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Can Painting Evoke the Kantian Sublime?

Robert Clewis*

Abstract

Can painting evoke an experience of the sublime, understood in terms adopted by Kant in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*? I will present three considerations that imply that painting cannot evoke the Kantian sublime. I then indicate some problems with each consideration. In the process, I explain how some paintings might evoke an experience of the sublime, even when painting is understood in terms of an eighteenth-century European context and conception of painting. In order to illustrate the phenomenology of sublime responses to paintings, I conclude with two examples. I thereby aim to show the real possibility of the Kantian sublime in response to painting.

Keywords

Artistic sublime, natural sublime, Immanuel Kant, painting, beauty

Introduction

In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant does not develop an account of the artistic sublime. To be sure, at the start of his discussion (§23), he offers the following suggestive claim: "We here consider first only the sublime in objects of nature (that in art is, after all, always restricted to the conditions of agreement with nature)" (KU 5:245).[1] The "first only" suggests that he would (or

* Gwynedd Mercy University, clewis.r@gmercyu.edu

[1] References to Kant's writings are from the works by Immanuel Kant published in the Academy Edition (Akademie-Ausgabe=AA), *Kant's gesammelte Schriften* (1900–), edited by the Royal Prussian, subsequently German, then Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, in 29 volumes, now published by Walter de Gruyter. Citations are given, in parenthesis, by volume: page number. Translations of Kant's writings are taken from The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge University Press, 1992–). The "Analytic of the Sublime" from the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and excerpts from the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (both from the Cambridge Edition) are also found in Clewis 2019. The following abbreviations are used (Akademie-Ausgabe volume listed in parenthesis):

Anth = Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht (AA 07).
KpV = Kritik der praktischen Vernunft (AA 05).
KU = Kritik der Urteilskraft (AA 05).

could) consider the sublime "in art." But Kant does not provide such an account.

In light of the absence of a Kantian account (among other reasons), it has been argued that such an account would be very problematic. Given Kant's terms and presuppositions, scholars have sometimes found it difficult to see how art could evoke the experience of the sublime.[2]

Let us strengthen the claim to the bolder thesis that it is not possible for art to evoke an experience of the sublime: "Deny." If, for present purposes, we restrict the concept of "art" to painting, the thesis can be expressed as follows:

"Deny: Aesthetic engagements with painting cannot elicit an experience of the sublime".

I will argue that Kant is not committed to Deny and that his apparent dismissal (if any) of the sublimity in painting would not be justified, even on his own terms. To do that, I will present several considerations seemingly in favor of Deny and then criticize or problematize them. In the process, and by providing two concrete examples, I will indicate how the sublime can be elicited by painting.[3]

Given the theme of this special issue, I limit my discussion to the visual arts and painting and do not examine poetry or architecture. But since it offers some initial support to my position, it is worth observing that in poetry and architecture it seems at least prima facie evident that the sublime can be elicited (Guyer 2018; Budick 2010). Kant suggests the possibility of artistic sublimity as early as the first section of the *Observations* (1764). He adduces the poetry of Milton and Haller, and the pyramids of Giza and St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, as eliciting sublime responses, even if in the case of St. Peter's the response is somehow combined with beauty (GSE 2:208). "St. Peter's in Rome is magnificent. Since on its frame, which is grand and simple, beauty, e.g., gold, mosaics,

V-Anth/Collins = Anthropologie 1772/73 Collins (AA 25).
V-Anth/Mron = Anthropologie 1784/85 Mrongovius (AA 25).
V-Anth/Parow = Anthropologie 1772/73 Parow (AA 25).

[2] For instance, Abaci 2008 and 2010. Yet, consonant with the present paper, Guyer (2018) argues for the possibility of the sublime in art generally and in poetry in particular.

[3] Abaci (2010, p. 170) asks for a "convincing explanation of the absence of an actual account in Kant's text." Part of such an explanation would be that Kant wrote "The Analytic of the Sublime" relatively late and did so in haste. Moreover, as can be seen from the relative brevity of his treatment of art (§§43-53) and of adherent beauty (§16, §17), Kant's aim was primarily to analyze the conditions of possibility of a judgment of taste conceived as making a universally valid claim. Unlike contemporaries such as Henry Home (Lord Kames), Kant was uninterested in developing or applying his theory of aesthetic judgment to the arts, criticism, or theories of genre.

etc., are spread in such a way that it is still the sentiments of the sublime which has the most effect, the object is called magnificent" (GSE 2:210). So it is evident that at one point Kant thought that it was conceptually possible to experience with great "effect" the "sentiments of the sublime" in response to a work of architecture which has beauty "spread" out over its frame, leading to an experience of what was there called the magnificent sublime, one of three forms of sublimity identified in that treatise (alongside the terrifying and the noble).

In any case, if my position is mistaken and Kant is ultimately committed to Deny, it would amount to a rejection of his earlier views about artistic sublimity. Such a change of mind is not impossible, but if it did occur, it would be remarkable, and in principle we should be able to explain why it occurred. Indeed, as Guyer writes, commenting on Kant's invocation of the poetic depiction of the "kingdom of hell" (presumably by Milton) in his works of both 1764 and 1790 (KU 5:314), "Kant uses the very same example of a poetic trigger of the experience of the sublime, and so it seems natural to assume that later as well as earlier he assumes that this experience can be triggered by art as well as by nature" (2018, p. 308).

Though one must be careful not to reduce this topic to a biographical matter or to ad hominem arguments about Kant's knowledge of the arts and painting, it may be helpful to mention a few painters with whom he had at least some familiarity, most likely through engravings and drawings (or descriptions) since he did not travel beyond the greater vicinity of his city, Königsberg (Clewis 2023). The situation runs parallel to how his knowledge of places around the world cultures and traditions was constituted by his reading of travel reports, journals, and travelogues.

We know, for instance, that Kant admired the theorist and engraver, William Hogarth (GSE 2:214). More significantly, not only does Kant mention St. Peter's in Rome, he was aware of the work of Michelangelo, whom he mentions in a note (Reflexion 1510; AA 15:826) as well as in lectures.[4] According to an anthropology lecture, Kant admired Michelangelo's work, claiming that the "best recent painters" in Italy, "such as Raphael and Michelangelo, display a truly high taste in their painting" (V-Anth/Parow 25:399). Likewise, a lecture transcription from 1784/85 states: "Genius gives new rules. Thus Michelangelo was a genius, as he built St. Peter's

[4] E.g., see the editorial note (at AA 25:1311) on a travel report as a possible textual source of Kant's knowledge of Michelangelo. Kant's claims about the Egyptian pyramids, Kant himself states, are based on descriptions by Hasselquist (GSE 2:210) and Savary (KU 5:252).

