (“Ribji Trg”)

Pavel Künl (1874)



This painting of an urban landscape under snow features one of the most typical views of Ljubljana.○

Story

Pavel Künl painted this image of Ljubljana in the winter of 1847. The image is featuring Ribji trg, (the Fish Square) on the right bank of the Ljubljanica river. This view of the town is still typical of Ljubljana, however, the fortress with the Renaissance tower had been pulled down 12 years before (1835) the painting was created. The reason was the regulation of the river's flow.

The image belongs to the earliest series of paintings featuring urban landscapes under snow. There are details of everyday life in the city, such as women doing their laundry and the frozen river.



Spain



Boats Arriving (“La Llegada de las barcas”)

Ricardo Verdugo Landi (1910-1920)



The traditional Málaga vessel (Jábega) that appears in Verdugo Landi’s painting, “Boats Arriving”, evokes poetic sentiments and truly illustrates the paradisiacal atmosphere of the “Costa del Sol”.

Story



The “Costa del Sol” (south west of Spain) has traditionally been regarded as a kind of paradise. Málaga is one of the oldest cities in Europe and its history begins with the Phoenician colonies. In fact, it became an important commercial centre in the Mediterranean during the 6th century BC.

The first traces of the Phoenician civilisation in the “Costa del Sol” predate Málaga. Vestiges of an abandoned city from the 4th century BC have been found next to Málaga. These remains show that floods caused by a tidal wave swept through the city and forced people to relocate.

Historians say that the Phoenicians understood tidal waves as a punishment from the gods for transgressing the symbolic barrier between land and sea. The impact of these tidal waves on the Phoenicians’ psyche is reflected in the form of religious temples dedicated to Melkart (later on Heracles or Hercules), a marine deity and the god of colonisation and the protection of sailors.

As relevant as these remains are, a living testimony of the Phoenicians' stay in Málaga is the "Jábegas", the traditional boat that appears in Verdugo Landi's painting. Its aesthetics scream "Mediterraneanness".



Links for more information:

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/la-llegada-de-las-barcas-ricardo-verdugo-landi/4AEkLABPVwBumQ?hl=es>



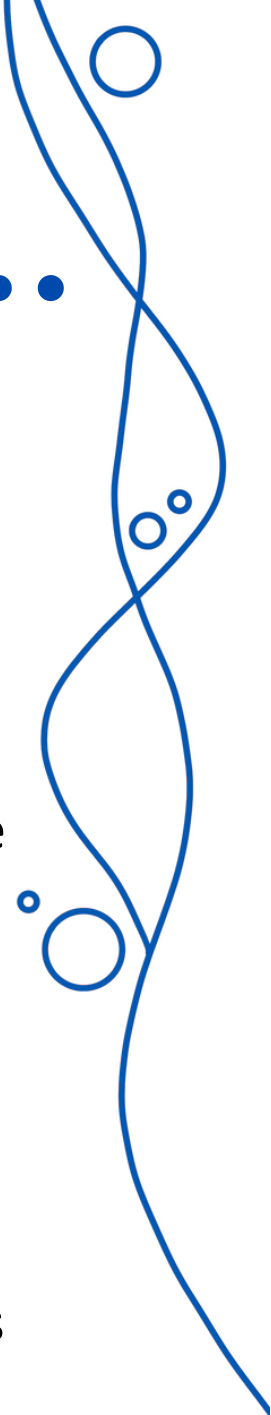
Into the water. Valencia's beach ("Al agua. Playa de Valencia")

Joaquín Sorolla Bastida (1908)



Sorolla's different ways of capturing light and its effects on water and on the anatomy of young people show the heritage of classical Greece in "Al agua. Playa de Valencia".

Story



The beaches of Valencia and its neighbourhoods are a recurrent subject in the Valencian arts scene of the 19th and early 20th centuries. For instance, Blasco Ibáñez's 1895 novel "Flor de Mayo", describes life in the "Cabanyal" neighbourhood that, at the time, was a maritime town full of huts that supplied fish to the city of Valencia.

Throughout the years, the Cabanyal experienced many changes. In the 18th century, a series of fires transformed the then village and many huts were replaced by small houses. That is why, in the 19th century, the Cabanyal became "the" place to acquire a second home. Consequently, many wealthy families came to spend their summers there. It was at this time that Sorolla painted "Into the Water".

Wherever water flows, life seems to spring up within and around it. Perhaps, that is why the Cabanyal neighbourhood (and its beach “Las Arenas”), despite its constant evolution, is still one of the cultural and touristic nerve centres of the city of Valencia. So much so that the “Guardian” included the neighbourhood among the 10 coolest in Europe (2020).



Links for more information:

<https://www.fundacionbancaja.es/obra/al-agua/>





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4 ELEMENTS in arts



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