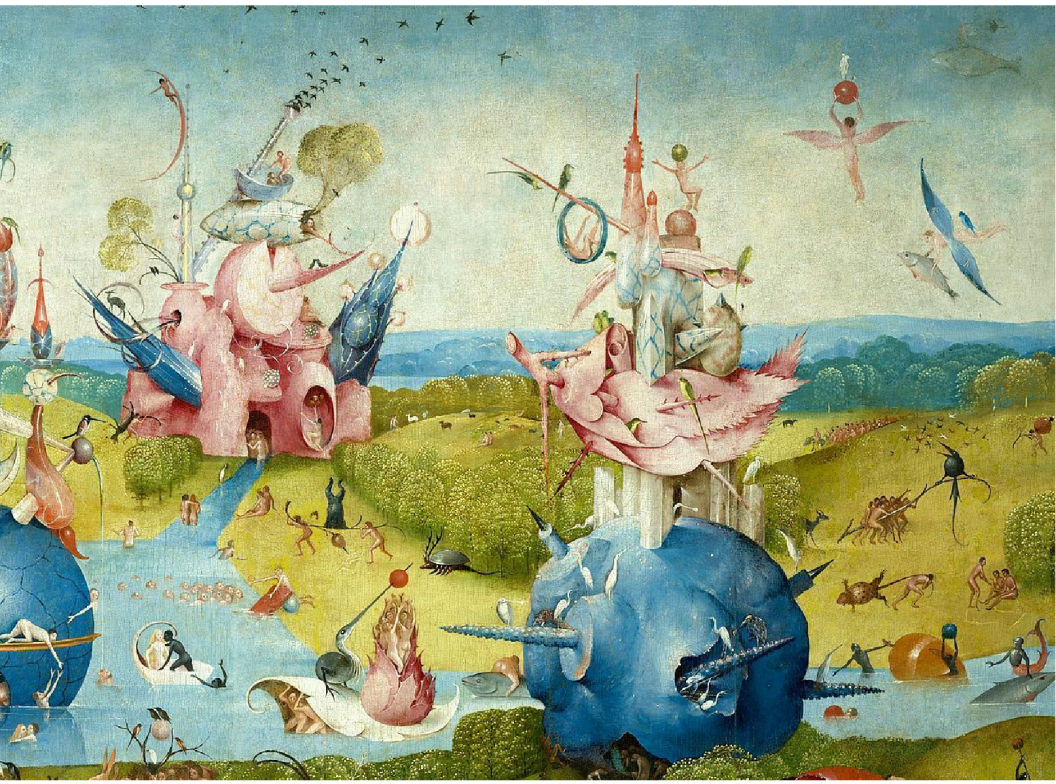

Lost in Reverie

THE HISTORY OF ART STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION'S

ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM JOURNAL 2022

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Cover Image: (top central panel detail of) Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, oil on panel, ca. 1510-1515, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

We wish to acknowledge the sacred land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peacefully share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes communally. Today, this land is still home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work and connect on this land.

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The History of Art Students' Association 2021-22 team is thrilled to present *Lost in Reverie* – a volume comprising the papers presented at the 2022 History of Art Undergraduate Symposium.

Fantasy, bliss, contemplation, and wandering—to be lost in a moment of *reverie*. Over the last two years, I have found myself doing just that. Daydreaming and seeking pleasure outside the confines of reality; an experience that I'm sure we can all relate to. This year's theme invites the exploration of this very phenomenon.

Art has a unique way of engaging this through a variety of modalities; by means of oil paint or marble, form or absence thereof, artists create spaces in which we can become lost. Through mythology, religion, spirituality, and divinity, we find meaning in our very existence. And artists can translate this meaning, purpose, and exploration for themselves and us to connect with. In many ways, art renders the abstract something concrete.

We can look to the works of Hieronymus Bosch who painted scenes that operates in an otherworldly realm, often, prompting us to explore the darker sides of humanity. Or we can turn to Vincent Van Gogh, who we can identify with through such intimate feelings that he translated to canvas. And perhaps, as viewers, as art historians, as scholars, we become lost in our study of these experiences.

We lose ourselves in the world of art, and through that, we can explore our own experiences as we immerse ourselves in a historical reality seemingly separate from our own. And It's in this way, that we become *lost in reverie*.

Needless to say, our symposium could not have been possible without the help of all our supporters. First and foremost, thank you to the faculty and administration of the Department of Art History at the University of Toronto for not only supporting us but allowing HASA to even exist. Thank you to Phil Sapirstein, the Associate Chair and Director of Undergraduate Studies, for being our faculty advisor in the editing process of our journal as well as being an incredible support outside the symposium.

Thank you Dr. John Paul Ricco for delivering the keynote presentation. Professor Ricco's lecture focused on his paper, touching upon Rousseau's *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*, as it thinks about the pleasures of losing track of oneself. An experience that opens other realms of thought and consciousness that enable the contemplation of non-human animal lives, their unexpected appearance, and their visible and invisible paths of disappearance.

Thank you to Professor and artist Bea Parsons who joined us in a discussion of her work. Bea Parsons is based in Tiohtia:ke/Montreal, where she is represented by McBride Contemporain. She holds an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University of New York and a BFA in Painting & Drawing and Art Education from Concordia University. Parsons has taught full time at Concordia University, Montreal, UC Davis, and the University of Texas, Austin. Children's art education plays a vital role in her career through her teaching at Montreal's Visual Art Center and a teaching residency a Winnipeg's Art City. Parsons has participated in residencies including the Catwalk Institute, the Kala Institute and the Wallace Stegner House. Her presentation at the symposium explored discussions of her Cree identity as connected to the subjects of her prints, motherhood and the pandemic, as well as her printing method as a medium for storytelling.

A sincere thank you to all our panelists for joining us to present their excellent research papers. We greatly appreciate all the hard work and patience that has gone into the editing process and the creation of this journal.

Lastly, thank you to those who have joined us in attendance at our eighth annual symposium! Thank you for reading our journal as well; it is your interest and support for this symposium and journal that we so deeply appreciate.

Iakoiehwahtha Patton
President 2021-2022
The History of Art Students' Association

The History of Art Students' Association is proud to introduce our five contributors who presented their papers at the 2022 History of Art Undergraduate Symposium – *Lost in Reverie*.

CHANGHAO LI (he/him) is an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto, double majoring in Art History and Philosophy. As a Toronto-based photographer and art historian on the academic track, Changhao's primary research interest is in contemporary East Asian and Western aesthetics. He aspires to explore the philosophy of Yoshinori Ōnishi, which venerates transience and natural imperfections in contradistinction to the Eurocentric art forms favouring perfection and eternity. Changhao's current research examines the transculturality of Yamamoto Masao's picturesque photography in relation to Haiku, Wabi-Sabi and Western Modern art.

SIENA KUNANEC (she/her) is in her third year at the University of Toronto. She is majoring in Art History and minoring in Latin American studies and Creative Expressions and Society. Siena is interested in colour field, landscape, and installation art and dreams of being an art dealer and professor.

TEHYA SILBERMANN (she/her) is a fourth-year student at the University of Toronto, graduating in the spring of 2022. She is a double major in the Art History and Political Science programs. Tehya is especially interested in early modern art & critical decolonial studies, and ancient Greek and Roman art and is passionate about examining the affective work and legacies of art in sociopolitical propaganda and systems of oppression. Tehya hopes to pursue postgraduate education in the field of Museum Studies and/or Art History. She hopes to pursue a career in the visual culture industry, in a curatorial or gallerist role.

SHEENA McKEEVER (she/her) is a third-year student at the University of Toronto pursuing a specialist in Art History and a major in Classics (Greek and Latin). She enjoys analyzing the philosophical and psychological underpinnings of her diverse interests, which include Baroque painting, Latin poetry, and ancient Greek mind-body dualism. Beyond her studies, she is the Editor-in-Chief of UofT's Classics undergraduate journal, *Plebeian*, and is a research assistant to two Classics professors.

AMARA WINSTON (she/her) is a fourth-year student at the University of Toronto. She is majoring in physics, minoring in art history, history, and philosophy of science. Amara is interested in studying the relationship between stem and the humanities and the effect of this relationship on society. Once graduated, she hopes to continue her career with the Government of Canada.

CHANGHAO LI (HE/HIM)
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Mask, Mantis, Hybridity and Temporality: The Metamorphosis of Surrealism

ABSTRACT: The essay explores the underlying theme of metamorphosis throughout surrealist art. The notion of alterity, change and hybridity, connects various artistic motifs. This essay questions how and why the concept of metamorphosis lies at the core of 20th century modern art; how the popular subjects of depiction in surrealistic art such as ritual masks, praying mantis, and therianthropes relate to it. Curatorial studies have explained the connection of much of surrealist art to the theme and its historical vitality; this project pieces together artworks and organizes them under the one core theme to illustrate the interrelations visually.

This paper contains four sections: *Ritual Mask and Subjectivity* exhibit artworks that are in relation to the African cultural inspired idea of transformation achieved through the temporary suspension of subjectivity. The second, *Mythic Insects*, discusses the motif of the Mantis as related to animal cannibalism. The *Hybridity* section contains artworks that express the transformation of the mode of beings. The last section, *Temporality*, includes artworks related to Georges Bataille and Heraclitus' philosophical idea of change. The essay further explains how each of the four approaches containing artworks of distinct motifs invokes the notion of metamorphosis, thereby illustrating the theme's ubiquity in 20th century surrealism artworks.

INTRODUCTION

This essay celebrates one of the long-lasting themes at the heart of surrealism by focusing on 20th century surrealist artworks from artists worldwide that evoke the notion of *metamorphosis*— the conversion between objects and

subjects. Like many metaphysical concepts, the theme of metamorphosis has been approached variously by different artists. Nevertheless, the same ideology lies at the core of surrealist artworks.

The study focuses on four approaches to the idea of metamorphosis, each approach contains artworks of distinct motifs and, although they depict diversified subjects, the artworks invoke the core theme of metamorphosis. Firstly, *Ritual Mask and Subjectivity* discusses artworks that depict the idea of transformation achieved through the temporary suspension of subjectivity. The second section, *Mythic Insects: Mantis*, showcases surrealist artworks of animal cannibalism, which Roger Caillois recognizes as "an act of pure automatism".[1] The *Hybridity* section explores artworks that express the transformations of the mode of beings and spiritual interconnection. The final section, *Temporality*, examines the artworks inspired by Georges Bataille and Heraclitus' philosophical idea of the world of dialectical change and art as sadistic impulse to destroy.

