

Dreams in Art History

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses and investigates oneiric art throughout the history by studying five iconic artists—Hieronymus Bosch (c.1450-1516), William Blake (1757-1827), Francisco de Goya (1746-1828), Odilon Redon (1840-1916) and Salvador Dalí (1904-1989)—and their works in depth, discovering the evolution of the theme *Dream*. The theme is put in different contexts—both Eastern and Western—and focuses on Western art from the Renaissance to the Avant-gardes in the 20th century. The techniques applied, art styles, artistic intentions and the lives of the artists are also explored.

Keywords: oneiric art, Art History, paintings, Romanticism, Symbolism, Surrealism, dreams

1. INTRODUCTION

Dreams have been a source of inspiration and stimulus of creativity throughout human history. Visions emanate from artists' minds spurring diverse motives and interpretations, as well as the use of different techniques, producing a fascination effect on the viewers. This paper focuses on the evolution of oneiric art through the analysis of six artworks from different periods made by iconic artists with a remarkable influence on Art History. The topic of this essay was encouraged by the fact that, despite the common presence of dreams in art, there are few monographic studies on this topic—such as *Into the Abyss. On Salvador Dalí's Dream of Venus* [1] and *Michelangelo's Dream* [2]—and even fewer transversal examinations following a chronological order—with a few exceptions such as *Painting the Dream: From the Biblical Dream to Surrealism* by Daniel Bergez.

Dreams in Western Art History are usually associated with the genres of mythology, religion and allegory, including topics related with mysticism, reverie, madness and the grotesque. Artworks were inspired by the world of nightmares and symbolism, as well as Freudian theories from the early 20th century onwards. Although the first reference to oneiric art dates back to the 12th century, human interest in dreams started long time earlier. During the Western Zhou Dynasty (c.1100-771 BC) in China, Duke of Zhou, named Ji Dan, had already written a book intending to decipher dreams for prophetic uses, called *The Book Duke of Zhou Interprets Dreams* (*Zhou Gong Jie Meng*). The Chinese philosopher Chuang-tzu (369-286 BC) proposed the well-known butterfly dream parable, telling a story about a dream that

he had where he was a butterfly, which felt so real that it made him wonder whether he was a man dreaming of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming of being a man. Despite being a popular motif in literature, dreams in visual art were less common and appeared later in Chinese Art History. For instance, in the Ming Dynasty, the poet and artist Tang Yin (1470-1523) touched upon the subject, painting *Sleeping in Shade* (*Tong Yin Qing Meng Tu*), *The Thatched Hut of Dreaming of an Immortal* (*Meng Xian Cao Tang Tu*)—where *Meng* means *Dreams* in Chinese.

In Western Art History, although interpreting dreams—or oneiromancy—was considered pagan and sacrilegious for Christians—since God was believed the only one who knows the future—biblical and mythological dreams were widely interpreted during Medieval times. This included *Joseph's Dream* and *Jacob's Dream* from the Old Testament, which passed on divine messages and had prophetic meanings that were deciphered during psychic rituals. In Greek mythology, the incarnations of the Greek god of dreams Morpheus—from "*morpho*", meaning *form* or *shape*—were also common in visual art. Religious dreams remained popular in the Renaissance although they gradually lost their original meaning of celestial revelation, increasingly focusing on individuality. From the early Renaissance to the 17th century, the French word *songe* was replaced by *rêve*, which also meant "to wander" or "to be delirious", [3] leading oneiric art to be associated with a sense of emptiness and madness. The former—"emptiness—might be created by the use of luminous colours and the naturalistic backdrop in the paintings, while the latter—"madness"—could be built up by

dramatic contrast in colours, unearthly sceneries and loose brushstroke—especially used by artists from the Northern School such as Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), Hieronymus Bosch and Italians such as Giuseppe Arcimboldo (c.1527-1593). The dreams during the Rococo tended to be represented in a more fantastical way, focusing on reverie, using with bright creamy colours and depicting various nature scenes.

It was the Romantic movement that really pushed forward the development of oneiric art since it considered emotions and dreams an essential part in life. Romantic artists were also inspired by the Bible and mythology, and particularly by literature. More importantly, they depicted dreams and visions focusing on individual feelings and fantasies, influenced by Romantic aesthetic concepts such as the Sublime and the Picturesque. Romantic works depicted dreams in scenes that often carried a certain level of melancholy to build a lucid dream world bathed in gentle sunlight or shimmering nightlight, populated by dreamers with hollow eyes. The topic of the Night created by Romantic artists was redefined, which developed into a more gloomy, moody and peaceful style, often enhanced by a cold palette. During Romanticism, artists used not only oil painting but also watercolour and etching, as well as new printing techniques such as lithography.

