

Chapter 2

MYTHOLOGY AND THE MIND AS SEEN IN ART

He is skillful at making things from gold, silver, bronze, and iron, and he also works with stone and wood. He can work with purple, blue, and scarlet cloth and fine linen. He is also an engraver and can follow any design given to him.

2 Chronicles 2:14

1. INTRODUCTION

Mythology is the study of a religion or heroic legend. These myths can be so distant from that what people in general experience, that it cannot be believed as the truth. Myths has two functions, the first is to answer difficult questions like; where do souls go after death? The second function of myth is to support existing social systems and interpret the traditional rites and customs. Myths are fascinating and easily misread. In English, a scallop-shell is associated with either cooking or with a medieval pilgrim returning from a visit to the Holy Grave. But Aphrodite, the Greek Love-goddess used a scallop-shell for her voyages across the sea, because the two parts were so tightly hinged together as to provide a symbol of passionate love – the hinge of the scallop was a primary element of the love-chain. Myths are seldom simple and irresponsible.¹

¹ Graves, Robert, (1969) New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology. England: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, p v,vi

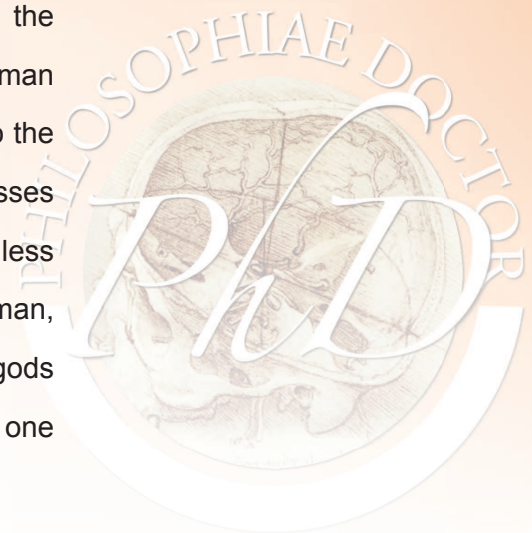


The concluding effect of Surrealism and the Dreamworld on the mind of the artist as well as the observer will be investigated together with the effect that mythology has on the mind of mankind. There is a worthiness between mythology, surrealism and all other shocking and anxious Art forms, in the sense that is different from what general people believe and understand. Understanding though, needs the vehicle of aesthetics to bring the Artwork in its fullness to the heart of the viewer.

1.1 ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF MYTHOLOGY AND THE MIND

Mankind have recognised various powers to supernatural beings throughout history. These include beings like the immortal gods and goddesses. Some of these gods are given credit for the creation of the world and mankind, or food, warfare, love, and all the other good and bad elements of life. The gods and goddesses may be worshiped with altars, elaborate or gigantic statues, or sacrifices. Poets and other writers may tell stories featuring the traditional myths about the deities' involvement in human life. There is countless differences from one society to the next. Most of the Roman and Greek Gods and Goddesses share enough characteristics to be considered more or less the same, but with a different name – Latin for the Roman, Greek for the Greek. Some of the Roman and Greek gods and goddesses -- Apollo, for instance -- have only the one name for both. ²

2 http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_myth_gods_index.htm



The term mythology can either refer to a collection of myths, e.g., Inca mythology or to the study of myths, e.g., comparative mythology. Mythology can refer to any traditional story. Myths may arise as either truthful depictions or over elaborated accounts of historical events, as allegory for or personification of natural phenomena, or as an explanation of ritual. They are transmitted to convey religious or idealized experience, to establish behavioural models, and to teach. Nineteenth-century comparative mythology reinterpreted myth as evolution toward science or misinterpretation of magical ritual.³

In the Surrealistic paintings of Hieronymous Bosch, for the first time and perhaps the only time, that the artist succeeded in giving concrete and tangible shape to fears that had haunted the minds of men in the Middle Ages. It was an achievement which was perhaps only possible at this very moment of time when the old ideas were still vigorous while the modern spirit had provided the artist with methods to represent what he saw.⁴

Fig. 220: Bruges around 1450.



3 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythology>

4 Gombrich, E.H., (1971) *The Story of Art*. London: Phaidon Press.

1.1.1 GUSTAVE MOREAU

SCENES FROM MYTHOLOGY AND THE MIND

Moreau made numerous accurately drawn studies from a wide variety of sources and then developed his complex paintings. A special feature of his work is his use of painted oil sketches to suggest the colour and compositional structures of his chosen subjects. He does this spontaneously. Moreau went through a number of different stages, including the construction of beautiful modelled wax figures, where after the final picture would be structured. Moreau use paint to create richness in his canvases.

Orpheus (1865) was a sensation when it was shown at the Salon of 1866, and it is typical of the artist's early style. The story is Moreau's own invention, based on the figure of Orpheus, the poet and lyre-player of Greek Mythology. In the picture, the head and lyre of the murdered Orpheus are being recovered from the river Hebron by a beautiful young girl. The young girl intuitively recognizes the significance of the dead poet's remains.

Although the artist are tied to complex fictional stories, Moreau wanted his paintings to operate primarily as mysterious and evocative poems of colour, line, and imagery.⁵

5 Vaughan, William (2007) Encyclopedia of World Artists, England: Grange Books, 302, 303



Orpheus symbolizes the qualities that did not only appeal to Moreau's pupils, but also to the surrealists of the 1920s, who, like Moreau, were interested in the subconscious powers of the mind and the ability of Art to convey fantasies, dreams, and nightmarish visions.

1.2 THE CULMINATING EFFECT OF SURREALISM AND THE DREAM WORLD

1.2.1 SALVADOR DALÍ – DREAM SEQUENCES

The dreamlike quality of Dalí's paintings and the themes explored in them reflect the influence of Sigmund Freud, whose writing brought to public awareness the concept of subconscious desires and the symbolic importance of dreams themselves. Like the other surrealists, Dalí was fascinated by the unconscious. *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus* was painted after his break with surrealism, but reflects this fascination, and explores the theme (also classically Freudian) of self-love, the utmost pride. The painting was inspired by an overheard conversation about a villager obsessed by his own reflection, who some local fishermen called a "bulb head" (a Spanish nickname for someone who is self-obsessed). Narcissus was the tragic figure of Greek Mythology who fell hopelessly in love with his own image reflected in a pool, and was then transformed into a flower.



In the painting, Narcissus appears (on the left) as the figure of a boy kneeling down in a pool or lake. Bathed in sun, the figure resembles, or perhaps is, a rock reflected in the still waters. On the shore (on the right), the figure is echoed by a giant hand, the ants running up the thumb suggesting age or decay. The knee of the first figure corresponds to a finger on the hand in the second figure, and the head or “bulb” is now an egg from which bursts a narcissus flower, a symbol of rebirth.

Fig. 222: *The Metamorphosis of Narcissus* 1937 – Dalí

The landscape of the painting belongs to an imaginary world. The intense coloration, sudden juxtapositions of scale, and vague fantasy images describe a dreamscape in which time, space, and meaning are outside the control of the conscious mind.⁶

1.3 ABSTRACT AND FIGURATIVE WAYS OF PAINTING TO REFLECT THE ANXIOUS IMAGE

1.3.1 WILLEM DE KOONING – THE ANXIOUS IMAGE

De Kooning absorbed styles from all around him and through his own hand and eye. He used the fractured and fragmented view of the world introduced by cubism, and the subconscious, intuitive actions of the surrealists. Through this combination of influences, and the academic training that aided his sense of composition and use of colour, de Kooning produced his own version of abstract expressionism.

During his most celebrated period, the 1950s, the artist used every medium at his disposal – oil paint, household enamel paint, crayon, charcoal, graphite, and collage – to achieve his results.

In *Woman IV* (1952-53), his most dramatic style is notable. It is an anxious painting, half-obliterated by its own making. In this painting we see the simultaneous creation and destruction of the image.

⁶ Vaughan, William (2007) Encyclopedia of World Artists. England: Grange Books, 110, 111



The painting has been worked over repeatedly with fast, energetic brush strokes to arrive at this point. In fact, the brushwork seems almost violent. The paint has been layered on thickly, scraped away and, in places, built up again.

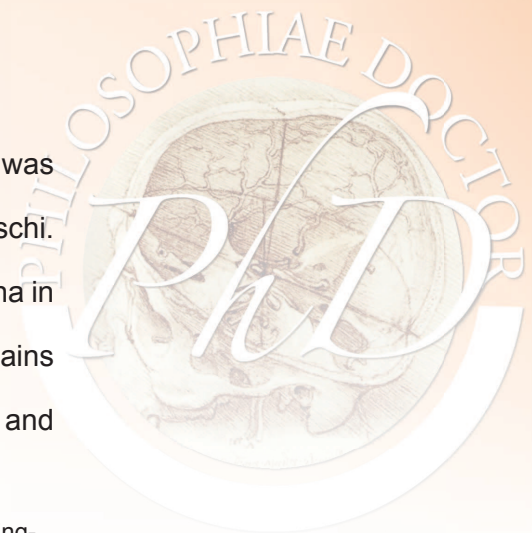
As an abstract expressionist, de Kooning always acted in response to the canvas in front of him, rather than carefully planning the composition and theme. The significant communication is between the artist and the medium, the painter and the paint, and the creative process is as much the subject of the work as anything else. Because of this approach – the constant questioning of the painting while working on it – the finished work is always, to some extent, unresolved. In fact, de Kooning himself was often unsure as to whether or not the work was finished.⁷

1.4 DRAMATIC AND SHOCKING SUBJECTS – SHOCKING REALISM

1.4.1 ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI

The story of Judith and the beheading of Holofernes was the subject most often depicted by Artemisia Gentileschi. The story comes from one of the books of the Apocrypha in the Bible, and tells how the Israelite heroine, Judith, gains access to the camp of the enemy Assyrian soldiers and their general, Holofernes.

⁷ Vaughan, William (2007) Encyclopedia of World Artists. England: Grange Books, 120, 121



Judith tricks Holofernes, pretending to offer him help, and when he falls asleep after a meal, she cuts his head and smuggles it out of the camp to present to her people of the town. Terrified by the death of their leader, the Assyrians were easily defeated.

Although both Caravaggio and Artemisia's father, Orazio, had depicted the same subject, it was never as graphically and explicitly portrayed as in this example. Indeed, the repeated choice of this subject has led many experts to wonder whether Artemisia used it to relieve her feelings, about being raped by Agostino Tassi.

The influence of Caravaggio is clear in Artemisia Gentileschi's use of chiaroscuro, and in the realism of the image. However, even Caravaggio does not go so far as to show blood spattering the arms and chest of the heroine. Artemisia makes the viewer very aware of the strength required to carry out the task, and of how messy and horrific it must have been, as blood soaks into the white sheets. Details such as Judith's rolled-up sleeves and her hand clutching the hair of the victim add a graphic realism.

Judith is not an idealized heroine – the look on her face is determined, but not beautiful. She is shown wearing a bracelet on her arm and a low-cut dress, which contrasts her femininity with the gruesome task she is performing. A reversal of the traditional female role are shown here.

Philosophiae Doctor

A close look at the position of Judith reveals that her arms are not in proportion to her head or body: they are too large and muscular. Her upper body is also strangely positioned. This is not obvious at first, however, as the richness of the fabrics and textures creates a powerful atmosphere that distracts from the awkwardness of the figures.

This painting would have been extremely disturbing for viewers, and it is not known exactly for whom it was made. Some sources suggest that it was for Cosimo II de' Medici. Where previously Judith was depicted in paintings as an innocent young girl and Holofernes as a brute, here the distinction is less obvious. If a person did not know the story, man might perhaps wonder who the villain really was. What is certain is that Artemisia wanted to make her mark in Florence, and was not afraid to shock people.⁸

1.5 A LYRICAL VISION USING SOFT LIGHT VERSUS A PRECISE, SHARPLY FOCUSED MANNER

1.5.1 CAMILLE COROT – A LYRICAL VISION

Corot painted this remarkable little picture in the last year of his life. It encapsulates many of the artistic ideals that he had developed during the course of his career. First and foremost, it betrays a strong debt to the past. Its gentle lyricism, is firmly in the tradition of classical landscape painting in France, typified by such artists as Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Poussin.

⁸ Vaughan, William (2007) Encyclopedia of World Artists. England: Grange Books, 168, 169



In addition, the subject harks back to John Constable's famous picture of *The Hay Wain* (1821), which had made a huge impression on Corot at the Salon of 1824.

In keeping with normal academic practice, Corot's landscapes are constructed rather than observed. During the summer months, he would make numerous sketches in the countryside. Then in the winter he would produce the finished landscapes in his studio, often combining elements from different drawings. Here, as in many of his pictures, he features a single, large tree at the side of the canvas, where it acts as a framing device. The gentle diagonal of the pathway links the foreground with the background, binding the composition together, while the horse, cart, and farm buildings provide the main focal points. The light is warm and tinged with gold. With the exception of his various versions of *Gust of Wind*, nature is always portrayed by the artist as a passive, benevolent force.

Corot's landscape style changed over the years. In the earlier part of his career, buildings and natural objects were often portrayed in a precise, sharply focused manner. From the late 1840s, however, he developed a softer approach, in which his foliage appeared blurred and feathery. Some critics have suggested that Corot acquired this technique after making a close study of Rembrandt's scetchings, but it is more probable that the artist was influenced by photography.

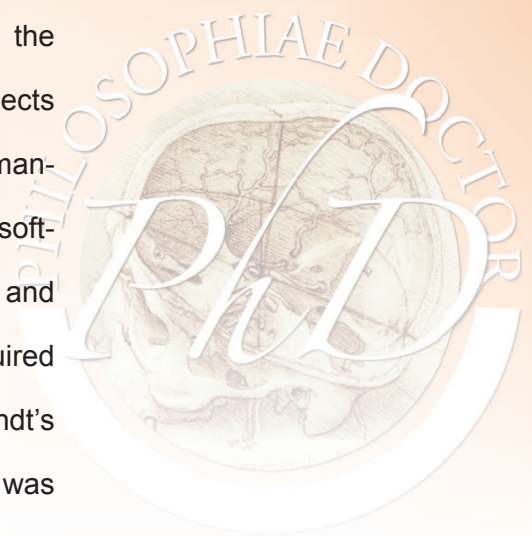


Fig. 225: *The Wagon* 1874 – Corot.



This Art was still very much in its infancy, and moving objects – the branches of a tree shaken by the wind, for example – would often appear blurred when caught on film. In addition there was a similar effect known as “halation,” which occurred when a strong light made forms appear ill-defined. This was particularly noticeable after the late 1840s, when the use of specially prepared glass plates began to replace callotypes and daguerreotypes (two early photographic processes). Corot is known to have owned about 300 photographs, and it is very likely that he was influenced by them. Although Corot made greater use of open air sketches than his predecessors (and these became highly collectable), it was the familiarity of his style that made him such a favourite with art-lovers. Nevertheless, it was a style that would soon be regarded as old-fashioned. *The Waggon* was painted in 1874, the year the first impressionist exhibition was held, which ushered in an entirely different approach to landscape painting.⁹

1.6 HIGH ART OF THE LOW COUNTRIES – DREAM OF PLENTY

The Low Countries, a vast flat land and if it wasn't for the Dykes, thousands of square miles of land would have been washed away. The region of the Low Countries have always been a place where borders shift around, could not be pinned down to a specific nation or even a mother tongue, like Dutch, Netherlandish, Flemish and so on.

⁹ Vaughan, William (2007) Encyclopedia of World Artists. England: Grange Books, 100, 101

The paradox is that this has had an enormous influence on the whole course of Western Civilization by how it has shaped our Modern World in terms of politics, science, advancement of learning, economics and history. There is no better way than to begin by exploring the rich story of its Art.

Behind the obvious clichés of its chocolates, beer, the waffles, the windmills and clogs, lies a vivid complex tale encapsulated in the world's most compelling works of Art. From the world of Medieval Flanders, rich and poor, sacred and secular, to the glories of the Dutch Golden Age, to the somewhat tortoise emergence of modern Belgium and Holland.

Fig. 226: The Low Countries.





Fig. 227: A Traditional Windmill.



Fig. 228: Massive Tulip fields.



Fig. 229: Men from Flanders were known for their skill at managing water.

Its the Art of an Atlantis in reverse, a land that rose from beneath the water to reach the pinnacle of Civilization.

The Zwin Estuary, is the spot where modern day Belgium and the Netherlands meet each other at the sea. For the Romans this land was frontier land. By the 10th Century they were building Dykes, man made humps to fence off portions of land from the sea. The Lowland created a sophisticated society from almost nothing. What made the whole culture of the Lowlands unique was that a Civilization was build on a network, a trading network of canals. From the late Middle Ages to well into the Renaissance, men from Flanders were known for their skill at managing water.

Location was crucial, canals connected the Low Countries with sea lanes North to the Baltic.

Philosophiae Doctor

West to the British Isles. South to Iberia and the Mediterranean. By the 1300s the Low Countries dominated trade in Northern Europe. Bruges was at the heart of one of the greatest trading centres in the world. It was the economic power house of a place known as Flanders. Part of a Low Countries patchwork of Mini States. The Low Countries' success was founded above all on cloth. As these people had woven land and sea to create the world they lived in so they weaved their identity into their fabrics. Flanders became an international byword for quality textiles, none brighter or finer.

The Lowlanders found their **first artistic expression** in cloth and not in paint.



Fig. 230 : Exquisite Fabrics on the Marketplace.



Fig. 231 : 1300 – Fabric Merchant in Flanders.



Fig. 232: The De Wit Royal Manufacturers of Tapestry, housed inside a 15th Century building.

1.6.1 1450 TAPESTRIES

Bringing vivid images into the medium of tapestry. Little to the East of Bruges in the Belgium town of Mechelen, is the De Wit Royal manufacturers of tapestry. Housed inside a 15th Century building, is a superb collection of Flemish masterpieces, displayed as they might have been

by their original owners.

One of the oldest tapestries, maybe 1450s, was created in Tornau which is now known as Southern Belgium. Tapestry was the number one luxury item.



Fig. 233: . One of the oldest tapestries, ± 1450, created in Tornau.



Fig. 234: Detail from the 1450, tapestry.

Valued more than even gold or silver for the amount of work that went into that. In one of the tapestries, the image of Christ is portrayed on the cross with wonderful detail. There is the bad thief, with his lost soul on its way to hell, at the moment of his death. In another tapestry, the Centurion, who is piercing Christ on the side with his sword with blood gushing out of the body. Some of the blood went into the man's eye and he was miraculously cured from his blindness.

Fig. 235: Christ is portrayed on the cross with wonderful detail – 1450, tapestry.