RITUAL MASK AND SUBJECTIVITY

The ritual mask as a motif has been much elaborated on by surrealist artists.[2] From Paul Eluard's poetry to Picasso's conversion of face to mask,[3] and from Michel Leiris' ethnographic surrealism to Nias Island ritualistic mask in *Minotaure*,[4] masks are closely associated with the metamorphosis from subject to object.[5] Surrealists, along with many other artistic movements of the time, contemplated and incorporated the exotic subject matter.[6] From the disguise for facial disfigurement of the veterans, to the popularization of woman's makeup, masks as a mode of change was a topic of interest to people of the 20th century due to their association with identity transformation, which became a major issue of the interwar period.[7]

The French surrealist writer, Michel Leiris, heightened the preoccupation with masks when he introduced to western anthropologists and artists the Ethiopian cult of Zâr and its phenomenology of possession in his work *La Croyance aux génies Zâr en Éthiopie du Nord* (1938).[8] The possession is a ritual technique of spiritual depersonalization performed by experienced local shamans, says Leiris who traveled to Ethiopia and conducted an ethnographic study himself.[9] The Indigenous peoples considered the technique a "mask," a means of switching between personalities and, thus, the person who wears it undergoes a process of transformation.

Such an interest in masks is exemplified by Francis Bacons' *Portrait of Michel Leiris* (1976) [Figure 1]. The surrealist painter was a close friend of Leiris[10] and portrays the writer with a disfigured appearance and layers covering his face as if he is wearing a transforming mask. The

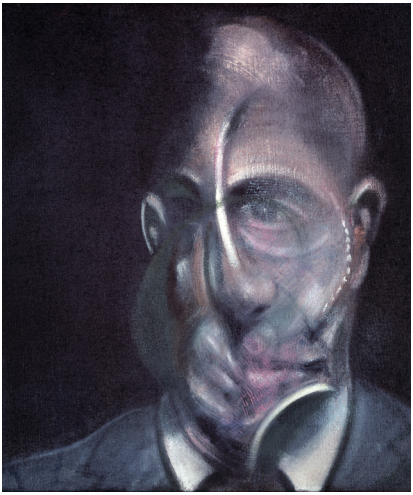

FIGURE 1. Francis Bacon, *Portrait of Michel Leiris*, 1976, oil on canvas, 34 x 29 cm, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris—Musée National d'Art Moderne.

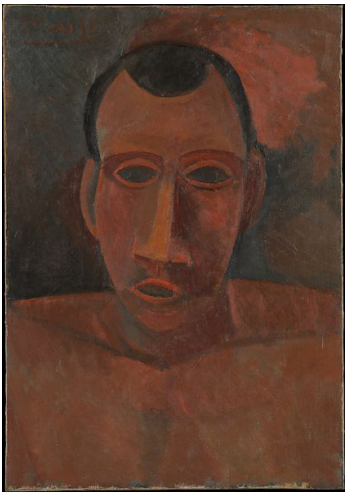

FIGURE 2. Pablo Picasso, *Bust of a Man*, 1908, oil on canvas, 62.2 × 43.5 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

painting undergoes three stages of transformation. First, as Bacon explains the image in his head "transforms itself by the actual paint".[11] As the facial structure alters, the second stage occurs. Leiris's face undergoes an active mutation, forming a layer of facial features that overlaps with each other as if he is wearing a mask. The third stage starts as the artwork illustrates the particular metamorphosis of depersonalization proposed by Leiris.

Many artists were drawn to African objects for its distinct system of understanding, as one of these artists, Pablo Picasso frequently elaborated on the motif of the mask.[12] Picasso was influenced by the object's conceptual embodiment (e.g. depersonalization) and the mask as a source of a formalized aesthetic.[13] *Bust of a Man* (1908) [Figure 2] is one of the many examples of Picasso's adaptation of the aesthetic African masquerade objects, possibly a result of the influence of the mask's ritualized function, i.e. the metamorphosis from self to object. Furthermore, Salvador Dali once reflected on the possibility of transforming from a being to an object, thereby creating what he called the "object-being".[14] *Bust of a Man* depicts a transformation of the same direction. Picasso paints the man without teeth and eyeballs, depriving the figure of vitality and downgrading it from a living person to a hollow shell. The disproportional arrangement of facial features strips away the naturalistic qualities from the portrait. Together with the earthy brown colouring and lifeless expression, the visage resembles an African ritual mask. Yet, Picasso chooses to delineate

the figure's hair. This choice thereby preserves the figure's lease of life. It is both animate and inorganic; simultaneously alive and defunct. The motif of the mask in this painting operates as a medium of change, bridging the side of life and the inorganic object, allowing for a transformation from a living human being to a lifeless entity. The masks' ability to initiate a metamorphosis from subject to object is hence rooted in the surrealists' minds.

MYTHIC INSECTS: MANTIS

The female mantis is well-known for devouring the head of the male mantis while mating.[15] This cannibalistic behaviour was articulated as a symbol of erotic violence by the surrealists, effectively rendering it as a central motif in their work.[16] However, the surrealists also favoured the mantis for its entomological value to the justification of automatism which proposes the possibility of artists creating works independently from human motivation and purpose. The existence of mantis provided a middle ground during the transformation from a conscious being to an unconscious entity. Instead of elaborating on the dangerous female mantis, Roger Caillois focuses on the fascination of the males. The subject was not depicted merely for its aesthetic appeal but also for its zoological value, which supports Caillois' entomological account of automatism: namely, the possibility of a living conversion and an "in-between" existential state.[17]

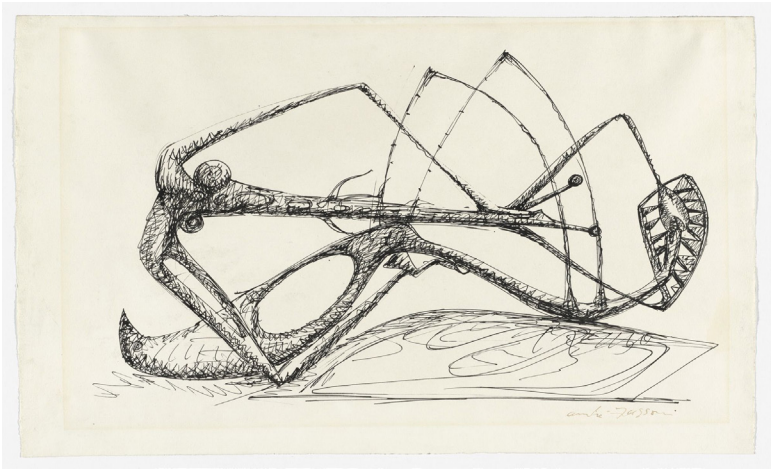

FIGURE 3. André Masson, *Praying Mantis*, 1942, ink on paper, 34.9 x 58.4 cm, Museum of Modern Art.

In the *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), André Breton proposes that the 'real' image exists in the metaphysical realm and, therefore, pure automatism should be free of any utilitarian value or procreative goal.[18] However, whether an action of such purity in terms of intentionality and interest could exist or not remains debatable. In reality, the male mantis is capable of continuing mating even after losing its head. According to Caillois, the male insect then remains in an ambiguous state, mortally wounded but still animated to perform mating activity. Although not self-sufficient to prove the plausibility of automatist art, the example of "organisms performing creative functions in the absence of a central nervous system" could showcase the possibility of artists creating works independently from human motivation and purpose.[19] The mantis displays a metamorphosis from a conscious being to an unconscious object, yet its movement remains. The movement of this alive-to-dead transformation, this "in-between" state, is free of any utilitarian motivations and, thus, it is a purely creative one; an *automatic* one.

Interested in the idea of metamorphosis,[20] the artist André Masson deemed the mantis an "admirable" insect[21] and made it a recurring motif in his art in the same year that Caillois published his article concerning the essence of the creature.[22] His oeuvre includes *Praying Mantis* (1942) [Figure 3], where the insects convert into a sign of the lemniscate. One can hardly distinguish the insects as they merge into one. The fused mantis devours its own head, yet remains in the shape of infinity. It continuously deprives its own cranial nerves while simultaneously remaining animated in the act of devouring. The artwork articulates such a state by illustrating the mantis' auto-cannibalistic behaviour even after consuming its own head. The surrealist favours the mantis for their significance to automatism through a transformation.

HYBRIDITY

The theme of hybridity runs through the veins of surrealism. This section discusses the three forms of metamorphosis in relation to hybridization: totalization, objectification, and transcendence. Breton in the *Manifesto of Surrealism* calls for the balance of power to be shifted in favour of women.[23] Among the surrealist artworks, there exists a female hybrid form that is used for a social and political statement on women's roles.[24] Surrealists evoke the theme of metamorphosis by utilizing the female hybrid form, for example, Magritte's reversed mermaid of half woman half fish [Figure 4]. Such a tradition fascinates artists, beginning with the surrealist's exquisite corpse. It is method of creating artwork that emphasizes the element of change by making each person draw a part of the figure without knowing what the previous person drew. *Cadavre exquis* made by Man Ray, Max

FIGURE 4. Rene Magritte, *Collective Invention*, 1934, oil on canvas, 73.5 x 97.5 cm, Private Collection.

Morise, André Breton and Yves Tanguy (1927) combines identical female body parts, such as genitals or breasts, with distinct objects such as fruits, woodblocks, or axes.[25] Scholar Elza Adamowicz explains the cruciality of the automatic technique as creating "defamiliarisation of the banal and the relations between part-bodies and totalities."[26] She describes the exquisite corpse game as parts "all jumbled up together" to achieve a totality.[27] This process of coming together evokes a transformation from distinctive parts to a unified whole. The artists elaborated with such a process of totalization. The conversion of separated parts attains the corpse's oneness, thereby undergoing a metamorphosis of composition.

Another form of metamorphosis revealed by hybridity deprives vitality. *Collective Invention* by Rene Magritte (1934) [Figure 4], as it refers to the creative method of exquisite corpse, the figure similarly combines female body parts with other objects. Through compositing a lower body of a woman and an upper body of a fish, the art transforms "the living woman into a 'still life' of disassembled parts which resemble a statue or corpse".[28] By replacing the upper body with an animal, Magritte deprives the faculty of reason from the figure. With no head or mind, the figure loses what the 20th century existential philosophers refer to as 'subjectivity' and returns the body to an indifferent state—as an *object*, through hybridizing human beings with other entities. The metamorphosis process here is, thus, one that objectifies.

