

Reality and Grotesqueness

-- A View of Bosch's art in Paradise on Earth

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Abstract: "Paradise on Earth" is the representative work of Dutch painter Bosch in the Renaissance period. His works create a dreamlike world with wonderful imagination and grotesque and exaggerated images. Bosch perfectly integrated the painting language with the real world and enriched the painting expression. This article mainly analyzes some grotesque images in his works and attempts to explore Bosch's art.

Keywords: Bosch, "Paradise on Earth", Grotesque.

1. Background Introduction of Bosch

1.1. The Life of Bosch

According to the records of Hieronymus Bosch, whose original name was Jheronimus Van Aken, was a Nederlander in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Bosch was born into the Van Aken family, which is officially a family of painters. His grandfather Johannes Thomaszoon Van Aken was the founder of the Van Aken family painting workshop. All five of Johannes' sons became painters.[1]

Bosch's grandfather was not only one of the leading painters in Schhertohenbosch in the mid-15th century, but also a member of the influential Marist Brotherhood in Schhertohenbosch, which Bosch later joined. There are only simple official records of the members of the Van Aken family and their workshops, and only Bosch's paintings have survived, not those of other Van Aken family members. So, even though we know that Bosch came from a family of painters, we can't get an in-depth study of his painting style from his family.[2]

The earliest known record of the name Jheronimus Van Aken is in a land lease dated April 5, 1474, which allowed the researchers to place the probable date of Bosch's birth between 1450 and 1456.[3]

Beginning in 1504, all his signings became Hieronymus Bosch, and there is a great absence of available documents concerning the social and economic affairs of Bosch during his lifetime. We can only get a rough idea from a few sources, and from a few fragments of information, we can make a rough guess that Bosch may have been educated in a church; Registered as an artist in his native Schhertohembosch; He married the daughter of a rich merchant in the city.[4]

After getting married, Bosch moved into a house owned by his wife and set up his own painting workshop. Getting married not only provided Bosch with a better financial income, but also improved his social status, indirectly helping him to increase his contract painting orders. With the accumulation of wealth after marriage, Bosch gradually became an independent painter in the true sense.[5]

1.2. The style of Bosch's works and the situation of his patrons

Bosch's works focus on religion, while his later paintings show more evil and depravity of human nature. He mocks the hedonistic world of desire by creating a variety of demigods, demons, monsters, and exaggerated proportions.

Felipe de Guevara saw him as a "monster and creator of delusion". In the sixteenth century, Bosch was known as Grillorum inventor. Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich described him as the creator of der Lustige.[6]

Bosch would have been appreciated by the high and noble, and North Brabant was the domain of the earls, so it made sense for them to be patrons of Bosch's painting workshop and the entire Van Aken family.[7]

Bosch's Paradise was first seen in the Palace of King Henry III in 1517, and was confiscated from the Palace of William Orange when the Dutch suppressed the Puritan Revolution.[8] In addition to the local aristocrats who were interested in Bosch's paintings, many visitors from other countries were also interested in the imaginative and grotesque forms of Bosch's pictures.

2. Grotesque Seeds

Wolfgang Kaeser proposed in his book that "grotesque is a structure". The author thinks that the recognition and understanding of "grotesque" should be carried out from three aspects: the content of the composition, the way of the composition, and the reception reaction of the viewer.[9] The ingredients of "grotesque" are often distilled from the familiar in everyday life; In the method of composition, most of them adopt the methods of mixing, grafting and deformation, so that the original familiar objects become unfamiliar things; The reception reaction of the viewer is that when the viewer uses his own experience accumulated in daily life to observe these strange images, there will be a sense of wonder, which is often accompanied by comical, fear. Next, the author will analyze the grotesque factors from three aspects of "grotesque", including its constituent content, constitutive way and viewer's acceptance reaction, and try to explore what on earth makes the viewer have a strange feeling towards the disintegrated and fragmented world created by the painter.

2.1. Monster map -- mixed with humans and beasts

The grotesque image is primarily a "magical image", following the metaphysical logic that everything is downward, abnormal, upside down, In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye argues that "one of the simplest techniques of transfer is what might be called 'gremlin adjustment' -- a deliberate violation of the tendency towards a moral connection between archetype and tradition".[10] In his works, Bosch often depicted strange creatures, either half beasts, or creatures of several different races reassembled, or given human-like behaviors.

