

<p>Caspar David Friedrich, <i>Arctic Sea,</i> (aka <i>Das Eismeer</i>) 1823-24, oil on canvas, 97 x 127 cm (38 x 50')</p>	<p>initial analysis</p>	<p>Friedrich wrote, 'The artist should paint not only what he sees before him, but also what he sees within him. If, however, he sees nothing within him, then he should also refrain from painting that which he sees before him.' (Note 1)</p>
<p>Most of the canvas depicts sets of ice floes and thick crunched sheets of ice and soil in the foreground has a pyramidal form with an emphatic diagonal thrust from the lower right to the upper left. Beyond this in the middle ground a flat sheet of ice surface and in the background an iceberg or mount of ice with a similar form to that in the foreground. The blue sky above has white cloud in the centre with a corona form haloed above the foreground pyramid.</p> <p>It is worth noting that the use of pyramidal form by Romantic painters is comparable to the recommendations of William Hogarth in his 1753 <i>Analysis of Beauty</i>.</p>		<p>On right crushed beneath the ice flows a ship, <i>Hope</i>, on its side.</p> <p>Friedrich never saw the real Arctic Sea. He knew the structure of piled ice-floes from the Baltic Sea. But the models for the ice floes in the painting were the small sheets of ice on the German river 'Elbe'. There were great amounts of ice on the Elbe in the winter 1820/21 and his oil sketches indicate that he had been inspired by the amounts of it. Friedrich used these sketches as drafts for <i>Arctic Sea</i>. He always factored his paintings in this manner: first, making various sketches from visual report of the natural world and then combining them together in his paintings.</p>
<p>The painting can be seen in the Kunsthalle Hamburg</p>	<p>The foreground angle of view is seen from an elevated position. The middle ground large pyramid of ice sheets is seen directly face-on slightly from below. This encourages a dynamic disruption in the viewing.</p>	<p>The painting addresses the limits of human endeavour and, allegorically, human existence.</p>

In the 19th century the Arctic attracted wide interest in Europe. There were Arctic expeditions to discover unexplored regions, especially to find a North-West-Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In 1819-1820 the Englishman William Edward Parry undertook an expedition and stayed the entire winter with the research vessels, 'Griper' and 'Hecla' in the Arctic Sea. Even though the ships were blocked with ice during this winter sojourn, they were not damaged and both ships returned to port – in contrast to the ship in Friedrich's painting. Nevertheless the painting *Arctic Sea* is related to Parry's voyage. Some contemporaries of Friedrich regarded the tiny shipwreck seen in the painting as the ship 'Griper'. It is disputable if Friedrich was referring to this expedition. Although he could have received inspiration by Parry's voyage, there were many reports, articles and in Germany illustrations about other Arctic expeditions from which Friedrich could have gathered his information. In 1822 Parry's *Journal of the Voyage for the Discovery of a North-West-Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific* was published in German translation.¹

In 1820 Johann Gottlob von Quandt, asked Friedrich to paint a picture which showed the 'Sublime North'. Quandt ordered it because he wanted a counter-image to a sepia-painting of the beautiful classic south from Johann Martin von Rohden. After Friedrich finished his painting, Quandt hung both paintings in one room, facing one another. Rohden's painting shows a hermit, who acts as a host for a pilgrim, surrounded by a beautiful Arcadian landscape. The counter-painting Friedrich factored is called *The Failed Hope*. This painting is now missing, but descriptions that exist of the painting show that it is very similar to the painting *Arctic Sea*. It shows a shipwreck, called 'Hope', which is buried in ice floes. Like the painting *Arctic Sea* it can be considered as an allegory.

Note 1. Gerhard Eimer and Günter Rath (eds.) *Frankfurter Fundamente der Kunstgeschichte. Band XVI. Caspar David Friedrich*, Frankfurt: Sammlung von Gemälden von größtenteils noch lebenden und unlängst verstorbenen Künstlern, 1999, p. 116.

¹ Nina Hinrichs. 'Das Eismeer' – Caspar David Friedrich and the North', Norway: *Nordlit: Tidsskrift i litteratur og kultur*, 01 February 2008, Vol.12 (1), pp.131-160.

Towards the end of the 18th century, the image of the North is related to the philosophical theories of the Sublime by Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller.² The Romantics found in the idea of the Sublime an attractive alternative to the strict rules of the neo-classical era. The Sublime is clearly associated with nature. Wild landscapes, polar zones, terrific storms, huge mountains, the view of the endless sea, the infinity of the starry sky or gazing into an abyss can evoke sublime emotions. The marvellous, but also hostile nature of the Arctic is encapsulated in the image of the 'Sublime North'. The Sublime emotion, in the sense of Burke, Kant and Schiller combines two contradictory emotions: horror and pleasure. Earlier, in 1688, the dramatist and critic John Dennis described his emotions as he crossed the Alps and was faced with the beautiful and at the same time terrible and life-threatening nature.

'And sometimes its [nature's] face appear'd Smooth and Beautiful [...] In the very same place Nature was seen Severe and Wanton. In the mean time we walk'd upon the very brink, in a literal sense, of Destruction; one stumble, and both Life and Carcass had been at once destroy'd. The sense of all this produced different motions in me; viz. A delightful Horror, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, that I was infinitely pleased, I trembled.'³

Kant and Schiller transferred ideas of morality and rationality to the Sublime. In their theories, Sublimity is marked by grandeur, vastness, incomprehensibility, and the power to cause an intense pleasure in the observer, which has transcendent qualities. According to Schiller, the sublime emotion in regard to powers of nature is the effect of three sequential conceptions: 1. An objective physical power – like the Arctic Sea, for example. 2. Our subjective physical inferiority. 3. Our subjective moral superior strength. In German Romanticism, the ideas of morality weakened. The 'Sublime North' was simply added to a counter-image of the Arcadia-South.

(Extracts from Immanuel Kant *The Critique of Judgement*, 1790, regarding the mathematical and dynamical Sublime have been provided on a pdf on my edublogs site.)

² Edmund Burke. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757, edited by James T. Boulton, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958 &c. Immanuel Kant. *The Critique of Judgement*, 1790, translated with analytical indexes by James Creed Meredith, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952. Friedrich Schiller. *On the Sublime*, 1801, translated by William F. Wertz, Jr., https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/transl/trans_on_sublime.html

³ John Dennis: 'Letter describing his crossing the Alps' (25. October 1688), *John Dennis: The Critical Work*, edited E. N. Hooker. Baltimore 1939/40. (Neudruck 1964), Band 2, pp. 380-382.