

ELVYRA USAČIOVAITĖ

Ancient Cultural Symbols in the Painting of Šarūnas Sauka

Summary

Šarūnas Sauka (born 1958 in Vilnius) is one of the most original and most popular Lithuanian painters who has won many different awards. However, the symbols of culture that are pictured in his paintings have not been explored yet. The article highlights the preconditions for the study of historical cultural symbols. The painter uses the symbolic images that refer to historic epoch of the author, his parents and his family, his own cultural interests. Sauka is a philosophical painter. In his works he contemplates the holiness of the world, the problems of the past and present, ethical issues. Such concepts as materialism, spirituality, fame, sacrifice are embodied in his works in a symbolically realistic way. In his works the painter uses the images from the New Testament and creates symbols which he specifically modifies.

The first period (soviet) in the work of the artist is characterized by the symbolism related to baptism and sacrifice. The remarkable feature in the works of this period is that instead of Christ the suffering is laid on Man – our contemporary.

Except for some paintings on the topic of sacrifice, the paintings of the second period of Sauka's creative work (when Lithuania gained its Independence) picture traditional images of *Rūpintojėlis* (Suffering Christ) as well as symbolic images of a moral character. Grotesque and satire are often inevitable when the author considers the dilemma of good and evil. This is how the painter tries to express the idea that corporeal pleasures in human life are not crucial since it is vital to serve the Spirit. This applies both to an individual and the public.

Key words: Šarūnas Sauka, painting, culture, religion, symbols, baptism, *Rūpintojėlis*, sanctuary, sacrifice.

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