

Bachelor of Science in Art History and Theory Thesis

Claude Lorrain's Great Escape:  
An Exploration into the Human Connection with Landscape Painting

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**Abstract:**

My thesis centers on the idea of the human connection towards landscape paintings by analyzing the seaport and coastal scenes by Baroque landscape painter, Claude Lorrain. Within these bodies of work I focus on ideas of escapism, visual pilgrimage, and virtual reality. My work will explore the questions of what escapism or a visual pilgrimage is, how a person can be drawn into a landscape painting, and whether or not the placement or orientation can impact how we interpret and feel about a work. I draw upon a wide variety of methodologies such as semiotics and psychoanalysis to frame my argument.

The scene is set, and all that is in sight is a dazzling body of water with a glimmering sunset surrounded by classical architecture. For a second, we are able to notice the chaotic scene that is happening around us but it's hard to focus because we can't keep our eyes off the light. It's like this great, glowing beam that is pulling us closer and closer into the scene, making it hard to pay attention to anything else. Certainly, we are able to notice the people around us and that there is a more important event that is about to begin but it's like everything has simply melted away and the only aspect we can keep an eye on is this warm, golden orb that shines down upon the sea. The object I am describing of course is Claude Lorrain's *Seaport with Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba*. (Figure 1) Claude is somewhat of a magician in the way because he has the ability to make everything else disappear and somewhat consume me. In fact, one of the most fascinating tricks a magician can learn is the skill of the great escape. The idea is for a magician to get a volunteer from their audience and then to make everyone in attendance believe that for even a slight second, that this person had been transcended into a different time or place. Art is similar to magic in this way because by the help of the overwhelming beauty in these images, it helps the viewer escape their everyday lives. I believe that Claude Lorraine's paintings are a good example of this trick for a multitude of reasons. In this piece, I am centering my ideas around the concept of the human experience towards idealized landscape paintings. I believe that it's through his depiction of ideal landscapes that are illuminated by the warm glow of the sun as it rises and sets, that Claude is able to create a portal to the sublime. By looking at Claude Lorrain's seaports and coastal scenes, I will center my ideas around escapism, visual pilgrimage,

and virtual reality. I intend to explore questions of what escapism or a visual pilgrimage is, how a person can be drawn into an idealized landscape painting, and whether or not the placement or orientation can impact how we interpret and feel about a work.

## The Voyager

Claude Lorrain, also referred to as Claudius, Claudi, Claudio Gelle, and Claude Gilli, was a French Baroque landscape artist who is primarily known for his seaport and pastoral landscapes. Claude was the third of five children born to merchants, Jean Gellée and Anne Padose, born in Lorraine, France between the years 1600 and 1605. Art historians are unsure of the exact year when Claude was born due to the lack of documentation.<sup>1</sup> Growing up in a merchant household, Claude was bound to experience a variety of different people, objects, and places. It is believed that around 1617, when Claude was around the age of 12 or 13, he moved to Rome following the death of both of his parents. This move to Rome was significant to Claude's story because it would go on to influence the architecture in his paintings and serve as influence to the type of paintings Claude created. There are many different ideas as to why Claude left for Rome. Marcel Roethlisberger thought that Claude was brought to Rome by a relative after his parents died so that someone could look after him.<sup>2</sup> Others like Filippo Baldinucci believe that Claude was brought to Rome to be an apprentice to the landscape painter Agostino Tassi.<sup>3</sup> While others like Joachim von Sandrart believe that Claude was brought to Rome to be a cook and a servant for the Tassi household where he was responsible for

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Kitson, *Claude (Le) Lorrain* (Oxford Art Online, 2003) 1

<sup>2</sup> Marcel Rothlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (New Haven, Yale University, 1961) 5

<sup>3</sup> Filippo Baldinucci, *The Life of Claude* in Marcel Rothlisberger's book *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (Florence, 1728) 53

cleaning, grinding colors of paint, and cleaning paint brushes and palettes.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, Claude's move to Rome was significant because it shaped his later works and influenced the architecture in his paintings while serving as influence to the type of paintings Claude created.