Realistic animals are often common and their meanings are widely recognized by the public. The descriptions of their shapes and details all come from the master's careful observation of realistic nature. Even though these animals are commonplace, one can still experience in them a completely strange sense of strangeness and a hint of terrible omen. Virginia Tuttle, in *Lilith in Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights"*, "argues that the occasional owl perched on a tree trunk in Bosch's painting is a nocturnal predator whose alert black eyes gaze impassively upon all evil, Mostly in a negative visual environment.[11]

LORENZO LORUSSO wrote in *Neurological Caricatures Since the 15th Century* that the synthetic animal in Bosch's painting is easy to give people a feeling of grotesque and discomfort, and the selection of its image follows the principle that "grotesque" comes from the real ". And the author adopts the form of "mixed up" which is common in "grotesque". For example, we can see merpeople flying in the sky in the second circle. People always dream that they can fly into the air with wings or grow a fish tail to dive into the sea. However, in reality, if someone grows non-human organs or has animal-like behaviors, we will call them "freaks".[12]

2.2. The falling tower -- the docking of inorganic materials

The mixing of animals, plants and inorganic matter in art inevitably arouses a sense of surprise and grotesqueness. The minarets with different shapes in Bosch's paintings may also imply the meaning of Babel. When we watch them, we always feel that the minarets here are crumbling, small and fragile, with slanting spikes inserted in the minarets. The seemingly stable and harmonious world seems to be just a frozen moment before collapse and destruction.

In the middle of the Garden of Eden, there is a pure primitive pool. In the pool, there is a pink tower fountain full of life. At first glance, it does look like a mixture of animal shell and modern bomb, with the combination of future elements of Gaudi's architectural style and nature of mineral foundation. From the point of view of alchemy, the fountain is more like a still, with a reverse coagulator inside. After purification and sublimation of the still, people can obtain spiritual purity after going through a hellish ordeal, so as to achieve the purpose of returning to nature.

The inanimate mineral gems under the fountain evolved into black fish and amphibians crawled out of the water and onto land, showing the evolution of life here. These black reptiles resemble the demons of Hell Wings, and Bosch wants to suggest that evil has crept into heaven.

In Bosch's paintings, the landscape is often a seemingly natural beauty, but in fact, it is dangerous and strange. Plants and bushes coexist in a way that is contrary to the laws of

nature. On the distant blue mountain, the branches of trees bend like fishing rods and perch two or three birds, giving the impression that they are about to lose their balance at any moment, creating an absurd, strange and unstable visual atmosphere. Although at first glance it looks delightfully detailed, it comes not from nature but from the artist's imagination, and transcends the boundary between nature and animals, and seems to represent the terrible transformation of dead matter into living things. In Bosch's work, nature is imbued with a sweet and beautiful falsity, creating a sense of absurdity before everything falls apart.

2.3. The fruit of desire -- ignorance without awareness

In Zhonglian's "Paradise on Earth", we can easily see the bright red fruits. In Zhonglian, we can see a group of people happily picking the red fruits on the trees, without any guilt of eating forbidden fruits in the Garden of Eden. The castor bean, full of red fruit, which shakes about, comes from a tree that knows good from evil. Fray Jose de Siguenza in *Historia de la Orden de San Jeronimo* considers these red fruits to be the most prominent feature of the Gardens of Boz, its fleeting aroma a potent symbol of earthly desire.[13] And Clement Wertheim-Aymes in *Hieronymus Bosch-eine Eineführung in seine geheime Symbolik* argued that the Bosch triptych was a Rosicrucian allegory, thus the strawberry symbolized the religious fruit of the divine soul.[14] Pater Gerlach in *Der Garten der Luste: Versuch einer Deutung* argues that the first couplet shows heaven before autumn, and Bosch's strawberries symbolize spiritual love.[15] Laurinda S. Dixon, in *Alchemical Imagery in Bosch's Garden of Delights*, wrote that she observed the use of strawberries in medieval medicine and considered the fruit an important allegory of death and resurrection.[16]

We don't know whether Bosch's ornate strawberries were specifically inspired by Fray Jose de Siguenza's snake and strawberry image, or whether he borrowed the fruit's unsavory symbolism. But it is easy to see the long, unisex men fighting for the fruit with an unconscious look on their faces, as if they were born to pick it. The creators of these "grotesque" are not trying to let the audience know what's going on, nor are they trying to save them, nor are they trying to pity them. In the most concise language, he evokes the power of imagery that is deeply embedded in the viewer's mental world, so perhaps the reason for the discomfort and shock of the viewer is that looking at the naked figure in this beautiful paradise is like seeing a parallel version of himself who knows nothing about this unreliable world.

2.4. Instruments of torture -- no resistance

The victims of grotesque art have no opponents, no final end, and they go without resistance to extremes unknown to the audience. The hell scenes in *This Paradise* show all the ugly scenes of the punishment of fallen souls and the process of pain and evil.

The strings of a harp pass through a man's body; The lute was used as a pillar, and a snake wrapped around the sinner. The harp grew out of the lute like a tree branch. Both instruments have a positive meaning in the Bible. In traditional last judgment, lutes and harps usually belong to the realm of justice, where they are depicted in the hands of musician angels. Here, by contrast, both techniques are techniques of torture. In early Christian hagiography, the harp was already seen as the image of the cross, and the human

figure, bound by the strings of the harp, appeared as the crucifixion. The idea that the strings of the harp actually run through the body of the cursed soul precludes any visual idea of escape from such torture. Bosch used music as torture in his paintings throughout hell, where evil souls had no escape.

