

# Critic Review on Nelus Oana

The prospect of this small opening speech contains a reference that could possibly cause some confusion. It says "From European view." Is not this specification unstable? Can Australia not be considered a continuation or extension of Europe? Shortly after James Cook at the end of the 18th century reached Australian shores, the 5th continent became like Great Britain's Siberia: Anyone that you wanted to get rid of they would be shipped off to the convict colony of Australia. A distinguished translation of "Down under" would sound like "ans Ende der Welt." (in German). Australia soon became the land of the immigrants but unlike the USA, in Australia only the whites reserved the right to establish themselves. The root of Australia was British but with time also came immigrants from other countries that undertook the long journey to the southern half of the globe. Not long after the 2nd world war, the grip the United Kingdom had on Australia had loosened and the country's focus was now directed to nationalism.

"Down under" is now considered somewhat of a quality seal. One is proud to come from "down under." The basis of this pride is European. Although the US currently has a strong influence on this country and for that matter so to the ever increasing number of immigrants from Asia, the basis of Australia's identity grows as the heir of Europe. This also counts for art.

Generations from Australia have studied in the United States and in Europe and when there was no occasion to gain knowledge about a specific place or spot, one had to rely on catalogues or postcards as illustrative material. Long before the slogan of globalization came into circulation, it was well known in Australia what was happening to the so called "Big art world." Approximately half a century ago, the majority of the "Big art world" existed just in Europe. Today the "Big" became the "old" world. Europe now days do not play the major role of developing the art and culture of Australia. But at the same time, contacts like Nelus Oana will always be strengthened and refreshed. In 1989 he left his home lane which lies in Europe.

Why then should we try to seek a difference between Australian and European views? For an artist like Nelus Oana the answers lie in the paintings. The time of his travel gives us the first clear clue to these answers. It was at the end of November when Oana took up his journey to Australia. We associate November with wet cold sadness and black darkness. But in Australia some things are just "upside down." Christmas, New Year's Eve both fall into the hottest season, so at the end of November on the southwest coast of the continent, the best surf and swimming weather awaits you.

As Nelus Oana arrived in Melbourne, it had poured for days and for all that he could have said as Shakespeare's Richard III said "Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer." Meaning "...the winter of our discontent..." refers to the time Romania was

under a total dominating communistic system. The "...glorious summer." Refers to the freedom, the fortune of being able to follow your own artistic preferences without restrictions. Oana had uncompromisingly given up his job as a dentist.

Already as a young boy he had an artistic mind. During his studies in Klausenburg (Cluj), he came into contact with Vesile Pop, one of the most well known contemporary artist in Romania. Pop had encouraged Oana and had in some regard "opened his eyes." The importance of Oana's development to Vesile Pop can be measured in that he had taken it upon himself to make the journey from Cluj, to be able to take part in the unveiling of his former student's artwork. First signs of success were already evident during his time in Romania where his artworks were repeatedly exhibited in single and group displays. Australia proved to be the real turning point in his life, and if you let yourself be infused by his paintings, they speak to you about the moment a big weight is lifted off your shoulders.

And finally he was able to fulfil his hearts desire. The refreshingly direct and natural style of his paintings reminds one of the moment in which it was made possible to set your own generous intentions free. Oana's brush strokes are bold, determined and spirited. The colors he uses in his paintings shine glow and light up in an orange red intensity. An amazing energy is made visible. The paintings are passionately and artistically spirited. Associating his paintings with the romantic period in history, one could say: Here lies an inner burning fire, and it can be assumed, that it is fueled by the longing and willpower of Nelus Oana-who against all odds and uncertainties, set foot onto his new home land 15 years ago.

Looking "From European view" onto these paintings, some things seem familiar to you. Flowers, groups of trees, open fields- these are familiar motives from middle Europe.

Even the stylish means that Oana uses awaken the rich store of knowledge of modern Europe. For example; When Oana paints a still life portrait of a tulip using simple, distinct color surface that results in a multi moulded unity; its some what reminds us of art displays by Henri Matisse.

