

**HEIRONYMUS BOSCH – In Defense of what is Magic
and the Roots of what we now call Surrealism**

By Gregory Evans

The power of putting hand to surface, of making marks, is truly a magical thing that we hominini have been doing for more than 50,000 years – this is no short stint. Its this miraculous activity that mimics what it is the gods do – its how we create. An idea becomes a real thing when the hand is the conductor for the translation of two seemingly disparate worlds – our hands are the bridge between the world of the non-physical (the realm of the imagination), and the material world. From time to time, an artist appears on this earth that has no hesitation to express this magic to its fullest, to expose a reality that few, if any, would ever see otherwise, to show us things we'd never even dream of dreaming.

Hieronymus Bosch is an artist such as this. All things considered, Bosch was certainly one in a long tradition of those who have risked more than most of us would dare in expressing their magic and their vision in what used to be quite a small world.

So, what to do when one wishes to examine an artist that very little is known of, when the facts of one's life are so obscure as to be nearly non-existent? What to do when the mundane realities of a man become mystery? What to do when you have only a few facts, some near-fact, some veiled-fact, some guesswork (educated, circumstantial and otherwise), and a large body sheer speculation? What to do with the many assumptions from poor to great, and a short list of nearly nothing to go on? What to do if your subject had disappeared from the face of the earth for hundreds of years only leaving a few of his paintings to mark his passing journey on this planet? What to do when one discovers details so sparse that a life without work was only a comment, barely a footnote in the history of art? What to do with so many questions and so few answers?

We have no journals, no diaries, no correspondences written by him or to him. We

have no thoughts on his own work shared by him. We don't know what he named his paintings, nor when they were actually painted.

What to do when one is tasked to write of such things?

To this, the answer is simple – first, we share those few unimportant facts and “near-facts”, then we learn of life and culture in the Den Bosch (the town where Bosch lived and the source of the name he chose to use) at the time, and then we examine his work and wrap it all up in a neat little imaginary package that could barely imitate the imaginary work of the man himself.

The Facts and Other Things

Hieronymus Bosch was a man whose history is as much a mystery as his work; so sparse are the facts surrounding his life that we could be tempted to think that his presence in this world was intentionally erased.

It seems he was born into a family of artists – its indicated that his grandfather and uncle were artists, and his presumed father either an artist or an art advisor of sorts to the local Brotherhood of Our Blessed Lady, all which would imply a deep tradition of profession was bred into the young Bosch, as well as a need to wear the robes of a gilded fine-artist proudly. Bosch was born

to see the last half of the 15th century and a small part of the 16th under a mostly gentle Spanish but very Catholic Habsburg rule during quickly changing times. It was the end of the Italian Renaissance (near but pre-mannerist period) and those southern artistic influences were only just beginning to influence Flemish painters. A religious revolution was about to start as well, under the guise of Calvinists and protesting protestants.

Bosch was married, and he married well, that is to say he married into a certain amount of money and property and prestige. Forming union to further family status would necessarily cement a need (obviously following in his father's footsteps) for him to become a member of a local and highly respected traditional religious fraternal order called the Brotherhood of Our Blessed Lady, for any nuptial moment as this would signal a need for a young man to step up in further ways than just ringing fingers.. In this brotherhood, his brethren were prominent and rich, and it would seem that, due to both his marriage or his father's own membership, Bosch fit perfectly into this realm and was now hobnobbing with the most important, the most respected, and the most influential in town. The results of this association are unknown, but maybe can be deduced. Did this association change his work? Did it contribute to, change or cement his religious views? Did it provide some sort of protection from potential but unwanted

attention? Was he compelled to paint more, or modify his presentation of his deeply spiritual beliefs?

Another difficulty with examining Bosch's work is his extant small-body corpus of which are only a couple of dozen paintings. Consider – while not completely unusual for the craft, it is the discovery and analysis of paintings attributed to Bosch that were not painted by him, but by those who would probably have been a part of his studio, either near-peers or apprentices, which speaks of Bosch's importance in the craft. These now re-attributed Bosch-attribute paintings may not be such an issue if his body of work were larger, but for each painting that was done by another, its one less in the small oeuvre we have that is done by Bosch. For a man, a painter of his importance, its unlikely he would produce so few paintings in nearly twice as many years, considering one reference found that says he was referred to once as “illustrious painter.” Also, his paintings were never dated, so our thoughts on how his work progressed over time is assumed, his growth and development as an artist is just “educated” guesswork – the evolution, the development, of his work a theory. Building a timeline of his work is something I wouldn't attempt, so am happy others have made their determinations, but from beginning to end, we

know (as of this writing) of only a 25 paintings correctly attributed to him.

