

ON THE CREATION OF PAINTER OCTAVIAN SMIGELSCHI TOWARDS A REASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE

“I do not know if nature is beautiful or ugly, good or bad from a philosophical standpoint, for at all times it produces wonderful things, which attract your attention; beings whose life may be studied, this being, of course, a very interesting occupation.”²

Abstract: The article deals with some aspects of the landscape painting of Octavian Smigelschi (1866-1912), starting from the extensive study written by Iulia Mesea: *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern*. Our contribution consists in bringing some additional information about the genesis of the artist's works. I consider that correlated with image analysis, biographical information can provide a new dimension to Smigelschi's landscapes, which were created in two major temporal stages, the first lasting between 1886 and 1900 and the second from 1905 to 1906. I insist both on the message underlying the works and on identifying the Western European influences on the artist. I believe that some of these works are indebted to John Ruskin's theories, while others, with a documentary purpose, were achieved under the influence of the monographic studies that dominated the period and, especially, under the influence of Professor Stefan Gróh, yet others being echoes of Jugendstil.

Keywords: Smigelschi, landscape, painting, reassessment, turn of the century, Transylvania

The painter Octavian Smigelschi (1866-1912)³ was not a landscape artist. However, he created numerous works in this artistic genre. This article, which aims to reassess his contribution in this direction, starts from the study of Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern (Landscape Painters from Southern Transylvania between Tradition and Modernity)*⁴ and offers an

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² Octavian Smigelschi, “Autobiografia adresată Societății Transilvania din București,” in Horia Petru Predescu, *Calendar pentru popor al Asociațiunii, Sibiu, 1934*.

³ For the painter's biography, see Virgil Vătășianu, *Pictorul Octavian Smigelschi*, Sibiu: Ed. Krafft & Drotleff S.A., 1936; Virgil Vătășianu, *Octavian Smigelschi*, București: Ed. Meridiane, 1982; Coriolan Petranu, “Octavian Smigelschi, 30 de ani de la moartea pictorului,” in *Luceafărul*, year 2, no. 1, Sibiu: Tiparul Institutului de Arte Grafice “Dacia Traiană” S. A., 1943; Virgil Vătășianu, “Octavian Smigelschi o sută de ani de la naștere,” in *Arta Plastică*, no. 9, București, 1966; Nicolae Iorga, *Expoziția retrospectivă O. Smigelschi, exhibition catalogue*, Sibiu, 1963; Nicolae Sabău, “Octavian Smigelschi și pictura neobizantină” in *Îndrumătorul pastoral*, Alba-Iulia, V, 1981; Nicolae Sabău, *Le peintre Octavian Smigelschi entre tradition et modernité*, in Mircea Țoca, Cornel Crăciun (ed.), *Pagini de artă modernă și contemporană*, Oradea, 1996, pp. 70-77; Nicolae Sabău, Ioana Gruică-Savu, *Octavian Smigelschi în presă. Construirea imaginii publice a artistului*, vol. I, Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Mega, 2009.

⁴ Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern*, Bibliotheca Brukenthal collection, 53, Sibiu, 2011.

extensive analysis of the artist's landscape works, preserved in the collection of the Brukenthal National Museum,⁵ placing them in the context of Transylvanian painting from the late 19th century and the early 20th century. The purpose of this brief research is not to resume the above-mentioned analysis, but, starting from the complex study written by Iulia Mesea and from a few basic principles formulated by Virgil Vătășianu, to contribute with additional information about the artistic message behind the painter's landscape works. I believe that correlated with image analysis, the new data resulting from the analysis of the artist's documents and statements can reveal a new dimension of his works.

The analysis of these types of works involves a temporal, chronological classification, which overlaps the stylistic classification. His landscapes were achieved in two major temporal stages, the first lasting between 1886 and 1900 and the second between 1905 and 1906. This classification is determined both by the painter's approach to landscapes and by formal aspects of his works.

Landscape was among Smigelschi's concerns especially in the beginning of his career, his early achievements dating from the time of his studies at the School for Art Teachers in Budapest. During this period, the artist had modest financial resources and tried hard to pursue his training in the artistic field. Landscape was a less costly artistic genre, investment in materials was not so expensive, and the works in this category fit the taste of the Transylvanian public, being therefore more easily marketed.

The artist's earliest works date from the months of June-August of 1886 and they represent travel impressions, made in the villages around Sibiu. It should be noted that, at that time, Octavian Smigelschi was on summer holiday, as he was still a student of the School for Art Teachers in Budapest, which he graduated in 1889.⁶ It seems that the summer of 1886 was prolific, as he undertook a series of trips to Racovița, Călnic, Tălmăcel and Gârbova, which ended with a series of composition studies, pencil drawings⁷ of elements in nature, of urban and rural landscapes (Fig. 1-11). One may surmise that since these were his years of training, the artist wanted to improve his drawing technique and, at the same time, to practise working in nature, in order to apply what he had learned throughout the first years spent at the school in Budapest.