With the appearance the works by Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) and Francisco de Goya, dreams turned nightmarish and even monstrous, showing the element of madness that was lost during the Baroque period. Goya's representations of dreams, for instance, nurtured Expressionism and Symbolism, as did Grandville's works for Surrealism. Also, in Symbolism, with artists like Gustave Moreau and Odilon Redon, artworks had the splendour of illusory phantasmagorias and showed more features of dream worlds in the use of colours and some oriental cultural elements, then considered exotic. The subject of dreams was also interpreted by Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) in his famous work *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (1888) and *The Dream (Te Rerioa)*, 1897). With the findings about dreams by Sigmund Freud and Avant-

garde movements like Surrealism, where dreams became the most fundamental subject, oneiric art rose even further in the 20th century, reaching a new cenit with artists such as Salvador Dalí.

2. THE ARTISTS AND ANALYSIS

This study on dreams in the History of Art will focus on the following six artists: Hieronymus Bosch, William Blake, Francisco de Goya, Odilon Redon and Salvador Dalí.

2.1. Hieronymus Bosch

Hieronymus Bosch (originally named Jeroen Anthoniszoon van Aken, also Jeroen Bosch) was one of the most representative Renaissance masters from the Early Netherlandish School of painting. His works are usually highly skilful, surreal and obscure, mostly being based on biblical stories, and hold a moralizing intention, depicting human sins and immorality with immensely imaginative figures and symbols in a lunatic and nightmarish manner. Yet, there are only twenty-five works that historians attribute to this master since few written records have survived. The bizarre hybrid creatures and the fantastical and macabre machines in his works are considered some of the main sources of inspiration for Surrealism in the 20th century. His most representative artworks include *The Seven Deadly Sins* and *The Four Last Things* (1485), the triptych of the *Garden of the Earthly Delights* (c.1490-1510), *The Marriage Feast at Cana* (1550) and the *Epiphany* (unknown date).

The *Garden of Earthly Delights* (Fig. 1) is painted by Hieronymus Bosch between circa 1490 and 1510 and it is now located at the Prado Museum in Madrid. Its commissioner is unknown, but instead of being a church altarpiece, it is more likely to have had a lay patron. It is one of the most notable and early masterpieces that addresses dreams, from the eccentric, oneiric and illusionary world of Bosch.



Fig. 1. Hieronymus Bosch, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, oak panel, 205.5cm x 384.9cm (81in x 152in), c.1490-1510, Prado Museum, Madrid.

Although the title *The Garden of Earthly Delights* only describes the central panel of the triptych, it now refers generally to the entire work. The landscape in the painting is continuous, with a winding river in the foreground and a high horizon in the background, which connects the Garden of Eden, the Garden of Earthly Delights and Hell, from left to right. A large number of naked human figures with different skin colours and numerous bizarre creatures are spread in groups, mostly around some fantastical buildings or abnormally sized plants. From a bird-eye perspective, the viewers can see the whole picture of the garden and observe each figure since they are depicted in meticulous detail. The perspective is frontal, with a central focal point in the middle of the horizon. Instead of the traditional three-dimensional spatial concept, this work is more oriented towards cavalier perspective which is largely used in Chinese traditional paintings. The contours of the figures are detailed and delicate, with lines cautiously depicting the gestures of the figures. The palette is made of a wide range of luminous, bright colours, especially green, blue, pink, white, black, yellow and brown, which creates a vibrant atmosphere.

The treatment of figures is naturalistic and skilful. The extremely thin lines of the drawing diminish the depth of the slim figures and make them look airy, less corporeal and fleshy. The figures in the three panels are depicted slightly differently. God, Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden look balanced and restrained, following the Classical treatment of figures, with the aim of representing the balanced state of Paradise. God is depicted young, almost as Jesus Christ in the New Testament, with the blessing gesture on his right hand.

The use of colours is intricate and luminous, with symbolic meaning and sensory functions. The different shades of green and brown in the Garden of Eden and Earth create a lush and tranquil natural scene, whereas the blue and pink build up a dreamy and romantic atmosphere and represent melancholia and love. The contrasting and bold colours take turns to draw attention yet maintain harmony because of the balanced distribution of cold and warm palettes. The colours in the third panel are much darker, mainly black and brown, creating an uncanny and barren world, but still maintaining similar features—intricacy in harmony. The various skin colours—black, yellow, white—of the figures also add up the complexity of this painting and make it universal. The contrast in the use of lights pushes the sensory effects even more. Heaven and Earth are bathed in soft daylight with some light shading, while Hell is sunken in darkness with unusual yellowish lightings. The foreground of Hell is brighter to show the tortured sinners. Beyond the river it turns much darker, revealing the underworld of a constant night. The uncanny beams of light in the background may be seen as Gothic elements because they create a solemn and religious atmosphere, also functioning as a stabiliser in the light of the entire work.