Bosch was religious – maybe not overly pious (or maybe so) but he was, in the least, traditional – his world was a middle-aged gothic world ill-suited to accept and receive sudden and contemporary changes in the Renaissance-influenced Church, changes which were, in the south, a more gradual process, spanning two to three centuries. In regards to changes in practice, dogma and perspective – some thought there should be none of that. Like many of the time in the Lowlands of Europe, Bosch was an “if it ain't broke, don't fix it” kind of guy. His traditionalism ran deep, but ironically, he also affected his own change to the status quo of Gothic art in transition at the time – changes that we today can see as something strictly Netherlands. In spite of Renaissance, gothic Bosch remained, while adapting and presenting standard church iconography and symbolism in his own way – it was here than he would inject strange and interesting, Bosch-like subjects, inferences and occult symbolism seen nowhere else in Church iconography.

Most importantly, for me, was his presentation – his portraits didn't portray the static, scenes of the Southern Renaissance art where subjects were caught, interrupted even, and seemingly

directed to remain still while the artist painted them. The Bosch portrait contained action – it showed us fanciful, candid scenes that were indeed honest and severe – his eyes saw no fluff, nor gave any. Similar to the static ways of presentation, he would catch his subjects in mid-stride, sometimes looking at the painter, but there is no feeling of subject being directed to hold still, to hold poses. Somehow, one gets the feeling that a glance was a quick and natural glance. His vision was immediate and his paintings capturing quickly like a camera. He did paint in a religious motif throughout his life and career, with the morals and values of a Catholic man evident in his work, but he only addressed accepted formats in a vague sort of way – his was always to make something different.

Life in the Neighborhood

In the mid-1400s, in Europe's neglected northern low lands, in what we call the Netherlands, and sometimes Holland, ordinary life and beliefs were as they'd been for centuries, but finally the ways of the Italian Renaissance were coming, albeit slowly. In the town called Bosch (formally called 's-Hertogenbosch), we have a changing cultural tapestry. This was a place less influenced, and so had opportunity to embrace its own direction, its own life, developing on its own – hermetically even, in regards to the hubbub and high-life of cosmopolitan Italy and

the Mediterranean lifestyle. It would have been that southern lifestyle that would influence those who might be resistant to modern ways suddenly imposed on ways that were one's own. As bizarre as it may have been with its plagues, fears and incomprehensible news of world events, people were settled in their ways, content even in the knowledge that they were all condemned to hell (as will be explained). Sure, the ways of art were changing – for many, that was one issue not so unwelcome – but the church had grown, meeting new demands found in the south, new demands of a new, more sophisticated man of the Renaissance. However, people in the Netherlands were different, they had no need of such sudden changes.

While the Netherlands was governed by the Habsburg Spanish King Phillip, it was this King's Church that controlled all things (as the Church did everywhere). In spite of Phillip being a local boy, he wouldn't be one to stop the encroachment of the Roman Mother Church, and in this day, as it was just beginning to bring in those new ideas from the southern capital of all that was Rome, it would not be stopped by this Catholic leader, but a certain devotion to his homeland would have its influence, stemming the tide, so to speak. Phillip did serve as a buffer to the southern ways, the Roman ways. In those nether-regions, it got to be emphasized that the northern world was still a middle-age world, and in that world, if something should be known, it

should only known through the filters, through the lens, of the old ways, they were ways that were understood.

As a good Catholic of the old world, Hieronymus stood resistant to these changes. As an artist, he also refused to adapt these new, attitudes and styles into his images – he had no interest in a rebirth. The late-Gothic ways were well in place for Bosch, and being the traditionalist he was, he saw no reason to change.