Church in Rome according to a completely new invention, which later became a model for all times" (V-Anth/Mron 25:1311).

According to *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798), a compendium based on his set of notes for the anthropology course he had given since the 1772/73 winter semester, Kant views Leonardo da Vinci as a "vast" genius, that is, a genius in many fields (Anth 7:224). (Vastness and genius are two concepts that are associated with the sublime; this is not to say that Kant is here giving an argument for artistic sublimity, but the linking is nonetheless suggestive.) Likewise, according to a 1784/85 transcription of his anthropology lecture, Kant calls Leonardo a "universal mind" who was "great in all the arts" and familiar "with every science" (V-Anth/Mron 25:1309).

Finally, according to a 1772/73 student transcription, Kant favorably refers to the contemporary painter and theorist Anton Raphael Mengs, paraphrasing his comments on Raphael, Correggio, and Titian. Kant approvingly cites Mengs's view that painting can show an *ideal* reality and that some painters are better at portraying it than others. In citing Mengs, Kant reveals his admiration of Raphael:

> A painter is either a mere imitator, or an original, who paints the original. According to the judgment of Mengs – who is still alive – Raphael painted the idea, since he painted the heavenly forms beyond the human. Correggio was a painter of blessedness, since he awakened a gentle play of sensations in us which experience does not give. Titian comes in last place, since he painted nature. (V-Anth/Collins 25:99; my trans.; cf. V-Anth/Parow 25:325-326)

Revealingly, Titian is said to come in last place because he "painted nature." It is open to interpretation what such a claim might mean, and it is, after all, written by a transcriber recording Kant's invocation of yet another person, Mengs. Still, perhaps it means that Titian comes in last place because he does not "idealize," even if Titian employed his own particular style. If that is right, it would imply that Kant is far from endorsing a straightforward mimetic-imitative principle in painting (i.e., copying nature exactly as it appears). Kant here appears to already endorse some sort of idealization in painting – a notion that would later be developed into the third *Critique*'s notion of aesthetic ideas.

The Sublime: A Reminder

While this is not the place to investigate the various ways in which Kant uses the term "sublime" and the outlines of Kant's ac-

count will likely already be familiar to readers, a few words about his employment of the term will be helpful. According to one of the most basic senses in which he writes of the sublime, it is an aesthetic feeling or experience (e.g., KU 5:257) in which the imagination is expanded but ultimately fails in the face of reason, revealing or giving a feeling of the theoretical or practical powers of reason, to which he refers using the terms "mathematical" and "dynamical" sublime, respectively. In general, pure judgments of the sublime occur when the representation gives rise to an immediate intuition of vastness or power, leading to a sensory experience of the power of reason. This agitated (though overall pleasant) mental movement is based, Kant holds, on the imagination or sensibility's interaction with an idea of the infinite or unconditioned, including but not limited to the ideas of the immensity of nature itself and of one's freedom to act without determination by nature.

In a second, technical sense, the term "sublime" can be applied to, or refer to, the ideas of reason themselves: *they* are sublime. Ideas of reason are conceptual representations (of, e.g., virtue, freedom, the sage, or justice) that cannot be fully or adequately presented in experience or, in more Kantian terminology, cannot be given in or exhibited in intuition and sensibility. This sense is clear in Kant's nominal definition of the sublime. In fact, in "The nominal definition of the sublime" (§25), he himself emphasizes the point as follows: "We call sublime that which is absolutely great [*schlechthin groß*]." A few paragraphs later, he offers this summary: "The above explanation can also be expressed thus: That is sublime in comparison with which everything else is small" (KU 5:250). Kant places the following (somewhat confusing) summary at the end of this section: "Thus we can also add this to the foregoing formulation of the explanation of the sublime: That is sublime which even to be able to think of demonstrates a faculty of the mind that surpasses every measure of the senses"(KU 5:250). Such descriptions cannot refer to any actual object given in experience but can only refer to ideas of reason, which are unlimited (or unconditioned) and surpass the limits of ordinary experience.[5]

Related to this, the term can also refer to the cognitive capacity that produces the ideas, namely the *faculty of reason*: reason, not nature (or phenomenal appearances), is sublime. Abaci, for instance, invokes this sense: "What the sublime reveals is rather our own capacity to think limitlessness in contrast to the limitedness

[5] Moore (2018) astutely discusses the implications of Kant's claim that, strictly speaking, natural objects are not sublime and that only ideas of reason are truly sublime. In my view, Moore's interpretation implies the possibility of artistic sublimity.

of everything sensible" (2008, p. 238). "The revelation of this true absolute greatness in the mind, in turn, gives a feeling of pleasure. Therefore, what is truly sublime is not any sensible object of nature, but our own supersensible capacity" (Abaci 2008, p. 240).

In a closely related sense, the term can also refer to the practical-moral *vocation* or, as Kant sometimes puts it, our *mental disposition*. For instance, Kant writes: "Hence it is the *disposition of the mind* resulting from a certain representation occupying the reflective judgment, but not the object, which is to be called sublime" (KU 5:250; emphasis added).

Finally, throughout his various ethical and aesthetic writings, Kant sometimes uses the term "sublime" as an adjective, in order to indicate what is elevated or raised (*erhebt*) above nature, or at least presupposes elevation over nature. Using this adjectival sense, for instance, Kant calls apathy (*apatheia*), or the *lack* of feeling, sublime (KU 5:272). Though this point is often missed, his calling "apathy" sublime would be absurd if "sublime" is not interpreted as referring, adjectivally, to the raised, but is instead erroneously interpreted in its usual sense, namely, as an intense aesthetic experience that borders on astonishment. For *apatheia* is precisely the *lack* of such intense feeling or affect. But since this sense and the issues it raises do not concern us directly here, I will leave them aside.

Considerations in Favor of Deny

I now present several considerations that might seem to support Deny. As will be seen, I think each consideration is problematic.

1) *The experience of the sublime in painting must be combined with that of beauty, so it can at most be a mixed experience*

As we have already seen in the passage about St. Peter's, this first consideration in favor of Deny contains a grain of truth: Kant writes that the sublime, if presented in art, must be combined with beauty. As I will explain, however, this poses no problem for the possibility of the sublime elicited by art.

Near the beginning of §52 of the third *Critique*, Kant writes:

> Further, the presentation [*Darstellung*] of the sublime, so far as it belongs to beautiful/fine [*schönen*] art, can be united with beauty in a verse tragedy, a didactic poem, an oratorio; and in these combinations beautiful art is all the more artificial [*künstlicher*], although whether it is also more beautiful (since so many different kinds of satisfaction are crisscrossed with each other) can be doubted in some of these cases. (KU 5:325)

Here Kant's discussion of fine arts is concerned with the beautiful and with taste, so it is no surprise that he appeals to a concept of the beautiful. Crucially, however, in making such claims Kant does not deny that an experience of the sublime can be evoked by art (Guyer 2018, p. 319-320). I will return to this passage below.