Since there are few written records about Bosch and this artwork, most of the interpretations are based and deduced from the context. Opinions about the subject of this grotesque and intricate triptych vary from different art historians. Specifically, the work depicted the religious story about the original sin of humans from the Garden of Eden (left), to the Garden of Earthly Delights (middle) and Hell (right). Some scholars believe that this

work is more likely to portray the anxiety or dread out of religious faith, inspiring in the believers a fear of the punishment for sins in the afterlife, with its nightmarish surreal world, [4] while some think that Bosch was a moralist and painted it to educate the viewers. Spanish writer Felipe de Guevara (c.1500-1563) recognised him as “the inventor of monsters and chimeras” in his book *Commentary on Painting and Ancient Painters* (written in c.1560, published in 1788), which is the earliest known testimony about Bosch. In the early 17th century, Karel van Mander, a Dutch art historian described Bosch’s art as “wondrous and strange fantasies”, criticising them as “often less pleasant than gruesome to look at”. [5] Later, however, other historians like the Netherlandish art historian Erwin Panofsky refused to do any “groundless” interpretations of Bosch’s paintings, producing his research from a Formalist approach. [6]

Bosch lived at a time ruled by Religion—Christianism—which held very strict morals and condemned all bodily pleasure as sinful. [7] Hence, it was unlikely for *The Garden of Earthly Delights* to be commissioned by the Church, which would disapprove of the promiscuous scenes on the middle panel. Bosch’s wife being one of the wealthiest residents in town (s-Hertogenbosch), he did not have the financial pressure to produce commercial art. Despite the explicit depiction of carnal sin and lust, there is evidence suggesting that the work was well received by the public at the time: in 1517, it was exhibited in the town palace of the Counts of the House of Nassau in Brussels, often visited by renowned personalities. Also, copies of the painting were made after the artist’s death, showing a long-lasting interest. [8]

The odd creatures, fountains, buildings and fruits are the highlights and indicators of the dream world, undoubtedly crowning Bosch as a master of the surreal and the oneiric. From the drawings, we can take a glimpse of Bosch’s creative process of the monsters which can only be drawn from dreams or the imagination, with deforming shapes, adding motifs and combining heterogeneous elements. [9] Although some of the extravagancies may be inexplicable, other may have common sources, being rooted in Netherlandish folk culture, Medieval illustration, alchemy and astrology.

2.1.1 Eden

There is a dracaena tree, whose sap was believed to heal. The fountain seems to resemble crabs, which represent the moon in astrology and are the source of energy for alchemists. An owl—symbol of stupidity and evil in Netherlandish legends, ignoring darkness¹—is peaking from the hole in the base of the fountain. A white unicorn—symbol of holiness in the Middle Ages—is sticking its horn into the river, as if purifying the water.

The hills in the background simulate pots in alchemy, implying distillation.

2.1.2 Earthly Delights

Flowers with sexual connotation, birds representing folly and sin in Christianity, crackles on the glass balls indicating the delicacy of the fleeting pleasure, fruits like cherries symbolising pride, and strawberries referring to lust, can be seen from the middle panel. In 1605, Father Sigüenza referred the earthly paradise as “the strawberry painting”, [10] as a metaphor of the ephemeral nature of pleasure as the disappearing taste of strawberries as soon as human eat them. Many of them are sarcastic—animals and musical instruments once human played with turned evil—and allegorically indicate that happiness and madness are fragile, and that a cruel fate is awaiting. Also, as the art historian Reindert Falkenburg—author of *the Land of Unlikeliness*, which focuses on Bosch, currently a visiting Professor of Early Modern Art and Culture in NYUAD—explained it in a video made by the Prado Museum in 2016, [11] this entire work may act as a mirror for the viewers and it triggers the deep memories and emotions beneath them. In order to make sense of some parts of the work, viewers may project their own associations on the painting, making different interpretations.

2.1.3 Hell

The animals that appeared in the first two panels turned into merciless incarnations of the Devil, as the sinful human beings are tortured in Hell. The dice replaces the cherry on women’s heads, which may indicate unchangeable fate, or as a symbol of the consequences of human vices like gambling. The secular musical instruments like the lute and the harp, normally used as entertainment and allure, are turned into instruments of torture. Some particular social classes are picked out, especially the clergy, who was criticised and depicted as a hybrid creature between a pig or a dog wearing a monk’s cloak or a nun’s veil. The Tree-Man has been suggested to be a self-portrait of the artist, who watched indifferently and cunningly. The Greek letter Ω is carved into the two knives around the Tree-Man. Since Omega is the last letter in Greek alphabet, it can be a symbol of the end of humanity.

2.2 William Blake

William Blake (1757-1827) was an English poet, painter and engraver, and one of the most important figures of British Romanticism. His visual and literary work is full of symbolism and he is now recognised as a visionary ahead of his time. He created very spiritual and metaphysical artworks based on biblical subjects in an

unorthodox and expressive manner, as part of the Romantic style. He illustrated his own poems with etchings and there is a close bond between his visual art and his writing. For this purpose, Blake created a new printing technique called “relief etching—a type of engraving in which the parts of the design that take the ink are raised above the surface of the plate—which generated harmful gases containing toxins that after constant work eventually deteriorated his health in his later years.