So, it was this old church, this medieval church, that offered solution to the hoards and masses of ordinary folk who struggled with pains, punishments and plagues that we couldn't begin to imagine today. Creature comforts of the Renaissance had not yet replaced humanities essential suffering. It was an age of sadness where man's only destiny was an undeniable and tangible pessimism that went beyond simple belief and was proven to be his daily reality. Hell called upon them all, everyone who lived, and that old Church made sure no one forgot this – this was a tangible thing, you could taste it and smell it in the air. The punishment of the damned was a product handed out from behind closed doors by men in robes, and we were all damned. This punishment was a product offered and given freely, though sometimes with credit for deferred payments, and always with a (non-contractual) verbal promise that there was a way

to avoid this miserable destiny. Meanwhile, even the pious and repentant rich and poor all struggled to avoid the snares of the Devil and his Minions, proving that credits and promises may not be enough. Faith in charitable payments could falter, requiring further payment to refresh one's position in the line moving towards those pearly gates.

It was a peculiar practice done while most knew that all the saints and rosaries in the world would only save a few from very real torment, and so other than hedging ones bets, the only contract that was guaranteed was a life in hell. An all-powerful Hell called upon them all, and could even tempt those who worked the robes and cassocks. All were born sinners, and Bosch would be as concerned with this status as anyone.. He knew that he, too, might not have that golden ticket to ride pie-in-the-sky promises. Hell was the great Bosch motivator – hell was everyone's motivator. The Renaissance ways would have greater benefits for those who could by those tickets to heaven. If one was rich enough, a donation of size could guarantee redemption.

King Charles, son of Phillip I, would be ruler to Bosch's lands in the later part of his life – that King, a Spanish King as well, was born in the Netherlands and as a young man saw himself as Flemish, speaking only Dutch and French. He understood his people, while of the Spanish he

understood nothing. Charles as the later Spanish Holy Roman King Emperor was yet to be crowned, but he would, at any cost, unify a complete Europe, and we would see the Renaissance Roman influence take complete hold over the prior, middle-age world of Hieronymus Bosch.

What is important – the Work

While much of the work of Hieronymus Bosch might appear at first glance to be surreal, his process could not have been, at least not in the terms or understanding of such by the first French surrealists of the early 20th Century (or their later day proponents) who coined the term. Also, if we choose to accept his symbols as a developed language with direct inference to real life then his work must be excluded from being patently surreal. His approach and technique are too rational, his images too well planned to be surrealist work. If we see post-Bosch works of future surrealist's paintings bearing similarity, it would be due to their accepting his influence, and not his process nor his language (drawn from his elaborate codex). For those later artists who rode that particular current or carried that torch of surreality, all Bosch did for them was provide a framework of presentation. He could share his style with them, but he did not teach them his language. Its only with our changed eyes that we can look in hindsight and say that

Bosch's work appears to be surreal in nature, but it is only in appearance that this applies.

To venture to say that Bosch's work could have even been prototypical for the more modern surrealists work would also be highly misleading, for a prototype, as original as it may be, implies that work is still in need of development before completion. This is not the case with Bosch's work. What he did was done as complete. His was a fluent language that had never been spoken only by him and his peers. His phrases are thorough, though cryptic. His vision, unlike all that passed before him and only copied after, was alive – his was a cornucopia of hallucinogenic occult treats that behaved (and continue to behave) more as parasitic morphons designed to forever chew new pathways through our mortal minds like demonic and voracious Pacmen and Tommy-knockers, consuming and corrupting any sense of reality that may have existed once before their passing. To gaze upon the work of Hieronymus Bosch is to be forever changed – his was an extravaganza of unearthly delights.

Bosch is able to paint with such perfect detail that we can only know what he's done is real – there can be no denial, his is not a dream.

However, he is not a realist in modern terms, but more a realist as the French Impressionists were realists. Not trying to mimic the appearance of

reality, he detailed only the essential in an object via representation. The Bosch way was elastic and meticulous, wild yet intentioned, darkly buoyant. It alludes to madness and paradise, to pain and joy, to suffering and love. Again, the language that Bosch spoke was complete – its this that allows us to feel the depth of his work, even while not speaking his language.

His work is to be felt, and can be experienced as personal experience via his rhetoric, as we see a man leaving a small village shoulder-bound by a basket filled to the hilt. His head is covered by one hat while he carries another in hand for reasons redundant and unknown. He wears a shoe and a bedroom slipper. Through identification, this man is us, we are this man, and while similar to the image of the Fool in the Tarot in many ways, this image has the dog ignoring the man only because the dog has not yet begun the Fool's journey. There will be kisses given, pisses taken and gallows hanging in Bosch's sparse background – what is in place there is there to show us what we are leaving behind. That is the real world, our world, a world found by following one's own road to perdition, though as we turn to depart with this man, as this man in this painting, that same road becomes the road of redemption, a road of adventure, and the road to the great abyss. This is the journey of each of us, regardless of belief

or religion and its dogmas.