However, the hybrid figures of objectification and indifferent totalization do not seek a harmonious union.[29] In fact, Breton declares that a harmonious metamorphosis does not favour a hybrid creature of "disquiet or revulsion," but should "invoke a sense of communion between all things."[30] Although the corpses amalgamate distinctive parts into a whole, the unification feels rather mechanical. The connection between head and body invokes a sense of incongruity as if they do belong together. Magritte's inversed mermaid offers a smooth transition from the human body to the fish, but the figure, after being washed ashore, appears to be gasping for air and possibly dying, while making no attempt to return to the safety of the sea. This "inversion" of a creature from the popular imagination immediately brings forth a feeling of unbelonging and misplacement, producing an inharmonious composition.

Alternatively, Remedios Varo's work strives for a more harmonious metamorphosis, a transcendence, inspired by the Deleuzian rhizomatic account of nomadic subjectivity which establishes interconnections between everything.[31] For Deleuze, the rhizomatic nomadic subject is a constantly shifting subjectivity.[32] Varo reflected on this notion both thematically and aesthetically in her works.[33] In *La creación de las aves* (1957) [Figure 6], she depicts a hybrid figure of owl and human, painting and studying in an enclosed space with a peaceful atmosphere. Varo uses warm, earthy colours to illustrate the melodious moment. Wild animals and fantastical scientific instruments coexist in a tranquil scene. The coherence denies any sign of repulsion in the painting. Similarly, in *Tailleur pour dames* (1957) [Figure 7], Varo illustrates a woman with attached machine parts in the shape of a standing cockroach. The figures appear to be relaxed and resting. Their postures and facial expressions portray no sign of abhorrence, despite being in the same room with a cockroach bionic person. Sirin (part-bird part-human creature) and cyborg, the boundaries between modes of being are thin for Varo, allowing a transformation between beings.[34] The figures are in a state of ataraxis and becoming, disclosing a spiritual interconnectedness.[35] Scientific equipment, wild animals, machine parts and human beings coincide, undergo a joyful transformation. Subjects connect objects peacefully without repellent, surpass themselves and merge with the environment into one. Such unification helps the subjects to achieve a transcendence of which the individual joins the universal. A merge which philosopher Simone de Beauvoir would refer to as attaining one's being. Different from Magritte's objectification, Varo's hybrid figure suffers from no such degradation and remains as an intellectual being. This transcendental process is the metamorphosis from the subject to the universal, the third form of hybridization, and a harmonious one.

FIGURE 5. Remedios Varo, *La creación de las aves*, 1957, oil on canvas, 52.5 × 62.5 cm, Museum of Modern Art of Mexico.

FIGURE 6. Remedios Varo, *Tailleur Pour Dames*, 1957, oil on masonite, 68 x 106 cm, Museum of Fine Art Boston.

TEMPORALITY

The *Manifesto of Surrealism*[36] outlined the views of the presocratic philosopher Heraclitus,[37] namely his concept of dialectical change, which was adopted by the surrealists.[38] For Heraclitus, 'reality' is a "never-ceasing flux of Becoming," a state of constant changes.[39] As surrealism was interested in the unity of the conscious and the unconscious, it naturally drew these artists to elaborate on Heraclitus' philosophical view.[40] In particular, Andre Masson was interested in Heraclitus' notion of endless metamorphosis; several of Masson's works were influenced by and expressed the presocratic idea of dialectical change, one being *Cosmic Song* (1953) [Figure 8].[41] Most of the pre-Socratic philosophers including Heraclitus understood the world through the four-element system, considering air, fire, earth and water to be the basic components of physical reality. In *Cosmic Song*, Masson sketches lines and arranges them in congested positions. The lines take on various forms as they almost resemble symbolic forms of elements such as fire, wind and water. The elements crowd together and overfill almost the entire space, constructing the cosmic full of entities. Yet, Masson uses only lines to represent the elements, indicating the commonality of existence between them. The painting articulates Masson's understanding of the physical world, one that is made up of interchangeable elements. The lines appear to be in motion. The curves evoke a sense of movement, thereby expressing the Heraclitian claim that every object that appears in our sense as temporally stable is in fact constantly changing. Masson's metamorphosis in *Cosmic Song* is that of the dialectical change of the world.

The philosophical thoughts of Bataille, who also reflected on Heraclitus, were influential to the surrealist artworks.[42] The French philosopher proposed that the origin of art is a sadistic impulse intended to destroy or disfigure as much as it is to create; in this regard, art becomes a series of destruction. Joan Miro, in *Dutch Interior II* (1928) [Figure 9], changes the figures of the original painting, the Dutch painting *Children Teaching a Cat to Dance* (1679) by Jan Steen,[43] into monstrous forms. As the head of the person becomes the body and the figures degrade to simple geometric shapes. Through this inversion of common image, Miro expresses metamorphosis as destructive. Similar to the *Collective Invention*, it evokes the feeling of misplacement, producing an inharmonious image.

Hence, the artworks reflected on the philosophy of Heraclitus and Bataille and other philosophers whom Heraclitus influenced, such as the alchemists, evoke the theme of metamorphosis through the adaptation of the philosophical arguments, the one that emphasizes the temporality of the world. Nothing is eternal, nothing is unchangeable, the world is a never-ceasing flux.

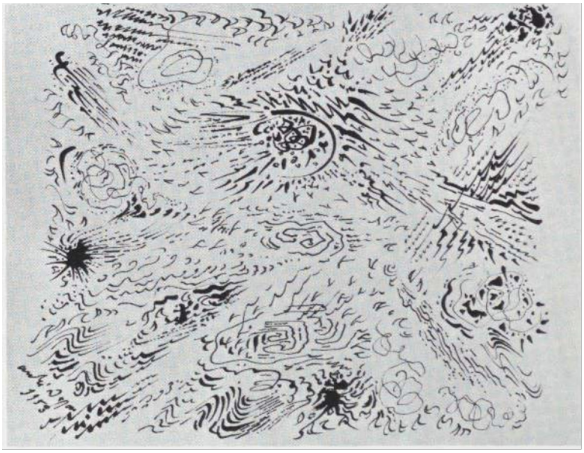

FIGURE 7. Andre Masson, *Cosmic Song*, 1953, ink on paper, 24 x 30 cm, Collection of the artist, Paris.

FIGURE 8. Joan Miró, *Dutch Interior II*, 1928, oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

CONCLUSION

The surrealists' works consist of distinctive subject matter yet the theme of transformation lies in their core. Inspired by the cult of Zâr, the surrealists utilized the mask's ritual significance of depersonalization to achieve a metamorphosis from subject to object. Mantis' cannibalistic behaviour represented to surrealists their conception of an automatic state, a stage of transformation from life to death. Hybrid creatures, as one of the vital motifs in surrealist arts, invoke three forms of transformation: parts becoming a whole; subjects becoming objects; and individuals becoming universal.

From the fascination of metamorphosis, surrealism embraces its various forms of artistic expression. From the ruins of a devastating war, in the hope of a better reality, they bring forth "the most significant metamorphosis of all: the transformation of the world."[44]

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Discussing the Meat of the Matter

ABSTRACT: Influenced by the 17th century genre of Netherlandish still life, Jana Sterback's *Vanitas: Flesh dress for an albino anorexic* (1987) follows the *vanitas* tradition in a work highlighting the temporality of life. Whereas 17th century Dutch painters depicted mirrors, skulls, and hourglasses, Sterbak chose a dress composed of raw, decaying meat to display a modern rendition of the traditional art form. However, political strife including artistic and social expectations of the late 1980s and early 1990s generated a politicization of *Flesh dress*. Through newspaper archives and recent interviews, this essay will examine political, social, and artistic attitudes to argue how the politicization of Sterbak's work not only strips the artist's vision but has, likewise, gutted the allegorical meaning of the dress within the *vanitas* tradition. Furthermore, this essay will highlight how politicians and art critics have set the table for the butchering of Sterbak's work and did so for personal gain. This work will elaborate on the unfortunate misinterpretation of *Flesh dress* on behalf of activists for food insecurity, followed by what has become the most permanent misreading of the dress which views the work as a piece of feminist art that critiques societal consumption as the female body like a piece of meat. Also examined will be *Flesh dress*' role in society today. *Vanitas: Flesh dress for an albino anorexic* highlights how, despite the artist's vision, their work will always be vulnerable to the greater narrative that society demands.

In 1987, Jana Sterbak completed *Vanitas: Flesh dress for an albino anorexic*. She sewed together raw cow flesh that was red as wine and marbled throughout, which she ultimately placed over a female model for a photograph. The photograph shows the model lounging on the floor, staring at the viewer as the raw meat sinks down over her body, its juices oozing onto her surroundings [Figure 1]. Today, the piece can be viewed

FIGURE 1. Sterbak, Jana. *Vanitas: Flesh dress for an albino anorexic.* Colour photograph. 26.5 x 20 cm. 1987.

in the permanent collection at the Walker Art Gallery: the decaying meat dress lays on a mannequin with the original photograph of the model on the wall behind.

The title, *Vanitas*, draws from the 17th century Netherlandish genre of still life paintings that depict objects which evoke a passing of time such as skulls, flowers, hourglasses, and mirrors. The genre was one that focused on the brevity of life and frivolousness of worldly possessions.[1] The title, *Vanitas*, draws from the 17th century Netherlandish genre of still life paintings that depict objects which evoke a passing of time such as skulls, flowers, hourglasses, and mirrors. Among vanitas paintings there is also a focus on rotting fruit or on feasts that use food and their destiny of rot or consumption to highlight our inevitable future of decay. Like a rotting apple, *Flesh dress* is set to decay, the piece functions because of rot. As the piece rots viewers can witness vanitas in action.

By creating a dress from meat, Sterbak also comments on the futility of worldly possessions. As fashion is in a constant state of flux, Sterbak highlights how buying into beauty standards is a futile process because, like meat, styles change and disappear with consumption. However, Sterbak's intentions of establishing a work that reminds viewers of the passing of time and of the frivolity of worldly possessions were lost in the public discourse in reaction to her piece.

Exhibiting the meat dress invited feminists, art critics, politicians, and activists for food insecurity to the artistic dinner table, so to say, making the dress an icon that remains buried within cultural memory. However, as was the case at its exhibition at the *States of Being* show in 1991 in Ottawa, Ontario, viewers continue to misconstrue Sterbak's intentions. The misinterpretation of *Flesh dress* has constructed a highly politicized identity for the piece that strips it from Sterbak's original concept. Catching the eyes of appalled politicians, the dress has been manipulated to fit the political menu of those who intended to sell specific narratives—often for personal gain. *Flesh dress*, in all its polarization, has been berated by homelessness and food insecurity activists as an example of artistic bourgeois ignorance and disregard for society's most vulnerable. While still misinterpreting the intended function, a more positive reception of the dress has come from those who view it as a piece of feminist art. The constructed political significance and polarization of the dress ensures that the original meaning of *Vanitas: Flesh dress for an albino anorexic* is vulnerable to decay.