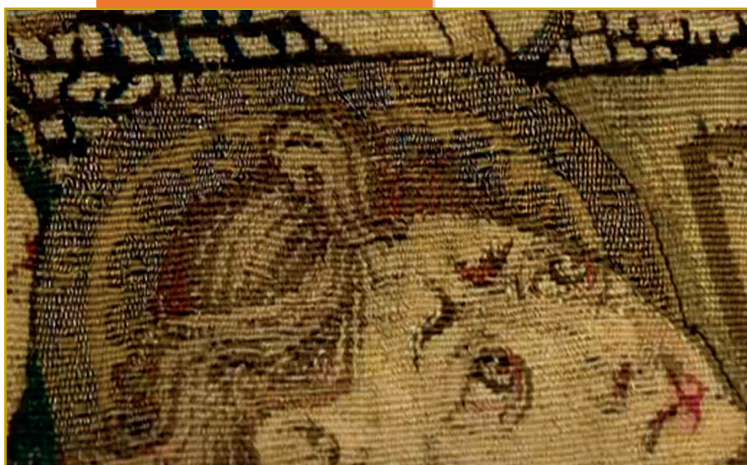
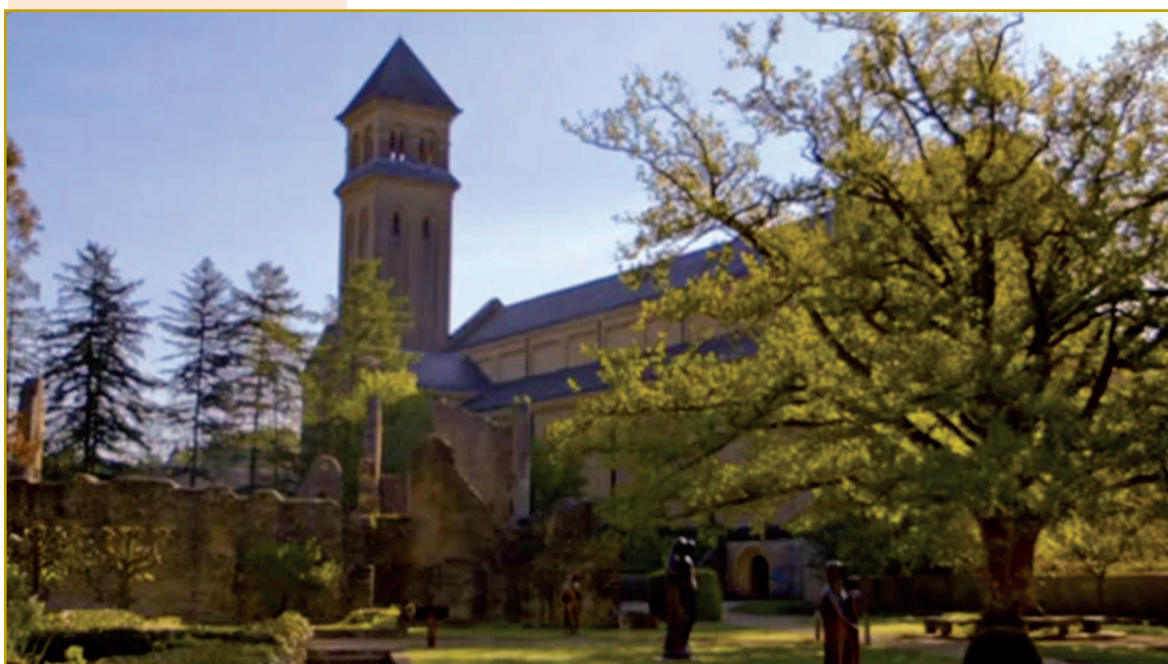


Fig. 236: . Detail from the 1450, tapestry – see the gold thread that was used in the halos.

When looking carefully one can see the gold thread that was used in the halos. This reminds us that this was a culture that was simultaneously in love with luxury and devoted to a profound sense of piety. The tension between piety and luxury had its origins in the very creation of the Low Countries. This

was a society ultimately build and owned by merchants and business men, secular people, but the foundations had been laid by Monks and Nuns. The ruins of the 13th Century Cistercian Abbey at Orval, is now the French speaking part of Southern Belgium, might seem to evoke the other worldly nature of the monastic life yet the practical know how, developed in monasteries that first made it possible that the regions rise from mud and poverty.

Fig. 237: The 13th Century Cistercian Abbey at Orval.





1.6.2 THE ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT

Fig. 238: Illuminated Book, ± 1500.

Entrepreneurs turned Monastic Art into a big business. The illuminated Manuscript, that was made for Centuries by Monks in the sanctity of their Abbey's Scriptoria was taken to a height of sophistication by secular Flemish artists whose workshops were in Flemish Town Centres. By the 1400s all of Europe's ruling elite were commissioning manuscripts from Flanders. This was a portable luxury object that was even more precious than tapestries.

The mayor of Anton Burg Museum in Antwerpen, houses the single most brilliant illuminated book that was ever created. It was made at around 1500, probably as a wedding gift for the Queen of Portugal, according to Claire Baisier the Curator of the Museum.



Fig. 239: Illuminated Book, ± 1500. Jewellery decoration with gems hanging on hooks.



Fig. 240: Illuminated Book, ± 1500 . This is the first image in the book – Christmas.

The first image is an image of Christmas and it is one of the most beautiful illuminations in the manuscript.

However, there are lots of miniatures like this because it's a prayer book. Normally it was made for Monks to use during the year. That's where it

began, these books were distributed to very rich people across Europe, to aid them in their personal prayer. What



Fig. 241: Illuminated Book, ± 1500 . The faces seem very Flemish, although the scene is playing off in Bethlehem.

is interesting to note is that the faces seem very Flemish, that Medieval or late Medieval habit of imagining the scene as if it was happening in your own time. It doesn't look like Jerusalem or Bethlehem, it's happening in Bruges or Flanders. Joseph is being told that there

is no room but the scene is of Bruges, the houses are built with bricks with windows and even in the background one can see a tower, which could be a Church in Bruges. Another decoration is jewellery with gems hanging on hooks. Another very beautiful illumination is where all the Apostles and Holy Mary, with the blue gown, look at the clouds where the feet of Christ is disappearing through the clouds.

At the spot where Christ started rising up, His two feet are showing on the rock, His footprint. No one can produce this quality now because man doesn't have the Art or the materials that they were using. Flemish illuminators achieved unsurpassed levels of immediacy and imagination.



Fig. 242: *Illuminated Book*, ± 1500. Christ rises up in the sky.

It's not always known who the responsible artist was, because their names were rarely recorded. Throughout Flanders during the 15th Century, the skills developed within the borders of a book's page, would increasingly be applied to the more public medium of painting. The first great painter to translate Flemish illumination to this far grander scale, and who made such an impact on

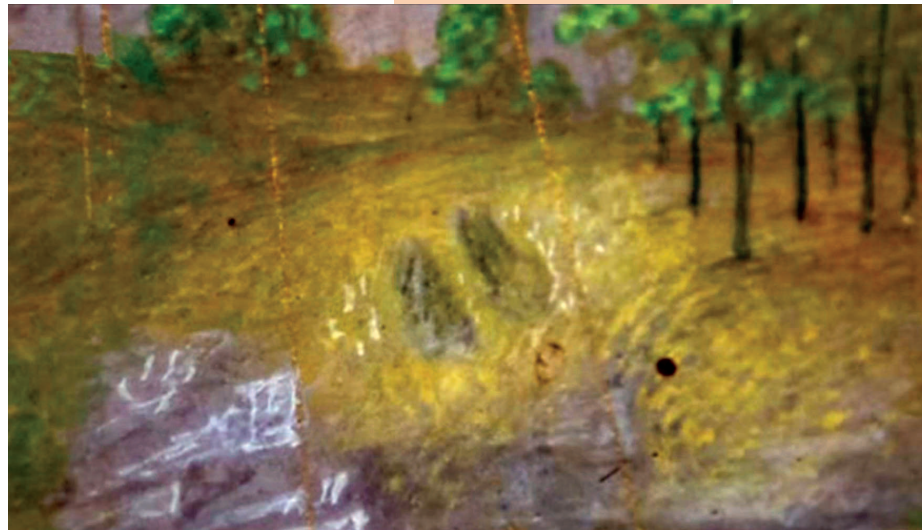


Fig. 243: *Illuminated Book*, ± 1500. Christ's footprints.

the course of Western Art, is Jan van Eyck. Van Eyck has started out as an illuminator. He lived and worked in Bruges, but it was in another nearby city that he created his most spectacular work.

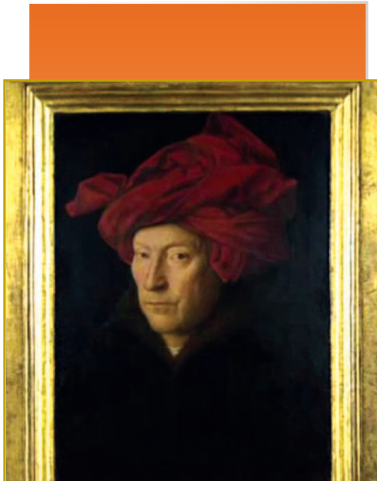


Fig. 244: Jan van Eyck

Fig. 245: The Ghent Altarpiece, Ghent – Van Eyck

1.6.3 JAN VAN EYCK

In the Church in Ghent, is one of the most luminous Flemish masterpieces. In 1432, Jan van Eyck finished a commission for this Cathedral. It was an opportunity for Van Eyck to show off his breathtaking discovery, something that had never been seen before. It was a way of applying layers of translucent oil paint to create astonishing illusions, depth and light. Essentially its a vision, its a fantasy, its a dream of what might happen at the end of the world. Everything converges onto a sacred centre. Here the sacred centre is that astonishing serious severe hieratic figure of Christ the Judge and God the Father rolled into one.





Fig. 246: Detail: *The Ghent Altarpiece*, Ghent – Van Eyck

At the extreme edge on either side, Adam and Eve are represented with tremendous lack of idealism, these are real human bodies and that is the whole point because this is their sin that has condemned us to live in a world of mortal time and that is what in this moment is been redeemed by Christ. This is the moment when all of the blessed as described in the book of Revelations, gather to enter the New Jerusalem, Paradise, Eternal Life. They are all uniting on that central mystical vision of the Lamb of God, symbol of Christ, shedding His blood on an altar while angels bear the symbol of His passion. Its like a church service taking place in a garden of utter beauty and delight. But what makes this picture truly extraordinary and what makes it one of the great works of Art ever painted? Its partly to do with Van Eyck's sense of composition and the way in which he has imagined heavenly perfection as this perfectly symmetrical universe of form. Imagine this painting, painted on one half and then perfectly folded over the other half, it would mirrors it perfectly.



Fig. 247: Detail:
The Ghent Altarpiece, Ghent – Van Eyck



Fig. 248: Detail:
The Ghent Altarpiece, Ghent – Van Eyck



Fig. 249: Detail:
The Ghent Altarpiece, Ghent – Van Eyck

Yet when one looks more closely into the picture, there's this wonderful lightning flashes of realism. These faces almost jump out to you, beards that you feel you can touch, flowers that you feel you can smell. George Ovusarius, the Italian artist, tells us how Van Eyck achieved this atmosphere. Van Eyck invented a new form of Art, oil painting.

Modern artist don't agree with this but Van Eyck did in effect invent oil painting, he discovered the things that could be done with pigment when it was suspended in this medium of oil. And this picture is like an Encyclopedia of his talents. "Look", his saying, "look what I can do with oil paint.

When the people saw this picture for the first time they were so stunned by it, they could not believe that an image that was made of nothing but paint, applied to boards of wood, could seem to them like life itself.

Philosophiae Doctor



Fig. 250: Portrait of a wealthy Merchant.

The rumour was put about in Ghent, in Bruges, Van Eyck's hometown, that this painter was not just an artist, he was a magician, some kind of Necromancer. Van Eyck's invention would be enormously influential while oil painting, the medium that he had pioneered, would be taken up all over Europe, from Venice to Northern and Central Italy, to Spain and beyond. And as generation after generation of artists had explored the facts, Art itself would be transformed forever. Van Eyck's mastery of oil paints made him one of the richest and highly respected artists of his day. But where he used the medium to conjure up an entire world of vivid detail it was another great Flemish artist who went beneath that glistening surface to explore the far depths of human emotion.

Philosophiae Doctor



They commissioned portraits of themselves immortalised in all their finery as evidence that they have made it. The most extraordinary portrait of all is also the oldest, painted by none other than the first great Flemish pioneer of oil painting, its the secular counterpart to his Ghental Altarpiece, not a vision of heaven but a depiction of an inscrutable man and his wife in the comfort of their bedroom. Painted in 1434, this entrancing picture by Jan van Eyck, opens the door to the private world of the wealthy Flemish Merchant class. It used to be called *The Arnolfini wedding*, there it depicted Gionanni Arnolfini, Banker from Luka, based in Bruge and his wife. The assumption is that this people is extremely wealthy, they were representative of this new upsurge of Flemish wealth and prosperity but it would be a mistake to see this picture for all its realism, some kind of snapshot of their domestic world, highly charged symbolic ritualised depiction of two people. There is something very solemn about it. The dog stands at the couple's feet. He stands for loyalty, obedience and fidelity. Behind the bride hangs a broom, a symbol of purity, cleanliness and around that beautiful convex mirror, there are painted scenes of Christ's passion as if to indicate that this is a union blessed in the eyes of God. A single candle burns in the chandelier, an emblem of the love that will never be extinguished. Just above the pair of clasped hands, Van Eyck has intruded another significant detail. A grinning, gurning Gargoyle, carved into the arm of the chair at the back of the room.



Fig. 252: Arnolfini Wedding.
Detail: Gargoyles

That Gargoyle is here to do exactly the same job as Gargoyles on the fronts of churches, namely to scare off evil spirits, to ward off all evil from damaging this union. On the window ledge and on the sideboard there is a little cluster of fruit. The woman's belly is round, not because she's pregnant because she's wearing a stomach-acher. The hope is that this union will bear fruit in itself. On the back wall, Jan van Eyck has signed the picture in curly script. The inscription says in Latin, Jan van Eyck was here. In the reflection below, in the convex mirror, that is so beautifully painted, the couple can be seen from the back and looking closely enough, a shadowy figure can be seen, perhaps two figures. Maybe it is meant to be Jan van Eyck himself? The painter preserving for ever this moment when he looks at them and they look at him. Maybe this picture was his wedding gift to the couple in the painting.

1.6.4 ROGER VAN DER WIJDEN



Fig. 253: Roger van der Weyden, painted himself as Saint Luke, Patron Saint of Artists.

Brussels based Roger van der Wijden, believed to have portrait himself as Saint Luke, Patron Saint of Artists, was described by his contemporaries as the greatest, the most noble of painters. In his almost unbearable portrayal of *Christ descend from the cross*, Van der Wijden explored every last trick of oil paint above all its ability to capture tears and blood. To render the full horror of Christ's death immediate and shocking.

Fig. 254: Christ descend from the cross and details a-c.

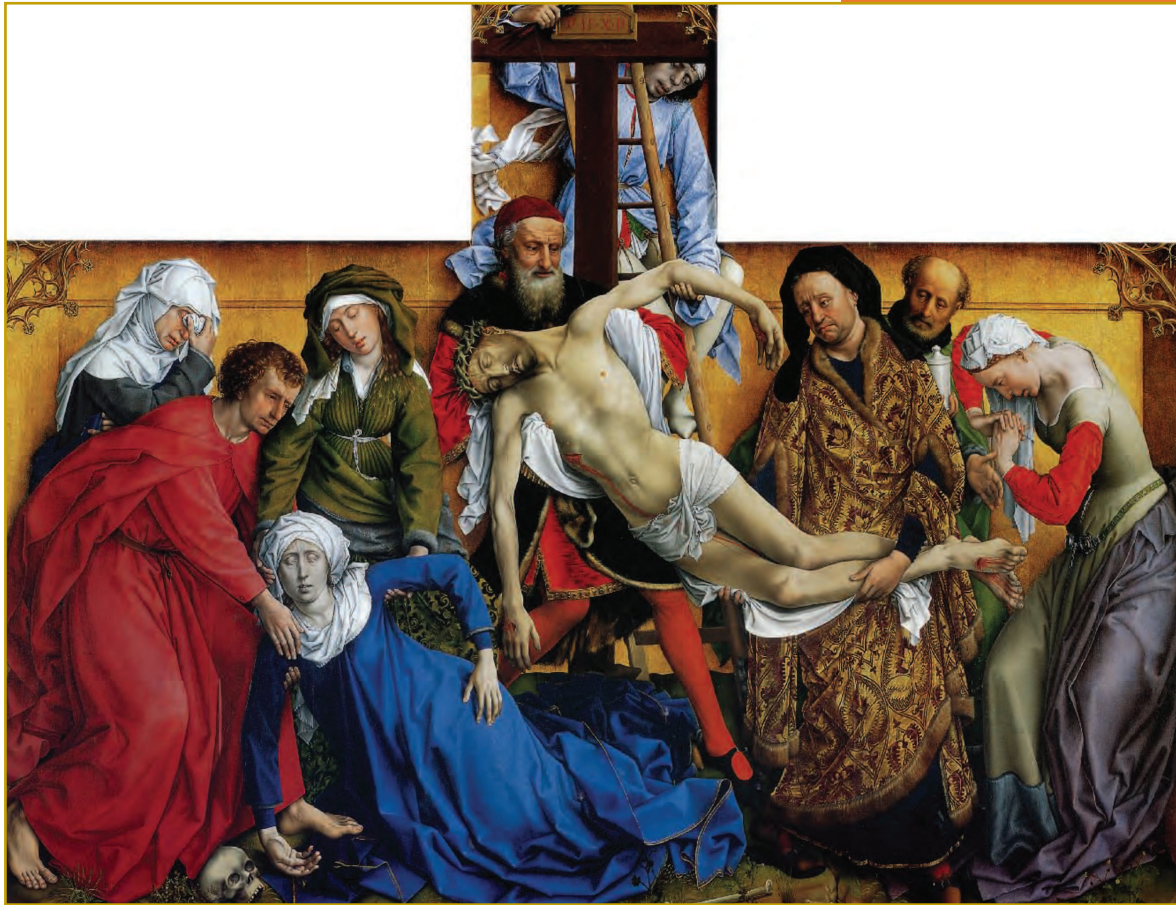


Fig. 254a.



Fig. 254b



Fig. 254c

This is pain, grief and sorrow made visible, almost tangible. In 1443, the Founders of a hospital, commissioned Roger van der Weyden to paint what would be one of the great jewels in the crown of Flemish Art. Was it a consolation or was it merely a warning for those who lay sick and dying in a world of barely imaginable harshness, hardship. Small pox and cholera was pandemic, plague a regular terror.