Another passage on this topic can be found in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. In §67, reflecting his rather restrictive view that art must somehow be tied to the beautiful, Kant states:

> *Beauty* alone belongs to taste; it is true that the *sublime* belongs to aesthetic judgment, but not to taste. However, the *representation* [*Vorstellung*] of the sublime can and should nevertheless be beautiful in itself; otherwise it is coarse, barbaric, and contrary to good taste. (Anth 7:241; original emphasis)

Note that what would make the representation "coarse" and "barbaric" (e.g., repulsive vastness or overwhelming power) is exactly what would *enable* a real object (of nature) with those apparent features, and under the appropriate conditions, to initiate an experience of the sublime. The worry, for Kant, is not that a represented object or event exhibiting these characteristics would violate the conditions of sublimity, but of taste or beauty.

In the next section, §68, which again focuses on taste (entitled "On taste in regard to the sublime") Kant likewise writes (here using *Darstellung*, not *Vorstellung*, to make the similar claim):

> The *sublime* is the counterweight but not the opposite of the beautiful; because the effort and attempt to raise ourselves to a grasp (*apprehensio*) of the object awakens in us a feeling of our own greatness and power; but the representation in thought [*Gedankenvorstellung*] of the sublime by *description* [*Beschreibung*] or presentation [*Darstellung*] can and must always be beautiful. For otherwise the astonishment becomes a *deterrent*, which is very different from *admiration*, a judgment in which we do not grow weary of being astonished. (Anth 7:243)

Again, Kant is concerned that the viewers or spectators continue to pay disinterested, absorbed attention to the artwork and not be repelled by what is represented there, which may otherwise be repugnant to taste. This is likely due to his commitment to the view that artworks must be beautiful (or at least *classified* as fine/beautiful), a point I return to below. Section §68 concludes with a restatement of his view (again in terms of *Darstellung*):

> The sublime is therefore not an object for taste, but rather an object for the feeling of emotion [*Rührung*]; however, the artistic presentation [*Darstellung*] of the sublime in description and dressing [*Beschreibung und Bekleidung*] (in secondary works, *parerga*) can and should be beautiful, since otherwise it is wild, coarse, and repulsive, and, consequently, contrary to taste. (Anth 7:243)

In light of such passages, Kant seems committed to the view that, if there is to be sublimity in painting, it is restricted to those cases where the artwork or painting is also be beautiful (or at least classified as *schön*) and not contrary to taste. Yet while it is true that the sublime in painting must also be presented as beautiful, these passages do not entail that painting cannot incite sublime responses. As Guyer puts it, "Kant's outright statement that in art the sublime must always be accompanied with the beauty of the representation itself likewise provides no argument that a work of art cannot trigger a genuine experience of sublimity" (2018, p. 319).

But now a core problem must be addressed. What it means for "the sublime" to be "accompanied" with the "beauty of the representation itself" is far from clear. For even if Kant does not deny that a combination of beauty and sublimity is impossible (§52), we are still left with the worry (pressed by Abaci) about how an experience of the painting could be *both* beautiful and sublime. I think there are several ways one might address how beauty and sublimity might both be present.

An initial, but ultimately unpersuasive, response is to say that some *aspects* of the painting are felt to be beautiful, while other aspects evoke the experience of the sublime. For instance, one could say that form evokes the experience of beauty, and the represented content or theme evokes the sublime. Some (limited) textual support for this view can be found at the beginning of §52, quoted at the beginning of this section (KU 5:325). Kant does not elaborate, so we must fill out his thoughts for him. In a verse tragedy, it seems that the beauty in the "painterly presentation" on stage is combined or united with the tragedy's content, that is, the plot: the turn of events, the heroes' responses, and so on, evoke feelings of the sublime. In a didactic poem, the beauty of the presentation in poetic form could be said to be combined with sublime content. And finally, in an oratorio, the beauty evoked by the "play of sensations" in the music (rhythm, harmony, melody) could be said to be united with sublime content expressed in the meaningful or inspiring words. Drawing from this, one might generalize that in such cases, the *form* is (or evokes the) beautiful, while the *content* (the represented) elicits the sublime. Perhaps along these lines, Kant writes, "Yet in all beautiful art, what is essential consists in the form, which is purposive for observation and judging" (KU 5:325-326).

This suggestion has two main problems, unfortunately. First, even if it has some textual support, it remains quite limited and implicit. Kant does not elaborate very much and, as mentioned, it

is we who have to flesh out the idea for him. Worse, the suggestion assumes that the perceivers are feeling both beauty and the sublime *at the same time*. Given how different their phenomenologies are, this seems conceptually impossible. One would need to explain how one could have both of these quite distinct experiences simultaneously.

So, it seems better to deny that in response to the work a perceiver simultaneously experiences both the experiences of the beauty and of the sublime. Again, a few options could be pursued at this point. One might view the matter *sequentially*: perceivers have first a feeling of beauty, and then the response of the sublime. They are both felt, just not at the same time. One problem with this move, however, is that it is insufficiently grounded in the text. Also problematic: such a shift between an experience of beauty and one of the sublime seems to be phenomenologically rare (though not impossible).

So if in response to a given work, one feels only the sublime, what are we readers to make of the claim that the work of art, even if it evokes the sublime, must be *presented* (*dargestellt*) in a beautiful way?

I see two remaining options here, the first more compelling than the second. According to the more plausible suggestion, while we are able to recognize or label a painting as beautiful, it does not have to *evoke* the experience of beauty. A work of *schöne Kunst* is not always felt to be, or judged, *schön*. Kant suggests this when he finishes the sentence, already quoted above: "and in these combinations *beautiful art* is all the more artificial, although whether it is also more beautiful (since so many different kinds of satisfaction are crisscrossed with each other) can be doubted in some of these cases" (KU 5:325; emphasis added). In other words, such art forms might be classified as belonging to the "beautiful arts" even if in fact they may not be (felt as) *more beautiful*: they might not elicit more or stronger feelings of beauty.

We can draw an analogy here. Just as some (e.g., early nineteenth-century German Romantic) paintings (say, paintings of the mountain *Watzmann*) that we can *recognize* as typically falling under the genre "sublime" do not necessarily or always evoke the sublime, so also do some paintings that we categorize or label as "beautiful" do not necessarily elicit the experience of beauty. We may recognize the painting as beautiful and as being in conformity with taste. The representation may be palatable, i.e., not repulsive or counterpurposive in appearance, but it need not evoke the feeling or experience of beauty in us every time we perceive it. On this view,

note, the phenomenology in response to the painting remains that of the sublime; it is neither the experience of beauty on its own nor beauty followed by the sublime.

