

Pictures at an exhibition: a look through the eyes of a geologist

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A visit to a museum's art collection, namely artwork from realist painters, is usually a quest for issues like history, the artist's sensibility, the customs of the epoch, styles and painting techniques, pigments used in the artwork or only a glance over beauty. But beauty, pigments, materials are, ultimately, geological objects or depend on them. The geologist, as the artist, needs to look at a landscape to know and interpret it. Science and art share the need to a careful observation of reality even if to decompose it in the end.

A strong need to represent geological phenomena started early in human history (e.g. Schmitt et al., 2014). Drawings and paintings were once the only way to capture Nature's images and then eventually making their subsequent interpretation.

Even recent artworks with less realistic representations allow recalling for geological processes, as in António Dacosta Ilha (1979-80). This painting represents a small volcanic islet in Azores and allows an approach to volcanic activity in the mid-Atlantic ridge and the weathering action over the landforms. This is particularly interesting when there are a few years difference between the original object depicted and its present appearance (Santos et al., 2014).

Visits to museums to see and geologically interpret landscapes in paintings can be a way of inviting visitors for a virtual field trip and a new intellectual experience to sum to the aesthetic experience of just enjoying the beauty in art.

Not forgetting the extreme importance of real field trips with students and general public, the use of artistic representations can be a starting point to bring art to otherwise markedly science orientated people.

Thus, combining art and Geology could bring geologists to a new field of work: art museum guidance. But further than this, could bring new publics to both art museums exhibitions and Geosciences making them understand that science and art are no more than different products of a universe exploring mind.

References

Santos, V.F.; Prudêncio, J.; Rodrigues, L.A.; Costa, A.M.; Cavaco, G.; Maduro-Dias, F. & Jácome, G. (2014) - Communicating natural history through art collections. An example of non formal geoscience education and geoheritage public awareness through an azorean painting. Abstracts Book Geoparks in volcanic areas: sustainable development strategies, Terceira and Graciosa Islands, Azores Global Geopark, October 29th to November 1st, p.55.

Schmitt AK, Danišk M, Aydar E, Şen E, Ulusoy İ, Lovera OM (2014) Identifying the Volcanic Eruption Depicted in a Neolithic Painting at Çatalhöyük, Central Anatolia, Turkey. PLoS ONE 9(1): e84711. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0084711