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 255: The Flemish Altar Piece and details a-c



Fig. 255a



Fig. 255b



Fig. 255c

The monks who attended the sick were themselves at constant risk. This wasn't just a hospital for curing bodies, a hospital for saving souls, its focal point was placed at the end of the sick-room, to face the beds of the sick patients. It is a Flemish Altarpiece. It was painted by Rogier van der Weyden about 11 years after Van Eyck painted the Ghent Altarpiece and what it shows, is the introduction to the Ghent Altarpiece. This is the moment of the Last Judgement, Christ sits in majesty over the world in a cloud of gold. In the centre is Saint Michael, depicted as a pale faced Flemish Prince of Justice, he holds up the scales with which he will weigh the souls of all mankind. The heavier of the two souls represents sin.

"Jekata", is written on the painting and he screams, he knows he is going to hell forever.

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 255: The Flemish Altar Piece and details d-g.

The soul on the right, looks almost complacent, kneels in prayer, rises up, his soul is light and he is on his way to heaven and as the four angels blow the last trump, the earth cracks open and the dead rise from their graves to discover their fate. Those on Christ's left are dragged, are vomiting, screaming, whaling, weeping into the flames of hell. On the right hand side, it is more tranquil, and here they troop off towards the heavenly city. The angel ushers them through the door. Everyone knows where they're going, they're going to that heavenly paradise garden depicted in Van Eyck's Altarpiece. To a superstitious Christian of the 15th Century, the purpose of this picture, would have been eminently practical. Most of the people in those beds, in times of a plague were going to die for sure. Before they did so, each one of them would be instructed to come forward into the Chapel at the end of the room and to contemplate this picture. The picture is basically there to give them a choice. Do they want to be on Christ's left, down in the flames of hell, or to Christ's right on their way to Paradise. It makes the choice somewhat uncertain, because having seen it, fills one with terror. Its a movie-like vision of what might happen to a person. So, a person can go back to bed, call the Confessor, confess his sins and if after confessing all of them, be saved. It is an astonishing picture, it's one of the great masterpieces of Flemish Art.

Philosophiae Doctor



Fig. 255d



Fig. 255e



Fig. 255f

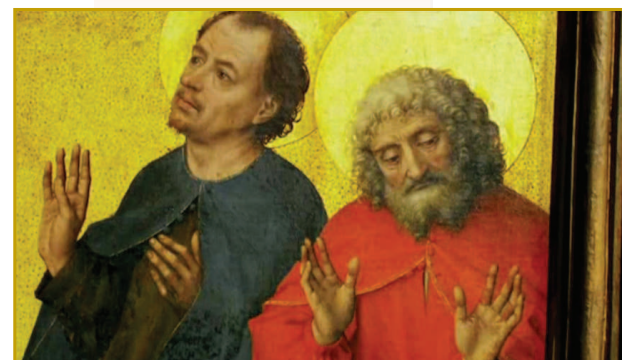
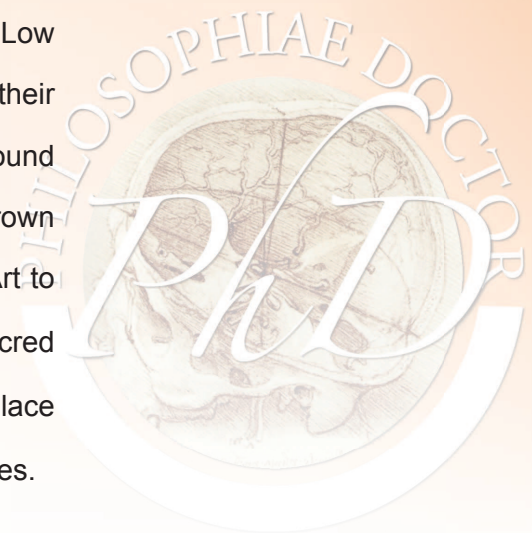


Fig. 255g

It absolutely represents that great flowering of painting that took place in Flanders in the first half of the 15th Century. The modern borders of the Lowlands, bare little relation to 15th Century Geography. The hospital, known as the Hotel Jude de Burn, once stood at the heart of the powerful Duchess of Burgundy. The ambitious Dukes of Burgundy wanted the great riches of Flanders to the North. Through strategic marriages and clever alliances they began to extend their power into the Low Countries. It took the Dukes of Burgundy a few generations to take over. They had to absorb each independent Mini State one by one. By the mid 1400s, Roger van der Wijden, Jan van Eyck and all their fellow Low Countrymen had become the subjects of the most illustrious Burgundian Duke of them all, Philip de Good. In fact Philip wanted culturally rich Flanders so much, that he even relocated his ancestral cord 300 miles North to Brussels. Philip de Good was good news for Flemish Art. He was an enthusiastic patron, especially for great talents like Van Eyck and Van der Wijden. He was no oppressive Autocrat, he gave the Low Country States freedom to conduct their business and their lives the way they wished. Flemish society revolved around the upworldly mobile merchant classes. They have grown used to the finer things in life and they wanted their Art to reflect that. The focus in Flemish Art changed from sacred to secular and this was part of a seismic shift taking place across all of Europe, but especially in the Low Countries.



Even under Burgundian rule, the Low Landers clung fiercely to their localised customs and independent ideas. Far from the shadow of the Vatican there were Religious movements, like the Brethren of Common Life who were not afraid to criticize the Church and to challenge authority they saw as corrupt. This was a strange unsettling time, especially as seen through the eyes of a Medieval man of faith, like the artist, Hieronymus Bosch.

1.6.5 HIERONYMOUS BOSCH

Bosch spent his whole life in and around the small Dutch town from which he took his name, Hertogenbosch. Yet, his most famous work, known to us as *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, include some of the weirdest objects and creatures from both known and unknown worlds that has ever been seen in Art.

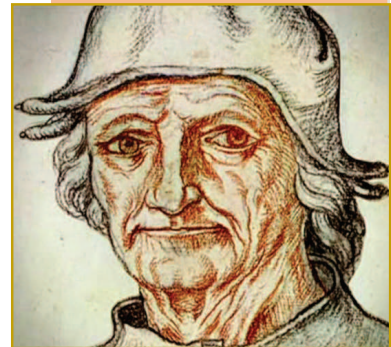


Fig. 256 Self-portrait – Hieronymus Bosch



Fig. 257: *The Garden of Earthly Delights* - left and right panel – Hieronymus Bosch.



The picture was painted around 1500, and its meaning seems at first sight disturbing and obscure but that can be fully explained. On the left is Christ with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but it's an Eden like any other. The picture shows a giraffe and an elephant and some frightening hybrid animals. On the right is some of art's most inventive impressions of the fate that awaits the damned. A pot-headed bird eat sinners and excrete them into the dam, instruments and forms scattered the blackened landscape. The centre panel shows the corruption of our earthly world? If that is true, what does the out sized fruit and birds represents and why is it filled with the most bizarre rituals?

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 257: *The Garden of Earthly Delights* - middle panel – Hieronymus Bosch

One of the favourite details in Bosch's strange panorama, the picture shows a little group of people holding up a gigantic strawberry, almost like the cult divinities that worships this object, this exotic thing. When you look at Bosch's painting you must remember this was the first time anyone in Europe has ever seen a strawberry. It was an object of wonderment to him, it was as if the world that they have known for so many centuries, suddenly changed and they realised there was another whole universe out there, a new world and I think Bosch's picture is in pass to attempt to imagine what that new world might be like. This is a Pandora's box in the history of human civilisation.

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 257: *The Garden of Earthly Delights* - Details from the painting – Hieronymus Bosch.



Fig. 257b



Fig. 257c



Fig. 257d



Fig. 257e



Fig. 257f



Fig. 257g



Fig. 257h



Fig. 257i



Fig. 257j



Fig. 257k

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 257: *The Garden of Earthly Delights* - Details from painting – Hieronymus Bosch



Fig. 257l



Fig. 257m



Fig. 257n



Fig. 257o



Fig. 257p



Fig. 257q



Fig. 257r



Fig. 257s



Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 257t

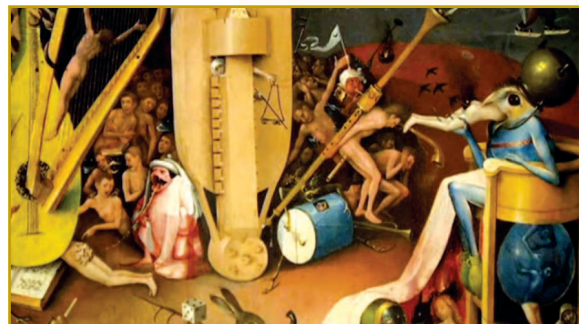


Fig. 257u

Fig. 257 *The Garden of Earthly Delights* - Details from painting – Hieronymus Bosch



Fig. 257v



Fig. 257w



Fig. 257x



Fig. 257y



Fig. 257z



Fig. 257aa



Fig. 257bb



Fig. 257cc



Fig. 257dd



Fig. 257ee

Bosch lived at a great turning point in history. A moment when the **Medieval mind obsessed with the terrors of hell and damnation** was giving way before a modern world of rapidly expanding horizons of **science and knowledge**. A world where the old order was being challenged by dangerous new ideas. These were the things made flesh, as is the beasts of Bosch's imagination. In his own highly original way Bosch expressed both the fascinations and the anxieties of his age. To see his own solution to those anxieties one must turn to one of his simpler least cryptic pictures, a work that hangs in the Fine Arts Museum in Ghent.

Despite all of this, Bosch is still a man of the Middle Ages, he still beliefs that God is the only route to salvation. He gives a little clue because there is other than Christ, one other good figure in the painting. She is Saint Veronica, she got the veil with which she wiped the brow of Christ. On this veil, is the image of Christ's face miraculously imprinted. She is on her way out of this male stream of evil. She found her escape route because her escape route is the image of Christ that she is holding in her heart. Bosch is saying to all of mankind, look at the picture, do what she does. Look at Christ's face, burn it into your minds eye, because it is the only way out of this troubled times.

Fig. 258a-j: *Christ carrying the cross* – Hieronymus Bosch

This fairly small fairly dark image of Christ carrying the cross is one of Bosch's cruder pictures but it takes you right to the centre of what he has to say. It takes you to the centre of his vision world, here he sees the world as a kind of sea of wickedness, weirdness and evil, through which Christ has to pass. Looking at that crowd, observe the three men down at the bottom including the evil thief, the fat soldier, an image of a witch, higher up the hooked nose of a mercenary, another soldier clutching the cross with its fingers. In the centre, the image of Christ with a tear leaking out of His right eye. It is as if He is passing through this bad world as if he is dreaming. He is right at the centre and what Bosch is trying to say, is in this age of anxiety, uncertainty, religious unrest, intellectual change, geographical exploration, this world where a person suddenly don't know where he is, **Christ is the one thing a person can be sure of.**

Fig. 258 Detail: Christ carrying the cross – Hieronymus Bosch



Fig. 258a



Fig. 258b



Fig. 258c



Fig. 258d



Fig. 258e



Fig. 258f



Fig. 258g

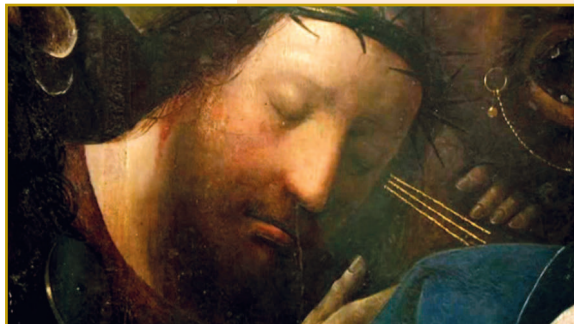
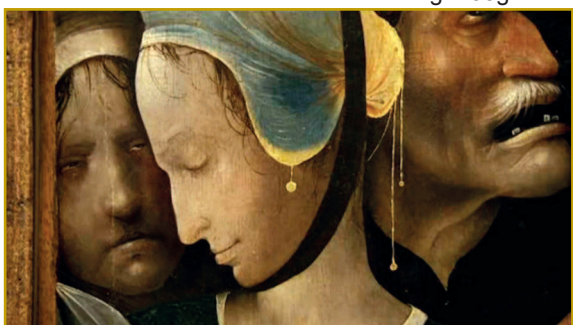


Fig. 258h



Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 258i



Fig. 258j

The tides of change swept on regardless. Soon after Bosch's death in 1516, the Reformation shook the established church to its foundations. Art too, turned critical. The subtleties of oil paint once used to conjure up the beauty or flatter the wealthy, was now used against corruption and ugliness. Satire was the order of the day, grotesque were the mockery, caricatures of officeholders, who supported popular rulers. The flames of unrest were fanned by a tyrannical new regime. In 1555, King Philip II of Spain, inherited the Low Countries from his Burgundian ancestors. A fanatical Catholic, he was determined to stamp out deviation. The attempted clamp down only provoked more unrest. Free thinkers multiplied. Perhaps the most quietly radical idea of all, was hatched in the imagination of not a philosopher or a scientist but of a painter. He took his inspiration from rituals and festivities of the common man. The people of the Low Countries have been participating in popular religious festivals since the Middle Ages. This festival in Mechelen in 1272, which celebrates the saving of the city from plague by the blessed Virgin Mary, has been going on for more than 700 years. The amusing thing is, ordinary people doing things like this, simply doesn't appear in Flemish Art until the middle years of the 16th Century and it was one man, Pieter Breughel the elder who put the common people on centre stage.

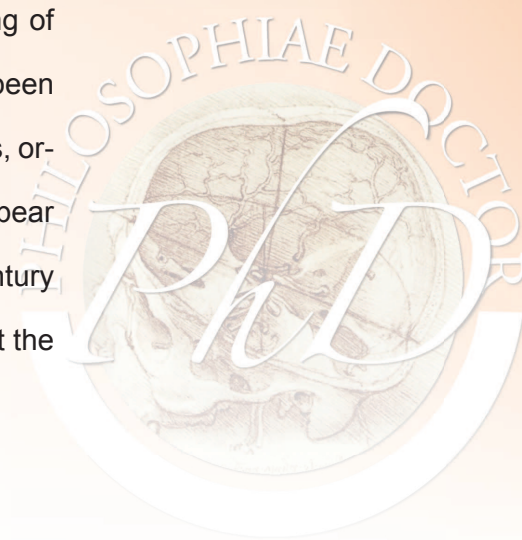




Fig. 259: *Satire was the order of the day* – Breughel

1.6.6 PIETER BREUGHEL

Pieter Breughel painted peasants going about their business, feasting, laughing, dancing, drinking. Breughel's work was popular and no doubt the wealthy clients who bought his paintings found comic entertainment in the rich detail. There's also a gentle subversive warmth and empathy for these ordinary people. It was though Breughel, were saying that its not just the high and mighty that's important. That nobody is an unworthy subject for Art.



Fig. 260: King Philip II of Spain – Breughel



Fig. 261: Caricatures of the jobs worth bureaucrats – Breughel

Peasants going about their business – Breughel



Fig. 262



Fig. 263



Fig. 264



Fig. 265



Fig. 266



Fig. 267



Fig. 268



Fig. 269



Fig. 270



Fig. 271

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 272a-f: *Landscape with the fall of Icarus* – Breughel

This is one of the most famous pictures associated with the name of Pieter Breughel the elder. At first sight, it's quite a baffling disorientating picture. The eyes are immediately drawn to this figure of the ploughman, plodding along his modest patch of earth, ploughing it up into these meaty chunks, following his horse. Behind him is a shepherd with his dog and they both seemed absorbed by something they see in these trees. Another person from ordinary life, is absorbed in an ordinary activity, fishing behind those ships. The title of the painting reads, "*Landscape with the fall of Icarus*". Icarus, is the character from Mythology, the boy who made himself wings from feathers and wax and then fly too close to the sun, his wings melt and he fell to his death. A pair of white floppy legs splashing into this emerald green ocean. It is quite an extraordinary image. Here he is imagining what it actually feels like to be someone who's outside history.

Fig. 272: *Detail from Landscape with the fall of Icarus – Breughel*



Fig. 272a



Fig. 272b



Fig. 272c



Fig. 272d



Fig. 272e



Fig. 272f

In a way its a picture about the spear carriers, people who aren't the heart of the action but they are at the heart of their own lives and its a picture about the disjunction between big history and little history and the little history doesn't even notice that the big history is going on. It's a picture about not looking not seeing. Everything turns away quite leisurely from the disaster. The ploughman may have heard the splash, the forsaken cry but for him it wasn't an important failure. The sun shone as it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green water and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen something amazing, a boy that fell out of the sky had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on. The subversive implication behind it for someone living in the Low Countries, someone that is unhappy with Spanish rule, the implication behind it is that if a person don't like the history that's given to him by the grades, from Kings from elsewhere, those coming into your world from outside, a little like Icarus, perhaps you're allowed to create your own.

In reality the lives of ordinary people went from bad to worse. When the Low Countries openly rebelled against Philip II's rule in the late 1560s, he tried to crush them with Spanish troops. That was the beginning of a bloody 80 year war against Spanish oppression that split the Low Countries in two. No one would escape the fall out, massacres on an epic scale. Cities were besieged till the starving citizens used shoe leather for food. This severest of times would produce one last great flowering of Flemish Art. The work of a painter called Peter Paul Rubens, which represents both the end and the encapsulation of the whole Flemish tradition.

1.6.7 PETER PAUL RUBENS



Fig. 273: Peter Paul Rubens.

Rubens was the supreme master of the new bold style emerging from the Catholic counter reformation, the Baroque. He spent most of his glittering career travelling Europe, on demand of his seriously impressive client list. Painting grand State Allegories of power, for among others, the Royal families of France and England. At public level, Rubens lived out a personal version of the history of the Low Countries, trading with foreign powers, rising from no origins to achieve astonishing wealth. His house in Antwerp, resembles the palace of a prince. But if you look behind its facade, to the private Rubens, you discover that his most intimate dream was surprisingly humble, touchingly simple. Rubens painted his self portrait in 1630. He was 53 years old and on the face of it he had it all.



Fig. 274: Ruben's House in Antwerp.



Fig. 275: Ruben's final works are joyful of marital life.

He has just been knighted by King Charles I of England. He is the painter to Kings, Princes, Queens, all across Europe, the single most powerful and influential artist who has ever lived. He does something truly extraordinary, he decides to marry the 16 year old daughter of a Merchant here in Antwerp. She's called Helen Formo. He was completely besotted with her. They had five children and he decided to retrieve completely from public life. He writes about it in a letter. He says: "I decided to do myself a kind of violence, I have decided to cut the golden knot of my own ambition." He retreats away from the world and during his last ten years, he creates an extraordinary deeply personal body of work, highly individual, utterly unique. It was the ultimate expression of a fantasy that had obsessed the imagination of people here in the Low Countries for Centuries.

