

## 5 What is painted in “La Tempesta”?

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“La Tempesta” is a lyric narrative painting using the synthetic screen technique that depicts as human’s mutual affection and feeling of anxiety to a crisis or calamity that is symbolized by lightning.

The lightning in the painting represents a lyric narrative of two people’s mind connection.

So, “La Tempesta” should never be considered as the “first landscape” painting in art history, as it is often said.



fig.1

“La Tempesta” 1506-08, Giorgione, Accademia Gallery, Venice

“La Tempesta” is a very famous painting that was painted around 1506-08 in high Renaissance period by Giorgione.

We can see it in the Academia Museum at Venice in Italy.

The first impression we have is its small size against the prejudice. The size is only about 83centimeter height and 73 centimeter width.

The painting was commissioned to Giorgione by the Venetian noble named Gabriele Vendramin.

The content of “La Tempesta” is not clear, but this painting has the appeal to attract ones mind.

There are few documents, so we must analogize the meaning of what is painted in it.

Let’s look carefully at the fine details.

The first eye-catching detail is the standing man and the mother and child.

Is the man Adam? A soldier? A farmer? A servant? A gypsy? Or an aristocracy ?

What is the feature of the clothes? The impression of the clothes is noble, so he may not be a gypsy.

A servant in “Adoration of the Magi”1459-60 by Benozzo Gozzol is wearing tights in red and white color.



fig.2

“The Worship of Biblical Magi”1459-60 Benozzo Gozzoli  
Medici Riccardi palace, Florence

The clothes of the man is very fashionable, so he may not be a farmer.

An aristocracy is a possibility, because the painting was ordered from the aristocracy of Venice.

The theory that Giorgione painted himself may be denied, because the painting was ordered from an aristocracy and not a private painting.

What tool is the man holding? Is that a weapon? Is that a farm-tool? Is that a cane? Is that a flagpole? or is that another tool?

The man does not look like a farmer, so the tool is not for farming.

The tool looks like a spear, but there’s no spearhead on top of the pole.

The weapon that soldier have in “the Battle of San Romano” (1456) painted by Paolo Uccello is very large and long woody weapon.

The woody pole the man has is conversely very small and short, so the pole may not be a weapon.

The pole may be a staff, but another possibility that it’s like a flagpole remains.

A soldier will wear the armor, but before the time of fight, he may not be wearing it.



Fig.3

“The Battle of San Romano”1435-60 Paolo Uccello Louvre Museum Paris

Next painting is “The Castelfranco Altarpiece” painted by Giorgione..

Look the spear which is twice as long than in the “La Tempesta” painting.

So, the spear in “La Tempesta” may be a broken spear.

If a broken stone pillar means death, a broken spear will mean death too.



fig.4

“The Castelfranco Altarpiece” 1505-06 Giorgione  
San liberare Cathedral Castelfranco Venet Italy

Thus, the possibility of a soldier and an aristocracy remains.

But, why is the man looking up the sky, when the woman and baby are near him. Is there a reason that he did not notice them or is he indifferent to them?

The man’s height is unbalance compared with of the woman.

This point of view is also very important to solve the meaning of the painting.



fig.5

“The portrait of Veronica Franco” 1575 Titian

Next, we look at the woman breastfeeding a child.

Is she Eve in the Old Testament? Is she the man’s wife? Or is she a prostitute? Or is she an icon of anything?

A prostitute on those days may be painted with the one side of breast shown like Veronica Franco. ( fig.5 )

So, the lady is not prostitute.

The most “artificial” point of the mother and child is that the child is not on mother’s leg.

But, why is the woman naked? Is the scene after bathing?

The white clothes over the shoulder and under the hip of the woman are bath towels? Or are they some religious symbol like virgin?

Are they truly sitting down in outdoors as they seem to be?

Is she a visual icon of heavenly love or heavenly people?



fig.6

“ Our Lady of Pomegranate” 1487 Botticelli Uffizi Florence

In conclusion, Giorgione configured the lady and a child as not our Holy mother and Child Jesus.

The expression that the figure of the lady is covered by bush means that the painting is not the portrait of the lady.

Adam and Evu expelled from Garden of Eden may feel a sense shame by the reason that they both have Original sin.

So, we can't understand the expression that Eva is naked but Adam is wearing clothes.