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*Picture yourself in a boat on a river,
with tangerine trees and marmalade skies.
Somebody calls you, you answer quite slowly,
a girl with kaleidoscope eyes.*

*Cellophane flowers of yellow and green,
towering over your head..
Look for the girl with the sun in her eyes,
and she's gone.*

*Follow her down to a bridge by a fountain,
where rocking horse people eat marshmallow
pies.
Everyone smiles as you drift past the flowers,
that grow so incredibly high.*

*Newspaper taxis appear on the shore,
waiting to take you away.
Climb in the back with your head in the clouds,
and you're gone.*

*Picture yourself on a train in a station,
With plasticine porters with looking glass ties.
Suddenly someone is there at the turnstile,
The girl with the kaleidoscope eyes.*

Lucy – in the sky with diamonds.

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The previous words are not words of Bosch, but they do describe, oh so well, a world akin to one of his paintings called *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. The author of these words, these song lyrics above, John Lennon, certainly has his experience cut from the same cloth as this Bosch painting, perhaps of Bosch himself, and his

admiration of the man might be evident. Whether fan or not, the image that these words evoke is certainly drawn from the same current, the same river – they both point to the same world.

The Bosch world is the perfect psychedelic world.

While fishgods sail blue skies on their driven flying-fish, trolling for unknown prey with unknown baits, waterside pink-stoned flowering royal castles host masses and mermaids amidst a departing entourage. An alien race of unrobed men and women ride upon and cavort among a plethora of beastly creatures known to be both of this earth and not. This is the land of legend, a hanging garden, a land that our land can only shadow.

Countless figures repose in bliss while others play in phytofloral-anal penetrations and other deviations. We find ourselves expelled from the bellies of ovoid-organic birth machines while sadistic hybrid birdfrog devils and dog-faced lizard birds chew upon our unfortunate corpses sacrificed for some hellishly divine purpose of rebirth. From kitchen utensils chasing objects of their hunger or lust to musical instruments designed to punish and crucify, we turn into animals and back again, only to feed on strawberries. Nothing remains still in this world,

all is in flux and flow and eternally changing form. Bosch was simply revealing the truth of our own world, this world that is such but ignored, this world that we continue living in and on today, a world of which is shown us from time to time by genius unforeshadowed. It would be this world that would so threaten one serious to the Handbook of Inquisitors.

How could someone create such a wonderfully nightmarish and beautiful Hell? How could the Church bear to recognize the existence of such a free artist, such a free mind, and such a free world as his portrayed – for viewers, for neophytes, this would be interpreted as blatant temptation. Bosch's work mocked the control the Church with its punishing enforcers wished to possess. How could a medieval-minded authority ignore such a man as Hieronymus Bosch? We can't say that he necessarily stepped up to destroy the language of the Church, but he did replace their simplified and established icons and symbols with others more suited for accurate description of this world, and he did do something they just could not understand. So yes, Bosch was an iconoclast, possibly only by default, but at the end of the day, it had to be taken that he was attacking the Church and its dogma. Bosch was claiming an authority over the new southern dogma by changing its presentation and its icons. The Inquisition and its officers were lingering at the fringes of his

neck-of-the-woods, would soon be taking up office in the den-Bosch, and Hieronymus' work was indeed heresy.

Though contradictory, Bosch would be both ferociously true to his church (the church as it was, the church unchanged), and a rebel all the same in regards to the new fashions of the coming day. In any other world at any time, we would find him standing against anything, regardless of its source, that was contrary to his own beliefs – such was his person and personality. As the church would change, Hieronymus would stand tall in his Order's authority and put his protest to this new church in his paintings. He believed, as any good Christian should, in his true, original church, not in a changing, evolving church attempting to lay new authority on ways that he thought worked just fine. Such were his deep beliefs.

For us as a modern audience, and probably to the dismay of Bosch himself (being his role may have been as a heavenly messenger), his work need not carry the weight of the ages upon its back. It need not carry the mores, the taboos and beliefs of a culture that died centuries ago. It need not be political, nor polemic or parable, for a modern audience that pursues entertainment, visual thrill and intellectual analysis. Maybe a painting can just stand as a painting and enjoyed as such, simply for its existence and because of its presence and its beauty, but Bosch's work had

a purpose, it used a narrative that carried that purpose, and yet, it looks great to those of us that care not for this purpose. Such is art...