Some of the final works are joyful allegories of marital joy. Invariably bursting with Ruben's characteristically voluptuous fleshy bodies. Rubens himself are gazing in admiration at his rosy cheeked young bride. Everything in Rubens's late paintings seems to speak of desire. No one had ever expressed it more urgently more fleshy. It's that same desire for colour, live, light and blessedness that had always infused the tapestries, illuminated books and paintings of Flanders right from the beginning.



Fig. 276a&b Detail from *Landscape with Rainbow* – Rubens



There's one work, above all, in which he reveal true Low Country soul. Painted on an epic panoramic scale, Rubens's landscape with the rainbow is quite simply one of the greatest landscapes ever painted. All these pictures are a hymn to plenty and abundance and ripeness. The ducks, literal symbol of the abundance of the land, clacking and quacking, wagling their feathers and diving into the water. The cows seem to be multiplying before our eyes and often in Rubens's Art, a real touch of human carnality. There's a milkmaid with her urn balanced very genially on her head, simultaneously flirting with the peasant and giving the spectator a wink at the same time. Her companion flirting with the other peasant.

The landscape is laid out, it's almost like a fertile body, a windmill sails glittering in the far distance. Even Rubens's sky is abundantly stocked with clouds. It's a dream of peace and a dream of plenty. Rubens wants the spectator to recognise that it is a dream. When Rubens lived, Flanders was not a place of utmost peace and prosperity and that's why he included the rainbow. The rainbow is an old divine symbol of hope, of something that might come to part in future. Rubens himself knows that what he has depicted is a world that lies in fact at the far end of the rainbow and he hopes that it will one day come into being. The painting is a beautiful dream but it is also a prophecy because not too far to the North another unknown Nation of the Low Countries, the Dutch Republic, would be attempting to turn that dream into a reality.¹⁰

¹⁰ Graham-Dixon, Andrew. High Art of the Low Countries Volume 1: UK: BBC Four.



Fig. 276: *Landscape with Rainbow* – Rubens



Fig. 276c: *Detail from Landscape with Rainbow* – Rubens

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 277: Tulip Field – Dutch Low Lands.



1.7 HIGH ART OF THE LOW COUNTRIES – BOOM & BUST

The Netherlands, a small nation but they achieved so much in a short space of time? It was a new kind of society, a society not ruled by Kings but by the Citizens. It was not driven by privilege but by the naked market forces and it gave birth to the first truly free Art Market. Portraits, landscapes, still life, sea paintings, drunken comedies, domestic titles – what the people wanted the people got. And all from genius like Rembrandt, Frans Hals and Vermeer. To find out how it all started, let's take a look at Horticulture. In the early 1600s the Tulip was an exotic flower that was imported from Asia, but then Dutch entrepreneurs learned how to cultivate even more vivid shades and shapes and the Dutch consumers went mad for them. They called it Tulip mania. The spiralling market in tulip bulb drew in people from all walks of life.

By 1637, the price of a simple tulip bulb was 10 000 gilds, enough money to clothe and feed an entire family a whole life time. Then the bubble burst, someone suggested the bulbs are actually worthless, everyone tried to sell, thousands were ruined. But in Holland there was always an artist watching as the wheel of fortune turned, ready to cash in with a topical satire.

Fig. 278-287: A compilation of Dutch Art and Tulip Export.

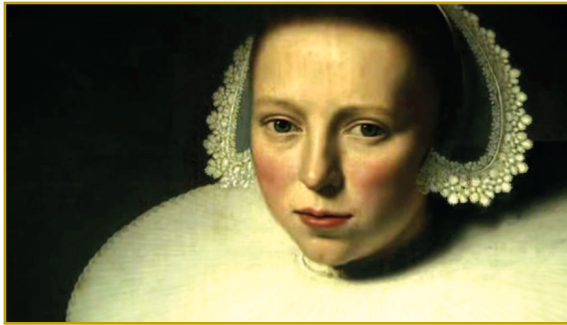


Fig. 278.



Fig. 279.



Fig. 280.



Fig. 281.



Fig. 282.



Fig. 283.



Fig. 284.



Fig. 285.



Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 286.



Fig. 287.

1.7.1 JAN BREUGHEL, THE YOUNGER

Jan Breughel, the younger, painted a picture, and what he basically says in the picture, is that the Dutch have made monkeys of themselves in this affair of the tulips. Jan Brueghel the Younger, *Satire on Tulip Mania Monkey celebrates, tulip in one hand, money bag in the other*. Move over and see those who lost in the speculation.



Fig. 288: *Satire on Tulip Mania Monkey celebrates, tulip in one hand, money bag in the other* – Breughel the younger.

In the corner, a monkey is having a slash on a bunch of tulips. It's a reminder that the Dutch had indeed invented a brave new world of capitalism but it was also a deeply unstable world and this cycle of boom and bust would be repeated throughout Holland during the Golden Age, both at the grandest scale and also in the very lives of some of Holland's greatest artists.

Fig. 288a-j Detail of *Satire on Tulip Mania* Monkey celebrates, tulip in one hand, money bag in the other – Breughel the Younger



Fig. 288a.



Fig. 288b.



Fig. 288c.



Fig. 288d.



Fig. 288e.



Fig. 288f.



Fig. 288g.



Fig. 288h.



Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 288i.



Fig. 288j.

Fig. 289: Cathedral Church – artwork inside damaged by the Protestant Reformers.



When one enters into a Cathedral Church, the first thought will be to think what a beautiful space it is, what wonderful architecture. One must not forget that this place was actually a battlefield. So much has been lost and destroyed. Before the Reformation, the whole Cathedral would have been ablaze with colour and imagery. Now there is only white space, blank glass and empty plinths.



Fig. 290: Defaced Altarpiece, 1576

The little plinths that once have supported statues, are no longer there. There is a little bit of fragmente sculpture, its actually Golgotha, the place of the scull where Christ was crucified, the image of Christ himself is gone, ripped out by the Protestant Reformers. This is how the Dutch Calvinist's lashed out to the Spanish Oppressors, by assaulting the fabric of their own Churches in waves of violent protests known as the iconoclastic fury. They saw it as purification, paintings, statues and altar pieces were all symbols of Catholic corruption. The sheer rage swept through Holland. The men defaced the altarpiece with their hammers and chisels and left the rest of it. There is the image of God the Father above, Mary with the Christ child surrounded by the Saints. They are all there, they all still have most of their original colour but their faces are gone. They have literary been sliced off, it is as if the man that came in here and did this, wanted the people to remember forever that they had once made images they had, in Protestant terms, "**worshipped**" and it should never happen again.

Philosophiae Doctor



Fig. 291: *Protestant Reformers ripping off a statue.*

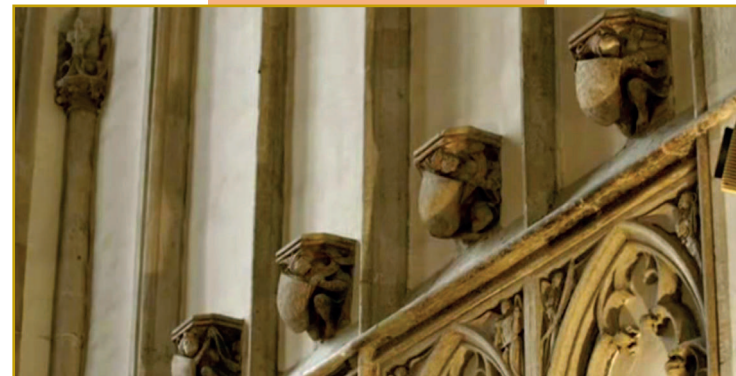


Fig. 292: *Empty plinths, no statue.*



Fig. 293: *Golgotha, little bit of fragmente sculpture remained.*



Fig. 294: *Christ defaced.*

In 1576, the Low Countries effectively split in two. Seven Northern Provinces broke away and declared themselves an independent Dutch Republic. They were rid of Monarchy and Tyranny. Their war with Spain would drag on for decades, it launched the dramatic rise of a new kind of State. Free of the Religious and Political paraphernalia of the past. How to build a new State from nothing? How to fill that void? One can begin to paint the void itself.

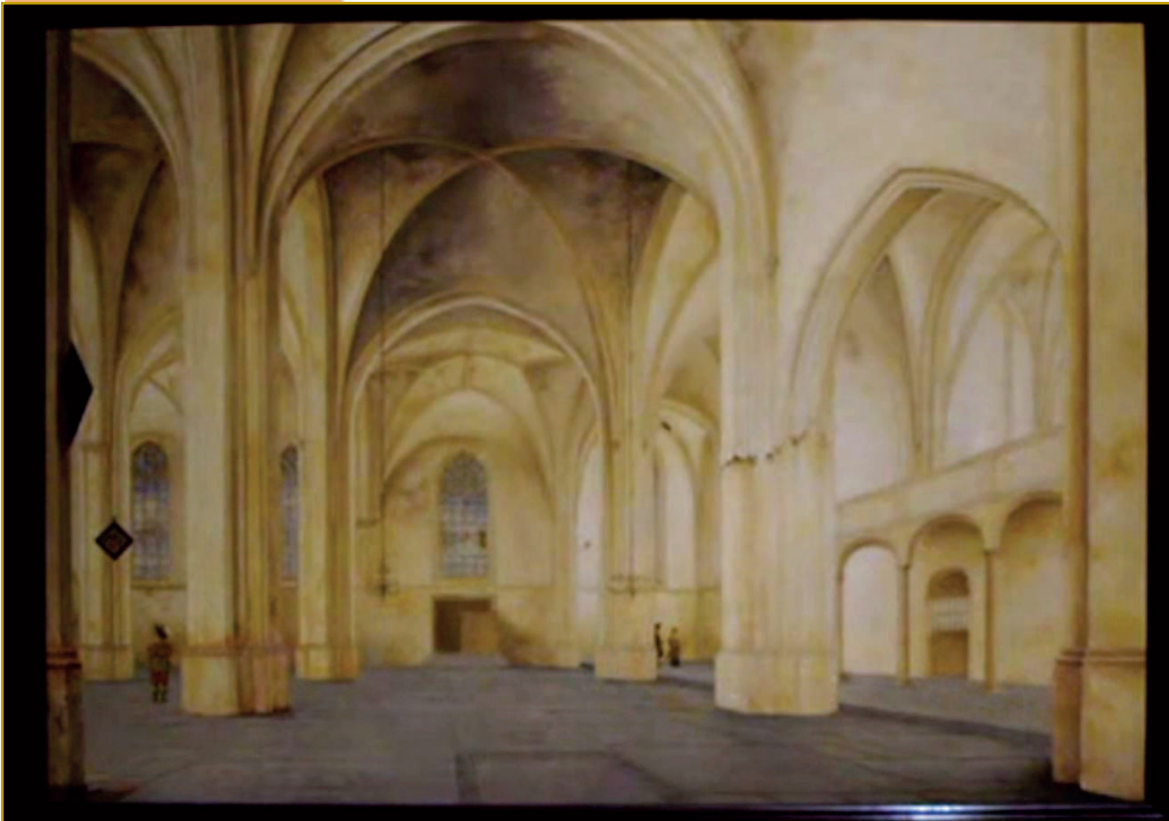


Fig. 295a-c: Pieter Saenredam was a painter of the Dutch Golden Age, known for his distinctive paintings of whitewashed church interiors.

1.7.2 PETER SAENREDAM

Peter Saenredam, working in the 1600s, celebrated the unadorned architecture of the Reformed Church with a purity that foreshadows modernism by 300 years. He takes a person to the spiritual heart of the New Republic. The old order is gone and what remains is man standing in the naked truth of God's word, ready to go forth and do business.

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 295a - c: *Detail of Saenredam's painting*

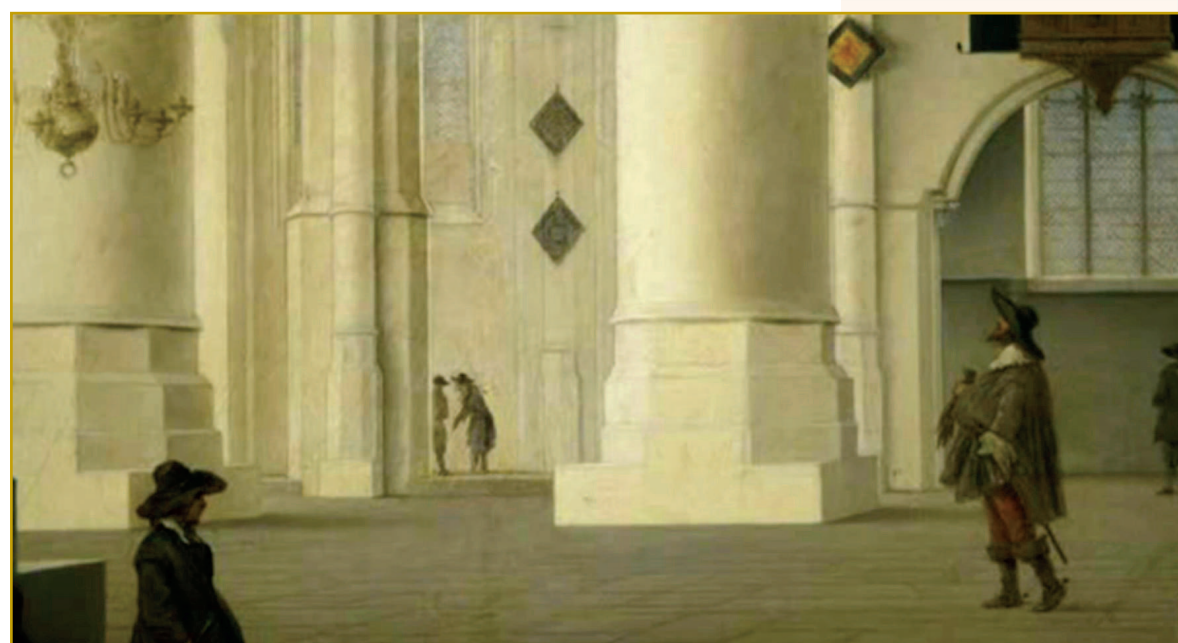
Fig. 295a.



Fig. 295b.



Fig. 295c.



Tiny Holland didn't had the right forces to survive without trade. So, its Calvinist leaders pursued a policy of half reluctant tolerance towards those of other faiths as long as they worked hard. This new society was forged first of all in the bustling of Harlem, in the heart of Holland.

By the start of the 17th Century, Harlem was on its way to becoming one of the great melting pots of Europe. It was a city known for trade and commerce and for Religious tolerance, the so called satisfaction of Harlem, was a statute that guaranteed everyone whether they be Protestant or Catholic, that they could practise their trade in peace. This new type of city, filled with merchants and a new kind of middle class, brought a new kind of Art, away from the religious traditions of old, an Art dedicated to the depiction of daily life. Portraits, Genre scenes, paintings of people drinking, paintings of peasants, paintings of the country side.

And its first great star was an artist called, Frans Hals. Like nearly a quarter of Holland's residence, Frans Hals and his family came as refugees from the Spanish occupied, Southern States. By his 20s, Hals had already made his name, capturing the city's Bourgeoise in paint.

1.7.3 FRANS HALS



Fig. 296: Frans Hals – Selfportrait

Hals's most famous portrait, the so-called laughing Cavalier, takes us straight to the beating heart of Harlem. We don't know who the sitter was, but we can work out why he wanted to be painted. The picture was a Valentines card, this man's gift to the woman he wanted to marry. Hence his romantic look and he was literally wearing his heart, and lots of it, on his sleeve. Hals could make anyone look a million guilders and he was just as impressive when working on a grander scale. The Civic Guard Portrait, portrays prosperous Burgers, generally depicted around a lavish banqueting table. These men are members of the Company of Saint Georges. They see themselves as the Guardians of Harlem's new found wealth and prosperity. They are seated at their Annual Banquet. The table, loaded with meat, cheese and bread, portrays how well Harlem is doing, they have all they want. Hals has done a rather remarkable and revolutionary venture in painting this picture.



Fig. 297: The Laughing Cavalier – Hals

Fig. 298: The Civic Guard – Hals



Fig. 299: Annual Banquet – Table loaded with food.



Fig. 298a: Detail – Table in painting.

Because what he has done, he's painted the International language of Court portraiture, the perception of aristocratic boasting, look at the gentlemen on the right, his elbow is thrust out, and if one reads the books of the 17th Century, the thrust out elbow is the mark of the gentleman. It apparently gives him the right to elbow his way through the crowd of ordinary people. This seems to be the very grand language, a language that was meant to be invented to be applied to Kings, Queens and Preachers, and yet, these people were not Kings, Princes, Aristocrats, they were Merchants. They made their money through trade. This picture proclaims that they don't need the old regime, the old apparatus of absolute Monarchy to function as a society.

Philosophiae Doctor



Fig. 300: *Group portrait of the Regents of the Old Men's Almshouse* – Hals

But the Hals mania, just like the Tulip mania didn't last. The new money that made Hals rich came with new temptations. He had a weakness for drink. The bags under his eyes and the disenchanted gaze tells it's own story. Business swept away and his painting became less fluent but more profound. Near the end he produced the Group portrait of the Regents of the Old Men's Almshouse. These women, the Board, are painted in a much more sombre mood, mirroring his own change of fortune. Commissioning the picture to Frans Hals may itself have been an act of charity because his later years were much more troubled. He fell out of fashion, his fortunes fell. **In 1664, he was granted poor relief and three card loads of peat to keep himself warm.** In the painting, darkness approaches from all sides, beautiful poignant faces, almost the faces of ghosts staring out at the viewers. The picture is very clever, it put the observer in the place of someone appealing to these women for charity. They look at the observer, they consider the petition, will they help? Won't they help? Will the observer be greeted by the hand that cares, will he be refused by the hand that withhold.

Philosophiae Doctor

It's Hals's wife reflecting on the wheel of fortune that he himself has experienced in his own life. That no matter how high you rise, in the end, you do always have to head for the exit.

Just two years after Hals painted this picture, Hals died, virtually penniless. Boom and bust was the Dutch way. You can even say it was a Dutch invention. In 1609, Amsterdam's new Wissel Bank introduced the world to Stocks and Shares. Suddenly everything was a commodity, especially Art. In 1640, an English writer, Peter Mundy, observed with amazement, Butchers, Bakers, even Cobblers, bought paintings to cover their walls, hoping to sell them again with a profit. It fuelled a huge boom in secular painting. Every artist specialising in a particular subject. But all reflected what the Dutch wanted to see, their own world, whether it was laugh in the kitchen, the sick room, or the class room, the national obsession with painting injected a whole new range of subject matter into the bloodstream of Western Art. But why were images so important to the Dutch? Because they were attempting to build a new kind of society, build on the Calvinist work ethic, communal effort. The Dutch needed Art to prove that their experiment was working and it was the artist's task to fill his blank canvas with the values of the Republic. That's why Dutch Art was often just a step away from propaganda, even when approaching the most apparently innocent subject matter of all.