For this series of works, Smigelschi was not interested in using colour, but practised playing with lines and, as mentioned by the art historians referred to above, he sought to resolve the problems of spatiality and composition. He was concerned to capture atmospheric landscapes, while experiencing with the power of lines, of valorisation and shading. Can be appreciate his intention to work outdoors, without further interventions in the studio, this aspect drawing him close, in terms of the method of approach, to the modern *En-plein-air* conceptions of the Barbizon School,

⁵ Referred to as BNM in the text.

⁶ Virgil Vătășianu, *Pictorul Octavian Smigelschi...*, p. 6, Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern...*, p. 219.

⁷ Virgil Vătășianu, *Pictorul Octavian Smigelschi...*, p. 7.

in vogue at the time.⁸ However, I should note his curiosity, similar to that of botanical enthusiasts for discovering different types of plants, powerfully manifested by the detailed rendition of vegetal forms and the ecosystem to which they belonged. I suggest that the source of inspiration for this type of approach resided in the writings and watercolour works of the English art critic John Ruskin⁹ and in the landscapes achieved in the English artistic circles, during the second half of the 19th century. Ruskin's precepts related to drawing in nature led to a new generation of watercolour artists whom Ruskin urged to seek natural, easily accessible elements, rural areas where the ground was cracked, textured, river banks and tree roots and to use these in drawing and composition exercises.¹⁰ In *The Elements of Drawing & the Elements of Perspective*, Ruskin gave some recipes for beginner artists, as regards both the choice of the subjects they would represent and composition, design or colour application. Ruskin's work represented valuable teaching material, which I am convinced that Smigelschi took full advantage of during his years of study.¹¹

From this period, the work that stands out is *Tălmăcel Landscape* (Fig. 10), from the BNM collection, capturing the course of a small stream. The artist is interested in the structure of stones, carefully outlined in pencil, in contrast with the fragility of the flowers on the river bank. The same idea is also conveyed in the work *Fern* (Fig. 9), also from the BNM collection, where Smigelschi rendered each and every detail, or *Landscape* (Fig. 7). Virgil Vătășianu and Iulia Mesea remarked an evolution of drawing in the work entitled *Landscape* (Fig. 11), from the BNM collection, where the artist displays his compositional knowledge and concerns:

"... two rows of hills, among which there flows a winding rivulet. Details are lacking altogether and the whole interest is focused on the grouping of masses. Two strong lines, consisting of a row of bushes in the light and another one in the shade, start from the foreground to the left and to the right, opening energetically towards the background, in order to deepen our gaze at a valley in the midst of which the river outlines the wide curve, framed by hilly masses, rhythmically arranged and rhythmically illuminated."¹²

Another experiment, in which the artist exercised the power of line and shading, is the work representing a house in Tălmăcel (Fig. 6), but also the work entitled *Landscape* (Fig. 8), where Smigelschi chose to depict a water mill and in which he exploited all shapes, textures and rhythms offered by such a topic. A series of urban landscapes that capture the old town of Sibiu also date back from 1886: *Landscape* (Fig. 4) and *Sibiu landscape* (Fig. 3), as well as the sketch of a Gothic

⁸ Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern...*, p. 220.

⁹ Scott Wilcox, Christopher Newall, *Victorian Landscape Watercolours*, Yale Center for British Art, 1992, p. 29.

¹⁰ John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing & the Elements of Perspective*, London: J. M. Dent, 1907 (first ed. 1857), Scott Wilcox, Christopher Newall, *Victorian Landscape Watercolours...*, p. 34.

¹¹ We know from studying Smigelschi's correspondence with his good friend Valeriu Braniște that the artist was familiar with the writings of Ruskin. For more information, see Gheorghe Iancu, Valeria Căliman (ed.), *Valeriu Braniște corespondență*, vol. III, (1902-1910), București: Ed. Minerva, 1989, pp. 33-48.