Are they cooling on the nature field? But why are they nude ?

Of course, they are not nudist.

A poor Romania would wear something, may be.

Now, I can present you a hint to solve the mystery woman that Giorgione painted in “La Tempesta”- She is the icon of heavenly people.

Titian painted the work “The Sacred and Profane Love” at Venice on 1514. (See the fig.7)



fig.7

“The Sacred and Profane Love” 1514 Titian Borghese Gallery, Rome

It is said that the nude woman symbolized the heavenly love and the costumed woman symbolized the profane love.

If this interpretation is acceptable, the woman in “La Tempesta” would also be the same symbol of heavenly love and heavenly people.

And, the man in “La Tempesta” would be dead and being in the heaven as same as the woman who is expressed with the icon of the heavenly love and heavenly people.

Titian was a Giorgione’s disciple. The two works were painted not so far apart from each other. The two works have the commonality that does not paint the pure realistic scene, but the conceptual scene of human’s mentality.

Let’s return to the whole contents from the viewpoint of Giorgione’s painting method.

Usually, on the case of perspective method, the close view is painted clearly.

But, the darkish front river and the empty lot on the right part of the man are not clear and not self-explanatory.

Especially, the boundary between the man’s standing ground and the darkish river stands out unnaturally.

That means Giorgione didn't paint it as how the other would’ve

conventionally done it.

In other words, he painted the close view in an unorthodox manner. And he also blurred some parts on purpose.

This fact means that Giorgione didn't have the intention to paint realistically as he normally did.

Furthermore, the new evidence related to its fact is that Giorgione painted the woman's size about 1.2 times larger than the man. ( Compare the blue and yellow line in figure 9.)

I can't believe that Giorgione didn't notice the contradiction of the scale ratio. I think he purposely painted the two persons on the different scale ratio.

Next viewpoint is the difference of the expression of the two persons' face. The man's face is painted unclearly but the woman's is painted clearly.

If the two persons existed on the same space, the expression of the two persons' face would have the same clarity.

The expression of the man's face painted by Giorgione is a little blurry, against the expression of the woman's face.

I can give you a hint to solve the above mystery. The work's title is "The Four Philosophers" painted by Baroque's painter whose name is Rubens.( See the fig.8 )

We can easily notice that there is one man amongst the four who is painted in a different way. He is "Lipsius"-a philosopher who already had died in 1606 before this painting was finished on 1611-12.





“The Fore People of Philosophers “ 1611-12 Rubens Palatina Museum  
 \* The Four Philosophers are in the yellow circle line.

Rubens painted the other two men vividly (except the outmost left which is Rubens)-to project an idea that the two others (except Rubens) are alive and Lipsius is not-that he is in fact just a spirit mingling with living people. (See the fig.5)

If we are going to follow this theory then the blurry and dark tone man of “La Tempesta” painted by Giorgione has already died. (See the fig.1)

And the expression is to specifically distinguished the alive mother and baby from the departed man.

These two facts also prove to us that the man and the mother and baby doesn't exist on the same space-they exist in a different space from each other.

The man who looks up in the looming storm in the sky longs for his hometown, and the woman who yearns for her husband is hearing the same sound of the lightning from the distant land.

The three elements of the man and the hometown and the mother and child, related with the tempest is synthesized and composed on purpose by Giorgione.

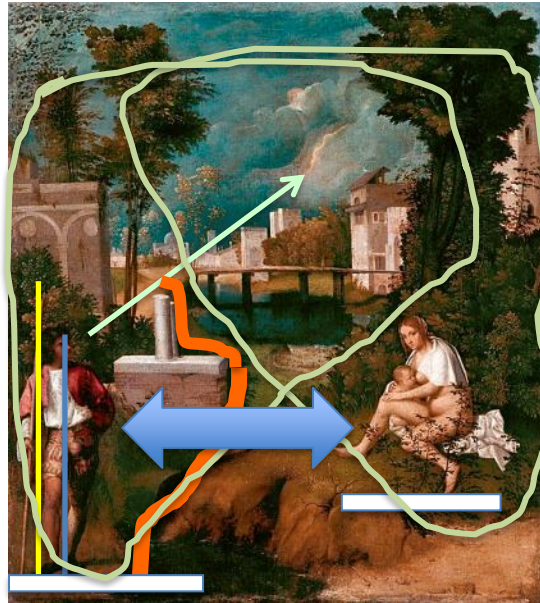


fig.9

- \*The white line means the existing position.
- \*The blue line means man's painted height.
- \*The yellow line means man's assumed height that is well balanced to the woman.
- \*The orange line means the space dividing line.
- \*The pale blue line means man's line of sight.
- \*The two pale green circles mean the component parts of the scene
- \*The both side arrow means that the two entity (the man and the woman with baby) doesn't exist on the same space as it made to appear in the painting.