In 1991, the National Gallery of Canada exhibited Sterbak's *Flesh dress* as a part of the *States of Being* show, an exhibition that reviewed Canadian artwork of the previous decade.[2] To discuss the meat of the matter, many viewers did not come to accept Sterbak's work of vanitas. In fact, the dress caught the attention of members of parliament and art critics, both of whom used *Flesh dress* for their own political agenda. Ottawa alderman, Mark Maloney, called in health inspectors to determine the safety of the exhibit: it was deemed as presenting "no health hazard".[3] In a similar vein, a cartoon was printed in the *Toronto Sun* and *Ottawa Sun* of a dress made of the same raw meat materials as Sterbak's; and both encouraged readers to cut out the paper and mail the work to the *States of Being* curator, Diana Nemiroff. As intended, one cut-out cartoon arrived at the gallery smeared in feces, and as a result, staff had to open letters with gloves on for weeks after the cartoon was published.[4] Furthermore, responses from politicians and media, who sought to reap the benefits of controversy, soiled the original meaning of *Flesh dress*. Such extreme reactions only brought more attention to Sterbak's work, but an attention that discouraged viewers from comprehending the authentic intentions of Sterbak. As the dress was displayed in Canada's capital city, it was primed for high-profile critiques on

behalf of politicians and, thus, succumbed to greater political interpretation. In this regard, the politicization of *Flesh dress* influenced its significance, rendering the work as one of uncleanliness rather than its intended function of representing the brevity of life and inevitability of bodily decay.

No response from a politician was angrier than pig farmer and Progressive Conservative Member of Parliament, Felix Holtmann. Holtman referred to the piece as a "jerky dress." Holtman added that "there are a lot of people who hold food sacred in this land, and they are appalled by the use of food for this thing."[5] Holtman's response contributed to another nuanced identity for and the function of *Flesh dress*: converting it to a symbol of food wastage whilst representing the artist as privileged and self-absorbed [*without basis*]. Furthermore, the recession of the nineties saw an increase of visitors at soup kitchens and shelters, provoking many viewers of the 1991 exhibition of the $260 flank beef dress as an insult to the poor and hungry.

While Jana Sterbak was attempting to assert her piece as a commentary on the perishability of the body, feminists viewed *Flesh dress* as a criticism of media and the male gaze's consumption of the *female* body. Namely, feminists compared the use of cow meat to how the female body is diminished to 'meat' for the male gaze and, thus, Sterbak's work was politicized yet again. Feminism in the early 1990s contributed to the rise of the 'Girl Power' movement which promised that progress and representation of women within the workforce would have a trickle-down effect for girls, ensuring a future of equality. There was a rise in women producing music, websites, zines, and visual art.[6] Therefore, feminists likely viewed Sterbak as one of the female artists paving the way for younger generations.

Raised by feminists of the 1960s and 70s, in which women were seeking bodily autonomy and sexual liberation, feminists of the 1990s understandably posited *Flesh dress* as a piece that represented the female body as no more than 'a piece of meat'. In 2010, pop singer Lady Gaga wore designer Franc Fernandez's version of a meat dress to the MTV Video Music Awards[7] [Figure 2]. Critics championed Gaga's dress in the same way feminists did with Sterbak's dress twenty years before—interpreting it as a symbol of female autonomy, liberation, and as a powerful statement against gender-based violence. Though, unlike Sterbak, Gaga intentionally wore the dress to mock the male gaze's interpretation of her body as a piece of meat; Gaga was effectively doing what feminists assumed Sterbak had done in the 90s. The stir around Gaga's dress dug up the previous feminist interpretations of Sterbak's piece, to which the artist responded: "[What Lady Gaga did] has nothing to do with [what] I do."[8] Ultimately, Sterbak's response to pop-culture interpretations of *Flesh dress* demonstrates the artist's defiance against mass interpretations and staunch protection of her original intentions.

FIGURE 2. Lady Gaga wearing the meat dress at the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards. Colour photograph. Raw flank steak. Designer: Franc Fernandez. 2010.

While it is true that Sterbak contributed to a waste of meat that could have been used for food, to consider her work as merely wasteful detracts from its value as an artwork. Politicians like Holtman exploited the vulnerability of groups like hunger activists by pointing the finger of blame on Sterbak and, by extension, the art world. As art critic Christopher Hume stated, the criticism from politicians at the time was "based on the notion that the National Gallery is somehow accountable for poverty and hunger in Canada."[9] The dress, and the art institution by extension, was used to distract the public from acknowledging politicians' role in the recession, and their responsibility for economic resolutions. In this regard, *Flesh dress* began to function as a symbol of waste and wealth disparity rather than situated in the vanitas tradition. Certainly, there is an irony in how Sterbak used food to comment on the futility of worldly possessions when homelessness and hunger were sweeping the country. However, the political criticism surrounding the work disregarded its intended function and, thus, was used by politicians to hide their role in the health of the economy.

Though Sterbak elected to create a piece that nods to a traditionally feminine garment, when presented with feminist interpretations, Sterbak suggested that "Men are made of meat too…in terms of aging, [women] are no different from men." Comments like these can be construed to be feminist in nature; Sterbak could be asserting equality between genders. In selecting a traditionally feminine garment, whilst connecting the work to men, one could view Sterbak's *Flesh dress* as an effort to blur gender roles and stereotypes. Nonetheless, Sterbak has stood by her intentions of perishability and futility. By also declaring the male body as meat, Sterbak simply asserts that her piece represents a genderless body—arguing that all bodies are subject to decay. When replying to feminist interpretations, Sterbak has stated that "people are to experience as they wish, they can add to it. There have been various feminist interpretations on my work, but I did not make it for a political point of view. Voila, people bring what they bring." As any artist should, Sterbak openly welcomes personal and varied interpretations of her work.

A controversial piece like *Flesh dress* will always fit the role it needs to for its viewers. Undoubtedly, as the world changes around Sterbak's work, the meaning of *Flesh dress* becomes ever more vulnerable to decay with time as viewers consume the artwork within the realm of their personal bias and broader societal needs. In *The Fate of the Object*, Jon Erickson describes the *objectification process*.[10] According to artist and professor Sherry Farrell Racette, memories and ideas are constantly deconstructing and restructuring the meaning of an object.[11] Time has shown that the meaning of *Flesh dress* has been subjected to the objectification process and remains under construction. As the dress decays on the mannequin, new political interpretations, guided by different knowledge and memories are projected onto and continually built into the original meaning and intended function of Sterbak's work.

Jana Sterbak's work remains within Canadian cultural memory as a controversial artwork. In 2012, the artist accepted the Governor General's art award, largely because of her 1987 *Flesh dress*,[12] demonstrating that the dress continues to be relevant for Canadian art and culture. When considering how *Flesh dress* fits into contemporary society, it is important to begin with examining the temporal environment. Through analyzing the temporal cultural attitudes rather than viewing the work as an isolated piece, we can gain greater insight into how the meaning of an artwork is often based on the societal role it must fit. Today, food banks and homeless shelters have seen an incredible rise in people seeking respite, with a quarter of them experiencing over a 25% increase in visitors since the COVID-19 lockdowns began in 2020 in Canada.[13] In this context, if *Flesh dress* was released today, the work would most likely be perceived and politicized

within a similar context as the 1990 recession. And, if released today, the dress might be greater in the world of the internet. But participation such as the tactile interactions with the newspaper cartoons from both senders and receivers at the gallery, probably would not exist with the drop in print publishing.

Jana Sterbak is accurate in suggesting that all viewers "bring what they bring"[14] to a viewing of artwork. Unfortunately, as continues to be the case with *Vanitas: Flesh dress for an albino anorexic*, polarizing art must fight against misinterpretation. *Vanitas: Flesh dress for an albino anorexic* demonstrates how both theme and original context of polarizing works are perishable over time and, ultimately, vulnerable to politics—just as the body is. Sterbak's dress was rendered political by ignorant politicians and passionate activists. Undoubtedly, viewers butchered *Flesh dress* like the meat that forms it to fulfill political agendas and, thus, Jana Sterbak's work is effectively stripped from its vanitas meaning. Instead, the dress becomes a political prop.

NOTES

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Compounding the Other

ABSTRACT: Historically, in order for cultures to define what it is to be human, defining what is less than human has been essential. In Hellenistic society, visual media was utilized to construct these cultural identity categories. In Hellenistic art, a general canon of shared features was constructed to depict various marginalized groups with related visual traits. This paper argues that not only were separate subhuman categories established and maintained through visual media, but that common visual associations with multiple marginalized groups were crafted that established a comprehensive subhuman other in the Hellenistic public psyche. This paper examines a terracotta statuette of a dwarf from the 2nd century BCE and discusses how it serves as a sort of amalgam of marginalized groups, including individuals with 'hunchbacks', and Black African peoples. All these human categories are visually related through features and behaviours common to the mythological creature, the satyr, associating marginalized people with the animal realm. Dwarfism as depicted in this statuette is made fantastical and is mythologized in this representation, othering those with Dwarfism and marginalized communities that are also visually implicated in the statuette to the extreme. The fantasized and mythologized individual with Dwarfism here serves to establish a broader category of general other, thus associating all those considered non-normative with the subhuman. The use of mythology, religion, and fantastical imaginaries in visual media crafted a common visual vocabulary of the transgressive, enabling broader othering work to occur in visual media that seemingly addresses only a singular minority group.

Throughout history and across cultures, people have sought to define themselves, and in doing so have created a categorization of the Other, a perceived undesirable subject defined by its transgressions from the norm, to define themselves binarily against. This essay will examine a terracotta statuette of a dwarf from the 2nd century BCE [Figure 1] and in doing so

FIGURE 1. Terracotta Statuette of a Dwarf, 2nd century BCE, New York City, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

FIGURE 2. Satyr sitting frontally, masturbating. Black-figure amphora. Berlin 1671. In *Before Sexuality The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, 2.4.

explore how Hellenistic "grotesques" depicting individuals with Dwarfism work to manufacture difference, establishing an undesirable subject position, and casting the Other. This includes justifying class divisions in a society that was marked by stark social hierarchies and was sustained by institutions of slavery. In accomplishing this, the bodies of those with Dwarfism are rendered abject through media like this terracotta statuette. This statue and its formal characteristics reveal that grotesques and depictions of marginalized bodies were used to create a broad social category of Others that aligned with common transgressive and non-Greco-Roman traits. The non-normative body of this terracotta Dwarf statuette provides an example of just one group of marginalized peoples that were cast as the Other in Hellenistic material and visual culture, thereby serving to normalize class relations and disparities in Hellenistic society.

ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE TRANSGRESSIVE

The non-normative bodies of individuals with Dwarfism that are depicted in these Hellenistic grotesques are associated with non-Greek conventions and transgressive social behaviours portrayed through distinct visual characteristics, particularly that of large *phalloi*. The statuette depicts the figure as bowlegged, with an exaggerated contorted face, with an open mouth. The facial features are large and exaggerated, with a protruding nose, forehead, brow, and bulbous head with uneven protrusions. The figure stands with open, extremely bow legs that emphasize a phallus so large that it acts as a third support to the statuette. The figure's contorted expression and wide stance indicates some level of suffering or outburst, and though the arms are missing, it appears that they may have been sticking out frontally, in a flailing position, that is common to representations of hunchbacks in other Hellenistic grotesques.[1] These associations that cast individuals with Dwarfism beyond the realm of acceptable human behaviour designate them as the Other, enabling their inhumane treatment as jesters and servants in Hellenistic society. The terracotta statuette of the 2nd century BCE depicts this figure with a phallus, semi-ithyphallic and so large that when the statuette is stood up, it acts as a sort of third leg/support by touching the surface it stands on. In Greek Hellenistic society, the large phallus was not viewed as a positive feature; in fact, it was not ideal. Rather, respectable, aristocratic, and idealized depictions of masculinity were portrayed in the visual arts with small penises.[2] The contrast between the dignified smaller penis and grotesquely enlarged *phalloi* demonstrates that respectability was not extended to figures like the terracotta statuette. Rather than failing to extend respectability, an ithyphallic phallus represents transgressive, unacceptable social behaviour, low social status, and connotations of animal-like behaviour, such as the inability to control

one's appetites, contrary to the highly important Hellenistic virtues of self-control and self-mastery. This representation is seen as the antithesis of self-control, especially through its associations with animal-human hybrid satyrs and their commonly portrayed sexual frustration. The depiction of the individual with Dwarfism in this statuette with this particular phallus would conjure associations of low social status and a lack of virtue for its contemporary Hellenistic viewers, ultimately, generating a low opinion of, and attitude towards, individuals with Dwarfism. Therefore, this statuette works to manufacture a classification of peoples with Dwarfism, alienating them from the Hellenistic public's conception of acceptable human behaviour. Ergo, making it easier to justify a differentiated and inhumane treatment of individuals with Dwarfism.

OTHERING LAUGHTER

Despite the seemingly positive associations of power and apotropaism with Dwarfism and depictions thereof, these representations continue to differentiate these marginalized bodies from the mainstream. Consequently, this enables hierarchization and subjugation of individuals with Dwarfism. The positive associations with depictions of Dwarfism were bestowed upon the viewer, rather than the individual depicted or individuals with Dwarfism in general. In the Hellenistic period, sculptural representations of hunchbacks were also often portrayed as having Dwarfism.[3] They served a similar socio-cultural role and were displayed in very similar ways. Both hunchbacks and individuals with Dwarfism possess non-normative bodies that were believed to embody apotropaic qualities, and were sexually othered through sculptural depictions. The provocation of laughter was seen as an enriching apotropaic function,[4] and both figures were represented in ways that rendered them the 'butt of the joke,' as their socially transgressive behaviour was highlighted through hyper-phallicism and other exaggerated physical qualities. For example, Trentin discusses the masturbating hunchback figure who demonstrates the animalistic and uncontrolled nature that is associated with another non-normative body. The intended comedy at the expense of bodies like the one represented in the terracotta statuette further alienates marginalized bodies to the Hellenistic public. In fact, the hyper-phallicism of the depiction detracts from the figure's perceived masculinity and privileged male standing, an important and primary marker of privilege and standing in Hellenistic society.[5] The oversized phallus renders what is generally understood as a signifier of masculinity hyper-visible. However, this hyper-visibility draws attention to its socially transgressive nature which opposes the Hellenistic markers of positive masculinity, self-control, and restraint, associating their sexuality with the "animalistic."[6] Therefore, this erases the privilege that

would be granted to males on account of their anti-masculine Dwarfism. Through non-Greco-Roman physical features and transgressive Hellenistic behaviours intended to provoke alienating laughter, individuals with Dwarfism were stripped of their status as a human of equal value.

SEXUALIZING THE OTHER: VISUAL/ICONOGRAPHIC PARALLELS BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS WITH DWARFISM AND SATYRS

Individuals with Dwarfism are associated with the socially transgressive, lowly mythological figure of the satyr through representations of the enlarged phallus and other similar bodily characteristics. These visual associations with the hybrid animal-man figure of the satyr directly link individuals with Dwarfism (as well as other non-normative bodied individuals) to animals within collective cultural conceptions. Satyrs are mythological subhuman figures who exist on the line between animal and human. Furthermore, Satyrs are associated with insatiable sexual appetites that are used to demonstrate a lack of self-control and a sort of laughable sexual frustration.[7] This uncontrolled sexuality that is exhibited through their large, ithyphallic states is understood as bringing "them closer to animals than to men"[8], elucidating that visual connections between individuals with Dwarfism and satyrs would have amounted to dehumanization to a Hellenistic viewer. An illustration from a Black-figure amphora depicts a crouching ithyphallic satyr, who is incredibly frontal, looking directly out to the viewer, while masturbating [Figure 2]. This frontality in Black-figure vase painting is uncommon, and underscores the uncouth, openly and knowingly exhibiting himself and his sexuality to the viewer. The terracotta statuette also features this kind of frontal exposure to the viewer, with the figure's arms appearing to have been facing forward, and in a leaning position that emphasizes this frontal direction towards the viewer, similar to that of an "exhibitionist."[9] This further violates the codes of decency and control and visually references these satyr behaviours. Beyond the phallus, the stylized facial features of the statuette and other contemporary sculptures depicting Dwarfism have a striking resemblance to the facial features of satyrs. The terracotta statuette, and other contemporary sculptures depicting Dwarfism, display stylized facial features that are similar to that of satyrs including being "mostly bald… with prominent forehead and snub nose."[10] Similarities in facial features establish associations between the behaviour and lowly view of satyrs with that of individuals with Dwarfism. This not only further others those with Dwarfism from society but casts them in a distinctly negative, low status, and subhuman position. These visual similarities construct an association between non-normatively bodied individuals and animals, justifying inhumane societal treatment.

RACIALIZING THE OTHER

Similar to the terracotta statuette's facial features mirroring satyrs', these features also share visual resemblances to the attributes used to depict African peoples in Hellenistic sculpture. These common features result in a racialized view of the Other by associating all marginalized groups and their perceived socially deviant nature in close proximity to Blackness and visible racial difference. In fact, throughout the Greek tradition of depicting Dwarfism, little distinction is made between "indigenous dwarfs," and African pygmies,[11] demonstrating the unclear boundaries between the two groups that were considered Other to Mediterranean Hellenistic society. The terracotta statuette features large lips and a wide nose, visual characteristics that are typical to Hellenistic representations of Black African peoples.[12] The similarities between the facial features of those with non-normative bodies, including those with Dwarfism, hunchbacks, and racialized Others, showcase an attempt to cast all othered bodies through a similarly abject and transgressive lens. Like depictions of persons with Dwarfism and those with hunchbacks, Blackness is often depicted as hyperphallic and/or in an ithyphallic state.[13] The terracotta statuette's visual amalgamation of features that denote many other marginalized groups reveals its function to mark them all as similarly non-Greco-Roman, transgressive, and abject. Ultimately, this casts non-Greek Black Africans, those understood as visibly and culturally distinct from Mediterranean peoples, in close visual proximity to the individuals with Dwarfism, designating them as similarly Other and foreign to Hellenistic society.

CONCLUSION

Marginalized communities including those with Dwarfism, those with 'hunchbacks,' and Black Africans, were cast as subhuman through a curated visual repertoire of common characteristics associated with the socially transgressive in Hellenistic society. These depictions of different marginalized peoples with shared visual characteristics worked to reinforce and compound the stereotypes and negative associations of each group. The terracotta statuette evidently displays the visual compounding of marginalized identities into one grotesque, creating a broader and all-encapsulating category of subhuman Other. Such a broader category is maintained through representations of various Hellenistic Others with common visual descriptors, as is done in the 2nd century BCE terracotta statuette. It then performs the work of enabling the mistreatment of these Othered groups based on their shared inhuman status.

NOTES

1. Lisa Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art* (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 75.
2. Aristophanes, *Clouds*, ed. Sir Kenneth J. Dover (Oxford University Press, 1968), 1011-14.
3. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art*, 20.
4. Ibid, 54.
5. Ibid, 75.
6. Ibid.
7. François Lissarrague, "The Sexual Life of Satyrs," *Before Sexuality The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 56.
8. François Lissarrague, "The Sexual Life of Satyrs," 56.
9. Ibid.
10. Lillian Bartlett Stoner, "A Bronze Hellenistic Dwarf in the Metropolitan Museum," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 50 (The University of Chicago Press), 95.
11. Stoner, "A Bronze Hellenistic Dwarf in the Metropolitan Museum," 95.
12. Trentin, *The Hunchback in Hellenistic and Roman Art*, 21.
13. Ibid.

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The Art of Synthesis: A Poetic Analysis of Nicolas Poussin's *Venus, Mother of Aeneas, Presenting him with Arms Forged by Vulcan* (1636-7)

ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes the contexts that underlie Nicolas Poussin's *Venus, Mother of Aeneas, Presenting him with Arms Forged by Vulcan* (1636-7). Inspired by Renaissance art historical theory, Hellenistic philosophy, and Classical artistic masters, Poussin synthesizes the most virtuous elements of the literary and pictorial corpora into a single composition. By unifying such artistic components, Poussin strives towards his intellectual goals: to create art that strives towards a universal idea and to prompt academic discourse. He engages with and contributes to the contemporary Roman artistic sphere. By means of his artistic synthesis, Poussin proves himself to be a most conscious artist and intellectual who has expanded the definition of poesis itself.