¹² Virgil Vătășianu, *Pictorul Octavian Smigelschi...*, p.26.

portal, in which the artist was concerned to render the architectural details of the medieval edifice. Along the same lines, there is a sketch presenting the interior of Câlnic fortress (Fig. 1), called *Old house landscape*, as well as a study depicting the entrance into the fortification from Gârbova¹³ (Fig. 2). In this series of works, there is a visible interest for representing, in almost documentary manner, the Transylvanian monuments. We may assume that the artist expressed his interest in fortifications in keeping with the spirit of the time and that he followed, above all, the example of his professor Stefan Gróh.¹⁴ The professor had emphasised, on numerous occasions, as a member of the Historical Monuments Commission,¹⁵ the beauty and wealth of the cultural heritage that comprised the old medieval buildings from the Transylvanian villages and towns.¹⁶ However, we can say that the beginning of the 20th century was marked by major monographic and ethnographic studies, conducted by Hungarian specialists, on the cultural heritage of Transylvania, which was deemed to have preserved traditional values unaltered. I cannot fail to mention, in this context, the studies of Malonay Desző dedicated to the area of Trascău in Alba County,¹⁷ where the author drew in pencil, for documentary purposes, most of the buildings in the village. Along the same lines, note should be made of the watercolours of Huszka József (1854-1934), which immortalised the frescoes in the churches from Szeklerland, works dating from the medieval period.¹⁸

Among the most accomplished landscapes created during the first period of his work, Iulia Mesea identifies a work, dated 1888, which captures a rural landscape in the dead of winter,¹⁹ made at Banská Štiavnica (in German Schemnitz, in Hungarian Selmecebánya), a small town in Slovakia, where the artist worked as a drawing teacher for a short time. The work is characterised by geometrical drawing, by a sequence of short diagonals, by the firm outlines and the stark contrast between black and white

¹³ A locality in Alba County, situated 20 kilometres away from Sebeș.

¹⁴ Gróh Ștefan (István) (1867-1936) was a Hungarian artist, the student of Székely Bertalan and Lotz Károly, and renowned art critic and a professor of the Higher School of Industrial Arts in Budapest, whose director he was in the period 1917-1926. He carried out documentation work on the Hungarian national monuments as a member of the Historical Monuments Commission in Budapest and he published scholarly articles focused on promoting Hungarian decorative art. He was also involved in numerous campaigns for the restoration of old monuments. He distinguished himself through a number of studies, underlining the possibility of using traditional Hungarian decorative art as a source for classical art, his works having a strong symbolist profile. The artist was delegated by the National Commission for Historical Monuments to restore and document cycles of frescoes in Transylvania, his works being later exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, with the goal of popularising the Hungarian historical heritage. See Pirigyi István, *Gróh István. A Hajdúdorogi Egyházmegye Jubileumi Emlékkönyve*, Nyíregyháza, 1987; Zádor Anna, Genthon István (red.), *Művészeti Lexikon*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, II, 1967, p. 293.

¹⁵ Béla Zsolt Szakács, *Guide to Visual Resources of Medieval East-Central Europe*, Central European University, Dept. of Medieval Studies, Budapest, 2001, pp. 88-89.

¹⁶ Virgil Vătășianu, *Pictorul Octavian Smigelschi...*, p. 49.

¹⁷ Malonay Desző, *A magyar Nép Művészete*, Budapest, 1909.

¹⁸ See János Mihály, *Huszka József székelyföldi falképmásolatai: (katalógus)*, Sfântu Gheorghe: Charta Kiado, 2008.

¹⁹ Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern*, Bibliotheca Brukenthal collection, LIII, Sibiu, 2011, pp. 222-223.

that dominates the colour palette.²⁰ I believe that, beyond the accuracy of the drawing, the work demonstrates the artist's concern for the architectural details that individualised the buildings in this town. The townscape focuses on capturing a panorama at roof level, where the unique shape of the chimneys stands out, highlighting the specific architecture of the Slovakian town.

This concern for the architectural landscape of various town could be a consequence of the contact the Transylvanian artist had had with art theories circulating in Great Britain. *The Stones of Venice* had been published in 1851 by the art critic John Ruskin.²¹ Smigelschi mentioned it among his readings: a three-volume treatise, which documents the architecture of the town of Venice, with its buildings made in the Byzantine, Gothic and Renaissance styles. John Ruskin's theories had a great impact in the Hungarian cultural milieu, especially in the early 20th century, this ideology being followed by artists, especially by those who frequented the art colony from Gödöllő. In their case, there was also a special interest in undertaking pilgrimages in Transylvania, to recover the cultural heritage preserved in the villages there, the decorative motifs of peasant architecture, and to create a synthesis between the traditional and the modern.²²

Regarding the above-mentioned study, we believe that Smigelschi adopted Ruskin's theories. In his correspondence, he mentioned the necessity of knowing the art of drawing, which he considered a compulsory, albeit not sufficient prerequisite for creating works of art. Besides the technical aspects, he mentioned that an essential part was the concept behind the work, which had to reflect the artist's feelings about the subject represented, so that the work could acquire genuine artistic value.

A large number of works in the landscape genre were completed for the exhibition that Octavian Smigelschi organised in Sibiu in 1890, along with his colleagues Fritz Schullerus and Robert Wellmann. Most of the works dating from this period were made using the watercolour technique. Reviews related to this event were published in the magazines *Siebenbürgisch – Deutsches Tageblatt*²³ and *Familia*.