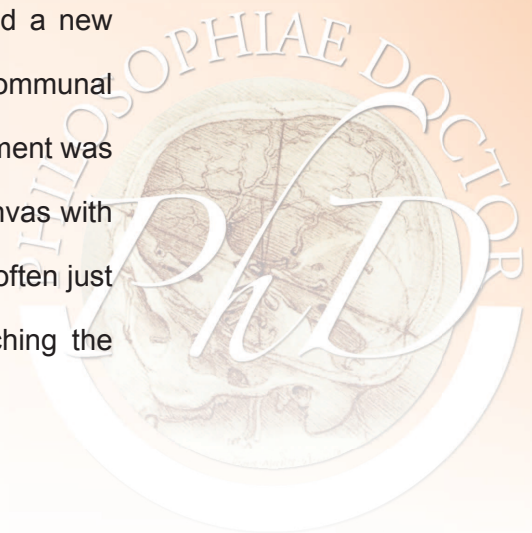


Fig. 301-307: Dutch Art.



Fig. 301.



Fig. 302.



Fig. 303.



Fig. 304.



Fig. 305.

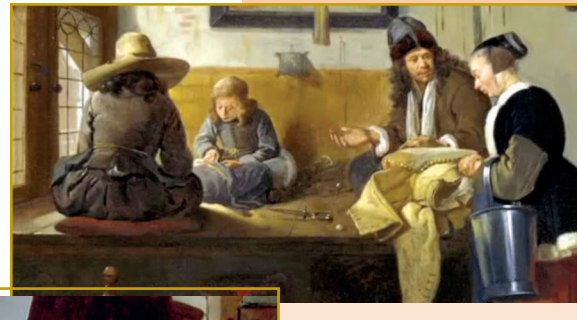


Fig. 306.



Fig. 307.

The Dutch landscape was itself a work of Art, a man made creation of immense ingenuity with their moats as they are called, fast expansions of meadow, fertile meadow, irrigated by a complex network of canals. The whole area was nothing but one vast lake till the 17th Century, until the polders came into being. If a person should cycle through the Dutch landscape, one would think that it is a Dutch painting and there's a good reason for that, landscape was one of the great subjects of Dutch Art.

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 308: Dutch Landscape.



Dutch painter saw their land not just as trees, fields or cloud filled skies, but as symbols of the country's achievements and the dangers it faced.

1.7.4 JACOB VAN RUISDAEL



Fig. 309: The Windmill at Wijk (1670) – Ruisdael

Ruisdael's towering windmills forever draining, irrigated, stand for the sheer hard work needed to keep Holland above water and to safeguard the future of the Nations children. The Dutch couldn't help trotting away at their world searching everywhere for meaning.

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 310: Dutch skating scene.



Fig. 311: Dutch skating scene.



Fig. 312: Paulus Potter's Bull – Potter.



1.7.5 PAULUS POTTER

Paulus Potter's, the Bull, is one of the great wonders of Dutch Art. If you want to understand Dutch pride in their land, this is the picture that absolutely encapsulates it. It's painted on the scale of an Altarpiece. It's to worship the image of Dutch prosperity, Dutch genius, it shows the livestock. A sheep with her udder pushed into the ground, baby lamb by her side, meek cow, flies buzzing by her side in the air. One can almost feel the heat of this summer's day.

On the ground, a frog, but at the centre of it all, this huge bull. There he stands, with his testicles the size of church bells, his prominent cock standing astride. A wonderful patch of vegetation, this picture is all about fertility. What is more extraordinary is the mere scale of the painting. The scale expresses the magnitude of Dutch pride in the achievement of having created this land of theirs.

Fig. 313a - d: *Rise of the Republican in Art.*



Fig. 313a.



Fig. 313b.



Fig. 313c.



Fig. 313d.



Fig. 314.

1.7.6 DUTCH REPUBLICAN ARTISTS

Dutch passion for the symbols of plenty was not abstract but entirely practical. The fruits of the earth were not just for looking at but for eating too. The pleasures of food are everywhere in Dutch Art and one can actually chart the rise of the Republican self-confidence, changing taste in still life painting. Dutch painters rendered the textures of food and drink with astonishing vividness. The sparkle of light through water, the glint of lemon peel, but to begin with at least, it was simple bread and shellfish on a plain white cloth. An arrangement of plain modesty and restraint. By the end of the 1640s, the Republic's 80 year war with Spain was finally over and Dutch prosperity was at its height. Now there is a definite loosening of the belt, more luxurious food and more of it. Exotic props. The early sense of propriety has given way for naked inspiration.

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 315: Amsterdam Mansion from the Golden Age.



Fig. 316: Portrait from the Dutch Golden Age.



It opened a kind of fault line in the Dutch line of Civic responsibility. How rich was it reasonable for a God fearing Merchant to become? From the start there was a tension between the free ideals of the young Republic and the way this free market economy actually work. Inevitably

some people did much better than others, living in fine Canal side homes, owning fabulous Art and monopolizing the mechanisms of civic power. One can still touch that reality in modern Amsterdam in a splendid mansion that dates back to the Golden Age. What was once new money is now very old. The family came to Amsterdam in 1583. Owner Baron Jan Six van Hellendam the Xth, is the sire of one of Amsterdam's long established families. This 46 room house contains one of the most private Art collections in the world. Here's a Saenredam. Many of the artists of the Dutch Golden Age are represented here.

Fig. 317: *Baron Jan Six van Hellendam the Xth – Rembrandt*

1.7.7 REMBRANDT VAN RIJN

The undisputed jewel of the collection is a portrait of the very first Jan Six, painted by his good friend, one of the greatest of all Golden Age painters, Rembrandt. It is almost unbelievable that a painting can conjure up a human being to such an extent that you feel that they are there. It's as if the man is almost alive. It looks like its painted wet on wet. It can be seen in the frill in the arm. Other places the brush thickness was used thick and Rembrandt took his thumb to draw the line, a thumb print. He turned it almost into an abstract painting, one can see the paint. That is so bold and daring and yet it isn't abstract, because what it conveys, is a man on the move, a man that is about to leave, a man who has been called for a second, his thinking. It makes it all so mystic. It's got that enigma quality, it draws you in, a bit like the Mona Lisa. Nobody knows what she is thinking. Nobody knows why she's smiling. And he is not smiling. No Dutch painter pushed his originality as far as this luring the line in between finished work and improvised sketch. Avant Garde is a later phrase.

But a good one for Rembrandt. Rembrandt had been an original, right from the start. When he arrived in Amsterdam in 1632, to make his fortune, he understood how the Art market worked in this thriving city. He saw that the key to being successful was to be different, to innovate. Just 26, he painted *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*, Holland's first great Anatomist. Blood, guts and awe. A brilliantly gory advertisement for Dutch science. Talp was delighted. And an even more effective advertisement for Rembrandt. Yet sometimes his Art would cut so deep into the tissues of Dutch society, that he risk alienating the very Market that sustained him.



Fig. 318: *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* – Rembrandt

Fig. 319a-d: *The Night Watch* – Rembrandt

And rarely did he walk a finer line than when painting his best known work, Holland's most famous painting – *The Night Watch*. Although like many famous paintings it's actually deeply ambiguous and endlessly fascinating. Even its title turns out to be fiction, it should actually be called *The Day Watch*, because Rembrandt did set the scene during daytime in a rather dark corner of Amsterdam with sunlight streaming in and catching these figures in its beams.

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 319a - d: *Details from The Night Watch – Rembrandt*

Fig. 319a.



Fig. 319b.



Fig. 319c.



Fig. 319d.

While it represents a Militia Company, one of many such Organizations that has sprung up during the wars of Independence to defend city by city against foreign invaders. Now what Rembrandt has done with the invention of the Militian Group portrait, he suddenly invested with a new kind of drama, a new kind of energy. He almost turned it into a history painting, it tells a story. This is the moment when the Militian Company is about to advance and prepares to do battle, but as we saw from the case of Rembrandt, all is not quite as it seems. By the time he painted this picture, Militian Companies such as these had in affect become a kind of gentleman's drinking club or noted for their partying and their fighting. Rembrandt had quite a bit of fun with his own knowledge. They're not actually fighters at all. Look at their finery. And its also this sense running through the whole painting like a rather subverse current of electricity. They are not quite sure of what they're doing. The one Musketeer, is pouring gun-powder into his musket as if he is a bit worried that he might blow his own hand off. The chap with his rather unconvincing helmet, gazing at the flint log mechanism with his gun as if he cannot quite remember how it all works. And right at the centre of the picture, disaster nearly strikes.



Fig. 320: *The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis* – Rembrandt

A little boy had his Musket out and he fired so close to the captains hat that it almost look if the plumes burst into flames. Look at the man behind, saying: "That was close". So yes, this is the great Company of Amsterdam's Militian man. But at the same time Rembrandt is just slightly verging on taking the Mickey Mouse out of them, is he perhaps suggesting that they are a bit of a dads army?. The Militian men adored the picture. Paid Rembrandt a fortune for it. He got away with it, for now he was Holland's no one painter. In 1369, he mortgaged himself to buy a house in Central Amsterdam. It is now restored as a museum. Rembrandt knew he made it. A five story family home complete with servants and a spacious painting studio. But fortune's wheel turned and Rembrandt's patrons began to see that his work wasn't in tune with the great Dutch project. Especially when he was asked to paint a hero from the nation's ancient past. *The Conspiracy of Claudius Civilis*. In 69 AD Claudius Civilis has led a rebellion against occupying Roman forces. In Dutch eyes he was the very first Militian man. This painting was intended for Amsterdam's elegant new Town Hall. But the Governors could not stomach this all too human depiction of a half blind coarse Barbarian chief.



Fig. 321a.



Fig. 321b.



Fig. 321c.



Fig. 321d.

Fig. 321a -e: Rembrandt's Self-portraits

The picture was turned down, Rembrandt's originality rejected. It marked a downturn in business and lifestyle for Rembrandt. He continued to surge the souls of the people he painted and to ask awkward questions. In this Revolutionary new Republic, the freest society in the world. What did freedom mean. If you can choose who you want to be, how do you know which is the real you? Rembrandt studied humanity but most of all he studied himself. He painted more self portraits than any other artists. He portrayed himself in different costumes, different moods with different expressions. A study of pictures form a chronicle of the many faces and pages of a single life. And the later pictures reflect unmistakably the fact that Rembrandt's luck was running out. By the 1660s, Rembrandt's life was very much on the slide. He's been a millionaire, he lived in a grand house on Amsterdam's main canal. He had a wonderful studio, possessions, riches, a beautiful wife. By now he has lost nearly everything. This is one of the pictures of the Golden Age but nothing very golden about it. Painted in the colours of flesh, of earth, he has depicted himself in a turban, holding a Holy Book as the Apostle Saint Paul, very much a prophet in the wilderness. Perhaps Rembrandt himself felt at this time like a Prophet in the wilderness. Certainly his Art for me runs shockingly counter to most other Art of the Dutch Golden Age. When studying portraits of the period, in almost every case their function was somehow to create and cement for the enterprising. It's also rather nervous Dutch, a sense of their own identity.

Philosophiae Doctor

But in these late self portraits, Rembrandt seems to be questioning the very notion of identity itself. He is not just reflecting on the slings and arrows of outrageous fortunes, he is reflecting on the fiction of self hurt. In *Self-Portrait with Beret and Turned-Up Collar*, Rembrandt is seated in a broadly painted fur cloak, his hands clasped in his lap. Light from the upper right fully illuminates the face, hollowing the form of the cheek, and allowing for the representation of blemishes on the right cheek and ear lobe. The picture is painted in a restrained range of browns and grays, enriched by a red shape that probably indicates the back of his chair, while another red area at the lower left corner of the canvas may be a tablecloth.



Fig. 321e.

Fig. 321f: *Self-portrait with Beret and Turned-up Collar*

The most luminous area, the artist's face, is framed by a large beret and the high collar that flatteringly hides his jowls. The skin of the face is modelled with thick, tactile pigment, painted with rich and varied colours suggesting both the artist's physical aging and the emotional effects of life experience. At first Rembrandt painted himself wearing a light coloured cap before opting for the black beret; since the original headdress was of a type that the artist included only in self-portraits where he is seen at the easel. It is possible that he initially intended for this painting to refer directly to his trade.



These pictures are great because they dare to suggest that a man can be many things. When looking at them, one is reminded of the words of the great French Philosopher, Rembrandt's contemporary, Montan. "*Boom and Bust*" like *Hals the drinker* and *Rembrandt the innovator*, died a pauper, age 63 and was buried in an unmarked grave. Holland hardly blinked and why should it. By the mid 17th Century the Dutch Republic was quite simply the most powerful nation on earth.

1.7.8 DUTCH MARITIME ART

The agents of the Dutch East India Company, established trading posts at the Southern tip of Africa, round the coast of India, Ceylon and in the Moluccan Spice Islands. Meanwhile Merchants of the West India Company has crossed the Atlantic to Colonise the Caribbean and the coasts of South and North America, including Manhattan Island which they christened New Amsterdam. The extremes of the Dutch Maritime adventure were mirrored in Dutch Maritime Art. More propaganda, Dutch men at war,

defeating their foreign foe in a fusillade of cannon fire. But there were other more uneasy pictures too. Scenes of impending disaster, stormy skies, traitorous rocks. How hard it was to steer the correct course.

Fig. 322: Dutch Maritime Art





Fig. 323: Dutch Maritime Art



Fig. 324: Dutch Maritime Art

Philosophiae Doctor

Where Dutch traders went, Dutch artists followed, giving a person a fascinating window into seeing the world by Western eyes for the first time. Some of the most intriguing Colonial paintings were made in the North East of modern day Brazil. At home the Dutch reaps the dividends of the Empire for the time they were Europe's chief importers of luxury goods, tobacco spices, coffee and fine Chinese porcelain. They also capitalized by making their own cheaper versions of those goods, tiles and pottery. The standard of Living in Holland was now higher than in any other country. They really never had it so good.

1.7.9 JAN STEEN

The Dutch embraced the good life, just rewards for hard work but still the old Calvinists conscience nagged away at them. If you had too much fun it might all be snatched away from you. Even if the party went on they feared it might be their last. It's a tension crystallized in the work of a publican turned painter, called, Jan Steen. As an Innkeeper, Steen was no stranger to the sight of people indulging in pleasure. No surprise then that he is famous for painting witty scenes of domestic chaos. So much so that even today the Dutch talk despairingly of a Jan Steen household, meaning a particularly anarchic home. But is there more to Steen's anarchy that meets the eye. Meet the Dutch neighbours from hell.



Fig. 325: Jan Steen, Self-portrait



Fig. 326: *The Merry Household* – Jan Steen

Het vrolijke huisgezin, *The Merry Household*, is the name of perhaps Jan Steen's most famous picture. Certainly one of the strenuous pictures of the Dutch Golden Age. It is an assembly of human gargyle. Look at this grinning head of the family, grinning his boozy delight at the pleasures of the bottle. Looking at the wizard throne, singing a tune. At the centre of the picture a kind of profane Madonna, the mother of the household with her distinctly Christlike child. If one look at these pictures they're full of warnings about the moral danger excess.

Philosophiae Doctor

The broken egg, symbol of fractured virtue, the smoke that curls up from the pipe, being smoked by the little boy, that symbolizes transient of pleasure and to underscore that moral, there's a piece of paper pinned above the fireplace and tells one, as the old sing, so the young will cheer up. In other words, set a bad example to your children and they will surely follow it. And yet, there is something about the picture that makes you wonder whether the moral isn't actually just an alibi for having a good old laugh. Jan Steen was after all a publican, he was hardly the enemy of those who sought to overindulge. Whether he was actually on the same side as the merry family. Laughing along with them rather than poking fun at them.

1.7.10 PIETER DE HOOCH

There's a polar opposite to Jan Steen's scenes of disorder. Pieter de Hooch's serene depictions of Dutch domesticity and there's no ambiguity in this Art. Clean house, clean soul is the message. Everything spotless, nothing out of place. If you're troubled by the pitfalls of consumer society, this is somewhere you can control, keep home. There was a huge Popular Vogue at the time for Household Manuals such as this, its a book called: The skilled and responsible Housekeeper. A kind of secular book telling exactly what and when to clean. The obsession with cleanliness is a lasting national characteristic. In Holland you're still expected to keep the pavement in front of your house clean and the common conversion to curtains shows you got nothing to hide.

Fig. 327: A Courtyard in Delft with a Woman and Child, 1658 – De Hooch



In the Dutch Golden Age, the house was a symbol not only of your own moral fibre but the state of the Republic itself. After all, what was the Republic but an edifice, a house where each brick, each fine upstanding citizen helped insure the whole would not collapse. And it would produce one last truly great artist who would try to grasp that dream.

Philosophiae Doctor



Fig. 328: *The Courtyard of a House in Delft* – De Hooch



Fig. 329: *Interior with Woman Beside Linen Cupboard* – De Hooch

Fig. 330: *The Milkmaid*, sometimes called *The Kitchen Maid* – Vermeer

1.7.11 JOHANNES VERMEER



If De Hooch was the great painter of Dutch bricks and mortar, I think it was Johannes Vermeer who most memorably most hauntingly depicted the interior spaces of the Dutch household. He paints a serving girl pouring milk into a bowl in a humble kitchen and yet the whole space is suffused with light that falls on her, almost like a form of pan a diction. Your eyes caught by the bread on the table which inevitably brings to mind the bread on the altar at the moment of mass. She's the high priestess of the home.

Then he paints the woman in blue receiving a letter, reading it for the first time. There's a look of anticipation on her face, the map behind her suggest distance, is she receiving news from her beloved, her husband. Her swollen belly suggests that she's pregnant. The whole scene has the aura of a secular annunciation. She is the madonna of the house. And perhaps most memorably of them all, he paints the girl with the pearly earring. Its the look of love caught forever on a human face. You can see the moistness in the corner of her lip, the wetness in her eye. It's an utterly beguiling picture. For Vermeer she represents almost the sanctity of love. She's a person but she's also a kind of Saint. One would hardly guess from the hollowed serenity of his Art that Vermeer struggled to make ends meet and lived in a somewhat troubled home often plagued by obnoxious relatives. Perhaps his paintings reflect a longing not a reality, a peace he wished he had.

