

“Winter Landscape” by Kazimir Malevich

Kazimir Malevich (1879-1935). Winter Landscape. 1929. Oil on canvas. 36,8 x 34.5 cm. Signed “KM” lower left, lower right inscribed by artist “05r”.

After almost nine years of abandoning painting Kazimir Malevich finally returned to it around 1928. Father of Suprematism was then creating not abstract, but figurative compositions and together with a cycle of Post-Suprematist works, he had landscapes, painted outdoors, using Impressionists methods.

The outer motivation for creation of these works was artist’s preparation to his one-man show, dedicated to his 50th birthday and 30 years of his work. This jubilee exposition opened on November 1, 1929 in The State Tretyakov Gallery.

From the end of 1910s Malevich defined his path as “from Impressionism to Suprematism”, it was this formula that had been put in the name of his first one-man show, prepared in 1919 and opened in March 1920. His last life-time show of 1929 complied with this artist’s concept as well.

By the end of 1920 Malevich did not have many of his early Impressionist works, they were mainly some early sketches, and the most elaborated composition, “Portrait of Artist’s Family Member” (c.1906) had been left in Germany as a part of his Berlin show of 1927.

The necessity to document his Impressionist period with some paintings created the need to make new ones in 1928-1929, dated, although, by artist as though painted in his early years.

It is needed to say that this mystification was not that easy to comprehend, as Malevich did not want to fool someone, and even less than that would he suppose that it would later be judged as an evidence of a “slain Suprematist”, who returned to landscape painting after an absolute abstractionism of the “Black Square” and the other Suprematist compositions. The true development of Malevich as an artist happened in the first half of the 1900s through Impressionism, and he aimed to vividly illustrate this development at the final show through his works, that possessed mature features of this style.

Impressionist landscapes and other paintings he continued to make also after the show, backdating them with early 1900s.

The generator of primal ideas in art, Malevich was as well an original theoretician. He rightly considered, that the path of the European art, contemporary to him, that went from first experimental aspirations to the pure abstraction, required an analysis and reasoned explanations of the happened step-by-step movement. The processes, created it, apparently started in the art of the French Impressionists, who radically broke up with academic traditions.

Malevich renders the grounding of this process not only theoretically, but also practically, with a brush in his hand he reveals and demonstrates methods of creation of Impressionist paintings. Through perspective of time inevitably it became clear, that this had been one more of his innovative attainments, the

meaning of which became clear only decades after his death. Impressionists, Cézannists, Pointillists, Expressionists, Cubists, we could go on with this list, every time developed their own painting language, which had its rules, an approach to reality, its set of tools and tricks. The aim of the great Russian avant-gardist was to vividly show, how a painting language had formed and developed. The author of this paper already wrote that Malevich had three portraits of peredovik (best worker) of production in his oeuvre: “Holder of the Order of the Red Banner Zharnovsky”, each one of them was painted with three different languages, utilizing the same model: the language of painting of Van Gogh, Impressionist language, and that of Rembrandt (all three from 1932, in the collection of The Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg).

The late Impressionist painting of Malevich, dated by early years, were in real sense, the creation of a conceptual character, going ahead of its time. Theories of visual art as a language appeared in international artistic process only after The Second World War (the English group Art & Language, and the consecutive art of the classicist of conceptualism Joseph Kosuth, born in 1945, ten years after Malevich's death).

Although it wasn't just a wish to illustrate theoretical concepts that laid in the core of the nature painting of the great avant-gardist. Malevich was born a painter; recalling his early years, he wrote that he could not wait for a morning to come, to run painting his sketches. This frantic passion to the very process of working with paints on canvas stayed with him to the end of his creative days, interrupted by a heavy illness.

The life of Malevich in Soviet times, though in pre-soviet as well, was hard and poor; the artist had to support his large family – his old mother, wife and daughter. The need to earn money caused a hard work, although Malevich was able to fill it with creative process – he was maintaining a large research and pedagogical work; The mentioned above “Holder of the Order of the Red Banner Zharnovsky” was officially also a commissioned work.