"... this time the exhibition surprised viewers through an entire series of landscapes in watercolour, which characterise very well his strengths, for his watercolours are so lovely and so brilliantly accomplished that they could be featured in the exhibitions of any world capital. The said journalist also says that in Mr. Smigelski there is hidden a part of Hildebrandt or Werner."²⁴

Less experienced in the new trends of modern art, the Transylvanian public received and was impressed by Smigelschi's accomplishments, even though they were in an experiment stage.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 222-223.

²¹ Smigelschi documented a version of John Ruskin's volume, translated into German.

²² Gellér Katalin, "Hungarian Art Nouveau and its English Sources," in *Hungarian Studies*, year 6, no. 2, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1990, pp. 155-165; Heather N. McMahon, *An Aspect of Nation Building: Constructing a Hungarian National Style in Architecture, 1890-1910*, mss. Central European University Nationalism Studies Program, Budapest, 2004, p. 50.

²³ "Kunstaussstellung," in *Siebenbürgisch – Deutsches Tageblatt*, 2-4 October, Sibiu, 1890.

²⁴ "Literatură și arte," in *Familia*, year 24, no. 40, 7-19 October, Oradea Mare, 1890.

Among these works, there stand out creations in which there is a fine observation of nature, in which the subjects are tree trunks, the artist probably using a recipe proposed by John Ruskin. The English art critic formed his own theory about the advantages of representing trees, which for him were the perfect didactic material and also a visual element of complex and infinite, inexhaustible variety, representing a challenge for the power of observation of any artist. According to Ruskin, trees offered a wide range of opportunities for exploiting various textures, shadows and curved lines, which compelled the artist to use all his technical skills. At the same time, Ruskin started from the theory that these natural elements should be treated like portraits. Following this principle, Smigelschi probably created work that represents a gnarled tree (Fig. 17), which is found in the BNM collection. I consider that he nonetheless went beyond Ruskin's principles, being also interested in the play of lights and shadows, the work being carried out in broad strokes, without rendering reality accurately. This draws it closer to *En-plein-air* painting.²⁵

It was also in this period, I believe, that the artist created a work he had originally drawn in pencil (Fig. 12), found in the collection of the Brukenthal National Museum, and that he subsequently transposed in watercolour and gouache, in a study found in the collection of the Art Museum in Cluj-Napoca (Fig. 13).²⁶ The winter landscape captures a village at the foot of a hill, and the composition is designed horizontally, along gently-sloping lines, suggesting the calm of a winter day, in which nature is numbed under the snow. In the version transposed into colour, the artist used browns to convey the volume of natural elements, which serve as the background for a number of houses, granting a horizontally structured balance to the work. The monotony is broken, here and there, by the introduction of strong vertical lines – the trees and the posts of a fence. The atmosphere obtained is rather oppressive, the only spots of light are accomplished through strokes depicting the snow, and the chromatic palette is quite austere. The landscape *Entrance to a mine*, now in the graphics collection of the National Gallery in Budapest (Fig. 14), conveys a similar idea.²⁷ This cycle of works includes *Village alley* (Fig. 15), but the composition is more complex in this case. The artist captures the village alley, with houses arranged on both sides of the road. In the background, there is introduced a human figure, which appears to be moving away and the foreground captures animals drinking from a trough. The work builds an atmosphere in which the artist does not forget any element defining life in the village: fences, with their specific shape, with beautifully decorated wooden gates, hills that vanish in the background. Clouds and the snow on the road are the stains of light that help complete the composition. Our gaze is led along the meandering line of the road, which provides the meaning of the scene.²⁸

²⁵ Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern...*, p. 220.

²⁶ Referred to as AM in the text.

²⁷ Matits Ferenc, "Megemlékezés Smigelschi Oktávról és néhány, Budapesten található művéről, in *A nyíregyházi Jóna András Múzeum évkönyve*, no. 41, 1999, pp. 447-458; Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern ...*, pp. 224.