A second, though less persuasive, response is to say that we *abstract* from the fact that we are looking at an artwork, and see it as if it were nature. To be sure, we may, upon reflection or if asked, recognize that it is an artwork. Yet in the act of considering, appreciating, and judging it, we would not take this fact into account. The idea here is that, if one abstracts in this way, it is no longer subject to Kant's condition that works of art must be beautiful, since perceivers are not seeing it *as* a work of art. Textual support for this suggestion might be found in Kant's claims that the (successful) work of fine art looks as if it were nature (KU 5:306-307) and that, in particular, the sublime in art is "always restricted to the conditions of agreement with nature" (KU 5:245), as well as his implication that the sublime in art should not look too "artificial" (KU 5:325). The depicted content might then be able to appear as repulsive, massive-looking, or threatening as *the real object in nature* that, according to the standard Kantian account, can inspire an experience of sublimity.

Perhaps we can have such an experience in response to trompe l'oeil (illusory) paintings. Such deceptive, mimetic paintings, in fact, were already being executed, with various degrees of accuracy, long before Kant's day, from still lifes in ancient Pompeii to Gerard Houckgeest's striking *Church Interior* (c. 1654), a remarkable example which brings to mind Kant's claims about St. Peter's.

For non-illusory and non-trompe l'oeil works, however, such abstraction seems psychologically implausible, even if still conceptually possible. Thus, this solution seems less fruitful than the previous one.

2) *A painting lacks the vastness or magnitude needed in order to evoke the sublime*

A second consideration seeming to support Deny begins with the premise that paintings are too small and limited to be able to evoke the experience of the sublime. With their shapes and sizes determined by artists, paintings – even extremely large ones like Rubens' *The Great Last Judgment* (1614-17) – do not come close to the immensity of nature needed to evoke a genuine experience of the sublime.

An initial problem with this consideration is that, as Abaci (2008, pp. 238, 246) and Guyer (2018, p. 321) have both pointed out, not even the natural wonders that elicit the simplest cases

of pure sublimity are infinite in power or extent. They are not unlimited or formless. They only give an appearance of being that way. An additional problem is that, according to one sense of the term "sublime," the natural object (or nature) is not itself sublime. Kant holds we commit a "subreption" when we give respect to the object (nature) rather than to "the idea of humanity in our subject" (KU 5:257).

Whether what is revealed in the sublime is taken to be an idea of reason, or reason as a capacity, or freedom, or the human moral vocation or disposition, it therefore seems misguided to look for determinate criterial properties or features of the object which give rise to the experience.[6] In other words, one cannot stipulate that objects must be a certain way in order to elicit the aesthetic experience. This point also synchronizes with the general tenor of Kant's aesthetics, which insists that aesthetic judgments are not cognitive or logical. Kant's account seems to allow for many ways to initiate an encounter with the idea or ideas at the core of the sublime experience.

Here a proponent of Deny might counter that the proposed view is too permissive. Could *anything* then elicit the experience? Are there no constraints on the objects at all? To be sure, the perceived qualities of the object, hence the qualities of the object itself (whatever they may be), still *matter*, but the point is that one cannot describe or stipulate beforehand the features of the object that will elicit the experience.[7] There is doubtless something about the object to which the perceiver – in a particular aesthetic engagement with the object – responds when she aesthetically reflects on it. To take the paradigmatic case, the vastness or power of the object (or of the scene or object represented) incites the imagination to expand. It fails to take in the perceived image all at once, so that one feels or "intuits" the power of reason or its ideas. Reason is felt to be greater than the imagination (in the mathematical sublime) or (in the dynamical sublime) sensibility. One feels part of a greater whole, a moral order, a teleology of

[6] For similar arguments using the mental character of the sublime as evidence of the possibility of artistic sublimity, see Kirwan 2004, p. 61, and Dunham 1933, pp. 88-89; also cited by Abaci 2008, p. 250 n7.

[7] I never held, nor wished to give the impression as claiming, that, as Abaci put it (commenting on my 2010 discussion piece), "the sublime is a completely introspective experience elicited and executed by the ideas of reason" (Abaci 2010, p. 171). I also never argued "for the unimportance of the object of perception in the sublime" (Abaci 2010, p. 173). I (still) deny neither the indispensable perceptual-imaginative aspect of the sublime experience (the expansion, yet ultimate failure, of imagination to comprehend a magnitude or power), nor the (pleasing) rational/mental aspects of the experience (cf. Abaci 2010, p. 173).

reason. It would seem that without *some* object, such an experience would not occur. In this sense, the object acts as a proximal cause of the experience of the sublime.

It should be evident that vastness is not a *sufficient* condition of the experience of the sublime, so I will not comment further on it.

Is vastness a necessary condition? Note that an object's perceived vastness is *relative* to a particular subject. What is vast at one distance becomes smaller from farther away. Kant makes this point by invoking Savary's description of perceiving the pyramids of Giza (KU 5:252). Kant implies that adopting the right or appropriate vantage point of the object (whether big or small) is an important, integral aspect of the sublime experience, but he does not imply that a particular, given vastness per se is *necessary*. Indeed, Kant himself indicates that small or medium-sized objects could, in principle, elicit the sublime.[8] "Here one readily sees that nothing can be given in nature, however great it may be judged to be by us, which could not, considered in another relation, be diminished down to the infinitely small; and conversely, there is nothing so small which could not, in comparison with even smaller standards, be amplified for our imagination up to the magnitude of a world" (KU 5:250). So the object's vastness is neither sufficient nor necessary for producing the experience of the sublime.

Before moving to the third and final apparent obstacle to Kantian artistic sublimity, I would like to comment on the potentially confusing term "nature." For if we are to say, for instance, that painting represents *nature*, or that a subject feels superior to nature, it should be pointed out that the meaning of this polysemantic term is not always clear. For one, Kant identifies both a sensible and a supersensible nature (e.g., KpV 5:43). As with many of Kant's terms, the word's meaning is determined by what it is contrasted with – e.g., noumena (the supersensible), reason, morality, and art. The term "nature" can refer to the sum of all "appearances" (sensible nature) as opposed to the thing in itself; to physical, material nature studied by physics or natural philosophy; and, of course, to the natural environment (sometimes called "external nature" in the literature), as in the trees, birds, insects, mountains, storms, or seashells – a sense employed throughout the third *Critique* and even in the second

[8] Abaci seems to agree: "But a relatively small object with great complexity of form can also provide a sufficiently long series of partial representations" to exhaust the imagination's capacity to comprehend them, and thereby elicit the feeling of the sublime (2008, p. 239).

one (on Leibniz's care for an insect, see KpV 5:160). This latter sense contrasts "nature" and "art."

