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A Comparison of the Iconic Artists Caravaggio and Hieronymus Bosch

Hieronymus Bosch and Caravaggio are considered to be among the most famous and critically acclaimed Renaissance painters. Their artistic explorations and original talent made them known across the world attracting followers and admirers from different countries and ages. In the following papers their iconic status and cult following will be compared and contrasted in regard to their art. Facts of their biography and critical praise of their work will be taken into account in order to comprehend clearly why they are considered to be iconic painters and art geniuses so praised by artists, critics, and followers. Caravaggio and Bosch are both magnificent artists talented and original in their work but they are different due to the nature of their artistic philosophy, worldview, drawing technique; academic art historians consider their long-lasting legacy to differ greatly because of the nature of their work and contents of their paintings.

Caravaggio was a revolutionary painter whose brilliant works of art influenced the history of painting significantly. His major artistic breakthrough was to start making realistic painting that depicted people in their humane and down-to-earth appearance. Caravaggio was the first major painter to depict poor workers and average people from the streets in his paintings. He portrayed them with dirt on their clothes, old, ugly and generally as close to reality as he could (Langdon, 56). He was the first painter to see and depict beauty of average everyday life. Unlike other painters who used to paint kings, queens, aristocrats, mythological heroes, and Christian saints Caravaggio saw subjects of his art everywhere – on the street, in a tavern or in a market. This made his work revolutionary and gained him numerous followers in Europe and around the world.

Hieronymus Bosch is considered by critics an individualistic painter. His position among the European artists can be described as a position of an outsider. However, he is a genius outsider whose talent and importance were acknowledged even by those who did not follow his artistic principles. Bosch did not make a lasting influence and his works were not considered magnificent instantly (Larsen, 41). A long time passed until his artistic legacy reached a point of a worldwide recognition. He is iconic because his paintings are incredibly original. Contents of his artwork imply innumerable different interpretations because of the complexity of his work. Bosch's paintings are enigmatic as they contain hidden messages of mythological, mystical, religious, philosophical, and psychological importance.

Bosch's most famous work is a triptych called "The Garden of Earthly Delights". This painting is unique, original, and innovative. Nobody of Bosch's contemporaries as well as before or after him succeeded at creating such enigmatic painting. Only in 20th century with the rise of surrealism, avant-garde, and abstractionism appeared the works as mysterious as his. Among the Renaissance painters Bosch stands alone different from them all (Larsen, 77). The originality of Bosch's paintings is his most successful achievement which is why he is considered to be an individualistic painter even though he had a school with followers. However, long-lasting popularity and critical acclaim of Bosch's can be considered a result of his status as a relatively unknown painter during his life and shortly after his death.

Caravaggio's artwork produced a lasting effect on the history of Western art. Besides being original in depiction the everyday life of ordinary people he was a revolutionary painter due to his innovative use of light and shadows. Caravaggio is often called "a master of shadows" because he used light-shadow contrasts to emphasize and depict psychological and emotional subtext of the context of his paintings (Langdon 98). By extensively using shadows Caravaggio was able to reflect the mood of the figures he depicted creating a certain atmosphere, mood, and tone in his work.

From moral and philosophical perspective both Bosch's and Caravaggio's artistic legacy can be considered iconic because it moved art closer to reality and life. Caravaggio saw more in art than just a way for rich people to outlive their time and stay in the memory of future generation by being portrayed. For Caravaggio life as ordinary people lived it was worthy to be depicted because it was closer to truth. Caravaggio's was a marginal infamously glorious in his tragic and dramatic life experiences. He was in conflict with the Church and government. His usual surrounding consisted of drunkards, misers, and even criminals. He was a homosexual and possibly killed a man in a fight (Langdon, 80). All these facts of his biography correspond with his art in which was an innovator because he broke many rules. He was asked by his contemporaries to idealize his figures but did not do it as he wanted to portray life as it really is and not as people want it to be. If not for Caravaggio the history of Western art would be entirely different.

Unlike Caravaggio whose personal life is widely known and researched, little is known about Bosch's life. Like his paintings the facts of his biography are full of unknown. Modern critics point out that Bosch's works are psychological and mystical because they imply a variety of different messages. Themes of religion and sexuality seem to be the most dominant in his works. Unlike his predecessors or contemporaries his paintings depict epic sceneries full of small details and highly complex (Larsen, 69). Even though he painted religious subject his work is nothing like that of the painter commissioned by Holy Roman Church. Bosch's works are full of strange animal creatures both exotic and weird. His paintings tell stories of human passions and religious revelations mixing it all into the incredibly rich and magnificent creations.

Caravaggio succeeded as a painter because he widened the perception of art and approached it with open mind being equally interested in all human and refusing to despise poor people, laborers, and even criminals. For Caravaggio life in all its complexity was worthy depicting as it was without intentional exclusion its parts. In his works Caravaggio approached modernity and, therefore, was a visionary. The main difference between Bosch and Caravaggio

is in the fact that Caravaggio was critically acclaimed during his life attracting followers from all around Europe while Bosch was almost unknown until the later times. Therefore, uniqueness of Caravaggio's artwork immediately gained him followers but Bosch's talent was rediscovered much later.

It was pointed out that Caravaggio and Bosch could be considered as iconic artists because of their original work full of innovative components. Nobody before or after these painters have ever painted like them making their artistic contribution unique and exclusive. Their work incorporated the hidden layers of human life in the artistic explorations making the closer to life, reality, and truth.

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