²⁸ The work was quickly noticed at the exhibition in Sibiu, organised by Smigelschi in 1903. Leandru, the author of the review published in *Tribuna poporului* from Arad, describes the work: "The colours of the winter landscape (the fountain) and of the three bulls by the trough at the village end are perfect –

Images that create an atmosphere and that document village life appear in the works *The Orthodox church of Streiu* (Fig. 23), *Rural church* (Fig. 22), *Saxon church* (Fig. 21) and *Landscape* (Fig. 26), all of them housed by the collection of the Brukenthal National Museum. None of these works is signed or dated, but we may assume that they were made around the time of the exhibition in 1890. The work created at Streiu is one of the most interesting landscapes dating from this period. The composition is built vertically in order to capture the entire medieval structure of the fortified church, with a focus on the architectural details that particularise it. It is a work full of light, the artist rendering carefully the shadows reflected on the side façade of the church. I find this work interesting also because Smigelschi introduced a male character, wearing a hat and a cane, who is close the entrance. This character seems a townsman who is interested in visiting the monument, which reinforces our assumption, launched a few lines above, that Smigelschi envisaged and encouraged the documentation of buildings with heritage value in Transylvania. In the works *Rural church* (Fig. 22) and *Saxon church* (Fig. 21), both in the collection of the Brukenthal National Museum, Smigelschi actually captures the same church in two different seasons. Depicted from two different angles, the church is individualised and its architectural elements can be easily identified. The Transylvanian painter was attracted to this framework and, just by changing the viewpoint, he presented this corner of a Saxon village, its houses with a porch and a wooden fence, both in summer, when everything is green, and in winter, when snow covers the ground and the house rooftops. By juxtaposition, we can notice that the artist was concerned with the manner in which light changes the viewer's perception of a landscape. If in the summery landscape the artist insists on the layout of the spots of colour, on alternating shades of green, light tones and prevalent short strokes, alongside larger patches of colour, in the winter landscape the artist darkens the colours, the lack of light being emphasised, and the patches of colour acquire stronger contours. The artist chose to highlight the traces of snow by applying a dazzling white, contrasted with the dirty greys and browns used for the rest of the work. From this period also date works such as *Landscape* (Fig. 24), *Landscape* (Fig. 25), and *Landscape* (Fig. 27) from the Brukenthal Museum collection. These works in watercolour have decorative effects, achieved by applying colour patches on ample surfaces, while the natural elements are graphically rendered with thin lines.

It is also from this period that there are several works which we have not been able to consult, mentioned in Virgil Vătășianu's study of 1936, namely six watercolours from the Pulcheria Smigelschi collection, a work that belongs to Magdalena Slușanschi, which we think is found in the collection of the Art Museum, to which the artist's daughter made a substantial donation (Fig. 32), two works in the

what I admire most about these paintings is the perspective..." These lines merely confirm that such a rural landscape was designed to attract attention and promote the image of the Romanian village. Smigelschi's artistic discourse was well received and correctly perceived by his contemporaries. This is attested by the fact that this work was the only one pertaining to the category of easel paintings exhibited that received attention in the pages of the newspaper from Arad. See *Tribuna Poporului*, no. 190, Arad, 1903, Nicolae Sabău, Ioana Gruitǎ-Savu, *Octavian Smigelschi în presă...*, p. 112.

collections of Vasile Smigelschi's heirs, and other works in collections belonging to the families Horșia, Vasile, Goga, Coulin, Russu, Piso, Crăciunescu, Hannenheim, Michaelis, Sigerius, Dörschlag and Hossu.²⁹

The watercolours from this period were exhibited, together with monumental paintings, in exhibitions organised in Sibiu and in Budapest in 1903. The magazine *Unirea* rendered a passage from the Hungarian newspaper *Új idők*,³⁰ which discussed the artist's creation in the sphere of landscape:

"Also at Smigelschi I saw in the hall some smaller paintings, studies on nature; they are prepared with extraordinary connoisseurship; especially worthy of praise are his small watercolours which, with fewer means, reproduce perfectly the cool, misty air of autumn, the wetness of the trees and the overall feel of the region."³¹

Because the artist was not attracted to landscape, for a period of time it was absent from his preoccupations, but he returned to it in 1905-1906. These works were done in tempera, and the colour palette lost its richness during the period of watercolours, the images were duller, the surfaces were flatter and the shapes were designed across large, almost geometric and very dense areas. As a way of applying colour, these works no longer had the transparency sought and obtained through watercolours at the beginning of his creation. Smigelschi managed to impart a personal touch to these landscapes and convey dynamism to these compositions, which are very at the bottom and increasingly more rhythmic towards the horizon. This is the case of the works *Evening is falling* (Fig. 31), *Winter around Sibiu* (Fig. 29) or *Landscape* (Fig. 30), all in the Brukenthal collection. Most of the works that I have consulted are designed horizontally, and the artist seems concerned to create a state of tension through the presence of the clouds, depicted in different tonalities. The sky, which in Smigelschi's previous works was a uniform path of colour, a background, is now much more animated. At the same time, also as a result of his experience and contact with modern European art, adopting, from the compositional point of view, the presentation of the space nearby, Smigelschi narrowed the area dedicated to the sky, which basically became a strip of colour.³² Although modern influences can be detected at the compositional level, I cannot say the same about the colour palette. Smigelschi was not an experienced colourist and his works are rather characterised by the application of colours in solid, uniform masses, in thick layers and the games of transparency are extremely rare.