According to Blake, “Imagination is the real and eternal world of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow”. [12] He valued imagination and lived in his own universe of fantasy, which is directly reflected in his artworks. He mistrusted the rationalistic and scientific interpretation of the world embodied by Newton, [13] claiming: “Art is the Tree of Life. Science is the Tree of Death”. [14] His artworks are usually full of emotion, fantasy, imagination and dreams, the most important ones including the collection of illustrated poems *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789), *Ancient Days* (1794), *Nabucodonosor* (1795-1805), *Jacob’s ladder* (c.1799-1807).

Jacob’s Ladder (Fig. 2) is drawn by William Blake between circa 1799 and 1807 and it is located at the British Museum in London. It was commissioned as an illustration of the Bible for Thomas Butts, depicting a scene from Genesis (xxvii, 12), and it was first exhibited in 1808 at the Royal Academy. Although it was not a particularly recognised work during the Romantic times, this eccentric and personal depiction of Jacob’s story later had a remarkable influence on contemporary artists due to its powerful Symbolism.



Fig. 2. *Jacob’s Ladder*, William Blake, drawing, pen, grey ink and watercolour, 39.8 x 30.6 cm, c.1799-1807, British Museum, London.

In the drawing, the dreamer Jacob lies on the foreground, and above his head there is a helicoidal staircase whirling up to the glorious sun in Heaven. Balance is reached through the symmetry of the swirling staircase, inside which one could fit an invisible cone, and through the distribution of the figures. Stepping on the lower part of the ladder are several female characters and angels carrying trays and urns. Other than these, on the foreground are numerous figures walking up and down. The upper side of the background is full of rays of celestial light cast from heaven; the lower part is darker and with scattered sparkling stars. The perspective is frontal, with a focal point at the end of the staircase, located in the centre of the upper edge of the work, indicated by the direction of the clear light rays. The farther and higher the staircase and the figures are, the smaller they become, adding up to the depth of the composition, until they vanish into infinity, which emphasises the holiness of Heaven. The contour is made with pen ink, the lines varying their thickness following the light and shadows, as seen in the long tunics, which improves the expressivity of the figures and contributes to the texture of the materials. The palette on the upper half is made of warm colours, especially the gold beams of light, with some orange and ochre, which contrasts strongly with the cold blue of the night sky on the lower half of the drawing. The watercolour provides a translucent and luminous quality that helps with the general ethereal aspect. The choice of colours and the technique shows a spiritual vision and a strong sense of artistic individuality.

The treatment of figures is realistic but in an unconventional way. The depiction of the skin and clothes of the figures is smooth and flowy, which makes them look spiritual and celestial. Each figure has unique gestures and they are full of movement, which makes them look nimble. Their skin is extremely pale and seems to lack any element of flesh. The use of colours is subjective and expressive, even experimental, such as the bluish shade on the bare skin. The colours have a low saturation which can result from the use of watercolour, being perfectly appropriate for the dream-like and metaphysical atmosphere. The light-coloured clothing of the figures is a well-balanced combination of Classicism—the shape and design resembling the attires of Greek statues—and Romanticism—the colour making the texture of the clothes airy and fantastical. The perspective and spatial reference is limited to the staircase since the ground on which Jacob lies and seems undefined, showing the free style and emotion-based nature of Romanticism. The main source of light comes from the Sun, whose golden light beams cast on the figures and the staircase, warming up the colour. There are also dimmer sources of light which are the stars in the blue background.

The theme of Jacob is one of the most popular topics in the representation of dreams. The story tells that Jacob

dreamt of a ladder connecting Heaven and Earth, on which angels were coming down. This subject had been treated by many artists before Blake's time in various forms. Blake here conveys his own unique interpretation of this motif, instead of a straight ladder, showing a spiral or helicoidal staircase, which adds his personal style and a richer texture. The composition is unique in its kind, the only ground visible being the land on which the dreamer lies, the staircase bursting through the blue starry sky—which can be seen from Earth—and the atmosphere on earth—which may be shown by the wavy border—to outer space where the sun looks enormous. This work by Blake was last exhibited in 1809 before he died, at a one-man exhibition that represented a turning point of his life. [15]

Despite the influence of the Romantic context, Blake's artworks certainly have some distinctive features, where a repetition of elements can be noticed when depicting certain subjects—dreams, Biblical stories—which outlined his imaginary world. Through *Jacob's Ladder* and another oneiric work, *Queen Katherine's Dream*, we can take a further glimpse of the ambiguous yet enchanting Blakean universe.