Similar to his reasons for coming to Rome, art historians are also unsure as to how Claude Lorrain actually got his start at painting. Like I've stated previously the most popular theory is that Lorrain was a pupil of Tassi's and that's when he learned how to paint.<sup>5</sup> But there is some evidence to suggest that his brother, Jean, was the first one to teach him how to create art before being properly taught. But others actually believe that not long after Claude got to Rome he then moved to Naples where he had his first apprenticeship with Goffredo Wals before later becoming a pupil of Tassi's.<sup>6</sup> Traveling from place to place must have brought great inspiration to Claude and is perhaps the reason that he started painting landscapes in the first place, as a way to document his travels. Joachim von Sandrart, one of Claude's biographers, brings up the idea that the reason why Claude started painting in the first place is because he couldn't find a decent job since he did not speak Italian. Tassi, seeing him struggle, decided to teach him how to paint before switching him over to drawing but inevitably made Claude go back to painting because he wasn't very good.<sup>7</sup> While Filippo Baldinucci, another one of his

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<sup>4</sup> Joachim von Sandrart, *The Life of Claude* in Marcel Rothlisberger's book *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (Nurnberg, 1675) 47

<sup>5</sup> Marcel Rothlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (New Haven, Yale University, 1961) 5

<sup>6</sup> Filippo Baldinucci, *The Life of Claude* in Marcel Rothlisberger's book *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (Florence, 1728) 53, 54

<sup>7</sup> Joachim von Sandrart, *The Life of Claude*, in Marcel Rothlisberger's book *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (Nurnberg, 1675) 47

biographers, believed that Claude was born with the gift of drawing and that it just came naturally to him.<sup>8</sup>

After studying with Tassi, Claude then returned to Lorraine where he studied under Claude Deruet for about a year in 1625. During his time with Deruet, he mainly worked on frescoes, specifically the ceiling frescoes for the Carmelite church in Nancy.<sup>9</sup> It's said that after a gilder almost died, Claude gave up his work with Claude Deruet on the vault of the church of Carmelites. Once finished with his apprenticeship, he then returned to Rome in the spring of 1627 where he would remain for the rest of his life. Voyaging from place to place must have given Claude great excitement as he may have used his studies and sightseeing opportunities to life in his landscapes. After working with a number of different artists, he really began to hone his craft by observing and studying from nature. Seeing that he had been to a variety of different places and seen numerous amounts of architecture, it's only natural that Claude would want to emulate that in his work. Sandrart remembers this detail of Claude's life by stating that he originally would study nature but did not paint outside. He actually met Claude while he was painting. Sandrart also paints from nature but claims to actually be outside when he paints. Sandrart believes that Claude adapted this technique of painting outside from him which later went on to influence his contemporaries and made them actually start to mimic this technique. Even though he struggled with his depictions of humans and animals, it was after this development in technique that Claude's career really began to take off.

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<sup>8</sup> Filippo Baldinucci, *The Life of Claude*, in Marcel Rothlisberger's book *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (Florence, 1728) 53

<sup>9</sup> Michel Kitson, *Claude (Le) Lorrain* (Oxford Art Online, 2003) 2

Claude became so successful that his work became known around the world which led to him only working for commission. He worked for people such as Pope Urban, Cardinal Bentivoglio, Cardinal de' Medici, Cardinal Giori, the Duke of Bracciano, the Prince of Leancourt, Cardinal Mellino, Clement IX, Pope Alexander VII, Prince Don Gasparo, Cardinal Spada, and his most notable client King Philip IV of Spain. In addition to his commissions, he also sent a number of works to different areas around the world to be placed in galleries or palaces so that others may enjoy them as well. Of these many commissions twenty three ended up in Paris, five in Naples, two in Venice, two in Amsterdam, two in Antwerp, two in Avignon, and two in Lyon.<sup>10</sup> The majority of his works were made in the 1640's with the production of eighty five paintings. But all together, he made seventy in 1630's, thirty in the 1650's and twenty five in the 1660's up until his death in 1682.

In regards to his production rate, Claude was notoriously known for working at a very slow rate which is why he only produced a small number of paintings within each decade. He was very detail oriented and would paint from a small scale meaning he would only paint from a small area of space at a time. His heightened success also came with many challenges. People started coming up to him and asking him if he had painted these pieces that were being sold on the street. Of course, he only worked on commission so the idea that these pieces could have been his was impossible. He became quite upset and angry at the idea of these people trying to claim his work and make a profit after what he had done so he decided to then keep records of all of his works. He made a

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<sup>10</sup> Filippo Baldinucci, *The Life of Claude*, in Marcel Rothlisberger's book *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (Florence, 1728) 58

record keeping book called “Liber Veritatis” which is also known as “Libro d’Invenzioni” or “Libro di Verità”.<sup>11</sup> In this book he would create exact copies of the works that he had done which also included the title, year, patron, and place that the item was being sent to. This was one of the first forms of record keeping for an artist and was significant because it protected him and his artwork from forgeries. Not only did this book act as a way to keep records but it could have also served as a way for Claude to document his journeys and used them for inspirations in his later works. He explored and lived in a number of different places so it only makes sense for him to want to keep track of what he saw and use it throughout his various paintings.