In his *Winter around Sibiu* (Fig. 29), one can notice a change in colours and strokes, which, in this case, are more vigorous, applied on the upper side of the composition, to emphasise the movement of the clouds. Apart from Iulia Mesea's considerations on composition and spatiality,³³ we can notice, on the right, a softening

²⁹ Virgil Vătășianu, *Pictorul Octavian Smigelschi...*, p. 25, n. 1.

³⁰ Hecceg Ferenc, "A törzsvendég emlékeiből," in *Új idők*, year 9, no. 52, Budapest, 20 December, 1903, pp. 576-577. The Hungarian magazine was one of the most important family dailies that were addressed to the middle class.

³¹ "Pictorul Smigelschi," in *Unirea*, year 13, no. 52, Blaj, 26 December, 1903, p. 509.

³² Aleksander Wojciechowski, *Arta peisajului*, București: Ed. Meridiane, 1974, pp. 68-69.

³³ Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern...*, p. 225.

of the contours and the lines, which are becoming increasingly blurred close to the horizon. In additions to this, given the arrangement of colours into irregular splotches and the overlapping colours, we see an interest in obtaining certain transparencies.

Iulia Mesea also points out the similarity between Smigelschi's work *Landscape* (Fig. 27) and Szinyei Merse Pál's compositions.³⁴ Starting from this reference, we found that in other works, such as in *Winter around Sibiu*, one can find a compositional similarity with the Hungarian artist's works *Creek* (1883-1894) and *Landscape with poppies* (1896), in which there is an accentuation of the curves through the layout of natural elements and through the use of similar characters.

This second stage was part of the new European trends. The artist no longer relied on a naturalistic rendition of reality, but rather sought to give his works a decorative character. There are many influences, in this sense, and they came primarily from the creation of his teacher in Budapest, Székely Bertalan,³⁵ who was, in turn, preoccupied with Jugendstil.³⁶ From this stage, a work that stands out is *Evening is falling* (*Autumn landscape*).

In the late 19th century and the early 20th century, European landscape was characterised by a multitude of tendencies that existed in parallel and developed very rapidly. First, one of the trends that made a career in the genre of landscape, Romanticism, dominated the 19th century. The melancholic spirit, drama and dreamy atmosphere continued to be reflected in the paintings until the end of the century, cohabiting with figurative-objective academicism, which was dominated by rigidity. Then came currents like Realism and Impressionism, which perceived nature as a spectacular subject, which no longer require human presence, landscapes being dominated by an obsession with colour, with light, rather than with shape. Also, as part of these currents, there appeared mood landscapes, conveyed emotionally and subjectively, and decorative landscapes, dominated by winding lines, as expressions of Jugendstil.

In Transylvania, the approach to this artistic genre was subordinated to the influences local artists received from Central European and, especially, Munich art, which arrived here via the Budapest and Vienna channels, gaining more moderate formulations, adapted to the provincial realities. Smigelschi's works from this second stage are no exception to the general rule, as they are more moderate versions of the types of landscape practised in Central Europe.

His first landscape works pursued the idea of composition and rhythm, by alternating dark and light areas, and for this stage, especially for his studies of trees and plants, we may find correspondences in John Ruskin's works *Stone pines* (1848) or *Rocks and Ferns in a Wood at Crossmount* (1847).

Another category of works are the landscapes depicting the world of the Romanian village, which are characterised by the specific atmosphere of Transylvania. It is undisputed that at the end of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, there emerged the landscape genre known as national landscape, reflected

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 220.

³⁵ Zsuzsanna Bakó, *Székely Bertalan (1835–1910)*, Budapest: Kep. Kiadó, 1982

³⁶ Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern...*, p. 223.

both in art and in literature, throughout Central-Eastern Europe.³⁷ National landscape was invested with specific, easily recognisable elements from nature or architecture, which were found only in a particular area. In these works, the artist captured landforms that were representative for the villages around Sibiu, especially hills, water sources or architectural elements, among which we should mention the village house and church rooftops, the Transylvanian village with its alleys, fountains with watering troughs for the cattle, and fences made of wooden posts. They are quite static, almost monographic studies of such places, but they also attempt to convey the atmosphere, the spirit of the place. Part of Smigelschi's landscapes are a reflection of the experience that the artist had assimilated both through his studies at the School of Drawing in Budapest, alongside his professor Székely Bertalan, who had also been concerned with the new trends emerging in art in the early 20th century, and through direct contact with the school of Hungarian art, through its representatives Pál Szinyei Merse (1845-1920) and Károly Ferenczy (1862-1917). The works from the period between 1905 and 1906 are characterised by more compact, massive shapes, rhythmically structured by the play of curves, conferring them a decorative feature, the artist's attention being focused especially on problems of composition and rhythm. Iulia Mesea identifies an a-perspectival conception specific to Jugendstil.³⁸ Smigelschi also made a series of works in pastel, gouache or tempera, under the influence of *En-plein-air* painting. Similar examples can be found in the works of his colleagues from Sibiu, but also in Hungary,³⁹ Poland⁴⁰ and in other parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, all having as a starting point influence of the Munich artistic environment, or of the French school, which also arrived here along German channels. In these works, the artist used the technique of short strokes, spots of colour, searches of light, bright colours and contrasts.⁴¹