Early modern painting was a synthesis of the art of telling and the art of making. Situated within a period of a heightened interest in creative expression, Baroque artists operated in terms of different narrative modes – such as the humanist mode of the *istoria* – and the poetic genres of epic and pastoral poetry. Poetics, derived from the Greek *poesis* ('making'), was a popular concept around which early 16th and 17th century artists centred their art. Artists drew inspiration from the literary and pictorial corpora of both contemporary Europe and Classical antiquity. A poetic subject popular in 17th century Italy that reflects late Republican values of Rome was Vergil's epic, the *Aeneid*. This paper focuses on one painting by Nicolas Poussin that exemplifies the virtues common to both Baroque art and Rome: *Venus, Mother of Aeneas, Presenting him with Arms Forged by Vulcan* (1636-7) [Figure. 1]. Nicolas Poussin established his originality – as a virtuoso and intellectual – by consciously synthesizing the most virtuous elements of the literary and pictorial corpora into a unified composition that embodies

FIGURE 1. Nicolas Poussin. *Venus, Mother of Aeneas, presenting him with Arms forged by Vulcan*, ca. 1636-1637. Oil on canvas, Overall: 108 x 134.6 cm. Art Gallery of Ontario.

a universal ideal and prompts intellectual discussion.[1] This paper first contextualizes the theoretical framework in which Poussin operated, then undertakes a literary analysis of his painted subject, and concludes with an investigation of his synthesis of intellectual and pictorial corpora.

THEORETICAL LINKS BETWEEN PAINTING, POETRY, AND PHILOSOPHY

Nicolas Poussin engaged with an academic circle of Roman aristocrats that consciously argued over the role of the arts, the primary debates being *paragone* and *ut pictura poesis*.[2] Poussin favoured and applied the latter in his compositions. Aristotle's argument in his *Poetics*, namely that poetic and artistic representations are intertwined in human nature, inspired Renaissance and Baroque artists to appropriate the Latin *ut pictura poesis* ("as is painting, so is poetry") concept into an applicable poetic device.[3] Abiding by such theory, Poussin adapted Torquato Tasso's definition of poetry to his own advantage, replacing 'poetry' with 'painting' to assert that "Painting is none other than the imitation of human actions."[4] Poussin subscribed to Tasso's argument that the process of election (i.e. decision-making faculty) and imitation of the correct *materia* (Latin 'substance') culminated in the

depiction of a universal 'Idea' (i.e. Exemplar, Form).[5] In Neoplatonism, God is the creator of the ideal form (i.e. Idea), a product of eternal intellect, that is split up across the universe. Classical thinkers believed it was the role of the artist to use nature to recollect the Idea in their art.

Poussin infused his composition with a synthesis of literary *materia*. Specifically Vergilian poetry and Epicurean doctrines, to strive towards the Idea and promote intellectual discussion. To select virtuous aspects of *materia* for imitation, Poussin used his *election*, an intellectual faculty that requires discrimination and a moral virtue.[6] The Idea is a transcendent concept of beauty that is inherent in Divine Intellect and selective imitation of the optimal *materia* in nature.[7] For painters who aspired to the Idea, Vergil's *Aeneid* was an optimal source of virtuous material on behalf of its moral agenda that promotes piety and fulfillment of duty.[8] Poussin's choice to depict book VIII was suitable, particularly for its juxtaposition of the themes of fate and free will. He focuses his composition on the conclusion of book VIII, the moment in which Aeneas is presented with divine armour; however, it is apparent upon closer comparison with the original text, that Poussin combines the most virtuous aspects of this book into one composition. In an appeal to his higher theoretical and intellectual goals, Poussin's representation is not a strict visual translation of the original Latin in order to prompt intellectual discussion.

AENEID VIII CONTEXT AND SYNTHESIS

Poussin, dedicated to achieving clarity of moral subjects, depicted the scene in which Aeneas is inspired to continue his epic journey to found a "new Troy".[9] He subscribed to the humanist Leon Battista Alberti's *istoria*, a narrative form of telling a story that communicates a moral message. Alberti prioritized logical compositions; linear perspective and a grid pattern were measurable ways for an artist to organize the narrative. Poussin likewise prioritized the clarity of his composition. He suitably reduced his composition to six figures and included minimal, but potent, motifs in the foreground to indicate the specific episode, including the armour and Venus' chariot.[10] Poussin also makes this episode easily identifiable by placing the three main subjects, Aeneas, Venus, and the armour, in the foreground and arranging them in a triangular composition. Each figure is rendered in a crisp form, clearly outlined, and posed to guide the narrative. Venus, mother to Aeneas, gazes towards her son and points to the armour as Aeneas stares at and reaches out towards the armour. The gazes of the leftmost *putto*, Tiberius, and Aeneas, *and* the gestures of Aeneas and Venus all direct the viewer's attention towards the armour. From left to right, Poussin inevitably leads the viewer to transfix upon the narrative clarity and thereby its morality.[11]

Poussin depicts the concluding episode of *Aeneid* book VIII, and in doing so, he prioritizes Aeneas' deliberative action. Vergil's conclusion to book VIII centres upon Aeneas' moment of solitude with the shield his mother bestowed to him. As described by Vergil, the shield bears extensive imagery of the future battles fought by Rome (Lat. *pugnata in ordine bella*): "There [upon the shield] the fire-god forged them, well aware of the seers and schooled in times to come, all in order the generations born of Ascanius' stock and all the wars they waged." (*Aen*. 8.738-741). The text begins with the imagery of Romulus and Remus (*Aen*. 8.742-747) and concludes with Caesar Augustus' triumph at the Battle of Actium (*Aen*. 8.790-802). By contrast, in Poussin's composition, the shield's design receives little to no attention, simply consisting of a nude male, encircled by a border of garland. The armour stands as a motif to define this episode and symbolize Aeneas' destiny. Poussin includes the river deity, Tiberius, and Venus in the composition in order to enhance the reigning themes of free will and destiny. Tiberius, though incorrect in his opinion, ensures Aeneas that this is the land upon which he will found a new city. He encourages him not to fear war and to form an alliance with Evander in Pallanteum to accelerate his mission.[12] In contrast, Venus grants him the divine armour as an indicator that his moral duty requires him to journey further. Venus urges him *not* to settle upon this land, knowing that he must instead establish Lavinium. Poussin's chiastic composition highlights Aeneas' moment of internal conflict and depicts him at a decisive moment, using his own *election* to appeal to his mother's command.[13] A line from the bottom left to top right is created by Tiberius' sprawled posture and Aeneas' gesture, with one arm stretched out behind him and one ahead. Poussin also establishes a perpendicular line running from the top left to bottom right through the outstretched body of the leftmost *putto*, Venus' pointing arm, the arc of her chariot, and her extended leg. Extending the same line at the left, a wind originates from the dark storm cloud and wisps across the composition. Blowing the flame, feathers, hair, and drapery, the wind thrusts Aeneas towards the armour. While the viewer anticipates Venus, led by the *putti*, to fly with the gust of wind, they might expect Aeneas – due to his Classicizing contrapposto – to move forward.

EPICUREAN DOCTRINES AND INTELLECTUAL DISCUSSION

Poussin imbues aspects of Epicurean physics and ethics, namely the materiality of nature, to arouse intellectual discussion surrounding destiny and free will. Known to be associated with the *libertines erudite*, Poussin, encouraged by his wealthy commissioners, was able to embody philosophical concepts and new methods of science in his compositions.[14] Poussin was likely inspired by the Roman poet and Epicurean Lucretius

(99-55 BCE) and his poetic treatise on natural forces, *De Rerum Natura* (*On the Nature of Things*). The Epicurean subscribes to atomism, a theory about the nature of matter in which the physical universe is composed of fundamental components known as atoms (Grk. *atomos*, 'uncuttable'). The gust of wind that Poussin depicts, a natural phenomenon that would have been rationalized by atomism in Epicurean doctrine, inspires both a tactile and visual sensation in the viewer. An Epicurean believes that one should take pleasure in the experiences of one's senses, which is the means by which the body is made aware of the intermingling of matter. Another possible allusion to Epicureanism is the varying crispness of the composition, since, for an Epicurean, nature and matter are in a constant state of flux. Poussin's background may be hazy to recollect the movement of atoms. He draws attention to the notion that images were pressed upon the minds of the reader, recalling the physics of effluences, the flow of atoms that an object emits.[15] Poussin draws connections to Epicurean epistemology and the belief that nature is meant to be observed and understood.[16] Epicurean physics informed its ethics, and according to the 'four-fold remedy' (Grk. *tetrapharmakos*), neither the gods nor death are to be feared and the good is readily attainable by the subject's own will.[17] Destiny does not exist to the Epicurean. By framing Aeneas in nature, at a moment of his own *election*, Poussin promotes discussion concerning the rational unity of nature and human autonomy.

SYNTHESIS OF THE PICTORIAL CORPUS

While appealing to a literary ideal based on his theory and episodic themes, Poussin also appeals to a pictorial ideal upon the same theoretical principles. He selects pieces from the Classical and Renaissance pictorial corpus to showcase his academic knowledge and appeal to the Greek and Renaissance ideals of beauty. Established amongst the Roman papal courts in the 17th century, Poussin was well acquainted with Cardinal Francesco Barberini and his secretary Cassiano dal Pozzo, who granted him access to academic resources, such as Pignoria's antiquarian research.[18] Appealing to a Classical ideal of beauty, Poussin executed his figures, not only in accurate proportion, but also *leggiadria*, the tenderness of contour.[19] Venus' soft contours, tranquil facade, and exposed breast recall *Venus de Milo*, and her downturned gaze and pointing gesture, the *Venus of Capua*. Aeneas' galant stride and reaching motion reference *Augustus of Prima Porta*. Finally, Tiberius' sprawled posture is a standard pose of a river god in late Hellenistic and Roman sculpture, such as the *River god* (*Arno*). Poussin also composed *putti* on behalf of his study of *scherzo di putti* ("children's game") and *tenerezza* ("tenderness"), referencing Philostratus' reliefs of Erotes at play and Titian's *Feast of Venus*.[20] Poussin, through both his expertise and utilization of literary and pictorial

materials, asserts his own mastery of *poesis*.

Poussin was one of the many early modern artists who operated within the established tradition of artistic synthesis. Artists in the past, such as the Carracci, synthesized and idealized the techniques of their predecessors – e.g. the chiaroscuro of Titian, colouring of Correggio, *disegno* of Michelangelo, and symmetry of Raphael – to contrive their perfect composition. Poussin is not only interested in creating an exemplary composition of pictorial arts, but also in synthesizing the ideal literary elements to compose a harmonious union. Poussin interleaves this scene adapted from Vergil's *Aeneid* with Epicurean doctrines and artistic exempla in attestation to his intelligence. He successfully harmonized revered narratives and artistic models that span centuries. By means of his artistic synthesis, Poussin proves himself to be an ingenious artist who has expanded the capacity of *poesis* itself.