Indulging in his passion of painting, the artist was able only in summer, during vacations and holidays. Already tied to bed, in 1934 he wrote a sore letter to his close friend painter I.V. Kliun, that because of his illness “the summer was gone”. Among his late Impressionism we see mainly summer landscapes, painted around Moscow suburb Nemchinovka. Some of the works were created in Kiev and during time of family vacations in Ukraine around Zhitomir.

The current landscape is unique, first of all because it depicts not typical summer, but a winter landscape. Malevich has several winter landscapes in his early Impressionist period – the March sketch and the “Church”, that were in the Costakis collection (now in Thessaloniki museum in Greece), as well as two Pointillist sketches in The Russian Museum. It is needed to say that they were created by a provincial painter from Kursk, almost self-taught one, which caused some features of dilettantism in them. On the contrast late Impressionist works were made by a mature artist Kazimir Malevich, who already had had a great path behind him. Among these late landscapes only two non-summer are known: one of them, depicting early Spring with some left-overs of snow, in French private collection (reproduced first time in A. Shatskikh “Kazimir Malevich”, Moscow, 1996, p. 6) and the second is the current “Winter Landscape”.

It was most probably painted in October 1929 around his beloved Nemchinovka. In October 1929 Malevich came to Moscow for the opening of his one-man show in the Tretyakov Gallery, which took place on November 1. He stayed in Nemchinovka, where his daughter from the second marriage Una was living with her grandmother (Una's mother, Sofia Mikhaylovna Raphailovich, died of tuberculosis in 1925). In daily "weather conditions", printed in "Vechernyaya Moskva" newsletter we find an interesting data. On Friday, October 17, 1929, there was the "first light snow", and the night from Saturday to Sunday temperature dropped to -7, and even to -11 in Moscow suburbs (Saturday was October 19). Monday, October 21, 1929, was indicated in the newspaper, temperature should hold close to zero with cloudy weather. These facts lead us to the conclusion that the early snow could stay for some time in Nemchinovka, that was comparatively far from Moscow, especially in forest areas. In his letter to Leningrad, from October 21, 1929, to his third wife, Natalia Andreevna Manchenko, Malevich wrote that "the weather is good, it is sunny".

On this landscape, we can see a sunny day with already fallen snow, but with trees still keeping leaves on them. It is worth mentioning that the lyrical landscape gave comparatively more opportunities for a demonstration of coloristic richness of the Impressionist language. Shadows of trees becoming blue on shining snow, transparent, but still colorful, in Autumn way, crowns of trees, in reality possessed that amazing frenzy of tints and colors, which were transfused by Malevich with an unprecedented mastery.

Despite the naturity of the motif and its impromptu lightness of painting, in the "Winter Landscape" there are features of a well-elaborated form, first of all because of a special rhythm of a well-thought composition with its verticals of tree trunks and diagonals of shadows. A special harmony is delivered with well-read proportions of a Golden section of the relations of the ground and sky, divided by the horizon line, well fixed by a long band of houses.

The texture rendering of this painting-sketch with its pastous relief brushstrokes, broken strokes, slid and forever frozen on birches trunks, with the most thin layers painted closely multicolored half fallen-off bushes and crowns, as much virtuosic, as its coloristic orchestration. The dynamics of brush movement is so vivid, that against our will we have a feeling of a painting being born in front of our eyes.

This painted sketch "Winter landscape" is in a perfect state of conservation and **impeccable provenance**. It was presented by the artist to the father of the owner, from whom it went into other private possession. Among its special features it is needed to indicate the original frame – Malevich loved to frame his paintings in real antique frames starting from the late 1920s, which can be seen, when looking at photographs of his Leningrad flat. Wooden frame was made in the epoch of Empire, as I suppose, its measure presupposed the size of the painting itself. At the same time we can't miss the fact that the "Winter landscape" has almost square format, to which Malevich, the creator of the Black Square was attached from his early years.

I would like to underline in conclusion that the “Winter landscape” because of the uniqueness of the subject should have a special place among artist’s Impressionist paintings and the creative legacy of Kazimir Malevich in general.

Aleksandra Shatskikh

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Doctor of art-history