The term "nature" can also refer to one (human) subset of generally "sensible" nature: our drives and inclinations. This sense is taken up by Abaci (2008, p. 246): "In the experience of Kant's sublime, it is rather the universally shared human (rational) superiority over and autonomy from (sensible) nature, and the moral significance of this contrast, that is made vivid to us."[9] It is worth dwelling a moment to reflect on this sense, for, even having read Abaci's response to my 2010 discussion piece, I still do not see why a work of art or artifice cannot reveal or make this contrast vivid, if or when "nature" is understood as referring to human drives and inclinations. At that point (nature as inner drives), the art/nature contrast is no longer concerned with *external* nature: and if we are no longer talking of external nature, the whole point of using the typical nature/art distinction is lost or given up, thereby opening up room for artistic sublimity. In other words, the Deny argument risks committing an equivocation concerning the polysemantic term "nature." Conceptual speaking, the sublime experience is understood in terms of a contrast between reason and *sensible* nature (human drives), then it is asserted that only objects of *external* nature (rather than art) are capable of starting the cognitive process that reveals the superiority of reason over, and independence from, nature.

Now, the leading question of this essay (Can painting evoke the Kantian sublime?) presupposes that there is a distinction between painting (as an artform) and nature. Parsing "nature" as "environment" (external nature), Kant would seem, in his discussion of the fine arts, to distinguish nature from art – thereby conforming to a common use of the word. Yet, if one carefully considers Kant's conception of genius, which is the faculty that produces fine art that is with spirit, the very nature/art distinction is blurred. After all, as many commentators have noted, for Kant, genius is a gift of *nature*. As Kant states in his definition at the beginning of §46, genius is the "inborn productive faculty of the artist" and "talent (natural gift)," that produces artworks that are inspired or endowed with spirit. Kant emphasizes: "Genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art" (KU 5:307). This means that the products of genius are always in some way products of *nature* (in the subject). If so, as odd as it may seem to state this, it is

[9] Cf. Abaci 2008, p. 248 and 2010, p. 171 for similar uses of the term "sensible nature" in the context of defining the sublime.

(inner) nature that gives rise to artworks that can in turn occasion the feeling of the sublime. Once again, the point of insisting on (external) nature (as a stimulus of the experience of the sublime) in distinction from art seems highly questionable.[10]

3) *Even if painting can evoke the sublime, it can only give rise to an adherent judgment of the sublime*

The third consideration draws from Kant's distinction between pure and adherent aesthetic judgments. Roughly, pure judgments do not incorporate concepts of the object (such as a concept of its purposes or functions) into the judgment, whereas adherent (sometimes called "impure") judgments incorporate them and do not abstract from them. In adherent judgments, concepts of the broader purposes, functions, or aims of the object play a role in the judgment. In the case of an artwork, this includes but is not limited to its role and place in art history, movement, style, period, and artistic intentions (Clewis 2016; 2009; 2008).

The above claim has some bite. However, it requires one to accept a premise that is widely accepted in the scholarship, but which I consider disputable, namely, the claim that aesthetic judgments made in response to art must be adherent. But even if one thinks that aesthetic judgments made in response to art must be adherent, there could still be *genuine* judgments of the sublime – just as much as adherent judgments of beauty are still judgments of beauty in a genuine and authentic sense.

To make use of the free/adherent distinction in discussing the *sublime*, one can extrapolate from what Kant writes about beauty in §16, the only section he devotes explicitly to the topic (he ap-

[10] This blurring of nature and art chips away at a fundamental premise of Abaci's original argument, namely, the (alleged) rigid, stable contrast between reason and nature, presupposed by experiences of the sublime. Abaci: "Kant has nature in mind as one of the fundamental components of an underlying contrast" (Abaci 2008, p. 240). Interestingly, Abaci seems to recognize my point: with Kant's introduction of the notion of genius, he writes, "the distinction between natural and artistic objects that Kant made earlier is somewhat blurred" (Abaci 2008, p. 243). My point is not to claim that the phenomenology of appreciating a work of "genius" (in Kant's sense) is the same as, or even similar to, an experience of the sublime. Nor is my aim to explore or assess the line of argument explored by Wicks (1995), Pillow (2000), and Tomasi (2005) that holds that a work of art (e.g., painting) can occasion a feeling of the sublime (or akin to it) by expressing *aesthetic ideas*. I agree with Abaci on the different roles played by imagination (in the experience of the sublime and appreciation of a work of genius) and of the fundamental differences between aesthetic ideas and ideas of reason. Rather, I am noting that works of art, if inspired by genius, are at the same time works of nature, so that works of art *can* be seen in the broader contexts of Kant's theory of *nature* – thereby blunting the force of Abaci's argument. Recall, too, that the development of culture – including the arts (KU 5:432) – is the ultimate (though not final) end of *nature* (KU 5:431).

plies his ideas to the case of human beauty in the §17). He writes: "There are two kinds of beauty: free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) or merely adherent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The first presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be; the second does presuppose such a concept and the perfection of the object in accordance with it" (KU 5:229). Kant adds that the adherent or dependent kind adheres to a concept and is thus "conditioned" beauty; it is ascribed to objects that stand under the concept of a particular end. The end can be either natural (as in the case of organisms) or imposed from without, say by an artist. Kant also calls it an "applied judgment of taste" (KU 5:231).

Despite some unclear presentation, Kant seems to hold that the distinction does not mark out two kinds of *beauties*, but two kinds of *judging* or ways of attending to the object. As I read Kant, one could make a pure judgment so long as the apprehender, in making the judgment, abstracts from the concept of the end. As Kant writes, in one of two crucial passages relating to this: "A judgment of taste in regard to an object with a determinate internal end would thus be pure only if the person making the judgment either had no concept of this end *or abstracted from it in his judgment*" (KU 5:231; emphasis added).