So let's just view a Bosch painting as something else, as if it were painted for us, not for its original audience. As contemporary German expressionist artist Daniel Richter speaks of Nazi painter Emil Nolde, he addresses the idea that with artists, musicians, even craftsmen of any other occupation, perhaps it is not the man or woman we are concerned with. It is not their beliefs, actions, words or diet that is important. It is the result of what their occupation is that we should be concerned with – what these individuals create for society in their actual trade. If one is a painter, then it is only their paintings we could be concerned with – not their politics, not their sexual preferences, nor the color of their hair. If that be the case, then Hieronymus Bosch, being a painter of the fantastic, would simply be a fantastic painter.

How well must we know a Van Gogh for example, to enjoy the work of that artist? Must we consider the needs and intentions of every artist, or is it sufficient to simply view a work and embrace what it gives you – what you think as a result of being a witness to some work – how is it you feel? Art is personal in this way – it doesn't matter what others see or proclaim to know in what each of us, as individuals, cast our eyes upon. When viewing a work of art, it is

you, and only you and your feelings and your thoughts that matter. Its just as when a painter is at work, it is the artist, and their feelings only that matter – no one else's. Ultimately, your thoughts and feelings are as valid as the artist's, which if only by proxy, makes you, the viewer, the artist of that work you gaze upon, just as the artist is audience to what he see being created. What you see is the same as what the artist saw when the painting was finished. Consider that it be you who is gazing upon your own finished work of art – consider your gazing upon a painting that's being painted, being finished each time its being viewed, created just as you view it?

In a day where our superstitions are a bit more sophisticated than those of the Middle Ages, we can enjoy Bosch's work in a different way than one so profound as leading to an understanding of God. Today, we can just view his work in joy and fascination towards something so beautiful – we can dance with it and just be present with it. In our current oversized-gallery culture with its overinflated artist's image taking a pedestal over the art itself, some would say simply viewing art for art sake is more superficial and less meaningful – one must KNOW the artist – but viewing the Bosch world free of all preconceptions and artificialities, and without the same intellectual filters as cultures – be them gallery or religious – would dictate, we allow the work to live, to shine in its brilliance. In our

own naive ways, we can view a work unfettered by constraints of belief. We can just accept its beauty as it is, as joyful and thoughtful image. As witnesses to these images, we are not seeking status, meaning, or enlightenment, we are just allowing ourselves to feel those feelings and think those thoughts aroused by such strange and foreign worlds. For some, it doesn't matter what the artist had for breakfast.

Maybe at this point we can step beyond all the fuss and bother of mundane detail about the man, and ignore all the speculation of those fools who know, those theorists who guess, those critics who analyze, those academics who teach and those writers who write. So what if Bosch might have been cult member, an astrologer, a prophet, a drug user (one so obviously stricken with ergotism), a folklorist, or even an agent for the Opus Dei?

An Epilogue (an Investigation of Sorts)

In spite of what I just said, I'll continue, but first, a disclaimer of sorts...

In regards to theory and guesswork, I'm happy to let those inclined to decorticate the little they can know of the man and his world view to speculate excessively at their own leisure or their own scamperings. My thoughts and theories, really, are as unimportant as theirs – I wish only to leave a man's work as it is. I need

know little more than my own opinion, and am happy to just bear witness to something so remarkable as Bosch's work from 500 years ago. His is a timeless work unconstrained by any purpose it may have served when it was brought into this world. My opinions, my theories, serve only as a soundtrack to this cinematic wonder of Hieronymus Bosch – they aren't meant to remove you from your joy of these strangely-made and strangely-revealed worlds.

The minimal historical presence of this man and his life should be suspect when considering his society kept extremely detailed and thorough civil records and yet so little remains. With Bosch comes a severe minimum of fact. We know much more of other artists of the time. We have no firm birth, nor a date of death. We have a marriage date and a list of properties gained by him from his marriage (though prior to this event were listed none of his own). There are no official or personal correspondences available, no journals or diaries, no personal reflections, no social media documenting his daily life. We have no idea what he had for breakfast. Its this unusual lack of information we have to consider.