His contemporaries accurately sensed the manner in which the artist conceived his landscapes. In a posthumous issue of the magazine *Pesti Hírlap* dating from 1913, it was stated about the creation of the painter that "His landscapes are characterised by a drawing that resembles a graphic creation..."⁴² George Oprescu claimed, in 1944, in a study dedicated to the artist, that Smigelschi "will also try creating landscapes – drawings taken before who knows which corner of nature, directly, honestly, showing that he is not inferior to his confreres around the rest of the country..."⁴³

³⁷ Anne-Marie Thiesse, *La création des identités nationales*, Paris: Ed. Du Seuil, 1999, p. 187.

³⁸ Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern...*, p. 225.

³⁹ Sármany-Parsons Ilona, "Nagybánya festészete. A Monarchia Művészeti kontextusában," in *Ars Hungarica*, year 28, no. 2, Budapest, 2000, pp. 321-356, Sármany-Parsons Ilona, *Constructing the Canon of Hungarian Modern Painting, 1890-1918...*, pp. 225, 227-229.

⁴⁰ Anna Bryski Long, "To Signify a Nation: The Problem of Polish Fin de Siècle Landscape Painting," in *Chicago Art Journal*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1996, pp. 27-39.

⁴¹ Iulia Mesea, *Peisagiști din sudul Transilvaniei între tradițional și modern...*, p. 220.

⁴² Kézdi, "Négy halott művész," in *Pesti Hírlap*, year 35, Budapest, 20 October, 1913, p. 7.

⁴³ George Oprescu, "Octavian Smigelschi, desenator," in *Transilvania*, year 75, no. 10-12, Sibiu, October-November, 1944, p. 817.

We do not believe that landscape was a priority for the artist, nor do we believe that he felt drawn to this artistic genre. Smigelschi was not an artist of colours and he was not interested in impressionism, a dimension that remained an unexplored terrain for him. His curiosity was rather for the rhythms of composition, for balance and lines, drawing representing his strength and not colour. We consider, however, that his landscapes round off his creation and reveal his theoretical concerns, as well as the manner in which he selected his sources of inspiration, which helps us to understand more clearly the message behind his works.

ILUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. Old house landscape, pencil on paper, dated 19/ VIII 1886, signed lower left Kelling (Călnic), inv. no. XI 241, BNM coll.



Fig. 2. The Gate of Gârbova Fortress, pencil on paper, dated 17/X 1886, lower left Smigelschi, inv. no. XI 203, BNM coll.



Fig. 3. Study, Sibiu, pencil on paper, dated 10/VIII 1886, signed lower right Smigelschi, inv. no. XI 160, BNM coll.



Fig. 4. Landscape, Sibiu, pencil on paper, dated 1/VIII 1886, signed lower right Smigelschi, inv. no. XI 188, BNM coll.



Fig. 5. Study portal of the church in Sibiu, pencil on paper, dated 1886, signed lower right Smigelschi, inv. no. XI 235, BNM coll.



Fig. 6. Tălmăcel lanscape, pencil/chalk on paper, 48x101, dated 26/VI 1886, signed lower right Smigelschi, inv. no. XI 187, BNM coll.



Fig. 7. Tălmăcel lanscape, pencil on paper, dated 6/VIII 1886, unsigned, inv. no. 67, BNM coll.



Fig. 8. Landscape, pencil on paper, dated 29/VI 1886, unsigned, inv. no. XI 196, BNM coll.



Fig. 9. Fern, Tălmăcel, pencil on paper, dated 24/VII 1886, unsigned, inv. no. 182, BNM coll.



Fig. 10. Tălmăcel landscape, pencil on paper, dated 24/VII 1886, unsigned, inv. no. XI 230, BNM coll.



Fig. 11. Landscape near Tâlmăcel, pencil on paper, 17x24, dated 30/VI. 86, signed lower right Smigelschi, inv. no. XI 227, BNM coll.



Fig. 12. Landscape, pencil on paper, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. XI 190, BNM coll.



Fig. 13. Winter landscape, watercolour, gouache on cardboard, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. 10193, AM coll.