Fig. 331: *Woman in Blue Reading a Letter*, c. 1664 – Vermeer

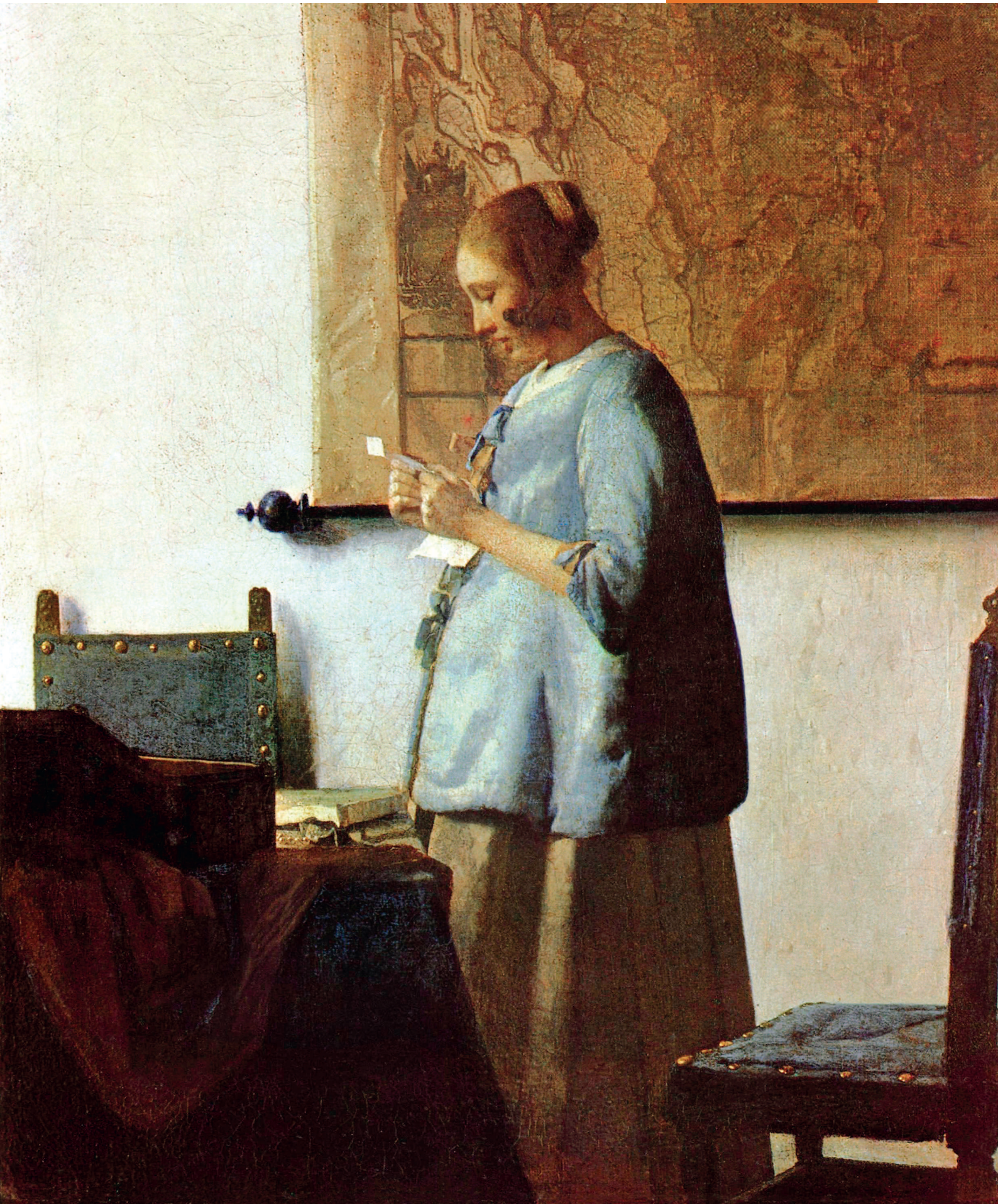




Fig. 332: *Girl with Pearl Earring*, 1665 – Vermeer

Vermeer was the last truly great artist of the Dutch Golden Age. It's downfall was his downfall. 1672, when Vermeer turned 40, was the Republic's great year of disaster. English, French and German forces tried to invade simultaneously from different directions. The Dutch had to break their Dykes and flood the land to resist invaders. It broke Dutch Global supremacy. They survived but their power would never be the same again and it broke Johannes Vermeer. He lost everything in the Economic crisis that followed and died, age 43, a destroyed man. One of his paintings that stands forever as an allergy to the extraordinary time and place that was Holland in the Golden Age, is Vermeer's view of Delft. Marcel Proust, the French writer said it was the most beautiful painting in the world. What the picture says is beguiling and enchanting and it's Vermeer's hometown, painted from a view that never was and idealized it to a great extent. Observe the way his tidied everything up. He has given a geometrical order to the outline of these buildings in the centre of Delft. It's a picture that encapsulates the great dream of Holland in the 17th Century. Dream of a perfect world, a world where all is for the best and in the best of all possible worlds. The sun is shining, people are going about their business, peace, tranquillity, prosperity, order. And, yet if one look more closely at the picture, Vermeer has also encapsulated that sense that the Dutch always had throughout their greatest hour, throughout the 17th Century that whatever they gained, whatever they made whatever they profited, it was always profoundly at risk, it was always vulnerable.



Fig. 333: *View of Delft* – Vermeer

Observe the weather, the sky, one can almost feel it moving above one selves. See the way he has depicted that subtly water, these lines of white that run across it. They are waves created in the water by the weeping of the wind. A person can feel the wind moving towards himself. The wonderful detail on the left where Vermeer had the paint ground in a slightly crystallized granular way so that those roofs sparkle and why do they sparkle, they sparkle because it has been raining, that cloud has dumped its load on those roofs. But that rain has passed, this is a moment of perfection, a moment of sunshine. The storm has past but another storm might be on the way. Vermeer has painted the Golden moments and he has painted the Dutch Golden Age itself. Something beautiful, something full of wonder, something extraordinary, but something also destined inevitably to pass and fade.¹¹

11 Graham-Dixon, Andrew. *High Art of the Low Countries Volume 2*: UK: BBC Four.

1.8 HIGH ART OF THE LOW COUNTRIES – DAYDREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

So far the story of the Low Countries has been about a tangle of different Cultures, a hybrid world from which stemmed huge developments in religion, politics, economics, but above all Art. From Bosch to Breughel, Van Eyck and into the Golden Age of Dutch Art, this small corner of Northern Europe, produced a rich crop with extraordinary images.

By the end of the 17th Century if Vermeer's great vision appeared to Harold a continued age of artistic brilliance, it wouldn't turn out that way. The next two hundred years would see a barren time for Art in which the Low Countries was perhaps too comfortable, too contented to produce anything daring and new. It was **a time of decline in religious faith and in its place rise a Trade – Industry, Money**. It was almost as if Art had gone into hibernation. The Low Countries were awoken from their collective slumbers at the onset of the 19th Century. First came the great trauma of the Napoleonic invasions, followed by the still greater trauma, Industrial Revolution, which changed the landscapes and the city horizons of this region forever. Dutch Art would be dominated by two towering figures, each in its own way, attempted to fill the great voids opened up by modern civilization. The death of beauty as they saw it, the death of God by turning Art itself into a new kind of Religion.

Philosophiae Doctor

Here in Belgium, there's a most unease of modern Nations States. The collectively, questioning, fractured sense of identity would be mirrored in an Art of a feverish dream – a nightmare.

1.8.1 VINCENT VAN GOGH

Early on the morning on Sunday the 23rd of July 1882, a 29 year old Dutchman climbed up onto the roof of his house in the suburb of the Hague while his alcoholic prostitute girlfriend and her small child slept downstairs. On any other day this young man would have plenty to complain about. His parents have just disowned him, his had two marriage proposals rejected, his been sacked twice and he has just got out of hospital, just again with Gonorrhoea. But on this day he feels happy, he looks out across the rooftops, he completes a watercolour and then he paints the scene again, this time in the words of a letter, to his brother, Theo van Gogh.

"You must imagine me here", he wrote. "Over the red tiled roofs comes a flock of white pigeons, flying between the black smoking chimneys. Behind this an infinity of delicate gentile green. Miles and miles of flat meadow and the grey sky, still and as peaceful. This is the subject of my watercolour. I hope you will like it." "I found my work", he writes in another letter from around this time. "Something which I live for hard and soul.

Fig. 334: *Watercolour – Van Gogh wrote a letter to his brother Theo about this subject – Van Gogh*



I have a certain faith in Art, a certain trust, it's a powerful current that drives a person." Now coming from anyone else in his position, he had only been studying Art for two years. But what wonderful Art he had been creating, paintings and drawings that really capture the lonely atmospheric feel of the flat lands at the edge of the city. Canals spearing towards the flat horizon, skies full of fast moving dark clouds. Early work maybe, but already it seems to hold out the promise of another Rembrandt in the making. Van Gogh's life story is a familiar tale. The unstable genius, who in a fit of despair cut off his ear. In his most radiant pictures you can see Van Gogh's faith in nature as a Religion unstated, uncut. But it is impossible to state where this passion came from without understanding his earlier work in Holland and Belgium.

Van Gogh hadn't set out to be an artist, he started off in the Priesthood, preaching to poor Cole miners in Belgium. But he failed spectacularly. He stuttered and despite his devotion, the Church Superiors deemed him unfit for public speaking. In Holland he chose again to settle among the rural poor but this time not to preach his subjects but to paint them. His first major figure painting is called the Potato-eaters and what you first notice about it is pervasive drabness. Van Gogh himself actually liked the effect. He said: "My subject is Potato-eaters and I want to paint them in the colours of a muddy potato, un-peeled off course", said he wanted the picture to smell of potatoes, even bacon. I can also smell the thick malty aroma, this peasant brew that the old lady's pouring. Its a thick form of Chicory Coffee, quite disgusting, but all that they could afford. The picture was greatly criticised, the hands were said to be too mild, the arms too long, the faces too caricature, the eyes too bulging, the noses too much like potatoes. But it was all intentional. Van Gogh wanted us to feel that those hands reaching into that plate of potatoes had dug those potatoes up from the earth. Those hands have been shaped, misshapen by all that manual labour. Although it's such a visually, unappealing un-appetizing literally copper coloured murk of a picture, Van Gogh, did continue to regard it throughout his life and I quote: "one of the best things I have done".

And I do think it's an extremely significant picture in the context of his career because it established right from the outset what it's all about as a painter.



Fig. 335: *The Potato-eaters* – Van Gogh

What mattered to Van Gogh throughout his life was not sophisticated technique. **He wanted to recreate in paint the intensity and violence of his own feelings and to arouse those feelings in his audience.** Van Gogh's later French pictures, might look very different from his early work but they too, use a form of self-conscious exasperations in ecstatic version of caricature. It's an attempt to forge a kind of new religion for common man, for the potato-eaters of this world. Everyday experiences of field and flower becomes visions of divine beauty. And it would reach a climax at his most famous subject of all.

Van Gogh had left Holland simply because it was too gloomy for an artist trying to find God, trying to find some sense of transcendent in the natural world, too much rain, too much shadow, too much darkness. He went to the South of France. In the South of France he felt illuminated by the sun. He said: "Suddenly nature's colours sing to me." He felt that he had never seen the colours of nature before. He felt that he found what he was looking for. The sunflowers was so important to him because it was a plant that seemed to him to have taken into itself, kept preserved all that radiance all that colour. It was as if he was looking at the sun itself when he looked at these blooms. He painted this pictures in a kind of storm of enthusiasm. This is almost a picture that you can eat. Van Gogh also said that the sunflower's his in a way. Why was it his? He knew that his life, his career, was going to be a short one.

Fig. 336: Sunflower Painting – Van Gogh



Philosophiae Doctor

His career was like a comet flashing across the sky. He compressed into just five years of a career what most other artists would spend perhaps 40 years creating. That's what he is depicting when he depicts the sunflower, his depicting a sense of himself. This rapid rise. This one flower seems as if it could be an outraged eye staring into space. The others, are cut flowers, one see them falling as if the whole of Van Gogh's life is encapsulated in this one picture. He signed it Vincent in that wonderful mauve colour, Vincent on the vase as if to say, this is me, this is who I was. Van Gogh's message was always destined to fall on stoney ground. In the early years of the 20th Century, Holland became a nation of evermore practical people. They were not looking for God, they were looking for market opportunities. In a fragile sea level world, nature had always been something to be conquered and tamed, rather than swooned over. The Dutch were carving out their own space in the modern global economy by pioneering what's now agri business, leading the way in the export of lucrative farm produce and flower bulbs. Almost half the world's cut flowers are still sold from their flower auctions. Everything that make Van Gogh despair of his fellow countrymen is still true of Holland today. But Van Gogh would not be entirely without influence in 20th Century Holland, the seeds yet sown, would bear fruit, at least in the rarefied arena in modern Art. In the summer of 1905, sixteen years after his death, the Dutch paid belated tribute to Van Gogh with a vast exhibition of his work.

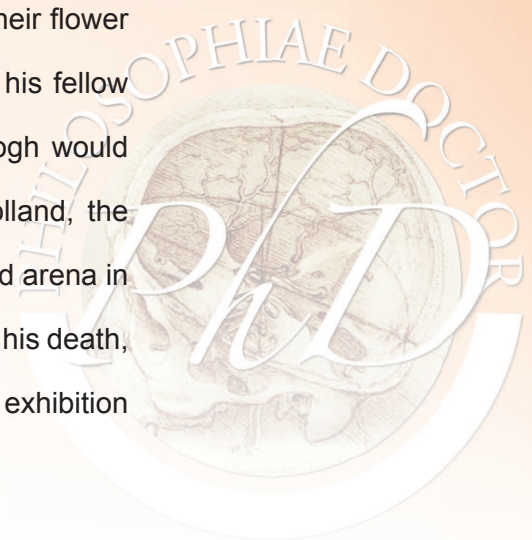


Fig. 337-343: Paintings – Van Gogh



Fig. 337



Fig. 338



Fig. 339



Fig. 340



Fig. 341a



Fig. 341b

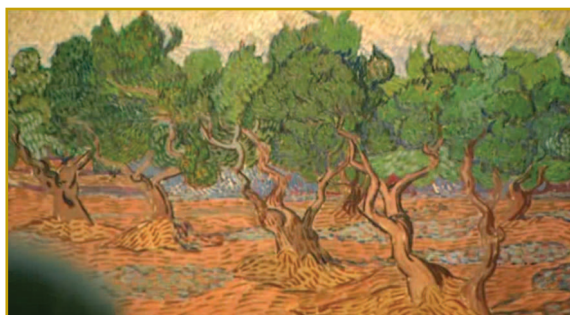


Fig. 342



Fig. 343

1.8.2 PIET MONDRIAN

Among the visitors was a little known Dutch Landscape Artist, called Piet Mondrian. Until now Mondrian had not been shown a huge talent, he spent his early years creating a group of intriguingly stylised, symbolically charged, rather murky landscapes. If you want to understand the essential effects that Van Gogh's Art had on the young Piet Mondrian, there is no better place to start than here. This is his early work, low toned, slightly melancholic, slightly mystical landscapes painted 1905, 1906, 1907.

It was like set fire to a match and lit the world. This is how Mondrian see reality after he has seen Van Gogh's paintings. Skies that seem to be alive with some strange electrical charm. But what is interesting about Mondrian, is that he is different from Van Gogh. He has fallen under the influence of the philosophical ideas of a movement known as philosophy. He has come to believe that matter is the enemy of spirit, so for example, while Van Gogh might have said I want to paint sunflowers that feel like you can eat them, like a blob of mayonnaise, that's not at all Mondrian's ambition. He would never have compared one of his paintings to food at what he was looking at. What he is looking for is some kind of mysterious, spiritual passion of reality that he feels lie beyond visible appearance. So his vision adventure would take him to completely different worlds.

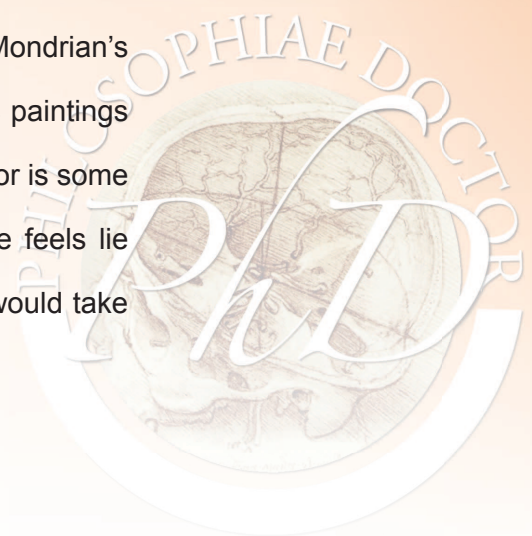


Fig. 344: *Geinrust Farm with Saplings*, 1905-07 – Mondrian



Fig. 345: *Five Tree Silhouettes along the Gein with Moon*, 1907-08 – Mondrian

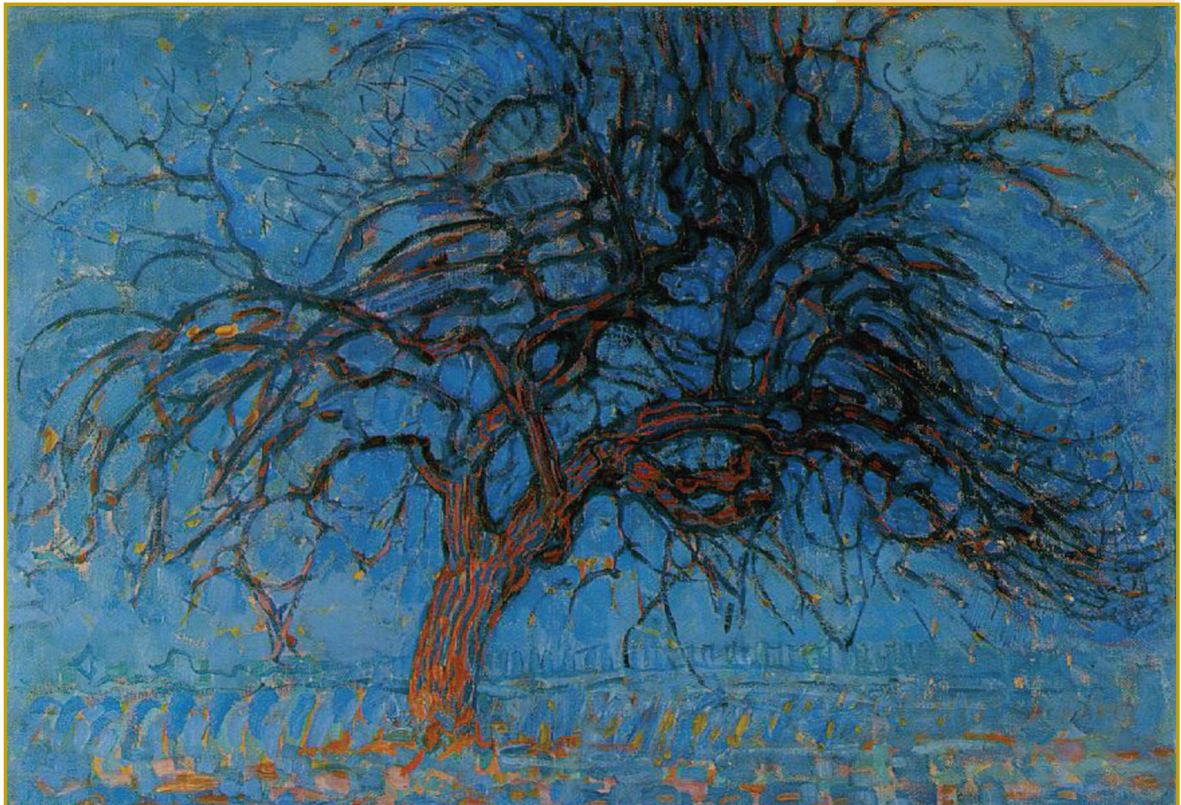
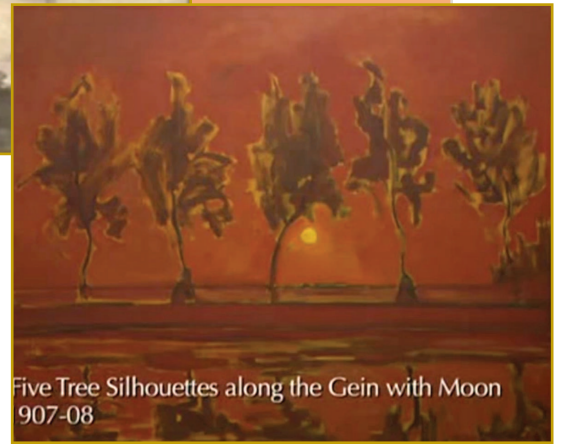