Its not just the records that are missing. We've also got to consider the volume of work (the lack thereof) of a master painter of the time. Painting was this man's profession, not his hobby, and painting could not be something

done whimsically or at leisure. Painters were considered equally entrepreneur as they were creative types – they were businessmen. I will, and can, only guess that an artist such as Bosch would have produced easily 10 times and more than the pieces we know of today, but yeah, this is just a guess, and probably foolish if not pure folly. And yet, if it were just a few works that have gone into the shadows, there would be no surprise – so why is the number of extant Bosch paintings a surprise – could it be that possible 10 percent survival rate I've already mentioned? Isn't this at the least suspicious? Where could a master's body of work have gone? When might the missing Bosch paintings have disappeared?

I'd propose that the Papal Inquisition took no notice of him while its influence was kept slightly at bay, in check, by the early Habsburg rule under Philip I. There is nothing to suggest that Bosch experienced any troubles in the ways of censorship or thumbscrews during his life as an artist. If the Netherlands weren't so overlooked by the already existent Inquisition at the time, Catholic-held Holland during pre-Reformation era could have been a very dangerous world for an artist like Bosch, and still it seems he only just missed potential persecution.

Someone would eventually take offense at his ways, so I'd present that it wouldn't have been until a Grand Inquisitor was assigned to the Den

Bosch region that things would go bad.

The first Grand Inquisitor of the inquisition in the Netherlands was appointed in 1523 by Hapsburg emperor Charles V, just 7 years after Bosch's death. To establish this office of the Inquisition was a slow and gradual process in the Flemish realm, one that could not be completed until the Flemish King Charles was appointed the Greatest Holy Roman Lord King Emperor. It was then that modern ways would have clear path in the formerly neglected nether regions of Europe. Prior to this, the Flemish population would be well aware of the witch-hunts already taking place in neighboring countries by Roman inquisitive forces, and most, including Bosch, would have know this service offered by the church was inevitable. Its go to be understood that the Church was extremely paranoid - it was threatened by the armies of Satan himself, his demons and servants in human form. The church knew via their own statistics that it was likely that the servants of Satan outnumbered the good and pious church-membership, and so had a necessary war to fight in the name of god. It was a horrible time to be a lowly and humble church official who recognized that a war already lost against the forces of evil must be a war won at any cost

In summary, even during Bosch's time, people would be witness to the erosion of certain

liberties, to a changing taste in the air, and to those stories and news from that larger world. Though Bosch would never see the Inquisition come to his town, he would have known those ill-winds were soon to come, and that the witch hunts would begin in the Netherlands just as they had in a more centralized and homogenized Europe. The Protestant reformation was just around the corner, as well, so the Church had to prepare for aggressive ways and responses to that mid-century heresy, but until then, what was an Inquisitor to do? There were always heretics to find and purge, even if, like Bosch, they were already dead.

Bosch's works are certainly imbued with religious symbolism, though his choices of how he displayed biblical irony, parable and human folly is far from the standard church fare of the time – his iconography was something completely different, and may have actually been the reason for Bosch's disappearance from the records, not only as a great artist, but as an individual. Honestly, if I were a pious and constipated church official of the time, I would have had all of his works burned, if not having the artist himself pinned to the stake with them.

Its difficult to say if his elaborate system of symbolism was his own language, or if it was a specific and understood language only of his brotherhood. There is much speculation about this issue. I'd like to say that Bruegal's language

of Netherlandish Proverbs (Spreekwoorden) was the same as the Bosch's language only to a small extent – we do see Bosch using the language of spreekwoorden, though his images bring us so much more than that. Bruegel's language could be understood by any that know the local folktales and proverbs – the local slang references serving much like Cockney Rhyming did in London. However, while Bruegel referred to the real world, Bosch referred to a shadow world, a world behind the scenes, a hidden world, an occult world. I would say again that maybe only Bosch's fraternal brothers would know this language.

Regardless, in his work, Bosch clung to his disturbed linearism and an embellished exuberance of the late Gothic period. He clung to what he knew best and refused subsumption and assimilation into the ways of the Renaissance. Even in his more traditional scenes such as the “Adoration of the Magi” and “Christ Carrying the Cross” you'll see distinct, rhetorical additions of the Bosch trademark, those things that just don't make sense and oppose reality – incongruities, dichotomous oddities, nonsense and beautiful irrationality.