If, in other words, there can be *pure*, free judgments of the beauty of art, it would be wrong to claim that for Kant, all judgments about the beauty of art are adherent. Indeed, Kant gives an example of "music without text" when *illustrating* what he means by a pure judgment of beauty: "One can also count as belonging to the same [free] kind what are called in music fantasias (without a theme), indeed all music without a text" (KU 5:229). This passage is strong textual support for the claim that Kant holds that art can give rise to free judgments (of beauty).[11]

The second crucial passage is widely quoted by proponents of the reading that for Kant all judgments of art are adherent, but it does not exactly say what they wish it to say. Kant writes that *if* the object in question is given *as* a work of art, then its being a work

[11] Abaci considers the promising possibility that vast works of architecture might be looked at or perceived as "mere magnitudes" rather than as objects with ends or purposes given by creators or artists (Abaci 2008, p. 240). "I mentioned earlier that Kant may have had in mind there the possibility that vast architectural objects can be perceived by the subject from an appropriate vantage point as mere magnitudes without regard to the fact that they are human artifacts whose forms and magnitudes are determined by certain human ends, so that they can occasion the feeling of the mathematical sublime" (Abaci 2008, p. 245). Yet he does not fully explore or embrace this possibility of free or pure judgments of the sublimity of works of art (calling it "untenable" in Abaci 2010, p. 172); in contrast, see Clewis 2009. Since this point concerns works of architecture, sculpture, and installations more than painting, we can leave it aside here.

of art (its purposes or "perfection" or what it is supposed to be) must be taken into account:

> *But if the object is given as a product of art, and is as such supposed to be declared to be beautiful, then*, since art always presupposes an end in the cause (and its causality), a concept must first be the ground of what the thing is supposed to be, and in the judging of the beauty of art the perfection of the thing will also have to be taken into account (KU 5:311; emphasis added).

The fact that an object, *given* as a product of art, is seen as, or presupposes, an end, can be read as a simple or trivial conceptual relation. This passage is far from saying that all judgments about art must be adherent and take into account the "perfection" of the work of art: one could view the work as if it were nature or a natural object (see also KU 5:306).[12] It is as if proponents of the widespread view wanted the sentence to begin with "since art" (omitting the italicized part). As noted, Kant illustrates what he means by "pure" or free judgment of beauty by way of the example of a musical fantasia. There, we do not see the fantasia *as* a work of art and in light of its presupposed ends and purposes, but delight in the play of sensations created by the rhythm, melody, and harmony. (To give a more contemporary example: massive works of land art, nestled in environmental settings, could be seen by viewers as objects of "nature" and thus need not be perceived as products of art.)

With this conceptual space opened up, these thoughts can be applied to the sublime. First consider adherent sublimity. At least implicitly, Kant indicates the possibility of *adherent* judgments of the sublime when he chooses, for purposes of presentation or exposition, *not* to discuss them.[13] In presenting his case, he will draw, Kant states, from examples of *pure* judgments of sublimity (Clewis 2009, p. 104). Nevertheless, this does not mean that he denies adherent judgments of the sublime or holds that they are impossible. In the "General Remark on the Exposition of Aesthetic Reflective Judgments," he comments on his presentation on the sublime as follows:

[12] There are several ways one might understand the concept of perfection here. For instance, it could refer to how well the work realizes the aims given to it by the artist or artists – the concept they had in mind when they produced the work. Or, perfection could be understood in a more general sense that is not limited to the views or intentions of the artist, but has to do with the uses or functions made of the object by anyone.

[13] Thus, even if Abaci were right that one of the "general features" of Kant's conception of art is "the intentionality of artistic production and the conscious appreciation of the product's objective purposiveness by its audience" (Abaci 2008, p. 241), there could still be room for partly teleological or *adherent* judgments of the sublime in response to art.

> Here one must attend above all to what was already pointed out above, that in the transcendental aesthetic of the power of judgment it is strictly pure aesthetic judgments that are at issue, *consequently the examples must not be drawn from those beautiful or sublime objects of nature that presuppose the concept of an end*; for in that case it would be either teleological or grounded in mere sensations of an object (gratification or pain), and thus in the first case would not be an aesthetic purposiveness and in the second case not a merely formal purposiveness. (KU 5:269-270; emphasis added)

Thus, Kant reasons, his examples will be of (e.g.) the starry sky as a broad, all-embracing vault (rather than worlds inhabited by rational beings, that is, as a place hospitable to life). But this is similar to how he first presented his theory of judgments of beauty by presenting the pure case, before then going on to introduce and describe the notion of adherent beauty (and, later, to present his thoughts on aesthetic ideas, beauty as a symbol of morality, and genius). As Guyer puts it, Kant "does not say that only the natural sublime is appropriate *tout court*, that only it is genuine, but rather that it is most appropriate *for the critique*, i.e., for the analysis of the experience" (2018, pp. 318-319; original emphasis; see also Clewis 2010, p. 168). In other words, since Kant aims to provide a transcendental analysis of a kind of *aesthetic* judgment that is taken to be normative, he starts with the pure form or mode of the aesthetic judgment in question. Thus, he claims, if one is to offer examples of pure, free judgments of the sublime, one should adduce instances of the ocean as it appears to us, not in terms of its functions in the ecosystem and water cycle, or in terms of its purposes for humans (separating land masses, facilitating sea-faring). This point underlies Kant's oft misunderstood, conditional claim (appearing a few pages earlier):

> rather I only note that *if* the aesthetic judgment is to be pure (not mixed up with anything teleological as judgments of reason) and *if* an example of that is to be given which is fully appropriate for the critique of the aesthetic power of judgment, *then* the sublime must not be shown in products of art (e.g., buildings, columns, etc.) where a human end determines the form as well as the magnitude (KU 5:252; emphasis added).

His concern is to give an example that is "fully appropriate" for the critique of the *aesthetic* power of judgment. Thus, he later claims that one must think of the experience of the sublime, if pure, in terms of "immediate intuition" (KU 5:270), or in terms of what strikes the perceiver immediately. In that case, one considers the ocean merely as the poets do, "in accordance with what its appearance shows" (KU 5:270). But that does not mean that one could not also have judgments that are partly teleological and

partly aesthetic. Examples of the mixed (adherent) kind are to *some* extent appropriate for the critique of the aesthetic power of judgment, but, given their partly teleological nature, they are not *fully* appropriate.

Although this raises issues that go beyond the scope of this paper, I doubt that, even on Kant's terms, a thing like an ocean or a ravine, in itself, would count as an "external nonpurposive object," a term used by Abaci (2008, p. 248) in defining the sublime. In §16, for instance, Kant considers horses as objects of *adherent* judgments of beauty, and thus as objects that are seen or judged as having purposes, making for a partly teleological and partly aesthetic judgment. Even such (external) objects as oceans (waterways) or horses can be seen, in some instances, or from some vantage points, as purposive or teleological. After all, Kant devotes the second part of the third *Critique* to an analysis of precisely such kinds of judgments. As Kant's claims in the "Analytic of the Sublime" show, an ocean is not, by itself or per se, either purposive or not – it depends on how we see it or what we do with it. We could see it as the poets do, or not. For similar reasons, an artwork may be a purposive object, but it need not always be *seen* or judged that way.