Queen Katherine's Dream was a non-commissioned work inspired by *Henry VIII* by William Shakespeare (Act IV, scene ii). It was the fourth time Blake illustrated this subject, the other three being in the 1780s, and then in 1807 and 1809. The composition of this drawing is cramped, with two figures sitting in the foreground, leaning on one hand to support their sleepy heads with closed eyes, which is a typical depiction of melancholic dreamers in Art History. [16] Queen Katherine is reclining on a bed, surrounded by flying apparitions that form a whirlwind around her, occupying the upper side of the work. A frontal perspective is shown by the shade on the chairs and bed, and the shadow of the spirits. Lines and contours have a heavy looking with the flowing and thick lines depicting the texture of the skin, facial expressions, clothes, furniture, and even the border of light and darkness. The palette is made of neutral and cold colours, mainly grey, blue and ochre, with a little bit of green and red.

The treatment of figures is skilfully detailed and exquisitely vibrant. As well as those in *Jacob's Ladder*, the figures look slim and lithe. The whirling figures of the spirits with garlands on their heads form a spiral shape which resembles delicate smoke. Some of the spirits have musical instruments like the harp or the lyre—an Ancient Mediterranean instrument—and a trumpet-like wind instrument. The figure of Queen Katherine is sticking out her arms and is ready to take the garland which the spirits bring.

The use of colours is simple and with low saturation, almost transparent with the watercolour. All the colours have a dull and greyish tone, which may be simulating darkness and illustrating the grave atmosphere as well as

a reflection of the insane and desperate state of mind of Queen Katherine. The light is coming from the very top of the work, which shines on the flitting spirits and leaves light and shadow spots, resembling the texture of waves. The shading is generally heavy, which makes this drawing more three-dimensional.

This subject is taken from literature and was a common source of inspiration during Romanticism. The story tells about Queen Katherine, who, being gravely ill, saw a vision of “a blessed troop” [17] of spirits and heard celestial music. Since this work was made in Blake's late years, the atmosphere may be influenced by his unknown health condition, combined with melancholy. Yet, the colours used in this work are darker but shimmer with light, which recreate the melancholic feeling of underwater, while seeing the salvation from a mystical force. This may support the argument that Blake was a joyful Mystic unlike the typical wistful ones, which means he always saw pleasure in sorrow and considered that joy usually outshines the shadows. From Queen Katherine's facial expression, it is noticeable that she might be frowning out of pain but was more praised by her fantastical beauty as it was described in text. Similar use of light can be discovered in these two works of Blake, in which the light is both coming from the very top of the drawings and spread on the figures. It might be related to the concept of God in the Blakean world. In *Jacob's Ladder*, Heaven is represented by the Sun, which shines brightly. This interpretation also appeared in other works of his like *The Ancient of Days* (1794). The bearded old man perching on the Sun is Urizen—a fictional evil god created by Blake as the embodiment of Reason and Law.

Another common element in the Blakean universe is the whirling shapes formed by figures or objects. In *Jacob's Ladder* is the helicoidal staircase, with a similar example in *The Lovers Whirlwind* (1824-1827). In terms of dreams, this flowy shape may indicate the everchanging nature and deformation of the dream world. Focusing on the figures, the softness in their forms enhances the ghostly, spiritual and impalpable. These wavy suave lines depicting the skin, hair and airy clothes imply great technical skills. The smoothness and thickness of the lines define the texture—for instance, the lightest and thinnest lines are used to depict faces. This style of technique might resemble that of the Chinese painter Daozi Wu (c. 680-759), who is known for portraiture.

2.3 Francisco de Goya

Francisco de Goya y Lucientes was a painter and printmaker and is considered the most important Spanish artist of the late 18th and early 19th century. His work embodies a bridge between Neo-Classicism and Romanticism, having been trained in the Classical School, and later being acknowledged as a pioneer of

Modern art. He made several series of prints in his later years which are related to visions and oneiric scenes—*Los Caprichos* (1799), especially plate 43 “The Sleep of Reason produces monsters”, paintings like *Witches Flight* (1797) and drawings such as *Pesadilla* (Nightmare) (c.1816-20). His interpretations of dreams often seem to have allegorical and symbolic meanings, providing a unique depiction of oneiric art. Goya was not, however, a pure emotion-based artist such as Blake—instead he valued the combination of Reason and imagination, which can be deduced from his manuscript explanation of this print: “Fantasy, abandoned by Reason, produces impossible monsters; united with it, she is the mother of arts and the origin of marvels”. [18]



Fig. 3. Francisco de Goya, “The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters” (El sueño de la razón produce monstruos), plate 43 of *Los Caprichos* (1799), etching and aquatint, 30.6 x 20.1 cm (platemark 21.3 x 15.1 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

“The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters” (Fig. 3) is plate number 43 of the non-commissioned print album *Los Caprichos* (*The Caprices*), formed by 80 prints that combine aquatint and etching. It was published on the 6 February 1799, having started working on the preparatory drawings around 1797. This work was an artistic experiment in which Goya criticized universal follies shared by all humans, although one can distinguish certain scenes that resonate with the Spanish society from that time. Although this plate was initially

planned to be the cover of the *Caprichos*, it was later replaced by a self-portrait of the artist, probably due to having a less critical topic. The title of this artwork represents Goya’s mindset in an allegorical form, influenced by the Enlightenment and the progressive ideas coming from France, such as the critique of superstition and the advocacy of Reason.