Fig. 346: *Avond, The Red Tree*, 1908-10 – Mondrian

Like Van Gogh before him, Mondrian felt he had to get out of Holland. In 1911 he set up studio in the heart of the International Art scene, Paris. In the early 20th Century the city was a magnet for artists wanting to be part of the Avant Garde. Instability in Europe had fuelled a mood of creative rebellion with radical breakthroughs in all forms of artistic expression. In this heated atmosphere, Picasso and Braque invented Cubism and Mondrian felt completely under its spell. From now on Mondrian will still paint nature but his individual trees start to dissolve into a cubist kaleidoscope of muted forms, to express the universal abstract nature of a tree. As he squares off his environment, Mondrian moves closer to grid form abstraction but he is not there yet. That styled defining revelation will come not from Paris but almost by accident from the weather battered dunes of Holland's North Sea Coast. When the great breakthrough came, chance played a large part. Mondrian was actually living in Paris to be in the centre of modern Art. He got word that his father was ill and he came to Holland which was supposed to be a short visit. But then the war broke out. He couldn't leave the country, and what did he do? He came to Domburg Beach, he had almost no money, just a stump of charcoal and a sketchbook. But he spent day after day looking at the sea, studying the sea, studying the sky, studying the stumps of these piers. And the result was Art that he considered, the great change.



Fig. 347: *The Grey Tree*, 1911 – Mondrian



Fig. 348: *Cubistic Kaleidoscope Tree* – Mondrian

Mondrian would sometimes sketch by moonlight or even with his eyes closed, so determined was he to find the fruits of his subject. Mondrian returned from the sea like a beachcomber with this astonishingly abstract distilled reduced vision of the disk of the North Sea beneath. The disk of the grey Dutch sky. One can sense Mondrian's rapture before the glitter and the dazzle of light on ocean breakers, we can feel the motions, the relentless motions of the sea. One can sense mists, fogs coming in across the ocean. It's an extraordinary image and it's one that takes us to the heart of the difference between Mondrian and Van Gogh. They start from exactly the same position. **The church is gone, its no good to them any more but they're looking for some sense of the spiritual, some mystery, some sense of deeper meaning and they're going to a new Church, the Cathedral of nature.** But where is Van Gogh? He's essentially helpless before nature. Mondrian takes control. It's the artist's job to see the structures, to see the patterns, to see the deeper meaning of the world behind the visible appearances of the world, hence, he distills, he purifies, he reduces, he purges. Now he sees himself as the pioneer of a new spiritualistic vision but, how Dutch, how very Dutch this Art seems with its distant horizontals and verticals in the Dutch landscape but not only that, Mondrian was the son of a Dutch Calvinist. When looking at this picture, one is instantly transported back 300 years to those very first images of the purged Protestant Church, painted by Pieter Saenredam in the 1600s.

A white space, lines, structure, nothing left in the church anymore, but a cross. Mondrian, all he sees in the end - a cross. While Mondrian was imbedded in tradition it's also important to remember that he was trapped in a very particular catastrophic moment of modern history. In the picture painted in 1915, just after the outbreak of the First World War, one can sense the shadow of that war hovering over Mondrian's spirit. It is noted by the way the cross forms. Becoming heavier, darker, oppressive. **It's an image that very much evokes the mass graves of the First World War.** Mondrian might not have had a con-

ventional believe in God but he did believe in Art as a kind of divine force, capable of reordering chaos after the war. He was sure that he could change the objective conditions of humanity if he could commit to canvas. The perfect arrangement of block and line. Mondrian's stark, grid compositions are

his trademark. The Dutch landscape distilled, purified into something he felt improved upon nature. It's impossible to overstate Mondrian's extremism.

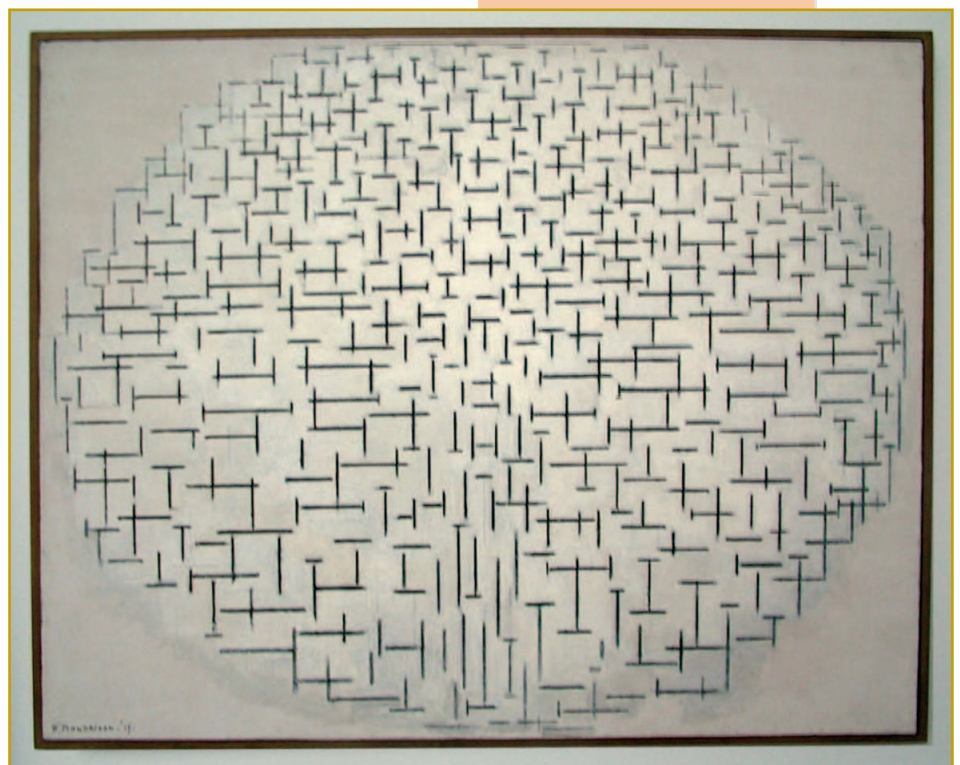


Fig. 349: Painted in 1915 after outbreak of First World War – this image evokes the mass graves of the war – Mondrian

As far as he was concerned he had invented the ultimate language of Art, perfectly abstracted, reduced to the perfect combination of colours and forms. But for him that was just the beginning. His pictures were blueprints for the world. And if the world took up the message imbedded in the pictures, then Art itself would no longer be necessary, we would have entered the final millennium of absolute understanding and enlightenment.

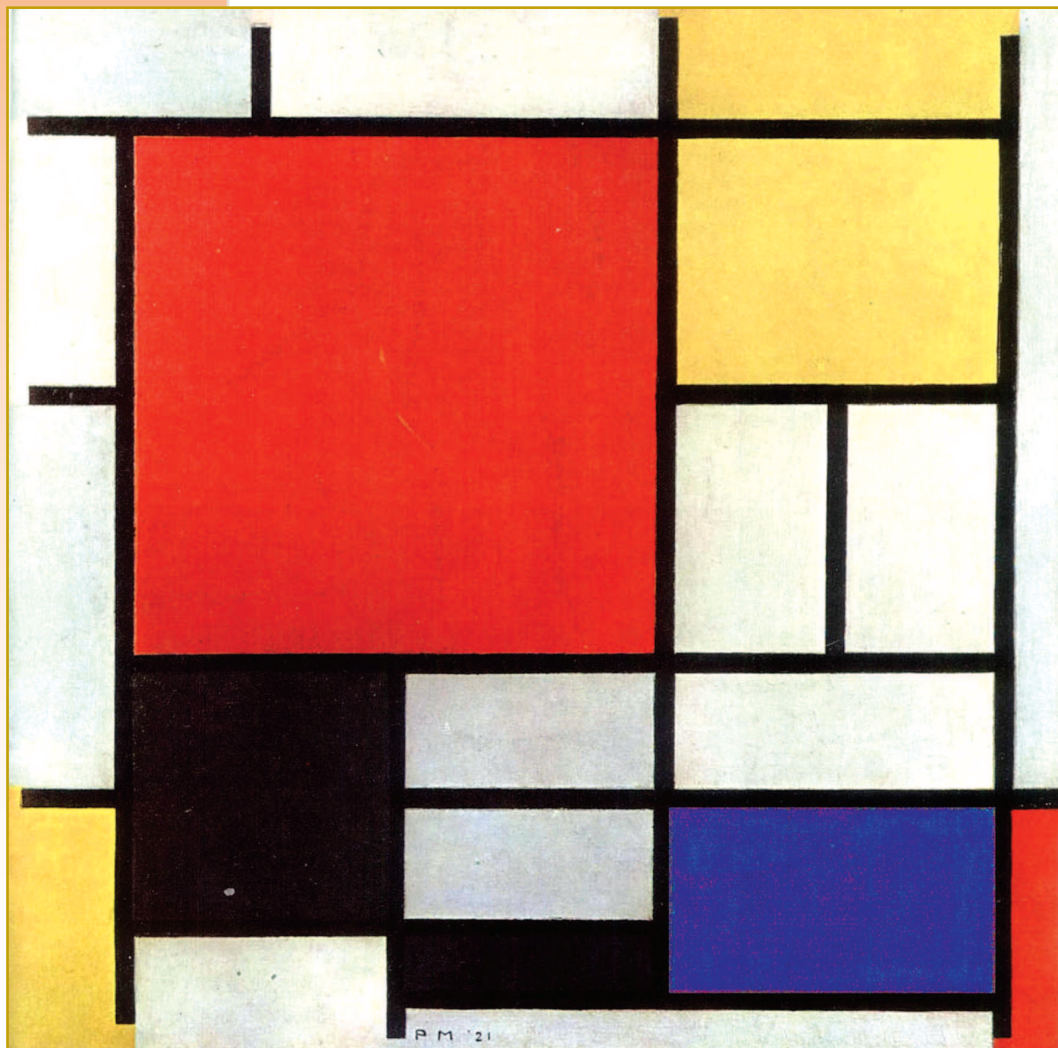


Fig. 350: *The perfect arrangement of block and line* – Mondrian

Sensing that most of his fellow Dutch countrymen were too levelheaded to take to his dogmatic idealism, Mondrian sort out like minded artists and form an extremist group. He took up the role as theorist and chief and in the summer of 1917, the group published a great manifesto of their faith under the banner; **De Stijl**. Their new world order would be one of **pure abstraction, a rigid aesthetic, angular austerity**. In 1924, one of the members, Gerrit Rietveld, attempted to put the group's hard edge theory into a family home. The famous Schröder House. Rietveld's Schröder House is the dogma of The Stijl made real. Its got more straight lines than a chest board. Everything framed as if in a Mondrian composition. When you open the window in the Maid's room, you get a double benefit.



Fig. 351: A painting by Mondrian, the artist who inspired Yves Saint Laurent with the dresses bearing his name – Mondrian



Fig. 352: The Rietveld Schröder House – Mondrian

Light from outside, almost like an abstract composition like a Malevich, which is a black square painting. The house was designed nearly 90 years ago for a very forward thinking client, Truus Schröder. She loved it, even though her children refused to admit that they lived in the crazy house. To open the door to go upstairs, it's like a constructive sculpture that you operates.

The floors, a painting or an arrangement of form in Mondrian's primary colours. Primary colours plus black and white. Red, yellow, blue, black, white. There is the famous Rietveld chair. There's something about this house that you feel you must evolve yourself, you need to evolve into a higher form, perhaps something a bit more cubistic, something a bit more angular.

Fig. 353: Gerrit Rietveld 's Architectural drawing of the Schröder House, 1924.



When the day comes that human beings evolved cubical buttocks then a person can sit on chairs like these. There is one concession to the organically rounded shape of the human form, the toilet.

The space, is totally modernistic, it's original, it's stark, it's extraordinary. There's a window that opens like a cantilever. It goes straight out into space, thrusting another pictorial Rietveld rectangle into the world. Although it's so modern, although its so cubistic, futuristic, Mondrianist, its also very Dutch because the whole space has the feeling of a ship or a boat. Where one thing folds out into another, maximum use is made of space.

What is a boat to a Dutchman. A boat is something you embark on an adventure in. The movement broke up in the 1930s and sensing that his own ideas were too extreme, truly to enchant the pragmatic people of Holland, Mondrian took his dreams elsewhere.

Philosophiae Doctor



Fig. 354: Different view of Gerrit Rietveld 's Architectural drawing of the Schröder House, 1924.

Fig. 355: The famous Rietveld chair.



New York thrilled Mondrian. He saw it as a realization of all his ideals. A whole living environment modelled on grid form composition. Skyscraper in block, clean, sharp, opposing vertical and horizontals. But it was different for his paintings too, more mobile, more jazzy. A city constantly on the move. And this is the result of that bombardment of energy.

Fig. 356: Schröder House Interior, 1924.



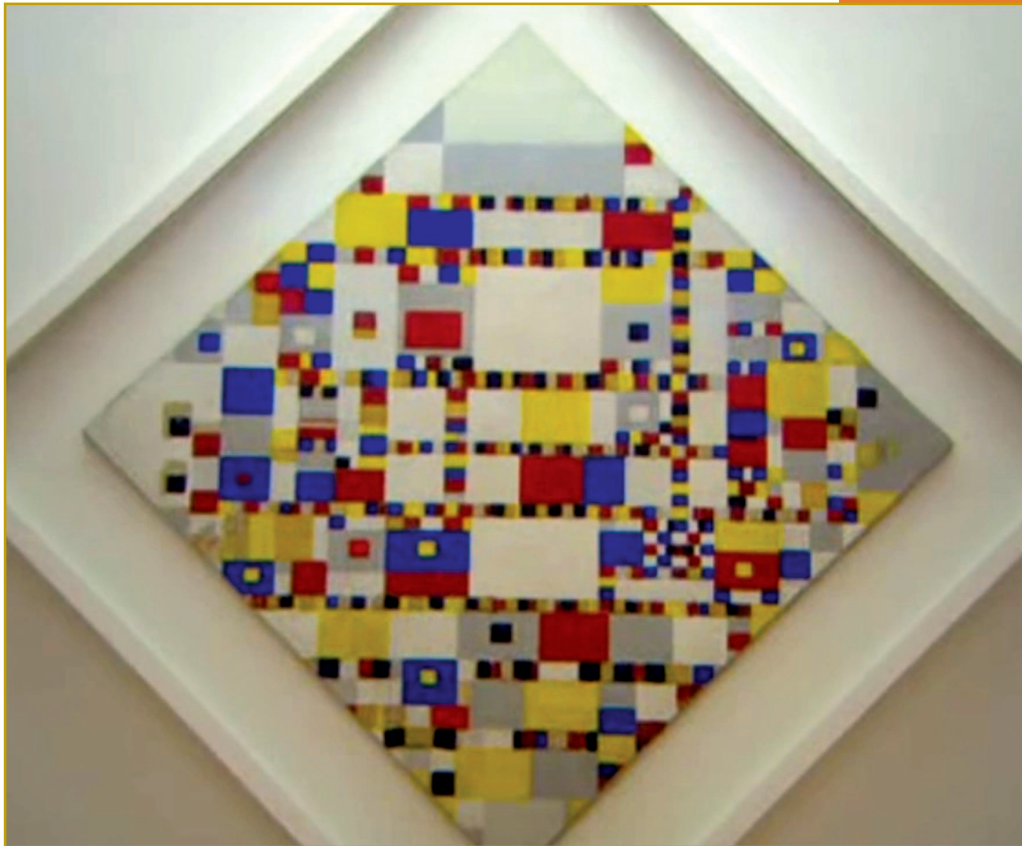


Fig. 357: Mondrian's
"Victory Boogie Woogie"

He was nearly 70 when he turned away from nature towards Manhattan and its Taxi Cab buzzing grid. It was to be Mondrian's last composition, his funeral march. But how full of life! He called it "*Victory Boogie Woogie*".

Mondrian was the great exile but his spirit does live on throughout Holland. Sometimes in surprising places, Dutch commerce in particular, operates like a well oiled Mondrian machine. In Rotterdam's vast International Port, each colour coded unit is wedged with a perfect economy into an ever shifting chequerboard, transaction and exchange. It's a Mondrian but with the spirituality stripped out. Container boogie woogie.

Philosophiae Doctor

But what of Holland's modern neighbour? Belgium. Until nearly 200 years ago the Region of North West Europe were not even a Country and the question has often been asked, what's the point with Belgium? Well, there was one once. The Kingdom was created as a strategic buffer between France and Germany and to keep Holland in its place.

The people of Antsworth famously hate the people of Brussels who detest the people in Brussels in turn. Its not even a Nation united by a common language, they speak at least three in counting. The only bilingual bit is Brussels Central. The Flemish region is monolingual in Dutch. Although there are administered services for the French speaking. Balonia is a pure French speaking territory, except where they speak German. So it follows that the most famous Belgium painting of the 20th Century should be a joke on the slipperiness of the language.