How, then, might these thoughts be applied to painting? Following the widespread (though dubitable) interpretation that art can give rise only to adherent judgments, a first thought might be that while adherent judgments of the sublime in painting may be possible, free (pure) judgments are not.[14] If so, any judgments of the sublime in painting must be adherent, on the grounds that one has a concept of the object (qua painting) in mind, and moreover, must try to understand what the painter was trying to achieve in the painting, the purposes, shape, color, and magnitude of which have been determined by the painter.

As can be seen from the foregoing, however, I adopt a non-standard view of the pure/adherent distinction in painting and art. I do not think that such judgments *must* be adherent – even if I agree that, as a matter of human psychology, in reality most of them would be adherent (whether or not this is the case would remain an empirical matter) (see Clewis 2008; 2009; 2016).

When we make an adherent judgment in response to a painting, we not only recognize it as a painting, we see in terms of concepts

[14] Abaci (2008, p. 247), for instance, holds that art could at most lead to impure, adherent judgments. "Kant thinks that the fact that the form of the object has been purposively determined by a human end has to be taken into account in our aesthetic appreciation of the work of art (§48, 5:311)." However, in other parts of his paper, Abaci, more suggestively, grants (based on §45, KU 5:306-307) that perceivers look at the works as if it were nature, without regard for the intentions imposed by the artist.

such as the artist's aims, or the painting's genre, movement or style, or place in art history, as well as concepts associated with the represented content (if any). Such incorporation of conceptual content goes far beyond just recognizing or labeling it as a painting. (Recall, on Kant's view, one can recognize something *as* a flower and still make a *pure* judgment of its beauty).

As noted, Kant at one point claims that we can *abstract* from the purposes of the object when judging. In the case of painting, such abstraction from teleological concepts would mean, for instance, that the perceiver can delight in the play of shapes or forms, or the painting's composition, without taking into account its genre or concepts associated with the represented content. Perhaps one can say that one sees it *as if* it were a natural object that is (in the act of judging) without determinate purposes.

So, in the case of the sublime response to painting typical of Kant's era, what might a *pure* judgment look like? It would mean that one feels an expanse of imagination before a painting that, e.g., represents the starry skies or the ocean as a seemingly limitless expanse, but that one does so without attending to concepts such as artistic intentions, the work's role in art history, its style, movement, or similar artistic and historical concepts. It would involve looking at the painting as if it were a (pleasing) intuition or image of nature, just as one can look at the sky as a mere vault, without thinking of the meanings or purposes of each light source. One would see it "as the poets do," not in terms of ends and purposes.[15] Rare as this psychological act might be, nothing in Kant's writings suggests that it is conceptually incoherent. It may be that, as Küplen (2015) argues, an experience of artistic sublimity is an uncommon occurrence. But this does not mean that it is impossible.

Of course, following the widespread (though questionable) interpretation, and perhaps in part because of the rarity of the psychological act of judging art in this non-conceptually determined way, one might not wish to accept the claim that aesthetic

[15] Note, these concepts are not identical to *the ideas of reason* that are revealed by the sublime experience or judged to be sublime. Abaci seems to have misunderstood my view of impure (adherent) judgments, thinking that I meant that the fact that ideas are involved necessarily renders all judgments of the sublime adherent. "Besides, if Clewis is right, then all cases of the sublime must be deemed impure because the involvement of ideas of reason is a definitive feature of the Kantian sublime" (Abaci 2010, p. 171). Incidentally, *that* view was once entertained by Guyer 2005:160-161; for previous discussion, see Clewis 2009, pp. 105-106. Abaci (2010) then goes on to explore precisely what I had had in mind: an adherent judgment based on the conception of the purposes of the object. It was for that reason that I drew the parallel with adherent beauty: "Recall that impure beauty for Kant is a kind of beauty in which the judging subject incorporates a notion of the end of the object into the judgment" (Clewis 2010, p. 168). In Clewis 2009, I had clarified that I was referring to the object's ends or teleological concepts.

judgments of painting can be pure and free. One might insist that they can only be adherent, and thus accept only the weaker thesis: while there may not be *pure*, free judgments of the sublime in response to art and painting, there can be adherent judgments. That would be understandable, though it would still be incorrect to deny the conceptual possibility of free judging of the sublimity of art.

In any case, there is good reason to think there can be adherent judgments of sublimity. And as noted, adherent judgments of the sublime are still genuine judgments of the sublime.

Two Examples

Before concluding, I now shift from the more scholarly register to the more personal. To give substance to what I have been arguing (and to partly "address" the problems Abaci raises),[16] I offer two imagined but concrete cases that I hope resonate with the reader. I wish thereby to show how painting might evoke experiences of the sublime. The following descriptions are based on my own experiences, and while I do not expect or demand anyone else to have had similar one – it is not normative in that sense – I think it is *possible* for them to do so, and I invite them to see if they have had, or could have, similar responses. (To clarify again, I share the following invented reflections as descriptions of experiences of the sublime, not as descriptions of works of art as exhibiting aesthetic ideas or works of "genius" in Kant's sense.)

My first example takes up and extends Kant's praise of St. Peter's and Michelangelo.

Perhaps prepared by a walk through St. Peter's basilica, eliciting in me an initial feeling of awe or bewilderment before its stunning magnitude and grandeur, I enter the Sistine Chapel. As I approach the chapel, I feel the excitement building in me, just

[16] According to Abaci's response to my discussion of his article, addressing "the problems" he raises is one of three desiderata for anyone making a claim to a Kantian theory of artistic sublimity (Abaci 2010, p. 170). With my pointing out an equivocation concerning nature (external) and "sensible" nature, and my examples in the present section, I take myself to be doing that here. The first of the other two desiderata is "to present us with a convincing explanation of the absence of an actual account in Kant's text." I take the aforementioned third *Critique*'s late, hasty composition, as well as Kant's transcendental (rather than art-critical) aims in the work, largely to do this. The final desideratum is "to take on the burden of a positive account that is able to explain our aesthetic response to purportedly sublime artworks in terms of judgments of sublimity as Kant understands them." He thinks my 2010 piece attempted to do this (but also implies he had more or less already considered and preemptively responded to such arguments in his 2008 article). I add to it here.