The print’s technique combines etching with aquatint on ivory laid paper. A single, big male figure is depicted on the foreground, sleeping with his head resting on his folded arms, hiding his face. He leans over a desk, in which front side is written the title of the work. Behind the figure there are different kinds of nocturnal animals including owls, cats, lynxes and bats, most of them having realistic faces, while others show more distorted or monstrous features. The figure and the creatures form a diagonal tall triangle, with a heavier volume on the ground and a lighter texture on the top. The spatial concept is inapparent and all the depth and volume are concentrated in the figures on the foreground, the background being neutral and two-dimensional. The lines of the drawing, etched with the burin, are thin and precise, while the shades, showing different scales of grey, are achieved through the aquatint, enforcing the contrast between light and darkness.

The treatment of figure is realistic, showing a skilful treatment with the texture of the clothes and his twisted gesture, as well as showing the strong academic training of the artist. Compared to the figure, the creatures are the most eye-catching elements of this work, especially their dramatically expressive eyes. Except for the bats, the nocturnal animals are depicted with large round eyes which gives out horror, foolishness, surprise and shock, creating a mysterious and sly atmosphere—the hollow look in the eyes of the owls, the penetrating stare from the black cat that perched behind the sleeping figure. The creatures are of different sizes, postures and tonal intensity, being distributed throughout the work to balance the volume and enhance the layers of textures, as well as the connections between the creatures and the figure. For instance, the large black bat on the top right corner act as an efficient functional figure to avoid too much heaviness at the bottom. The use of light is another iconic feature of Goya’s artworks and usually has a symbolic implication. The light, coming from the left, focuses on the figure, leading the eye towards it, while the animals are immersed in darkness. In Goya, particularly in his graphic work, light represents good, and darkness, evil. In this print, the figure is the incarnation of *Reason* and has a positive connotation, whereas the nocturnal creatures are the embodiment of darkness, foolishness, superstition and vice.

During the recovery of his illness in Cádiz, which started in 1792 and left him deaf, he had the chance of studying British satirical prints, which influenced his later work. Goya then returned to Madrid and formed

some ideas with Leandro Fernández de Moratín. He made his first drawing from the series *Sueños* in 1797 and constructed the visual conception for his *Caprichos*, marking a turning point in his life and career. The subject of this work, drawn from Goya's own imagination, addresses the world of nightmares and expresses his rejection towards obscurantism. Many plates from the *Caprichos* display a world abandoned by *reason* and humanity, occupied by stupidity, monstrosity and atrocious violence. [19] Specifically in plate 43, Goya depicted the power of irrationality in a nightmarish scene, further emphasized by the use of the word "sueño" (dream) in the title. It also follows the conventional depiction of dreams, where the visions are usually generated from the back or above the head of the dreamer.

As the artist stated, there is no prophetic or compensating meaning in the dreams represented in his graphic work. According to the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), Goya had great talent making the supernatural realistic. [20] He was also a master of blurring the lines between reality and dreams, which suggests that in his interpretation of oneiric world, the disturbing terror and uncanny scenes were taken from his own personal reality. The light casting on the figure is a dramatic symbol referring to the Enlightenment, while the human incarnation receiving or reflecting the light with darkness rising behind him adds complexity to the work—suggesting the Gothic nature embedded in humanity. Linking back to the title "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters", although the light of *reason* shines on humanity, in the dreams—revealing the deep nature of humanity or believed traditionally manipulated by unearthly power prior to the Enlightenment—of the figure, monsters come back—which resonates with the Gothic idea of reappearance of the dark past and is a response to the Enlightenment. On the other hand, the dreams created by Goya might be a medium of expressing his political values and personal emotions, which explains why he is also recognized as the precursor of Romanticism. Alcalá Flecha explains compellingly that Goya used Reason, in which is rooted Neoclassical art, to balance out the absurdity of the excessive fantasy that creates monsters.[21] Alternatively, it might indicate the inevitable failure of *Reason* from the Enlightenment, since it is asleep and besieged by the dark powers. What remains undoubtful is that "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" reveals the artist's belief in the power of *Reason* to banish human errors and vices, making shine the light of truth.

2.4 French Symbolists

Gustave Moreau and Odilon Redon were both French Symbolists from the late nineteenth century influenced by Orientalism. Their styles, however, differ, Moreau's being more dreamy, enigmatic and full of bright colours.

Most of his works were significantly influenced by literature, mythology and the Bible. He had studied at the Paris Art School and worked in Eugène Delacroix's studio, having received a traditional education. Two of his students, Henri Matisse and Georges Rouault, later became the founders of Fauvism. Some important works by Moreau are *Le rêve d'Orient* (1881), *L'Apparition* (The Apparition) (Undated), and *Jupiter and Semele* (c.1889).