So, I would like to name it as **“the synthetic screen technique”**.

This painting is also a lyric narrative painting.

I can imagine this painting on the man's perspective.

The man standing on this land symbolized death from the two broken pillar stone, while looking up the sky, increases anxiety for his families safety as he hears the sound of the lightning over the hometown.

On the other hand, the lyric narrative from his wives perspective may be like this.

The wife who is now in heavens people's sitting down with her baby, she hears the sound of the lightning and is anxious about her husband who had been in a far place to fight.

Usually, the mother would smile at her baby in the religious paintings, but she looks dark and hard in this painting.

In conclusion, this painting is a lyric narrative painting that is painted as human's mutual affection and anxiety to a crisis or calamity that is symbolized as a lightning.

In short, the theme of this painting is human's affection and anxiety.

I believe Giorgione is also a genius painter, because he painted a lyric narrative painting which features universal human psychology theme against the religious painting that was in heyday at that time.

This painting is perfectly suitable as the prerequisite of what Leonard da Vinci defined as an excellent painter's work.

He said in his manuscripts that an excellent painter would paint

both the target's outline and inner of it.

They had met at Venice before “La Tempesta” was painted by Giorgione.

In other words, the possibility that Giorgione was influenced by Leonard's theory and may have succeeded in the painting of “La Tempesta”.

In addition, the screen composed technique to three parts that is the man, the lightning-shining sky and mother and child is wonderful. (See the fig.9)

In other words, the two screens far from each other are composed in the relay of the lightning-shining sky by marvelous technique of Giorgione. (See the fig.9)

By the way, why the customer of this painting who is a Venice noble named Gabriele Vendramin commissioned Giorgione?

In those days, a noble occasionally commissioned a painting as a gift for another noble or a making of family memories.

For example, Botticelli's “Primavera” (fig.10) and Tizano's “Amor sacro e Amore profane” (fig.11) was a gift and Giorgione's “the Csstel Franco Cathedral picture “ (fig.12) was a family memories.



fig.10



fig.11



fig.12

“Primavera” “Amor sacro e Amore profane” “the Csstel Franco Cathedral picture”

1482

1515

1505

I guess the reason is that the family in the painting had been dead already by that time when this painting was ordered to

Giorgione.

The Venice noble Gabriele Vendramin and the man's family in the painting could be family related.

The Gabriele's family would make memories of the man's families loving personality in "La Tempesta" by Giorgione.

The reason why the expression of man's face is blurry and why his wife was expressed as heavenly people is that they are already dead and Giorgione hadn't met them yet.

So, "La Tempesta" would not be the initial landscape painting in art history.

Please compare the next painting (fig.13) with "La Tempesta".

We usually conclude this painting as the allegory of the three stage of life and no one would think it is a simply landscape painting.



fig.13

"The allegory of the three stage of life" 1520-25 Dosso Dossi

Metropolitan Museum New York

\*If "La Tempesta" were a landscape-painting, "The allegory of the three stage of life" would also be judged a landscape-painting.

Giorgione who painted "La Tempesta" as advanced, universal theme "the mutual affection and anxiety in family" which is composed a symbolical lyric narrative painting using the

synthetic screen technique must be a genius Renaissance painter.

Because, the time Giorgione lived was in the heyday of religious or mythological paintings.

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While superfluous, I remember a famous Baroque painter Caravaggio who used a nearly synthetic screen technique in his work- “the Calling of Saint Matthew”, “the Martyrdom of Saint Ursula” or “the Revival of Lazarus”.

But I have no document to indicate that Caravaggio met “La Tempesta” at Venice on his days in Milan before moving to Rome. (See my study report: St. Matthew with glasses on : 2013)