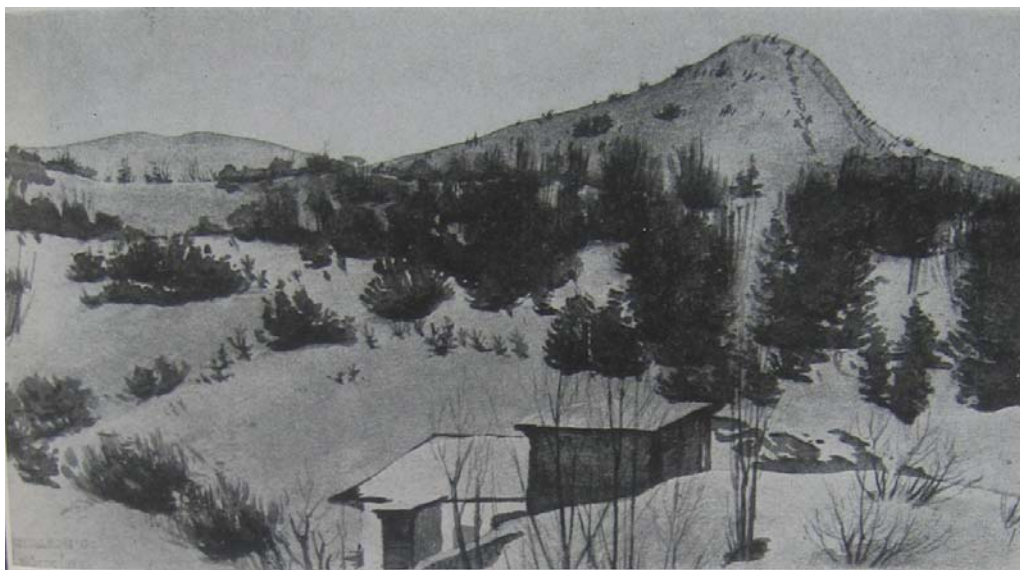


Fig. 14. Entrance to a mine, *apud*. V. Vătășianu, *Pictorul Octavian Smigelschi*, Ed. Meridiane, 1982, img. 29.



Fig. 15. Village alley, watercolour on paper, 29x25,7, not dated, signed lower right Smigelschi, inv. no. XI 943, BNM coll.



Fig. 16. Village well, watercolour on paper, 45x32, not dated, unsigned, coll. of Eng. Octavian Smigelschi, Bucharest.



Fig. 17. Tree study, watercolour on paper, 18,2x12,2, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. XI 218, BNM coll.



Fig. 18. Glade, watercolour on paper, not dated, signed lower right Smigelschi, inv. no. XI 944, BNM coll.



Fig. 19. Landscape at Schemnitz, watercolour on paper, 34 x 17 cm, unsigned, not dated, family coll. *apud* C. Chituță, Octavian Smigelschi, album, p. 84.



Fig. 20. Landscape with birches, tempera and crayon on paper, 41,5 x 48, not dated, unsigned, coll. of Mario Smigelschi, Bucharest.



Fig. 21. Saxon church, watercolour on paper, 38x27, not dated, signed lower right in black Smigelschi, inv. no. 113, BNM coll.



Fig. 22. Rural church, watercolour on paper, not dated, signed lower in black Smigelschi, inv. no. XI 942, BNM coll.



Fig. 23. The church of Streiu, watercolour on paper, 34x26, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. XI 225, BNM coll.



Fig. 24. Landscape, watercolour on cardboard, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. XI 151, BNM coll.



Fig. 25. Landscape, watercolour on cardboard, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. XI 121, BNM coll.



Fig. 26. Landscape, watercolour on cardboard, unsigned, not dated, inv. no. XI 114, BNM coll.



Fig. 27. Landscape, watercolour on cardboard, 42,5x48, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. XI 100, BNM coll.



Fig. 28. Landscape, watercolour on cardboard, 25,5x19, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. 130, BNM coll.



Fig. 29. Winter around Sibiu, tempera on cardboard, 54x108, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. 1678, BNM coll.



Fig. 30. Landscape, tempera on cardboard, 47,7x101,5, 1905, unsigned, inv. no. 1594, BNM coll.



Fig. 31. Evening is falling (Autumn landscape), tempera on cardboard, 56x108, 1905, unsigned, inv. no. 1668, BNM coll.



Fig. 32. Autumn landscape, watercolour on paper, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. 10195, AM coll.



Fig. 33. Landscape at Tălmăcel, tempera on cardboard 33 x 48,5 cm, unsigned/not dated, coll. of the Smigelschi family.



Fig. 34. Landscape, watercolour, gouache on paper, not dated, unsigned, inv. no. 2071, BNM coll.