NOTES

1. Nicolas Poussin, *Venus, Mother of Aeneas, Presenting him with Arms Forged by Vulcan*, oil on canvas, 1636-7, (Art Gallery of Ontario).
2. *Paragone* and *ut pictura poesis* were long-standing debates that prevailed during the Italian Renaissance. *Paragone*, as opposed to *ut pictura poesis*, promoted the idea that painting and sculpture were distinct from one another. The debate concerned which medium was superior.
3. Aristotle, "De Poetica," In *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. Ingram Bywater. (New York: Modern Library, 2001), *Poetics* IV 1448b4-10.
4. Unglaub, 13.
5. Unglaub, 14, 18. See also Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (1672). The Idea is a concept rooted in the ancient philosophy of Plato and Plotinus that was then reconciled with Christian belief. It was believed that once an intellectual form reached matter, the most corrupting force, it then contained flaws.
6. Jonathan Unglaub, "Ideal Imitation and the Nobility of Subject," in *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting: Pictorial Narrative and the Legacy of Tasso* (Cambridge, 2006), 14, 22. One cannot select any human action to represent, since some may be corrupted.
7. Unglaub, "Ideal Imitation and the Nobility of Subject," 20. This concept is most apparent in Bellori's "Idea della bellezza".
8. Unglaub, 18. Aristotle influenced Tasso's insistence on differentiating virtuous *materia* by genre. Cf. *De Poetica* XXIII.

9. Unglaub, 15-6. Poussin's "cabinet painting" consisted of modestly scaled narrative paintings of history, the Bible, and literature. The notion of poetic imitation as the very *diffinizione* of painting is deliberately exclusionary, applying only to narrative painting.
10. Unglaub, 16-7. Alberti promoted the clarity of art to instruct the ignorant, and Poussin promoted such to encourage academic discussion. While Poussin's early works were dedicated to the papal courts, later works were commissioned by noblemen for private consumption. Poussin also may have subscribed to strict criteria for his paintings as a professional strategy to distinguish himself from *bamboccianti*, a group that painted genre scenes of ribaldry.
11. Phillippa Plock. "Watching Women Watching Warriors: Nicolas Poussin's *Tancred and Erminia* and the Visuality of Papal Court Tournaments," in *Art History* 31, Vol. 2 (2008), 147. In a line of Vergilian dactylic hexameter, likewise read left to right, subjects of anticipation are often delayed to the final feet of the line. Cf. enjambment.
12. Virgil, *The Aeneid*, translated by Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 242-3.
13. Human blindness and delay are recurring themes in the *Aeneid*, such as in book IV when Aeneas established a life in Carthage with Dido for an extended period, to which Jupiter sent Mercury to urge Aeneas to press on and fulfill his destiny in Italy.
14. Sheila McTighe, "The Hieroglyphic Landscape: 'Libertinage' and the Late Allegories of Nicolas Poussin," (Yale University, 1987), 17-82. Chapter 1, "Poussin and 'Libertinage' in Rome and Paris," provides a thorough context of Poussin's philosophical affiliation.
15. Unglaub, 19.
16. Janis Bell, "Poussin and Optics: Reflections on the Lake in 'a Calm'," in *Venezia Arti* 2, Vol. 29 (December 2020), 50. Poussin was largely influenced by mathematical theorist and artist Matteo Zaccolini (1574-1630).
17. *Hellenistic Philosophy*, trans. Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson, 2nd ed (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), I-5. The doxographer Diogenes Laërtius (180-240 CE) summarized the Epicurean principal doctrines, and maxims I-IV record the τετραφάρμακος.
18. Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey, "The Greek Style, Exquisite Taste, and the Prehistory of Neoclassicism," in *Nicolas Poussin: Friendship and the Love of Painting* (Princeton, 1996), 32; Anthony Colantuono, "The Poetry of Atomism: Duquesnoy, Poussin, and the Song of Silenus," in *Critical Perspectives on Roman Baroque Sculpture*, ed. Anthony Colantuono and Steven F. Ostrow (University Park, 2014), 96. Also, Cassiano's own archaeological investigations of early Christian Rome.
19. Cropper, "The Greek Style, Exquisite Taste, and the Prehistory of Neoclassicism," 43.
20. Colantuono, "The Poetry of Atomism: Duquesnoy, Poussin, and the Song of Silenus," 88, 97. Further establishing himself within the discussion of the arts, *scherzo* was based on the Greek literary genre of the *paignion* ("children's game").

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The Evolution of Mosques from the Beginning of Islam to the 10th Century

ABSTRACT: In the past, art historians have struggled to define Islamic art. In general, Islamic art is believed to be any artwork that was created in a society with a Muslim majority. However, seeing as Islam has spread throughout a multitude of countries, Islamic art encompasses many different styles and mediums. In any one of these societies, the resulting artwork is a combination of the local culture and the Islamic religion. This general rule not only applies to fine art, but also to the local architecture and consequently the local mosques. Throughout the years, from the formation of Islam to the 10th century, the evolution of mosques can be traced back to the local culture and the progression of the Islamic religion. This paper will examine the changing style of both the *qibla* walls and the architecture that surrounds it in the Prophet's House, the Great Mosque of Damascus and the Great Mosque of Cordoba. Additionally, the paper will analyze the style of and the iconography found in Syrian tiles on display at the Aga Khan Museum. By comparing the design elements discussed in this paper, the nature of the relationship between Islamic art and the divine will be revealed.

In its many forms, the mosque is the quintessential Islamic building. Islamic architecture falls into a category that is entirely its own, for it is rooted in the principles of Islam. Serving as a place for congregation and prayer, a mosque's essential purpose is reflected in the building's orientation towards the Kaaba in Mecca (*qibla*).[1] Although mosques can vary in architectural style and additional functions, the *qibla* wall continues to be the focal point of these buildings. The most common style of mosque is the hypostyle mosque: a type of mosque where the prayer hall contains rows of pillars. This paper examines the evolution of hypostyle mosques as a cumulative affair; from a simple courtyard to an elaborate assemblage of columns, they combine design traditions from past mosques with local aesthetics. This can be clearly seen when analyzing the progression of

the *qibla* wall: the combination of new and old emphasizes the mosque's connection to the divine. In support of this argument, I will examine particular design elements of the Prophet's House, the Great Mosque of Damascus and the Great Mosque of Cordoba; floor plans, details of the *qibla* wall and decorative elements borrowed from local cultures. I will then analyze a panel of tiles from the Aga Khan Museum, which includes details that represent the amalgamation of historical and local features in mosque architecture. Together, these monuments and artifact represent the design progression of mosques and their *qibla* walls.

Built when the Prophet Muhammed moved to Medina in 622 CE, the Prophet's House, which also served as the first mosque, was constructed from mud brick and palm trunks.[2] Originally, the *qibla* wall faced Jerusalem; however, following a revelation that came to the Prophet, it was reconstructed to face Mecca.[3] The building was a rectangular, enclosed courtyard, with covered areas along the north and south walls.[4] Rooms attached to the exterior of the east wall housed the Prophet and his wives.[5] A wooden chair with two steps was situated in front of the *qibla* wall and was used by the Prophet as a *minbar* (pulpit) from which he spoke.[6] Although this building would undergo several reconstructions and renovations, the original form of a hypostyle mosque would remain popular in the Middle East and Northern Africa.[7]

FIGURE 1. *The Great (Umayyad) Mosque*, mosaic, ca. 709–715 CE. Photographed: 1955.

The Great Mosque of Damascus, also known as the Umayyad Mosque, was constructed in the early 8th century as part of a plan to establish monumental buildings in major Islamic cities, and it represents the first time that a building was used for political purposes in the Islamic empire.[8] The site of the mosque was originally the location of multiple holy sites, including the Temple of Hadad, the Temple of Jupiter, and the Church of St. John the Baptist.[9] Al-Walid I, the mosque's benefactor, chose a location that was already associated with spirituality and holiness. All that is left of the original building are the inner perimeter walls and two of the corner towers,[10] and the design is that of a traditional hypostyle mosque. The central courtyard is surrounded by covered arcades on three sides and a long prayer hall on the fourth side. Glass mosaics created with tiles provided by the Byzantine emperor cover the prayer hall, the court facades and the inside walls left over from the temple.[11] Due to the depiction of a collection of fruit-bearing trees that resemble Islamic descriptions of Paradise, it has been suggested that these mosaics could represent Paradise, the geography of Damascus or even the New Islamic World Order.[12] It is worth noting that, if these mosaics represent Paradise, then in this instance paradise is constructed from Byzantine materials – which shows that al-Walid was willing to include local cultures in the relationship between his congregation and the Divine. On the walls inside the mosque, the upper sections are covered in mosaics and the lower sections revetted in marble,[13] and the treasury is an octagonal structure placed on columns in the courtyard and covered in mosaics.[14] Inside the prayer hall, there are three arcades that run parallel to the *qibla* wall, and they are separated by large arches supported by Corinthian columns, which were constructed from repurposed pieces of other buildings.[15] This is an example of local materials being used for an essential element of the mosque's layout; without the columns, it would not be a hypostyle mosque. On top of the large arches, there are smaller arches supported by more columns,[16] the rows of which intersect with a central aisle that leads to the *maqsura*, the *minbar* and the *mihrab*. The *maqsura* is an area close to the *qibla* wall that is only accessible to the sovereign[17] and the *mihrab* is a small alcove found on the *qibla* wall.[18] Externally, this aisle is demarcated by an octagonal dome and a large gable that resembles the facade of a Syrian church: this architectural feature highlights the importance of this area within the prayer hall.[19] The spatial hierarchy created by the *maqsura* suggests that the *caliph* has a privileged relationship with the divine.

The Great Mosque of Cordoba was constructed in the late 8th century, after the remnants of the Umayyad dynasty had fled to Spain following the Abbasid takeover.[20] It is believed that the location of the mosque was once the location of a Christian monastery,[21] but this claim

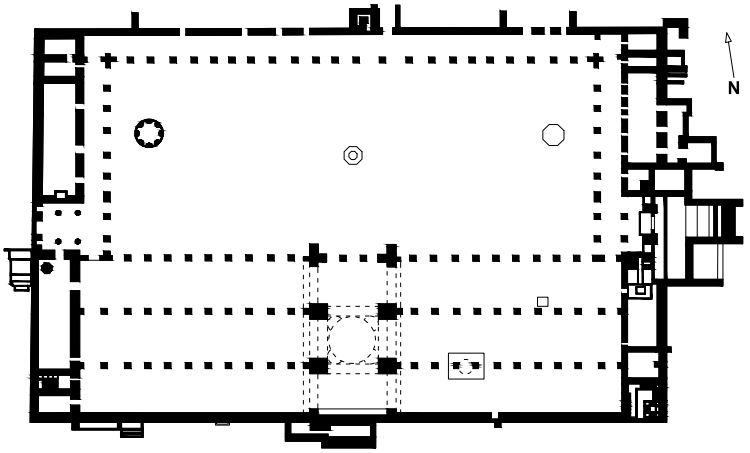

FIGURE 2. *The Umayyad Mosque* (*Great Mosque of Damascus*), architectural plan. Wikimedia Commons.