Claude mainly worked by himself on his pieces and not with a team, although there is a story about Claude training one pupil. It’s said that Claude taught a crippled boy, Giovanni Domenico Romano, how to paint. Unfortunately this little boy died very unexpectedly which caused Claude to be so upset and distraught that he never trained another pupil again. Nearing the end of his life, Claude lived with his nephew Joseph and supposed “natural” daughter Agnes who took care of him. Claude died on November 21, 1682 at the age of eighty two to what we believe to be complications from gout. In his will, Claude gave the majority of his works and real estate to his nephews but left his book “Liber Veritatis” to his daughter Agnes. Perhaps Claude wanted to have his daughter experience the same kinds of adventures that he was able to take. Throughout his life Claude was known as a generally good person. Baldinucci describes him as being “the friend of everyone, and he wished to have peace with all.” Not only was he

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<sup>11</sup> Marcel Rothlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (New Haven, Yale University, 1961) 37



considered to be a good person but Claude also had a highly accomplished life with his creation of over 250 paintings, 1300 drawings, and 44 etchings by the end of his life. Being that he did amount to so much and created so many different pieces of artwork, it's only natural that his techniques and skills would grow and change with him throughout his life.

## The Technique

Claude “invented” many new techniques for painting that helped to change the way artists made landscape paintings for decades after his death. The majority of Claude’s paintings were characterized as “ideal landscapes”, which are creations of an image of nature that are more beautiful and better ordered than nature itself.<sup>12</sup> This means that while Claude would paint what he saw in nature, he would then also idealize the landscape to make it look even more beautiful. It’s known that oftentimes Claude would draw from different bits of architecture or nature that he had encountered over the course of his travels. In addition to the creation of ideal landscapes, the techniques that he used to make them were also very new for this time period. The way he made these paintings as described by Micheal Kitson is by “using a white ground and laid over that a second ground, which varied in tone and colour according to the tones and colours to be employed in the final layer. The unusually intense blues in his pictures are due to his use of real ultramarine, a pigment made from lapis lazuli.”<sup>13</sup> This technique of layering was very new to the time and had only recently been adapted into techniques of painting. The

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<sup>12</sup> Michel Kitson, *Claude (Le) Lorrain* (Oxford Art Online, 2003) 1

<sup>13</sup> Michel Kitson, *Claude (Le) Lorrain* (Oxford Art Online, 2003) 15

purpose for this technique was to make it so the colors would appear brighter and more vivid once they were on the canvas. Moreover, before this point, most artists would just use their memories to create what they had remembered nature to look like, where Claude would actually go outside and study from nature. Sandrart says that he developed this technique from him, where Claude would actually go outside with his canvas and carefully map out and study what nature truly looked like.<sup>14</sup> Being that he moved from Lorraine to Rome to Naples back to Lorraine and then once again back to Rome, it would appear obvious that the varying landscapes from all these places would be quite interesting to see in comparison to one another.

The majority of the work that Claude made depicts either a sunset or a sunrise so it's only natural to assume that he would go out at these points in the day. His aim was to accurately depict these different times of day in different months of the year in different seasons which his predecessors had not done accurately before. Most of the time, these artists would just paint large yellow balls in the sky but would not actually capture the warmth and significance that the sun actually brings to a painting. Sandrart is said to have said "Evening (rendered) so that the red, hot, suffocating atmosphere and the warmth occurring in hot summer days are seen."<sup>15</sup> This style of painting would go on to influence his contemporaries following his death such as J.M.W. Turner.<sup>16</sup> Claude also put an emphasis on the use of lighting in his paintings. Before this time period, artists didn't really focus on this aspect of painting but Claude was an early example of a painter really

