

Nature's fragments

by Bart Spaan, 2000

Since our first meeting at my home in Amsterdam, in the spring of 1987, Alberto Reguera's work has changed in many ways. The figurative elements - very present in his paintings at the time - have gone. So have the references to painters like Paul Klee and Joan Miro. But his fascination for the many, subtle apparitions of light and colour remain.

Like a modern-day Claude Monet, Alberto worked this fascination into his masterpiece. Whether painting spreading plains, distant skies or mysterious seas, light is the most important thing. These representations never fail to surprise me. They seem to reflect nature itself, a manifestation of light like the subtle changes of colour at twilight. They are amazing, no matter how often you look at them.

Some of Alberto's paintings. Like the abstract images of the canals in Amsterdam, refer to an environment with which I am very familiar. But most of his works are abstractions of place, such as the paintings of Saint Malo or the Norwegian fjords, which I have only seen on a map. Unlike Alberto, who is a born traveller, I stay at home but thanks to his paintings I can take a look at the unknown. His views of faraway places gave me many ideas for my musical compositions.

I believe there are two "geographical" themes in Alberto Reguera's work. Some paintings emphasise colours like black, white, grey or blue. I tend to think of them as "North European" landscapes. Other works, on the contrary bring to mind a more "South European" atmosphere. In these Mediterranean works Alberto uses mainly red, yellow or orange.

These two themes may also be linked to certain human emotions, since Reguera's paintings may also be interpreted, it is often said, as "landscapes of the soul". His northern works show clear connotations of sadness and depression and while his light "southern" paintings are joyful and exuberant. In fact, his work is - fortunately - more subtle than these simplistic interpretations.

The constant tension between north and south, sometimes on the same canvas, often inspired me to seek musical translations. My electronic compositions "Silencios" and "Castilla" named after similarly titled paintings, are the clearest examples. These works are designed to be explicit representations of this division.

I will probably not be the last composer to be strongly inspired by visual impressions. I am by no means the first. Claude Debussy was in this, as in many other respects, a great pioneer. In 1903, Debussy once said that he thought nothing was more musical than the movement of water or the sunset. He believed a composer should study such phenomena with great care.

I never forgot this advice and neither did Alberto Reguera, though it was not intended for him as a painter.