1.8.3 RENÉ MAGRITTE

This is not a pipe said René Magritte, of course it's not, its a painting of a pipe. At least we can all agree on that. This cultural knot explains why Belgiums are so drawn to the European project, its a way of ironing out the crumpled quilt of overlapping internal divisions. Opting instead for the appealing fantasy of a United Europe. It's Belgiums dream of being part of a greater whole.



Could this be why the most distinctively Belgium creation of the 20th Century should be a universal character with no identifiable personality with affectionate embodiment of the European dream – Tintin by Georges Remi. The adventures of Tintin. They are the one good dream produced by this Nation.

Tintin is a curiously sexless young cup reporter in knickerbockers, accompanied by his faithful white dog Snowy, and they go on many different assignments. But his real job is to make Belgium feel better about itself. Another more so then in one of the first books, Tintin in the Congo, which had been the size of perhaps the dirtiest of all of Belgiums Colonial exploits.

Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 358: "It's a painting of a pipe" – Magrit

But you never know from this book, Tintin arrives, is greeted by a sea of happy, smiling, somewhat caricatured black African faces. He makes everything better. There's a nice touch at the beginning of the book where he's accosted by agents working for all the major newspapers of the world. New York wants him, London wants him, Lisbon wants him. He's the one Belgium the whole world hangs on his every last word.

He's a one man, one teenager, United Nations. An Ambassador for the EU, before the EU was invented. He lands on the moon, he saves the world from a giant asteroid. Plays a decisive role in politics, the cold war.

He does everything that Belgians know they can't really do or be. There's a charming super physicality about the Tintin books. Mirrored in the ever so clean style of Hergé himself, a Belgian equivalent to the anonymous style of American pop-art. Behind the heroic fantasies of Tintin, lurks a deep-seated fear of having to confront the bewildering reality of everyday Belgian life.

If there's one place that is the great cave of Belgium dreaming it's the house of René Magritte. Born in 1898, Magritte spent his whole adult life issuing mind wrenching riddles from this perfectly Brussels Townhouse. He didn't venture far to find subjects for his pictures.

Fig. 359a-g: *The adventures of Tintin – Georges Remi.*



Fig. 359a.



Fig. 359b.



Fig. 359c.

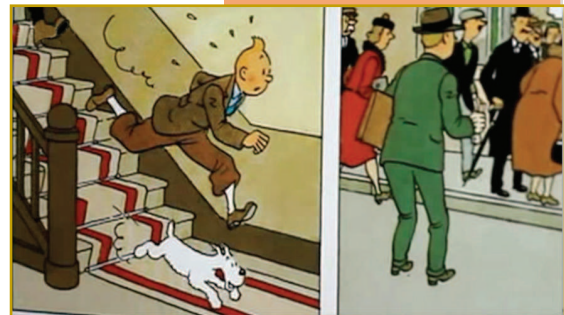


Fig. 359d.



Fig. 359e.



Fig. 359f.



Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 359g.

They are filled with the stuff for domestic interior, but Magritte was determined to make the most familiar objects scream aloud. Much like those Dutch seekers after higher truth, Van Gogh and Mondrian.

Everywhere in Magritte's world there's a sense of mystery and after echo of spiritual yearning, for transformation, for trans-substantiation, even celestial harmony? But what if Mondrian really did try to find an alternative religion in the everyday world. Even as Magritte recognised the desire for transcendent, he made a mockery of it and yes in his visions of paradise, internal life is possible, but only if you employ a taxidermist. The artist had his Pomeranian dog stuffed.

Magritte lived to the part of the conventional Belgium, who's life he mocked. He understood the deep uncertainty, contemporaries felt in the first 20th Century and he embodied a picture puzzle form. In the gloomy chambers of the Magritte Museum, his pictures hang like spot like provocations. Common sense is trifled with laws of gravity defined. Everything seems the wrong way round, front and back, day and night.

Magritte painted more than 20 versions of this image, which he called *The Empire* or sometimes *The Dominion of lights*.

Fig. 360: *The Dominion of Lights* – Magritte



It clearly obsessed him, it's an image of a moment, a mood, an attitude. It's the magic hour, it's that threshold moment. It's that moment when the visible world seems to tremble on the edge of invisibility, light is turning to darkness. Mondrian was obsessed with this moment. Mondrian, painting and sketching in the dark at Dombay Beach, waiting for the world to disclose its inner truth, its inner pattern. Magritte, when he puts one in front of the image, he puts a person in that same frame of mind. He sits or stands near the image and a person becomes someone waiting for the world to reveal itself, waiting for the miraculous to unfold. But Magritte kept a person waiting for a very long time.

Fig. 361: *Christies_*
Magritte_Okapi

And that's the point, **Magritte's principal weapon is to**

deliver everything but the answer. He gives one the restatement of religion, the spirits, the wonders, but without the explanation.

There's a very Flemish particularity about his style, so sharp and so clear that a person really believes that it's raining businessmen.



Fig. 362: *A moment?* – Magritte



Fig. 363: *Raining Business Men* – Magritte

Philosophiae Doctor



Fig. 364: The apple, emblem of the fall – Magritte

For all his self conscious surrealism, Magritte is the direct descendent of the old Flemish painters of Christian miracle, Jan van Eyck and Roger van der Wijden. But Magritte is a painter of sabotaged Altarpieces. His wine is not the blood of Christ, instead the bottle that carries it, turns into a phallic carrot.

But the centre of this bleak approaching, less universe, is the apple, emblem of the fall. In Magritte's hands it becomes a trademark, a brand, stamped on all humanity. Redemption? Forget it, especially if your'e a Belgium. While Magritte, played games with the Belgium Bourgeois's mind, there was another less well known more vulnerable Belgian Surrealist, who actually tried to cope with it.

Fig. 365: *Magritte Paints Upside Down*



1.8.4 PAUL DELVAUX

Paul Delvaux spend his life trying to open up cracks in the psychic to see what might lie within. Delvaux self, began life as a Bourgeois and ended it as a wild haired Bohemian. His Art was a journey, leading from the safe Salon subject matter of his youth, the steam trains of Belgium's Industrial Revolution, to the more troubling sexually charged work of his maturity.

How did Delvaux get to the destination of his later Art? Filled as it is with curious transfixing, glassy eyed nudes and ghastly reminders of death. He bought a ticket as a young man to a peculiar kind of Fairground attraction. Imagine yourself back to 1932, it's the Summer Fair in Brussels. The height of July and star attraction is the Horror Show.

Display of skeletons and anatomical models, the young Paul Delvaux enters the booth through a pair of red curtains and he remembers what he sees for the rest of his life with the force of a revelation, grizzly displays of Syphilitic disease models of human genitalia that's been deformed by illness. As far as the Belgium Authorities concerned, this is a kind of government health warning, its a way of encouraging Belgiums, young men, particularly soldiers, to stay clear of prostitutes.



Fig. 366

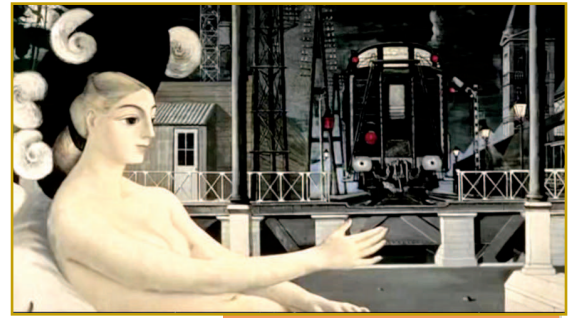


Fig. 367



Fig. 368



Fig. 369



Fig. 370



Fig. 371



Fig. 372

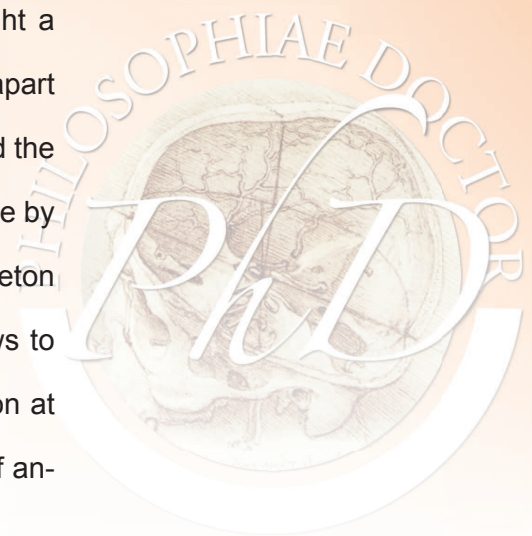
Philosophiae Doctor

Delvaux proclaims in paint what Freud had written in psycho-analysis. No matter how normal we like to seem, all of us are constantly subject to subconscious dreams and fantasies, ruled by thoughts of sex and death.

But to Delvaux, this young man brought up by an overprotecting mother, a rather narrow-minded father, the scene was like an eruption of sexuality in depth into his rather conservative world. Almost overnight the spectacle triggered a sudden unleashing of latent desires and anxieties onto his canvases. What's the deeper message behind this strangeness of Delvaux's Art?

Delvaux proclaims in paint what Freud had written in psycho-analysis. No matter how normal we like to seem, all of us are constantly subject to subconscious dreams and fantasies, ruled by thoughts of sex and death. That's why naked women pursue practises outside their otherwise Bourgeois boundaries, they stand or lie for desire. In some of his wartime work, Delvaux sensed that a person hides from what man don't want to know, and it becomes charged with even darker meanings.

If a person don't control a persons drives, what might a man do to the world? In Delvaux's *Sleeping Venus*, apart from the central nude, everybody seems to look behind the confines of the Architecture. Something terrible to judge by their staring eyes and agonized expressions. The skeleton has the air of a messenger, bringing unwelcome news to the lady in the feathered hat, news of what is going on at Auswitch, perhaps? After the war, in this outpouring of anguish and guilt, Delvaux was traumatized.



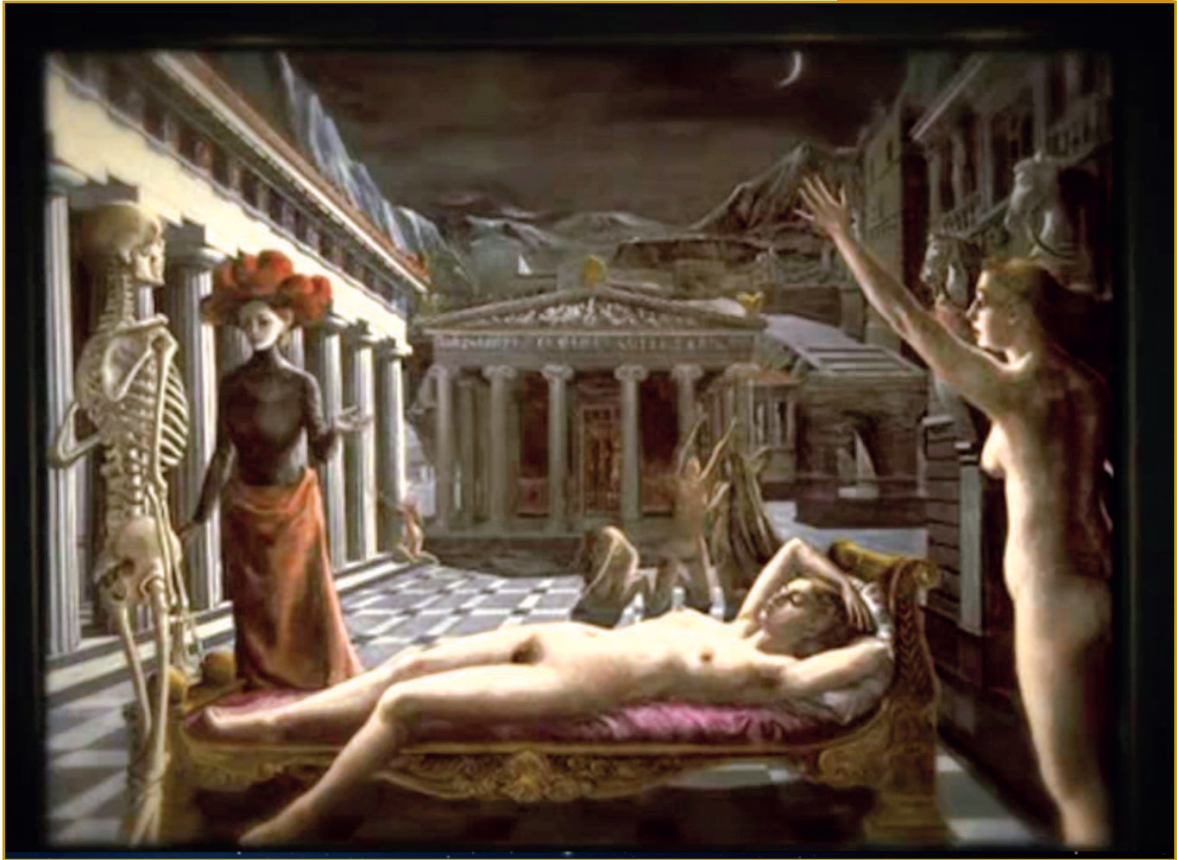


Fig. 373: *The Sleeping Venus* – Delvaux.



Fig. 373a: *Detail of The Sleeping Venus* – Delvaux.

He spent the rest of his life sleep walking, retreating in a rather safe busy world, as if he couldn't bear what he had uncovered. In the early 1950s Delvaux embarked on his largest cycle of paintings, it's in a private home in a gated area in one of Brussels's exclusive neighbourhoods. Only a hand full of people have ever seen it. One really feels part of Paul Delvaux's world. This world is sometimes strange or weird. People is watching, observing, one doesn't know what people really thinking about you. Most of the times the curtains must be closed to preserve the paintings and it's not easy to live in a house like this.

How long did it take Delvaux to create this? It took him two years to finish all the panels. **It's a cross between Bourgeoise Brussels and the Classical past.** One don't really know if one's in Italy or Antique Greece. From the commissioner of the painting and his daughter, one comes down the stairs from the present day in the 1950s into the Classical past. Then into the 19th Century and then back into the Classical past and suddenly all their clothes are falling off. But there's not really an expression on the faces, they're quite odd but with beautiful faces and that's weird, one expect them to smile, to be enjoying themselves because its nature and its landscape, but there is no expression. The feeling is, there is something weird happening, what exactly nobody knows.

Fig. 327-383: Largest cycle of paintings in private home in Brussels – Delvaux.



Fig. 374



Fig. 375



Fig. 376



Fig. 377

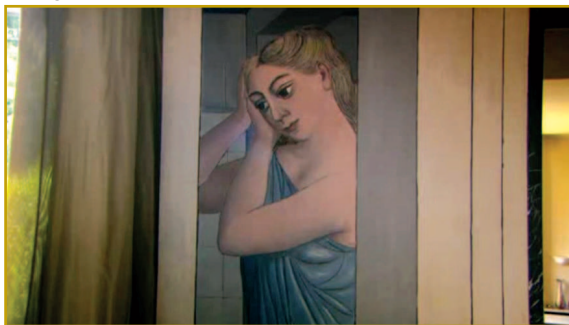


Fig. 378



Fig. 379



Fig. 380



Fig. 381



Philosophiae Doctor

Fig. 382



Fig. 383

Fig. 384-393: Largest cycle of paintings in private home in Brussels (continue) – Delvaux.



Fig. 384



Fig. 385



Fig. 386



Fig. 387



Fig. 388



Fig. 389

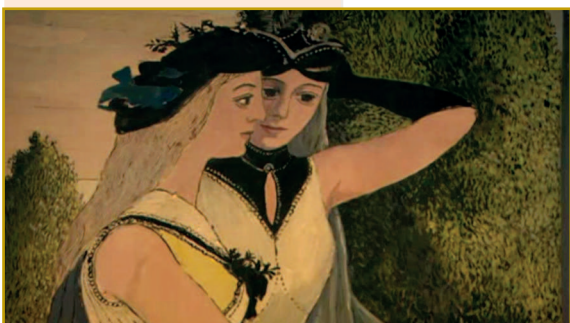


Fig. 390



Fig. 391



Fig. 392



Fig. 393

Fig. 394: Largest cycle of paintings in private home in Brussels (continue)
– Delvaux.



Philosophiae Doctor

Delvaux take the traditions of the past and surrealises them and makes them somehow mythological, somehow strange. One can never get beyond that mystery, its something about a dream. While Delvaux was holding the world at bay with those emotionless, speechless pictures, the already divided country, has fallen further in domestic chaos. Since then, economic crisis has widened the gap dividing North from South. Against its backdrop of rusting steel and cracked concrete, flowers this raw fascinating form of Surrealist dreaming. It's this compliant rules of graffiti that speak most nakedly about the dilemma of this fractured disillusioned nation. What are the graffiti images of? Hope, Despair, Defiance. Their chaotic blending certainly speaks of division.

2. CONCLUSION

While Belgium worries, and looks within, what of it's more confident more united neighbour. Where do one find Art that reflects the modern Dutch identity. The idea of Art certainly appeals to the civilized Dutch. For some time the Dutch paid their artists a social benefit to produce Art. Most of the Art ended up in a State owned lock-up in the outskirts of the Hague. The social welfare scheme was set up in 1949.

Fifty thousand works of Art are locked within its vaults, brought out on rare occasions to decorate the offices of government officials. By the time the money ran out in the late 1980s, it did subsidised a quarter of all the artists in the Netherlands. Paying them up to three times the value for their work to be expensively shelved. The artworks wait for someone to adopt them.

It is compliant rules of graffiti that speak most nakedly about the dilemma of the fractured disillusioned nation.



Fig. 395



Fig. 396



Fig. 397



Fig. 398



Fig. 399



Fig. 400

g
r
a
f
f
i
t
i

This must be the largest euro mountain of unwanted Art in existence. What does this say about a modern society? That it's willing to pay a service to Art and then manage to forget about it almost completely. Cultures constantly change but the Dutch are more at home with practical Art of Design and Architecture. That's why their Galleries are so much more impressive than their Art. The Gallery by Rotterdam's Rem Koolhaas, is a very cool house.

More than 2000 years ago, Plato declared that the last thing a Republic needs is the de-stabilising figure of the Artist, someone who's individual visions run counter to the communal efforts of the State's. This is true of Holland today. The modern Dutch wants business as usual. They want their Banks, they want their Container Ports, they want to grow and sell more flowers than anyone else in the world. It's that sense of profound collective enterprise that sets modern Holland apart from modern Belgium and it's also what defines the Dutch attitude to Art. They know they got to have lots of it because after all it's the mark of a civilised State.¹²

oo—O—oo

12 Graham-Dixon, Andrew. High Art of the Low Countries
Volume 3: UK: BBC Four.