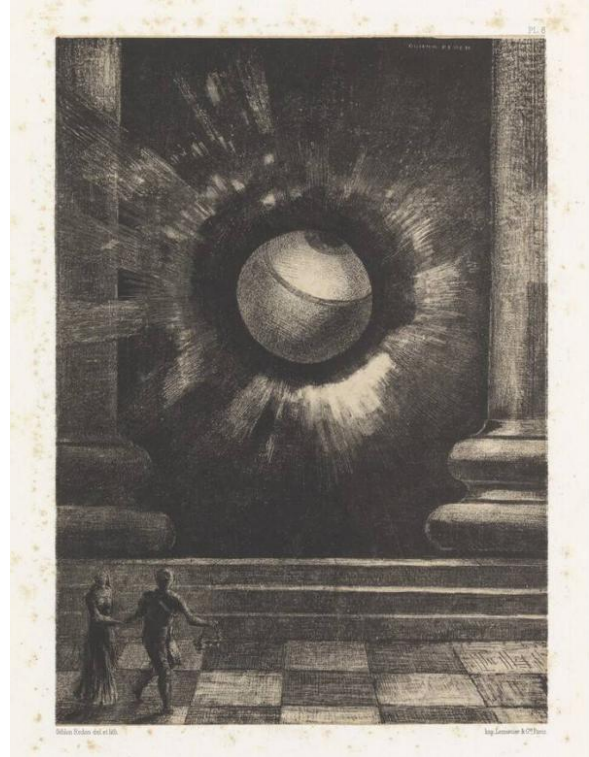


Fig. 4. Odilon Redon, *Vision* (1879), plate 8 from the series *Dans Le Rêve*, lithograph, 27.4 x 19.8 cm (sheet), Art Institute of Chicago.

Redon was slightly younger than Moreau and was both a painter and printmaker. Some of his most used drawing techniques were charcoal and pastel, as well as lithography in prints, to illustrate his fantastic and oneiric worlds. The subjects of his paintings were often inspired by nature and literature, and his style, marked by saturated colours, was strongly influenced by Oriental arts and religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, Japanese art such as Ukiyoe, and Persian miniature. His works exposed some parts of the unconscious mind and imaginary world. Redon, too, tended to depict more imaginary aesthetic objects instead of realistic objects. In his own words: "My originality consists in putting the logic of the visible to the service of the invisible". [22] He rejected both Realism and Impressionism because the former lacked imagination while the latter was too much based on emotion. He focused on exploration of humanity and its psyche to create his own artistic language. For his oneiric images, he is considered one of the pioneers of Surrealism. His most significant works

include *The Smiling Spider* (1887), *Closed Eyes* (1890), and *Cyclops* (1914).

Vision is plate 8 of Redon's lithographic series *Dans Le Rêve* (In the Dreams, 1879) (Fig. 4), which is an independent work. It is one of the most remarkable works of the Symbolist artist and his oneiric world. It is a lithograph print on ivory Chine on wove paper. The composition is centre-focused and has a simple layout, with a gigantic eyeball floating in the centre of the image. On the lower left corner are two small figures that emphasize the scale of the eye. Slightly further are three steps with two massive columns on the sides, provide the depth of the composition alongside the tiles, which also reveal a frontal perspective, although the central focal point is immersed in the darkness. The etched lines have a subtle effect on the print and reveal the texture of the different elements.

Although the treatment of figures is realistic, they are not the focus of the work but the Symbolism as a whole. The disproportionate size of the eyeball, which is pointing upwards, suggests spirituality and enigma. The two figures are hand in hand and seem frozen in their gestures. The profile of the woman can be recognized vaguely, while the man only shows his back. Their attention is fully attracted by the eyeball and a sense of awe is implied in their postures. Redon's genius makes the figures function as the hook that captures the attention towards the large eyeball and suck the viewers into the work, feeling themselves inside the vision. The black and white of the print enhances the mysterious atmosphere. Redon himself showed a preference for the colour grey, which he eloquently called "the soul of all colours" since it does not evoke sensual enjoyment but is more of an agent of mind. The source of light in this print is the floating eyeball, from which emanates beams of light that cast on the right column. The mysterious background is in complete darkness, luring and encouraging the viewer to step into it, perhaps as a symbol of infinity.

The subject of this print is about Redon's vision which is represented by an eyeball. The eye is a common symbol in the artist's work including *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1883), and *The Cyclops* (c. 1914), which may give of an unsettling feeling of a nightmare and was inspired by religion, mysticism and the thriller literary work by Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). The subject and the technique may also be influenced by Goya [23] and Moreau, [24] who was 14 years his senior. A huge spherical eye can symbolize a complete world of dreams, almost like a planet in its shape. The fact that the eye is turning towards the darkness is a further expression of the artist's curiosity about the enigmatic dream world, where the intention or the content can be hardly deciphered. Also related might be the title of plate 143 "The Eye like a Strange Balloon Mounts towards Infinity", from Redon's series *To Edgar Poe* (1882). Redon believed that the arts are inseparable and "true art lies in reality that is felt".