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<sup>14</sup> Joachim von Sandrart, *The Life of Claude*, in Marcel Rothlisberger's book *Claude Lorraine: the Paintings* (Nurnberg, 1675) 48

<sup>15</sup> Marcel Rothlisberger, *Claude Lorraine: the Paintings* (New Haven, Yale University, 1961) 16

<sup>16</sup> Claude's interest in the changing effects of light on the landscape foreshadows the Impressionist movement of the 19th century.

capturing the essence of the sun. Claude would study the specific colors that would arise during different parts of the day and made this delineation in his paintings by painting sunsets with more warm tones and by using cooler tones in his sunrises.<sup>17</sup>

He also used this same technique to distinguish between Ovidian and biblical paintings but instead of using different hues, he would use different gradations of color. With his Ovidian scenes, they tended to be much lighter in mood while his biblical scenes seemed to be much darker.<sup>18</sup> The way in which he also created his paintings was also very unique and careful. Before he would even get started painting, he would draw on his canvas and measure so that he would have the correct proportions of different architectural elements.<sup>19</sup> It is known that Claude was very detail oriented so it makes sense that he would want to take this much time to get the correct proportions for his paintings. He used the technique of linear perspective which is when an artist would use the corners of his canvas to make diagonals that would intersect at one specific point to bring the viewers attention to this specific area. For Claude, the vanishing point would most of the time be his depictions of the sun. The way he worked through his pieces is also very interesting. He would mostly work from the background to the foreground.<sup>20</sup> By doing this he would be able to work with the more general aspects of the painting, meaning the areas that required less detail, to start with and then move closer and closer to the front of his piece where the most detail oriented aspects of his work were. Another interesting part of his method was that if he didn't like something, he would simply just

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<sup>17</sup> Marcel Rothlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (New Haven, Yale University, 1961) 16, 28

<sup>18</sup> Marcel Rothlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (New Haven, Yale University, 1961) 24

<sup>19</sup> Marcel Rothlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (New Haven, Yale University, 1961) 11

<sup>20</sup> Marcel Rothlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (New Haven, Yale University, 1961) 11

paint over it, which is very unique because most painters would actually just start their paintings over again entirely. It's also believed that Claude would rub in a small amount of varnish into his paintings to create atmospheric unity into his paintings.<sup>21</sup> This would most likely help make his paintings look more idealistic and bring out the glow that would surround his depictions of the sun.

In regards to the actual subject matter of his pieces, Claude varied from his contemporaries in the fact that while he did depict humans and animals, they were never the main subjects of his work. He was mainly concerned with the nature and architecture of the piece but still chose to incorporate these elements to provide a storyline in his paintings. Most of the time, the connections he was trying to make were between different pieces of literature such as the Bible and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. One aspect that is interesting about his painting style is that around the 1650's Claude began to use antique buildings, gestures, and expressions that are normally found in historical paintings.<sup>22</sup>

Art historians have also been able to note that most of the settings he used in his paintings were actually depictions of places that can be found in Italy such as Bracciano, Sorrento, Nemi, Palestrina, Civitavecchia, and Subiaco, among many others. Based purely on the fact of how much he moved around as a child, it's only natural that he would use places like this in his paintings because they were most likely places that he had actually seen and encountered. Another interesting aspect in his work are the trees he would use. It's said that he would paint a different type of tree in every single painting he

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<sup>21</sup> Marcel Rothlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (New Haven, Yale University, 1961) 12

<sup>22</sup> Humphrey Wine, *Claude: the Poetic Landscape* (National Gallery Publications, 1994) 18

made.<sup>23</sup> Most of the time artists will revisit different kinds of trees and use them throughout a number of different compositions but Claude chose to use a very unique and individualistic view towards each one of his paintings. This technique makes sense considering the various places he has been to see that he would encompass a variety of different aspects of nature within each place. Claude developed a technique based on his travels and his interest in the effects of the light that he used to create ideal landscapes.