The Mediterranean ease (Leggerezza) and clarity, are the trademarks of the French Master. Oana follows this calm relationship between form and color in some of his flower paintings. Another example is the sunflowers. A motive that Oana often uses and that is also a result of closer relationship with Europe's modern art history is the sunflower. Sunflowers relates to van Gogh as does Mona Lisa to Leonardo da Vinci or like the Isenheimer Alta to Matthias Grünewald. Also like a signature or a logo. Oana purposely makes his connection with van Gogh, as is evident in his paintings, as his role model. Similar to the restless pilgrimage of the Deutchman, Oana often uses rough pastel like colors, like in his earlier paintings such as "Explosion of light in the woods" or "My Red Trees." Now and then he creates a 3 dimensional surface, instead of the traditional classical panel paintings. The consequence of one's perception not being able to glide

over the level surface anymore, is that it is now captured by the elevations and deep valley's protruding out of the paintings. These protrusions also affect one's color impressions. Where the color is smoothly spread, there is a perception of unity, but ridges are formed the colors may be overshadowed depending on the light source.

The colors appear to be darker in these ridges than in places where the paint is evenly spread. This kind of moulded painting brings out the so called "pulses" of these pictures. Oana accelerates the "pulse," by scratching the fresh paint to

form grass bushes and leaf shapes. This causes a small disturbance, nervousness or movement throughout the contents of the paintings. When the light shines front on, a different color scheme is created, than if light was directed from the side at an angle. Therefore it is impossible to view all of Nelus Oana's paintings through the same perspective. Through the movement of the surface structure, his paintings become variable; the angle of the light alone can make the blue, the yellow, the green stronger or weaker. In other words, Oana has achieved a moment of multiply meaning. The color structure in these moments is found by a formal impression. Oana's inner emotions are therefore expressed in the paintings. Oana expresses his invaluable experiences in his paintings; however the use of bright colors suggests that he is trying to portray a different part of the world that does not exist in Europe.

This different part of the world is Australia. He points this out very often, as seen in the painting titles or through the motive contents, like the abstract portraits of birds and plants that only exist in Australia all these paintings are formed around reality, but they are not painted to reflect a specific reality.

Oana sees the picture, absorbs it, perceives it, and stores it in his sub-consciousness, so that he can set them free while he is painting at anytime, unexpectedly and all of a sudden.

Oana often surprises himself with how accurate his eruptive method of painting depicts reality. Oana brings forth or as he says "Hurls" forth the stored images he has. Impressions that Oana has somewhere, somehow absorbed and cherished, to which he can associate names but which are superimposed, mixed up, transformed, modified by inner psychological flows, energy; such that through vague suspicions, fragmentary reflexes from the past and altogether religious confidence, a ground rule of his life is established. All this flows into the paintings of Nelus Oana, without retelling actual events. "The old boat" is one of his latest paintings, which focus on a red boat. Whoever knows Oana's biography knows that he fled Romania on board a freighter, and they are reminded of the seven weeks that he spent as a stowaway, secretly looked after by the ship's cook. You don't need to know this, however you feel the allusively distress that the picture says to you, not only through the colors and the dramatic movement of the picture.

Another work Oana titled “Childhood Memories with Sunflowers.” It depicts a sunflower field and is proof that his childhood memories are permanently stamped into his mind and could not be erased by four decades of life experiences.

Nelus Oana grew up in Danubian lowlands in the countryside, where widespread of sunflower fields belonged to his early visual experiences. From that point of view, the picture can be considered a piece of his biography.

At the same time, it's more than that shown through the painted sky. Of course one can see it as an after-image from his youth, but considering painting like “The Baobabs”, “Palm Trees” or “Stormy Mornings” the sky reveals an unusual dynamic. One can imagine a baroque ceiling painting, in which the eye of God would burst through the clouds. Or you can interpret the unusual shimmering rips in Oana’s skies as an illusion of the hole in the ozone layer, which is especially felt over Australia. What is left is a soaring expression of fear, an underlying threat, which comes out even more when combined with idyllic motives. This comes from a pre-existing opinion that is neither European, Asian or Australian, but universal. An opinion in which luck and suffering, success and failure, lust and mourning are opposite, overlying and conflicting to each other. This is the actual reality that Nelus Oana’s paintings remind one of.

**Michael Hubl**

[michael.huebl@web.de](mailto:michael.huebl@web.de)