

HIERONYMUS BOSCH

Flemish school, active by 1480 - died 1516.

Very little is known of this artist's life. According to van Mander he was born in s'Hertogenbosch (Bois-le-Duc) in North Brabant ; and a claim has been made for the discovery of his birth-date as October 2, 1453.⁽¹⁾ As well as being called Jeronimus Bosch, which corresponds to the way in which he signed his paintings -- he was also known by the family name of van Aken, and it is now known that he came from a dynasty of painters in s'Hertogenbosch, which included his grandfather Jan, who died in 1481, his father Anthonis, who is recorded between 1472 and 1481, and also two uncles and two brothers who were equally master painters. It was in s'Hertogenbosch, correspondingly, that he spent most of his life. He is first recorded there as "Jeroen the painter" in 1480-81, was married by June 1481 to Aleyt, daughter of Guyart van der Mervenne, and became a member of the Brotherhood of Our Lady in 1486-87. He is subsequently mentioned a number of times, between 1488 and 1512, in the register of the Brotherhood, and is known to have made a ~~a~~ made a design for a stained glass window for the chapel of the Brotherhood, and also a cross for a surplice and a design for a candlestick. In 1504 he was commissioned to paint a Last Judgement for Philip the Handsome, Archduke of Austria. He died in s'Hertogenbosch some time in 1516. Works of his were in private hands in Venice by 1520, if not earlier. Later, in the mid-sixteenth century, Philip II of Spain and Don Felipe da Guevara were both extremely interested in his work, and consequently many important pictures which they acquired are in Spain and Portugal. This interest, along with the evident popularity of the artist's bizarre inventions in the north, led to a multiplication of variants and replicas of his work which appears to have continued throughout the sixteenth century, and probably later still. Bosch's key paintings consist of triptychs, or composites of other kinds, which are filled throughout with a rich vein of allegory and complex allegorical and moral meanings.

Ecce Homo

oil on panel, 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ ins.

Condition

Good.

Provenance

Silberman Galleries, New York. Acquired by Dr Clowes in 1940.

Literature

E.P. Richardson, "Augmented Return Engagement....of the Masterpieces of Art from Two World's Fairs ", Art News, 40, 6, May 1941, p.17 ; Masterpieces of Flemish Art, van Eyck to Bosch, Detroit Institute of Arts, Oct.-Dec.1960, pp.208ff., cat.no.56, ill. (entry by J.Folie) ; C.de Tolnay, Hieronymus Bosch, (1965), Eng.tr., London, 1966, p.352, cat.no.12a, ill. p.104 ; D.Buzzati-M.Cinotti, L'Opera Completa di Bosch, Milan, 1966, under cat. no.27, ill. ; Jheronimus Bosch, Noordbrabant Museum, s'Hertogenbosch, Sept.-Nov.1967, under cat.no.25.

Exhibited

Masterpieces of Art from European and American Collections, Twenty-Second Loan Exhibition of Old Masters, Detroit Institute of Arts, April-May 1941, cat.no.3, ill. ; Holbein and his Contemporaries, John Herron Art Museum, Indianapolis, Oct.-Dec.1950, cat.no.7, ill. ; Ind., 1959, no.6 ; Detroit, 1960 (see lit.)

Versions

Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G.Johnson colln., no.352. Oil on wood, 20 × 29 ins. (De Tolnay, 1966, cat.no.12, ill.p.104) Does not include the horizontal parapet at the ^{bottom} ~~bottom~~ ; and a second column to the left of Christ, further over than the one in the Clowes version, was removed by cleaning in 1938 (see

cont.

The Worcester-Philadelphia Exhibition of Flemish Painting, Feb.-Apr. 1939, cat.no.41 and the plate there, as compared to the one repr. by De Tolnay). The gold at the top has been much rubbed.

Evidently cut along the base, since the painted surface extends to the extreme edge there. It has been suggested accordingly that it formed part of a larger whole, corresponding in character to the composition reflected in a drawing in the Crocker Art Gallery, Sacramento (ill. De Tolnay, p.326)³

H.Tietze and De Tolnay (1940)³ considered this work to be by Bosch and superior to the Johnson version ; and Richardson (1941) echoed this view, while Valentiner considered both versions to be originals by Bosch.⁴ Subsequently De Tolnay modified his earlier opinion (1965), stating that the Clowes version was undoubtedly a replica, from the atelier of Bosch, though equal in quality to the Johnson version and even slightly better preserved. Bozzati and Cinotti (1966) correspondingly argued for its being a copy from the studio of Bosch, made as a self-sufficient painting as opposed to a fragment of a larger whole⁵; and in the 1967 catalogue it was designated as not autograph, but very close to the original.

This painting is indeed virtually identical to the Johnson version in terms of the placing of the figures and the character of their expressions⁶; and the addition of the parapet here, with its slightly incongruous perspective, would seem to point, in the compiler's view, to its being a replica, whether or not the Johnson version is a fragment. It is, at the same time, of very high quality and may perhaps, accordingly, have been produced under the direction of Bosch himself.

As noted by De Tolnay, three moments in the story of the Passion of Christ are condensed and melded together here : the Flagellation, referred to in the column and scourgers ; the reading of the sentence (shown at the left) ; and the presentation of Christ to the people by Pilate.

Notes.

1. See the report stemming from J. Mosmans, "Chronique d'Art", Gazette des Beaux Arts, 53, 1959, pp.15f.

2. See H. Swarzenski, "An unknown Bosch", Bull. of Boston Museum of Fine Arts, 53, 1955, p.5, and the comments of De Tolnay (1966, p.351) and Bozzati-Cinotti on the implications of the perspective. De Tolnay correspondingly affirmed that the right hand edge had been cut irregularly; but this is not commented on in the 1939 cat. entry. It is stated there that the removed column was put in to cover up damage and repair --including slight widening -- caused by a cleavage down the length of the panel at this point.

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3. Statements of _____ 1940, Clowes archives. See also De Tolnay's comment (1966) on his earlier opinion.

4. Undated document, Clowes archives. For opinions of the Johnson version expressed by writers who did not know or did not mention the Clowes version, and dates suggested for it, see Detroit cat., 1960, p.210; De Tolnay (1966) assigned it to the 1490s, and Buzzati-Cinotti to around 1500-1504.

5. They argued that the Clowes version must have been made after the cutting up of the larger composition, which led to the painting in of the additional column there. But they give no indication of the dating that this would imply for the Clowes version -- except that their argument would seem to suggest a considerably later date than ^{is implied by} their use of the term "di bottega" implies. (I am grateful to Stephen Ostrow for his help in interpreting their view, in comments made in a letter to Allen W. Clowes of Feb. 22, 1967, to which he appended a translation from the Italian). Furthermore, the column in question, which they held to be understandable only as a disguise of the poor restoration, does not appear ~~in the~~, as noted above, in exactly the same place as in the Clowes version; and it should also be noted that ⁱⁿ the 1939 Worcester-Philadelphia cat. (cf.

Notes, cont.

n.2 above) a different view was expressed as to the original character of the Johnson version : namely that it was originally somewhat taller in format (but still a self-contained painting).

6. There are minor differences, noted by De Tolnay, in the direction of the cudgels and halberds low down. He also felt that the faces were rounder and softer, creating a somewhat empty effect as opposed to the sharply defined psychological tension found in the Johnson version.