## The Beholder's Triangle

One of the most important aspects of viewing Claude Lorrain's artworks is discovering and understanding the relationship between the artist, the artwork, and the viewer. While I am interested in the viewing experience of viewers in Claude's time, when I use the word viewer in this sense, I am referring to a person who would have seen Claude Lorrain's work in a gallery setting in the present time. A growing field known as "neuroaesthetics" has begun to emerge due to scientists' increased curiosity of how the brain interacts with visual art. These scientists use a technique known as the transcranial magnetic stimulation or TMS to monitor what happens in their brains and subjects' brains when they look at different works of art. They found that based on the images they showed, the brain would exhibit different physical actions based on the type of work being shown. For instance, David Freedberg, the Columbia University art history professor involved in the study reports that this specific connection explains why viewers of Degas' ballerinas sometimes report that they experience the sensation of dancing

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<sup>23</sup> Marcel Rothlisberger, *Claude Lorrain: the Paintings* (New Haven, Yale University, 1961) 24,26

because the brain mirrors the actions depicted on the canvas.<sup>24</sup> The scientists also wanted to study how viewers would respond based on the placement of the piece of artwork. Ulrich Kirk, a neuroscientist at the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute, conducted a test to see if a viewer would respond the same way to a masterpiece being exhibited in the Louvre compared to a piece of artwork being shown in such a place as a garage sale. In this experiment, Kirk showed his test subjects a series of images in which some he told were fine artwork and others were created by Photoshop but in reality, none of these images were Photoshop-generated. This experiment resulted in Kirk finding that different areas of their brains were fired up when he declared an image to be “art”.<sup>25</sup>

These neurological responses give insight into how viewers may have interpreted Claude’s artworks back when he was actually creating these pieces. Since the majority of his patrons were royals, members of the nobility, and cardinals of the church, it’s safe to assume that most of his paintings were hung in these grand buildings that would give viewers a sense of importance. Experiencing an artwork in such a place can make it easier for viewers to be transported into such images. For example, Claude’s painting *Seaport with Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba* (Figure 1) made in 1648. This work is an oil painting made for Frédéric-Maurice de la Tour d’Auvergne, duc de Bouillon, general of the army, that depicts the biblical story of the moment that the Queen of Sheba is departing on her journey to visit King Solomon in Jerusalem. This painting sits at around 148.5 x 194 cm and is currently located in London, England at the National Gallery of Art. This painting is able to make the audience blend into these crowds of

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<sup>24</sup> Abigail Tucker, *How Does the Brain Process Art?* (Smithsonian Magazine, 2012)

<sup>25</sup> Abigail Tucker, *How Does the Brain Process Art?* (Smithsonian Magazine, 2012)

people being that it is around the average size of an adult but more importantly, it depicts the moment a Queen has arrived. This event alone is enough to make someone feel important and to truly be a part of something larger than themselves. Both the home of the Duke of Bouillon and the National Gallery of Art are such large and magnificent buildings that it's hard for viewers not to be drawn into this painting. In both the subject of the painting and the placement within these two buildings, it's only natural for the audience to feel this sense of grandeur both in the fact that this queen is about to embark on this magnificent journey and that this piece of artwork is being displayed in such a large area that it brings the viewer in and makes them feel as though they are a part of something larger.

After reading these studies of how patrons interact with pieces of artwork, museum curators and educators are then able to use what they know to make these exhibits truly come to life and be more interactive for people to experience. But artists have always been studying the way in which the world works and is perceived therefore it's only natural that they have come to truly understand certain features of our minds like how we see objects, color, or form. As humans we have this innate desire to find meaning in the object that we see, even if it's just a simple shape or color, we use that information to make connections in our brains between the information that we are seeing and our experience as humans. This method of learning is known as "constructivist learning theory" which basically just means that it is an approach to learning that allows people to actively construct and make their own knowledge based on the experiences of

the learner.<sup>26</sup> Sarah Ganz, the director of educational resources at the Museum of Modern Art, says that "Central to the design of interpretative experiences is awareness that there is no one authoritative explanation or meaning," which means that there is no right or wrong way to interpret an image but that the viewer's interpretation is based upon their worldly knowledge and can be subject to change.<sup>27</sup> The idea interpretation is essential when discussing the meanings or artworks. Carol Stapp, director of the museum education program at George Washington University, regards interpretation as the process of "setting up a structured opportunity for a learning encounter and then letting go."<sup>28</sup> I believe that what she means by letting go is letting go of preconceived notions of what an artwork is supposed to mean and instead embracing what the meaning of an artwork may be. A great quote made by Terry Barrett, professor of art education at Ohio State University, is that "Art comes alive with the viewer."<sup>29</sup> I believe that this quote is important to Claude's work because when viewing his landscapes, at first glance the audience may only see a ship, some water, and people but it's only when the viewer truly starts to observe and investigate his work that the audience can be transported into these ideal landscapes and become a part of the painting.

