



THIRST: project description

Abstract

THIRST is an audiovisual film installation depicting the Atlantic ocean during a fierce storm. The documentation of the visually and sonically expressive marine landscape was produced in the Faroe Islands as single-shot uncut registration of violent storm with a sound recoding. The audio-visual installation invites to enter the landscape of troubled waters, wind, rain and noise and to observe and listen to it from a distance, the action impossible in the natural circumstances when admiration is replaced with fear. The work is presented as a large-scale cinematic installation in a dark space. The back-projection screen is positioned at floor level for audience free to walk around to offer an experience similar to that of attending an ocean coast. The projection screen is reasonably large and accompanied with a sufficient sound amplification to match the sonic effect heard during a storm.

On the Observation of Flows

The observation and study of natural phenomena related to water has inspired numerous scholars and artists throughout history. In Western culture, one of the remarkable instances of such an attempt is documented in the notebook known as the *Codex Leicester*¹ of renowned Renaissance artist Leonardo Da Vinci. The codex contains

¹ The manuscript was acquired and published by Lord Leicester in Rome in the eighteenth century.

careful studies and sketches discussing various aspects related to water and flow: sedimentation and erosion in rivers, and how they produce meanders and so on. Philip Ball in his book „Nature’s Patterns. Flow”² concludes that *“Of all the passions that he evinced, none seems more ardent than the wish to understand water. One senses that he regards it as the central elemental force: „water is the driver of Nature”, he [Leonardo] says, „It is never at rest until it unites with the sea.. It is the expansion and humour of all vital bodies. Without it nothing retains its form.” [Ball, 2009]*



Fig. 1 Turbulence pattern, a sketch from *Codex Leicester* of Leonardo.

In his studies of flow-related phenomena Leonardo pursued a particular path of natural philosophy, profound enquiry into Nature, characterized chiefly by observation and contemplation of the complex movements of water vortices by sketching on paper, discovering patterns hidden from mundane view. *“This is why he had to sit and stare for hours: not to see things more sharply, but, as it were, to stop seeing, to transcend the limitations of his eyes.” [ibid]*

The method of learning of the world by way of observation tells something essential about the human nature and the way we relate ourselves to the world. Perhaps, this is best indicated by the feeling that an image or a magnificent landscape has a potential to convey an experience that excels the mere visuality of a scene. *“The desire to look through*

² Ball, Philip 2009. „Nature’s Patterns. Flow”, Oxford University Press, New York

nature and find its underlying forms and structures is what characterizes the approach” in Ball’s words. Then Leonardo’s *“studies of nature are an attempt to see what is really there beneath the surface of things, not what appears to be.”* [ibid]

Ball further notes that “On the whole the flows that Leonardo was studying were turbulent, fast-moving and unsteady in the extreme, so that they changed from one moment to the next. He observes: *„The whole mass of water, in its breadth, depth and height, is full of innumerable varieties of movements, as is shown on the surface of currents with a moderate degree of turbulence, in which one sees continually gurglings and eddies with various swirls formed by the more turbid water from the bottom as it rises to the surface.”* [ibid]

Another important aspect here is keen interest with the manifestations of forces of Nature and its elements; an affect that perhaps dates back to the time when the first of men was horrified by the rumblings of the first thunder. Among such occasions are natural disasters as volcano eruptions, tsunami waves, whirlwinds, and heavy storms that are at the same time terrifying and magnificent.

A classical work of literature that conveys a man’s fascination with devastating turmoil of the ocean is a story by American writer Edgar Allan Poe, “A Descent into the Maelström”³. The story recounts of a particular event that took place by the coast of Norway.

A fishermen’s vessel is drawn by an irresistible current towards the spiral of a gigantic whirlpool. A man manages to survive the vortex to bear witness of the experience of his escapade: *„Never shall I forget the sensations of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me.”* *„At first I was too much confused to observe anything accurately. The general burst of terrific grandeur was all that I beheld. [...] how foolish it was in me to think of so paltry a consideration as my own individual life, in view of so wonderful a manifestation of God's power. [...] I became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself. I positively felt a wish to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make”* [Poe, 1841]

Perhaps, one of the essential functions of art is that of framing the experience, providing a perspective to what is there, by amplifying it and placing within a context. As a legendary page of history of art informs us, heroic method of observing extreme meteorological effects at close quarters was practiced by William Turner, an English painter of the Romantic era.

“It is rumored that in Turner’s late career he requested to come aboard a sailboat when a storm was brewing. He wanted to observe the storm first hand, but it even went beyond that. Turner insisted that he

³ Poe, Edgar Allan 1841. “A Descent into the Maelström” first published in Graham's Magazine, New York

*be tied to the mast, and is quoted as saying: "I got the sailors to lash me to the mast to observe it; I was lashed for four hours, and I did not expect to escape, but I felt bound to record it, if I did", "Snow storm" gives us the sense of being in the eye of the storm, watching the sea swell and the sky turn black."*⁴



Fig. 2. Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth (1842) by J.M.W. Turner

Awe-inspiring natural phenomena like ocean storms are among the rare occasions when man can experience the immense forces of Nature. On those moments of encounter with such a dramatic yet magnificent events, most often we are urged by instinct to seek refuge from the harsh conditions. And it takes a daring philosopher to look in the eye of a storm and experience the terrific spectacle at the expense of extreme wind and rain in the face. Luckily, for the rest of us, there is art!

⁴ www.turnermuseum.org accessed on 25.11.2011.

Monument to the Ocean Storm: Production

“THIRST” is envisioned as a visual monument to the ocean during violent storm, a documentary that offers a singular view to dynamic landscape produced by agitation of large masses of water, never at rest, wind and rain. The inspiration for this idea came from a personal experience of a storm that would be impossible to tell otherwise than visually. In order to facilitate the transfer of the austere ocean landscape from the natural conditions to an indoor space, it is necessary to employ a mode of presentation as truthful as possible by technical means. In order to accomplish this task, the following strategy was devised. The filming was carried out during the period of winter storms in the Faroe Islands on the coast of the Atlantic ocean. The documentation of the visually and sonically expressive marine scene was produced as a single-shot unedited registration of a violent storm, with a live sound recoding. It was shot from a steady ground of the coast, so that the camera view coincides closely with a human perspective when standing on the firm rock of shore. In technical terms, the filming resulted with 4k material of cinema quality and duration of ca. 50 minutes.

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