thinking about what I am going to see. I have been there before, and the memory of visiting it (now long ago) builds up my expectation. I also think about all the history that unfolded in the chapel and its function as the site of the papal conclaves – the discussions held and documents signed, the alliances made (or not). The setting thus adds to the moment. I am aware of the contributions of the other artists such as Raphael, and even of Michelangelo's own *Last Judgment* on the altar wall, but I focus my attention on the ceiling. I imagine the hordes of people that have streamed through the chapel in the summer – though perhaps typically only for a matter of minutes. I am relieved they are gone and that I am allowed to visit it with just a few friends. Taking my time, I scan Michelangelo's work: I observe the biblical figures. I see the beautiful and symmetrical forms, but I also view them in light of what (little) I know of Christian theology. Naturally, I dwell on the image of Adam's finger almost reaching, yet falling short, just barely, of God's hand. Though the image has been reproduced widely on postcards, prints, and internet images, it is still striking and moving: it looks fresh and new to me. Far from making it clichéd, the scene's renown adds to the moment. As I contemplate the fresco's meaning in this place, as an image about the Christian story of creation, I feel small, one might say a "creature" – it is hard to get beyond the Christian symbolism. I wonder if the individuals in the bustling crowds felt awe, or if they were in too much of a hurry, or perhaps too thirsty. I think about my place, my personal goals and aims in life, and family and close ones. I cannot capture the entirety of the idea of this meaning and purpose. I look up again at Adam. I feel small before the representations of Adam and God. But I also feel uplifted. It is not just that I admire the mastery and technique of Michelangelo, his "genius" and the virtuous cultivation of his talent, though that is part of it. It is that I feel uplifted above ordinary affairs and events. The depicted scene stands in for nature: it all seems small in the face of a divine creator, or the idea of a profounder purpose that we aim for but fail to fully reach. The feeling of rising above ordinary affairs and concerns is ennobling: it is a feeling of freedom. It exposes a deeper meaning, perhaps a larger moral order. I feel goose bumps and my heart rate increase. Perhaps it is caused not by a late morning cappuccino but by a rush of endorphins brought about by my perception of the images and these reflections.

The second example must be briefer: a marine painting. A number of paintings from Kant's era could be chosen: Jan Por-

cellis's *Ships in a Storm on a Rocky Coast* (1614-18), Rembrandt's only seascape, the (stolen and still missing) *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* (1633); Jan van Goyen's *The Thunderstorm* (1641); Arnoldus Anthonissen, *Seascape* (1660-1670); or one of Claude Joseph Vernet's numerous sea-wreckage paintings, such as *The Shipwreck* (1772). While Kant lacked firsthand acquaintance of these paintings, he could in principle have been aware of either prints or descriptions of them.

Let me take the Rembrandt, which, like Michelangelo's frescoes, also deals with Christian themes. As I look at it, I recall a curious and unfortunate fact: in an incredible heist in 1990, it was stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. So I can only look at reproductions of it, arguably making eliciting a sublime response even more difficult (and my task here even more challenging).

I look up the image online. I recognize this genre of painting, a marine painting dealing with biblical themes. Looking at the depicted scene, the content, I take my time with it and zoom in on the faces. It depicts the story of Jesus and his disciples on a boat in the middle of a raging storm. I study the grimaces of the sailors. One disciple is vomiting over the side. Another disciple, one with Rembrandt's face, is looking back at me. Intended or not, this self-reference – Rembrandt's placing himself next to Jesus – strikes me as both as somewhat humorous and challenging, a challenge to me the perceiver. Jesus is calm and poised with *apatheia*. The painting is well executed of course, and conducive to taste: the scene that would be repugnant if it were real life, is now tamed and (to use Kant's language) made beautiful (a work of "fine" art). Accepting the painting's invitation, as it were, I place myself in the position of the sailors on the boat. I am aware that the painting is a work of art, indeed an online image of a painting, but I place myself on that boat. In this sense, I regard the scene as if it were an image of nature (cf. §45, KU 5:306-307). I try to sense what the disciples felt: fear. Though I have never been afraid on a boat in this way, I imagine what it must be like. The sailors look like the people today who don't like to fly, who hold their hands together, or startle, when sustained, heavy turbulence bounces their bodies to-and-fro. If I were on that ship, I imagine, what fear I would feel too. Thankfully, I am here, looking at the online image of the painting – and it is a painting after all. I don't feel fear now, and the image does not threaten me. But reflecting and imagining in this way does bring to mind what it is like to feel such fear, and thus to disclose the merely relative value of

everyday affairs, perhaps even of existence itself. Noticing the relative worth of mundane matters – even of life, apart from the meaning I have given to it – is freeing.[17] And that feels good.[18]

Concluding Remark

If the above analysis turns out to be unsound and Kant is committed to Deny after all, it would seem to go against artistic practices. In that case, one might well want to let out a sigh: so much the worse for Kant! The rejection of Deny seems to be implicit in contemporary social practices in the visual arts. In fact, the rejection seems to have been in place since the Romantic painters, or even, as the Dutch marine paintings show, long before the Romantics.

Accordingly, I have addressed the argument using the terms of Kant's day and context. I have argued that even when adopting such a perspective, a case can be made for the possibility of the Kantian sublime in response to painting.[19]

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[17] Abaci provides a useful explanation of how paintings (of high mountains, oceans, and the like) might, through the perceiver's fantasy (or make-believe) and imaginative reconstructive activity, evoke the sublime, but for some reason Abaci does not find the example very satisfying: "So only if this quite unlikely phenomenology of a second-order subreption is the case, then there is a roundabout sense in which we may call our aesthetic response to such artistic representation of a 'sublime' natural object a judgment of sublimity" (Abaci 2008, p. 247). But in his contribution to the present journal issue, Abaci seems more open to such a possibility. For a similar example inspired by the sea, see also Schopenhauer's vivid description in §38 of *World as Will and Representation* (Clewis 2019).

[18] Consider too (associated with a *mimetic* view of painting) trompe l'oeil works, that is, illusionistic paintings that are intended to look so lifelike that one mistakes them for the real thing. If my argument is correct, such paintings, if carried out in the right manner, and perhaps bringing about the impression of the vast magnitudes found in architecture or in natural landscapes, could in principle elicit sublime experiences. Such awe-like responses might be evoked not just by the lifelike *content* (taken for the real thing, artifact, and/or nature), but also by the skillful powers and mastery of the artists who are able to create such stunning creations and pull off such feats of illusion. Compare Abaci's claim (2008, p. 247): "by means of a certain perceptual illusion such a painting [of a high mountain] may invoke in us a feeling of infinity." This tradition continues in paintings and installations today. Just to give one of many possible examples, street artists have painted deep-looking, dark holes in the sidewalk that are so realistic, passersby are afraid to walk over them, swooning before an apparent abyss.

[19] The paper originated in a workshop, organized by Arno Schubbach and Johannes Grave, at the University of Jena, July 17-18, 2022. I thank the organizers, participants (including Uygar Abaci), and audience for comments and discussion.

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