## Disappearing Act

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<sup>26</sup> Pamela Carter-Birken, *Interpretation and the Role of the Viewer in Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art*. (Curator51, 2008)

<sup>27</sup> Pamela Carter-Birken, *Interpretation and the Role of the Viewer in Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art*. (Curator51, 2008)

<sup>28</sup> Pamela Carter-Birken, *Interpretation and the Role of the Viewer in Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art*. (Curator51, 2008)

<sup>29</sup> Pamela Carter-Birken, *Interpretation and the Role of the Viewer in Museums of Modern and Contemporary Art*. (Curator51, 2008)



One of the main functions of art is to form a distraction from people's everyday lives and to make them stop and enjoy the beauty, much like Claude did when he decided to start painting outside. However, this idea of escaping reality is not exclusive to art and is actually used quite often in everyday life. For example, oftentimes people from large cities tend to go on vacations to much quieter areas to escape their hectic lives while people from more rural areas tend to want to go to cities to experience an adventure. I believe that this idea of helping people escape is the main function of Claude Lorrain's paintings and can be used for audiences to be transported into this new place. Take for example Claude's work *Seaport at Sunset* (Figure 2) painted in oil on canvas for an unknown patron in 1639 and is currently being displayed in the Louvre in Paris, France. The calmness of the water and the lack of commotion in this piece, helps the viewer blend into the crowd and makes this piece perfect for an audience who is trying to remove themselves from their busy lives and instead relax and enjoy nature. I say this because there isn't supposed to be an overarching theme or story in this piece making it easier for a person to relax and just enjoy what they are looking at. This artwork was merely made for someone to simply come and enjoy the sunset. However, his painting *Cleopatra Disembarking at Tarsus* (Figure 3) made between 1642-1643 does the exact opposite. This oil painting, also featured in the Louvre, is meant to excite people and prepare them for a journey. The viewer can see the commotion caused by the arrival of this decorated queen who is landing in Tarsus. For this story, Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, had come to Tarsus where she was sent to meet and seduce Mark Anthony, the ruler of Tarsus. Cleopatra is pictured wearing a blue dress and a gold crown, which is not

historically accurate for the time of this story. But this painting has everything and more that a person, trying to escape mundane life and go on a journey would want, love and adventure.

To further explain my point, it is important to understand the psychological phenomenon that I am trying to explain which is escapism. Escapism as entertainment is made to draw us away from our everyday troubles, and, sometimes, to help us to fantasize ourselves as better, more important, and better off than we really are.<sup>30</sup> This is a common phenomenon that people use quite regularly. This idea of transporting through a painting is easy to do in Claude Lorrain's artwork because of the fact that it is idyllic and almost perfect causing the audience to get somewhat lost in his artwork. Due to either the calmness or serenity of the piece, it's easier for a person to forget their worries or stressors from their actual lives and just sit back and relax. But, on the contrary, paintings with more action cause the viewer to become more inquisitive and make them explore while going on a journey through Claude's artworks. The use of escapism is different from self deception however because it is not a process of denying or avoiding the significance, or importance of opposing evidence and logical argument but instead just a way to temporarily leave reality and fantasize about different things. Therefore the use of escapism in literature and art can be used not to avoid one's issues, but instead change one's view. Therefore the idea of escapism goes hand in hand with the idea of virtual reality. Oliver Grau defines virtual reality as "transporting someone to an enclosed, illusionary visual space".<sup>31</sup> He also says "this kind of virtual reality excludes the

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<sup>30</sup> John L. Longeway, *The Rationality of Escapism and Self-Deception* (Behavior and Philosophy, 1990) 1

<sup>31</sup> Oliver Grau, *Into the Belly of the Image: Historical Aspects of Virtual Reality*. (Leonardo 32, 1999) 365