FIGURE 3. *The Great (Umayyad) Mosque*, mosaics, ca. 709-715 CE. Photographed: 1955.

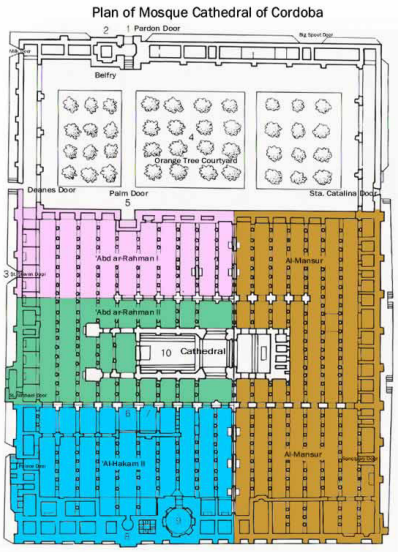

FIGURE 4. *Plan of Mosque Cathedral of Cordoba*, cathedral visitor guide. InfoCordoba.

has never been proven. It has been suggested that this story was created as a tool to link this mosque to the Great Mosque of Damascus, which has a similar origin story.[22] The Great Mosque of Cordoba is another example of a traditional hypostyle mosque, and the mosaics within it make reference to the mosaics found in the Great Mosque of Damascus.[23] The white dots that are common to the mosaics found in Cordoba resemble the pearls used in the mosaics found in Damascus. Displaying a relationship between the mosques of Damascus and Cordoba was important for Abd al-Rahman I, who needed a connection to the initial Umayyad Dynasty to legitimize his claim to the *caliphate*.[24] This desire to establish an association with the Umayyad Dynasty would explain the elaborate adornments found in the *maqsura*. There are arcades that run perpendicular to the courtyard and are separated by two-tiered horseshoe arches – a typical element of Christian visigothic architecture.[25] These arches were composed of alternating brick and stone, a common feature of Roman architecture found in Merida.[26] These arches demonstrate that regional traditions were included in the design of the mosque, illustrating the design synthesis of old and new. Over the years, the mosque underwent multiple renovations and extensions. For example, in 855 CE, Muhammad I added a *maqsura* to the mosque.[27] Then, in 961-6 CE, al-Hakam II upgraded the *maqsura* by constructing a space that was physically separated from the rest of the room by a screen

of polylobed arcades and topped with three domes connected to a central aisle.[28] The most luxurious decorations can be found within the *maqsura*: these include carved marble, stucco and mosaics.[29] Additionally, the *mihrab* was no longer a niche in the wall; instead, it became an entire room covered in magnificent decorations and topped with a dome in the shape of a shell. On one side of the *mihrab*, which is surrounded by vegetal scroll and Kufic inscriptions,[30] is the entrance to the treasury, and on the other the entrance of a passageway to the palace.[31] It is evident in the design choices such as the hypostyle layout, the mosaics, the carved marble and the vegetal scroll, that the Great Mosque of Cordoba was meant to be an homage to Umayyad traditions, particularly the architecture of the Umayyad Mosque.

A panel from the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, discovered in Syria and thought to be dated at 1575, is composed of 18 tiles that are painted in white, blue and green. The main subject of the panel is a *mihrab* which is composed of two columns and a pointed arch. The arch is portrayed in a way that suggests that it is constructed of alternating materials, with one material painted white and the other ornamented with an abstract vegetal pattern. The columns are adorned with a naturalistic pattern that contains images of fishes and birds, with the design on the capitals consisting of leaves and simple geometric patterns. Inside of the *mihrab*, there is an oil lamp, of the type which would hang inside the prayer hall, decorated with Arabic inscriptions that represent the declaration of the Muslim faith.[32] At the foot of the panel, there are two candlesticks in candle holders, while on the upper corners of the panel there are images of various plants and flowers. The vegetal patterns and the mihrab represent the more traditional Muslim or Islamic side of the design, while the arch composed of alternating materials represents the inclusion of Roman methods. By combining the declaration of the Muslim faith with these symbols, the artist shows the important role that local cultures and Islamic tradition play in declaring their faith. The tile panels combine traditional and local design elements with a declaration of faith, demonstrating that the artist sees a connection between that and the relationships that Muslims have with their history and with their neighbours who are not part of their religion.

Throughout the evolution of different architectural designs used for mosques, the *qibla* wall has remained the focus of each building. The only thing that has changed throughout history is the way in which that significance is demonstrated. In the Prophet's house, the *minbar* was placed in front of the *qibla* wall, and so, when the Prophet spoke at the *minbar*, the *qibla* wall served as a backdrop. Consequently, the audience's focus was turned towards him, and by extension towards the wall. In the Great Mosque of Damascus, there are many architectural elements that focus the audience's attention on the *qibla* wall as well. The *mihrab* was placed on this

FIGURE 5. *Panel of Revetment Tiles Representing a Mihrab*, underglaze-painted fritware, Syria, ca. 17th century CE, Aga Khan Museum, Toronto.

wall and going forward, the *mihrab* would be used to identify the *qibla* wall in any mosque. The wooden chair from the Prophet's house transformed into a proper pulpit from which the *imam* would speak. The addition of the *maqsura* created a spatial hierarchy within the prayer hall, which meant that the space directly in front of the *qibla* wall would be seen as more important and exclusive. Furthermore, the creation of the central aisle places even more focus on the *qibla* wall that it leads to. The purpose of the *qibla* wall is to turn the congregation's attention towards the direction of Mecca. Not only is Mecca seen as the holy city of Islam, but it is also the city in which the Kaaba, which is believed to be where the mortal world and the celestial world connect, is located.[33] Every year, a large number of Muslims participate in Hajj, a pilgrimage which ends in the circumambulation of the Kaaba. The movement of the crowd around the stone mirrors the rotation of the universe around this point.[34] In the Great Mosque of Cordoba, decorative artwork was used to enhance the architectural elements found in the Great Mosque of Damascus. The *maqsura* was adorned with three luxurious domes and a screen that physically separated the space. The *mihrab* is located in front of the *maqsura*, but rather than a niche in the wall, the *mihrab* is a domed room with a horseshoe-shaped entrance.[35] These examples demonstrate that throughout the years, Muslims have found new and creative ways to honour the *qibla* wall. By decorating the *qibla* wall so ornately, the creators of these mosques are honouring their connection to the sacred. Furthermore, by including traditional and local aesthetics in the elevation of the *qibla* wall's appearance, the architects show that their connection to the divine relies on their relationship to the past and to the people and culture that surround them, whether they are of the Muslim faith or not.

Overall, the architecture in mosques has upheld tradition while also incorporating aspects of local culture. The Prophet's Mosque introduced the *qibla* wall and the *minbar*, two architectural elements that highlight the congregation's connection to Mecca and subsequently, the divine. The Umayyad dynasty combined these traditional elements with aspects of the local culture to create the Great Mosque of Damascus. This combination, which can be seen in the Byzantine mosaics, the mosque's location and its Corinthian columns, reflects the importance of Islamic history and local culture in a place of spirituality. Moreover, the addition of the *maqsura* and *minbar* elevate the status of the *qibla* wall, and it is later and further enhanced by the expansion and decoration of the *mihrab* and the *maqsura*. The Cordoban Umayyads combined their own political narratives and traditional architectural features with aspects of local customs to create the Great Mosque of Cordoba, which included an even more ornate version of the *qibla* wall, evident in the horseshoe arches and its location and mosaics.

The transition between the different architectural elements of mosques highlights the evolution from a simple courtyard to an elaborate assemblage of columns. Overall, the combination of Islamic culture with that of the area-specific cultures reflects the importance of Islamic history and local culture in this place of spirituality. The relationship between these mosques, the past, and cultural history and the local population show how traditional and modern aspects of mosque design influenced Muslims' perception of their relationship to the divine.

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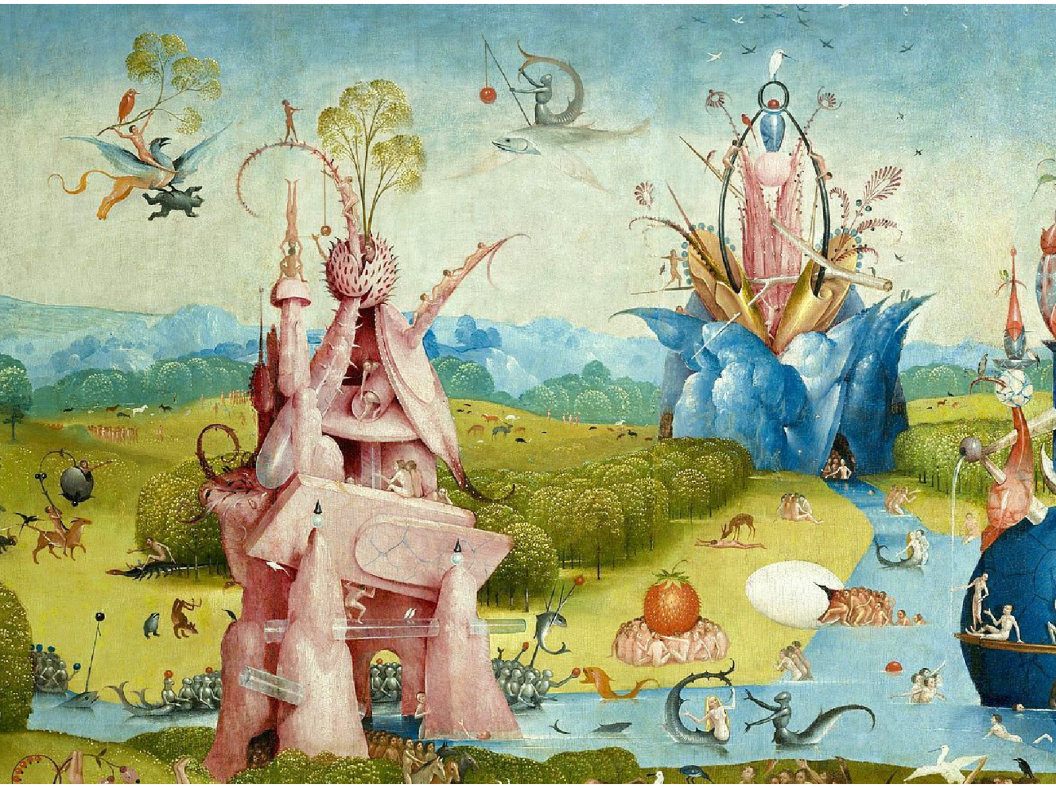

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