I think the best way to address the disparate differences in the ethos of the period, the perspective, is by understanding, philosophically, that the Renaissance way was focused on the expansive by seeing god in the universe, in the macrocosm, while the Northern Medievalists were more literal, seeing god in the Microcosm, in the everyday life. Life in the south, the land that brought us the Renaissance, was extravagant and presumptive, arrogant even, in thinking it could know and recognize god in the great unknown. In the north, people still saw the magnificence and foreboding ways of god in the immediate world of man and its effects in even the smallest of details of daily life.

Sooner than before long or later, though thankfully after his death, Bosch would be considered a heretic, and even taken as buffoon and mocked as such! How could he know he would posthumously be demeaned and disparaged early on by next generation Spanish painter Pacheco⁽¹⁾ and that his work would soon be called grotesquery and devilry by that same Church that he'd once loved? How could he know that by simple slander after his passing, he would be condemned to a life in historical

(1) “There are enough documents which speak of the superior and more difficult things, which are the personages, if one finds time for such pleasures, which were always disdained by the great masters – nevertheless some seek these pleasures: that is the case for the ingenious ideas of Jérôme Bosch with the diversity of forms that he gave to his demons, in the invention of which our King Philip II found so much pleasure, which is proved by the great number of them which he accumulated. But Father Següenza praises them excessively, making mysteries of these fantasies that we would not recommend to our painters. And we pass on to more agreeable subjects of painting.”

shadow until just the end of the last century ? How could he know that he would be an artist whose language would be ignored before it could ever be heard, and even if not preventing that slander that would be pinned to him, destroying his reputation as an extremely fine artist, a king amongst painters, a genius even, whose ideas were so far from the realm of the status-quo they threatened revolution of thought and perception, and threatened the always fragile nature of the church?

When all is said and done, the church could rest happily in knowing that such a degenerate demon as Bosch had been purged from annals of history while his paint was barely dry. Burning at the stake could not have been so effective as a medieval smear campaign combined with Watergate-like erasure of documents.

Thankfully, this wasn't the end, and new artists were already in place to continue tradition. There were those near-contemporaries who carried this Gothic tradition into a new age, and throwbacks they weren't. It would be them that would contribute something important started by Bosch to the Netherlander Renaissance. Peter Bruegel, Joachim Patinir, and Pieter Aertsen would all be there to bring that gothic touch reminiscent of Bosch to the table. Though great painters as they all were, none would be so disturbing in an other-worldly way as their

progenitor, none could portray such a brutally honest madness.

Historically, we would continue seeing this current continue through the later works of Adriaen Brouwer and the Youngers Teniers and Francken. We'd see the harsh ruler Phillip II become patron to Northerner art, standing in clear disagreement to the snobbishness of then living Pacheco, collecting even Bosch works which would later end up being shown to us in Spain's Prado Museum.

This direct influence of Bosch in Spanish art survived in places even after Pacheco's disapproval by leaving its mark in the work of Goya in the 18th century. Goya's "mysterious," sometimes secondary characters seen in so many of his works carry a certain wry look to them, a certain quality of trickster. It all happens when you see someone in a painting who seems to be something they are not, doing something with a purpose that we're not to know, doing something that just cannot be explained.

Gabriele Finaldi, past deputy director of the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid and current director of the National Gallery in London says this of the deep connection between the two lands of Holland and Spain. "I think one has to realize just how important the Netherlands were for Spain, and everything to do with the

Netherlands. The traditions, the history of the Netherlands, the painting of the Netherlands – all those identifying elements were vary, very important for Spain, and in particular for Phillip the II (author's note: son of Charles V). I think Phillip II sees in Bosch an artist who to a large extent, summarized everything the Netherlands meant for Spain.”It is this style that we'd see our Flemish Van Gogh carry into his early career peasant works and the classic paintings the Potato Eaters and others. Bosch is also evident as an influence to Salvador Dali and other modern surrealists. If we open our eyes, we'll even see Bosch in the work of Doctor Seuss .

There is something quite recognizable and unique in this Flemish approach to painting as a fine art. It's not specifically the colors, the subjects, the compositions or techniques. Its more about an intangible oddness, a view made obvious by Bosch, and made more subtle after by others. Its in the portrait work, displayed usually in the background and secondary characters. Its in the scenes of the spectacular and the ordinary. It's in the flavor of a different vision. Foundationally, its something of those northern lands where both life and vision is different – something that needs nothing but what it is itself – perhaps this is what Bosch was defending.