sensation of being alienated by the image and surrounds the observer in in an illusory setting where time and space are one” meaning that this person is literally having reality vanish away behind them so that all they are able to focus on is the image in front of them.<sup>32</sup> By viewing images in this type of way, it allows the painting to act as a portal for the audience to be transcended into a different time and place. Part of what helps the viewer be transported into Claude’s paintings is his mixture between depicting nature and architecture. Due to the fact that he uses these contrasting shapes, like how in nature these shapes would be much more organic and free flowing and in architecture shapes would be much more angular and sharp, help to create this idea of other worldly to establish a feeling of sublime or peace which reminds the viewer of ideas of godliness because of the resemblance to Mt. Olympus.<sup>33</sup> A great example of this would be the delineation between Claude’s building that appears on the right side of Figure 3 and the trees that are peaking out just above these buildings. Artists will use this strategy to trick the viewer into believing that they are somewhere else, however this is not the only strategy artists use. Light actually has a lot to do with the idea of transcendence because based on the type of light an artist may use, the viewer can be made to feel more ethereal and otherworldly. Claude’s main source of light is his depictions of the sun. It's only natural for the viewer's eye to be drawn to these large bright spots because they draw so much attention and make everything else in the painting look more dreamy. Also, Oliver Grau believes that the representation of nature gives the vision totality and creates a sense of journeying through space and time which causes a complete universe of illusion and

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<sup>32</sup> Oliver Grau, *Into the Belly of the Image: Historical Aspects of Virtual Reality*. (Leonardo 32, 1999) 365

<sup>33</sup> Oliver Grau, *Into the Belly of the Image: Historical Aspects of Virtual Reality*. (Leonardo 32, 1999) 366

since all of Claude's paintings are depictions of landscapes, it's easy to see how someone may be transported and drawn into his painting.<sup>34</sup> In saying all this, it's clear that the more realistic and natural an image seems, the more believable this use of transcendence is to the audience.

## The Magic

Perhaps the most alluring aspect of Claude Lorrain's paintings is his depiction of the sun. As I've stated previously, the majority of Claude's artworks depict either a sunset or a sunrise which some may argue is the most entrancing aspect of his painting. His goal was that by painting outside and observing nature, he could accurately depict the landscapes that he wanted to make. Before his time, artists usually struggled to depict the sun because they didn't understand how much skill it actually took to paint the sun and instead would paint large yellow balls in the sky. However, Claude understood the complexities of creating the sun on a canvas and was actually able to make people feel the warmth and significance that radiated off of it. Some may say that Claude was able to capture the essence of the sun which in turn captures the essence of life.<sup>35</sup> One of the most important things Claude did that caused his paintings to be so alluring is that he would study the specific colors that would happen during different parts of the day and would use these colors to make delineation in his paintings by using warm tones in sunsets and cool tones in his sunrises. This attention to detail is what causes his paintings to draw viewers into the landscape. He would also use complementary colors in his work

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<sup>34</sup> Oliver Grau, *Into the Belly of the Image: Historical Aspects of Virtual Reality*. (Leonardo 32, 1999) 367

<sup>35</sup> Barbara A. Weightman, *Sacred Landscapes and the Phenomenon of Light*. (Geographical Review 86, 1996) 59

so that the different hues would pop more. Complementary colors are colors that are opposite from one another on a color wheel, these pairings would be red and green, violet and yellow, and blue and orange. A clear example of his use of color would be his oil painting *Ulysses Return Chryseis to her Father*. (Figure 4) The primary complementary colors Claude chose to use were blue and orange. The heavy use of these colors can be seen on the clothes the characters are wearing in this painting but more importantly in the sky. The majority of the sky is filled with this beautiful light blue, but the viewer's eye can be drawn closer and closer to the center where there is an amazing orange halo surrounding this enormous ship. This halo is truly what draws the audience further and further into the painting. Not only is color important to Claude's depiction of the sun but so is his portrayal of light. As humans, we're often told to not look into the sun or don't go towards the light but when confronted with Claude's work, it's impossible not to stare directly at this brilliant orb.

During the Baroque Era, of which Claude Lorrain is a part of, artists really began to start heightening the drama in their pieces. Most did this with color but also especially with light. These artists wanted to heighten their works by creating pieces of artwork where there were these intense shifts between light and darkness also known as chiaroscuro. However, part of what makes these artworks so dramatic is this idea of the sublime. Edmund Burke, in his book *A Philosophical Enquiry in the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, states that the sublime is "an artistic effect productive of the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling."<sup>36</sup> All this being said, the sublime is

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<sup>36</sup> Tate, *Sublime - Art Term* (London, Tate)

really just describing how an artwork can invoke such a sense of awe in the viewer that these feelings can overwhelm a person's senses. This feeling can create sort of a "religious experience" for the viewer which leaves them stund at the type of artwork they have just seen. Edmund Burke is also quoted as saying "Greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the Sublime."<sup>37</sup> Sometimes the sheer magnitude of a piece is enough to cause the sensation of the sublime. Claude's work do tend to be somewhat large so actually physically standing in front of one, could cause a person to feel as though they are blending into the painting and become fully encapsulated in what they are seeing.