3. Interpretation of Paradise on Earth Combined with Image Reproduction Psychology

In the 1960s, Gombrich et al. introduced visual psychology into image analysis. According to him, the starting point of artists is not the observation and imitation of nature, but the experience of art works: all representational art is conceptual, is the grasp of a language, and even the most naturalistic art starts from the so-called transcendental schema.

Images are conceptualized, expressive and schematized in nature, which are endowed by creators in the process of creation. With the development of art history, paintings in different periods carry different image forms, and different image forms carry different expressions and understandings of creators and viewers.

Combined with Gombrich's theory of a series of books on image representation Psychology and Qian Jiayu's Visual Psychology, this chapter will interpret Paradise from two perspectives: image form is the "translation" code of the creator, and the presupposition and change of visual constancy.

3.1. The image form is the "translation" code of the creator

In *The Validity of Interpretation*, D.E. Hirsch reiterated and demonstrated that the meaning of a work is the meaning intended by the author, and what the interpreter does is to determine the intention of the creator as best as he can.[17]

Through his rich creative experience and grotesque imagination, Bosch presented us with an image form different from the style of the Renaissance in Paradise. He successfully translated his world view and aesthetic concept with an image form with obvious personal style. He expressed the main ideas of the painting in different pictorial forms. Adam and Eve is a vision of the Garden of Eden at the beginning of all things; The Garden of Pleasure is a free garden of playfulness and desire; The Infernal punishment is a scene of punishment filled with terror and pain.

For example, in the third verse, the body of a man is traversed by the strings of a harp. This stop-motion image form reminds the viewer that the man on the strings is being punished for playing music outside the rules of the law. There is also an image of "tree man" in the third scroll, which is one of the most famous image forms in Bosch's paintings. The body of the tree man is an eggshell-like space, and the space is a bar-like place. We can imagine this space as the refuge of the Inferno, where all the punished people enjoy the short pleasure.

The complete picture of Paradise on Earth is completed through the interaction of image form and thinking, which is Bosch's "translation" process. The form of image is a kind of "translation" code, which records the countless attempts, innovations and practices of the creator, and carries the concept exploration of the creator again and again.

3.2. Preset and change of visual constancy

Our relative indifference to the dizzying variety of changes

taking place in the world around us is what psychology calls "Constancy." [18] Constancy of vision, or perceptual constancy, refers to the constancy of size, shape, color and brightness of the image of vision or perception while the conditions of vision or perception are changed within a certain range. Visual constancy enables us to obtain a recognition pleasure and sense of identity when looking at images. It also helps us to promote the trigger and projection of thinking, so as to construct a new visual constancy.

Schematized images are a kind of constancy in people's visual memory, which will play an auxiliary role in our cognitive activities. The constancy of vision has its initial presuppositions and its later changes. We encode images within a certain range of cognition, and the range of cognition determines that this presupposition of "constancy" is incomplete, and that it changes over the course of continuous cognitive activity.

When we look at the groups of buildings with unstable structures in "Joy Garden", the blue and pink unconventional structures are not the images we remember in our visual constancy. Instead, we analyze these groups of buildings based on preset constancy information such as size, shape and color. Perceptual constancy tells us that these buildings do not possess the stability of conventional buildings, so the intention behind these unstable buildings created by Bosch can be derived from the symbolic image of "instability". What Bosch wants to express is that this scene of harmony and joy in the whole paradise is not eternal, it is fleeting, and the desire to satisfy this kind of licentious sex is also temporary.

Bosch borrowed from the reality of the image, to create a new meaning of the symbol world. These new forms of images aim to reveal the nature of a certain reality, satirizing the ugly phenomena of reality in a surreal form.

Changes in visual constancy have to do with the triggering and projection of new forms of images. Different observers have different presets of visual constancy and trigger different projective responses, so the direction of visual constancy change will be different. All viewers and researchers will concretify images in the form of images. While changing their own visual constancy, they will seek a sense of identity in triggering and projecting activities, so as to get closer to the "translation" intention of the creator, and thus establish a new visual constancy. The meaning of image form is that it cannot give definite meaning, which brings countless possibilities of projection to the viewer, and gives infinite possibilities to the change of visual constancy to the viewer.

4. Conclusion

Bosch was not as well known as the other Renaissance masters, but he was still an innovator in the form of images of his time. The image form of Paradise on Earth not only impressed us deeply, but also showed that Bosch found new image forms to "translate" the intention he wanted to express in the process of creation. The whole creation process is not accomplished overnight. Before creating a new image form, Bosch also experienced the thinking trigger and projection of the interpretation of the original image form on his own picture. All new image forms are derived from the original image forms. On the basis of the original images, Bosch broke the visual constancy of his subconscious presupposition in the creation of images, broke the inherent form of images in real life, and broke the inherent expression form of the narrative of painting. His quest led him to his own unique personal style of "translation" code. Going back to the general social

background of Netherland in the early 15th century, we will find that his thinking triggering and projection are not out of nothing. Most of the image forms can be found from the cultural background of Netherland proverbs, proverbs and medieval fables.

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