Another important aspect of creating this feeling of the sublime is the use of obscurity.<sup>38</sup> The most important element that makes Claude's paintings a part of this feeling is his depiction of the sun. Unlike his contemporaries, Claude's depiction of the sun was not just a bright yellow globe but was in fact this blurry blob that would melt the sky and the water together. He would use this technique of obscurity by making the sun and the sky melt into one another so the viewer is uncertain where the sky ends and where the sea begins. The philosopher Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment*, states that "the Beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having boundaries, the Sublime is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it, or by occasion of it, *boundlessness* is represented".<sup>39</sup> Claude is no stranger to this effect and can especially be seen in his painting *Landscape with the Embarkation of St. Paula Romana*

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<sup>37</sup> ARTnews, *Beyond the Infinite: Robert Rosenblum on the Sublime in Contemporary Art, in 1961*. (New York, ARTnews, 2019)

<sup>38</sup> ARTnews, *Beyond the Infinite: Robert Rosenblum on the Sublime in Contemporary Art, in 1961*. (New York, ARTnews, 2019)

<sup>39</sup> ARTnews, *Beyond the Infinite: Robert Rosenblum on the Sublime in Contemporary Art, in 1961*. (New York, ARTnews, 2019)

*at Ostia*. (Figure 5). This dramatic use of light can be seen in the comparison between the brightness of the sun in the foreground of the painting and in the shade that comes from the building that is the closest to the audience on the left. The shining from the sun in the middle of the painting almost yearns for the viewer to look at it being that it is so drastically different from the light in every other piece of this painting. This is to be said in most of Claude's paintings. He is able to make it very clear for the viewer to see what is the most important aspect of these paintings and for the most part it is his depiction of the sun. I believe that the sun is one of the most prominent elements that is able to draw the viewer in and transcend them into a different time and illusionary space.

## The Final Bow

Claude Lorrain's work is important for a number of different reasons, whether it's the techniques he created, the style of idealist paintings he produced or the fact that he created a brand new style of painting outside and studying nature. However, I believe that the most important aspect he brought to the art world was his ability to create connections between human existence and landscape paintings. He does this by first understanding the relationship between the artist, artwork and the viewer. Claude, like most other artists, have always been studying the way in which the world works and is perceived for his whole career, therefore it's only natural that he has come to truly understand the psychological features of our minds like how we see objects, color, or form. More important than this, he understands the idea of virtual reality and is able to use this concept to his advantage. His artworks, such as *Cleopatra Disembarking at Tarsus*, Figure 3, and *Ulysses Return Chryseis to her Father*, Figure 4, demonstrate how he is

able to create landscapes that help people go on a journey to either escape their everyday lives or go on an adventure. But perhaps the most important element of his paintings is his depictions of the sun. He is able to capture the warmth and radiance of the sun in his paintings that is truly the contributing factor as to how people are able to disappear into his paintings. His artworks truly are so natural and realistic that it's understandable why people would be forced into the psychological phenomenon of escapism and virtual reality. He was able to truly create magic and help people pull off a disappearing act and have reality melt away around them and be transported into these illusionary times and places.



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**Figure 1**

Claude Lorrain, *Seaport with the Embarkment of the Queen of Sheba*, 1648, Oil on canvas, 148.5 x 194 cm, London, England, The National Gallery of Art

Figure 2



Claude Lorrain, *Seaport at Sunset*, 1639, Oil on canvas, 1.03 x 1.37 m, Paris, France, Louvre

Figure 3



Claude Lorrain, *Cleopatra disembarking at Tarsus*, 1642-1643, Oil on canvas, 1.19 x 1.68 m, Paris, France, Louvre

Figure 4



Claude Lorrain, *Ulysses return Chryseis to her father*, 1644, Oil on canvas, 119 x 150 cm, Paris, France, Louvre

**Figure 5**

Claude Lorrain, *Landscape with the Embarkation of St. Paula Romana at Ostia*, 1639-1640, Oil on canvas, 211 x 145 cm, Madrid, Spain, Museo Nacional del Prado