[25] He also thrived in the world of ambiguity and hidden meanings: "Like music my drawings transport us to the ambiguous world of the indeterminate". [26] Each plate of the work is a vision within a dream with a bizarrely juxtaposed scale, and a certain sense of disembodiment, which contribute to their symbolic meanings and the dream quality.

2.5 Salvador Dalí

Salvador Dalí (Salvador Domingo Felipe Jacinto Dalí i Domenech, Marqués de Púbol) was a Spanish painter, engraver, sculptor, scenographer and writer, and one of the most important Surrealist artists. Surrealism was hugely influenced by Freud's discovery of the subconscious mind and his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Dalí painted his dreams with extremely detailed and realistic painting technique and recorded grotesque oneiric worlds. His works became extremely popular and influential when he worked in America and became a cultural symbol of the 20th century. His art inspired the movie industry and generated many other branches of Surrealism. His most well-known works include *The Accommodations of Desire* (Las acomodaciones del deseo) (1929), *The Persistence of Memory* (*La persistencia de la memoria*) (1931), and *Lobster Telephone* (Teléfono langosta) (1936).

Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee (Fig. 5) was painted by Dalí in 1944 when the artist and his wife Gala were living in America. This work is typical of Surrealism, fully unfolding the essence of the Surrealist Manifesto since it depicts the state between dream and reality—"a second before waking". Also displayed in this painting are some of the theories about dreams proposed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), such as the concepts of "condensation" and "transformation".

The composition of the figure, animals and the objects form an upright triangle. On the foreground is shown a nude female figure—the artist's wife, Gala—hovering over a piece of land surrounded by water. Almost all the animals and objects are floating, which include a bee, a big and a small pomegranate, two tigers, a fish, two eggs and a nautilus, and a gun pointing at the woman. Not floating, however, is the elephant with an obelisk on its back and extremely long and thin legs, which are in physical contact with the water surface. The volume is almost entirely provided by the intensely naturalistic figures and animals, while the background is rather uniform and flat. It is more like multiple scenes condensed in one image, creating a sense of stirred time and space. Also, it may resemble some features of dreams since the brain generate the objects near the dreamer with richer details, while the distant view tends to be ideal and surreal and would only come in life when getting nearer. With the remarkably realistic contour of the figures, this "hand-painted dream photograph"—as Dalí referred to his paintings—forms an illusionistic reality that is unique

to the artist. The palette is made mainly of the three primary colours—blue, yellow, red—and some neutral colours such as black, grey and ochre. Colours like blue and red are commonly used for the motif “dream” and can have symbolic meanings.



Fig. 5. Salvador Dalí, *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second before Waking* (1944), oil on panel, 51 x 41 cm, Madrid Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza. (Scala Archives Image Library)

The treatment of figures is picturesque and extremely expressive. Despite the stretched limbs of the female figure, she looks balanced and has no dramatic expressions on her face, which resembles the Greek classical tradition in the depiction of figures. On the contrary, the two tigers show a dramatic attitude with their crouching positions and wide-open mouths, the tusks and claws baring, which makes them even more intimidating. The depiction of the figure and the objects is also highly skilful, distinguishing different textures—the glowing nude skin, and the rough side of the rocky ground. The colours used are bright and harmonious with an ethereal quality, spread evenly in the composition, with almost no visible brushstrokes. The brightness and intensity of the colours may implicitly indicate the urge of lust. The transition of the colours is very smooth and natural, especially the treatment in the sky on the background and the shadows of the floating objects. The colours usually offer symbolic insights; for instance, the sky blue is commonly used by Surrealists like Dalí, Miró (1893-1983), Chirico (1888-1978) and symbolists like Vassily Kandinsky (1866-1944)—particularly in his painting *Sky Blue*, 1940—to represent a state of dream

or the unconscious. The light spread evenly on the panel, coming from the upper right corner, enhances the three-dimensional feature of the objects depicted, making them even more realistic to stress the vivid feeling of dreams.

The dream is a fundamental theme in Surrealism, which composes the artists' approaches to their creations and expresses their individualities and the artistic manifesto most efficiently. Dreams depicted by the Surrealists are usually their personal illusions in which some recurring motives may appear and are associated with the artists' life experience. Since they are deeply influenced by Freudian theories, most of the motives have sexual connotations and are erotic. For this particular painting, the bee—representing pollination—and the pomegranates—which have lots of seeds, representing the Virgin Mary in Spanish culture, indicates reproductive power—may refer to fertility. The long-lived yelloweye rockfish may represent vitality. First appearing in this painting, the weird thin-legged elephant is a special motif which Dalí valued—"The elephant is a distortion in space", showing the paranoiac-critical mind of the artist. The spindly and arachnid legs, also being described "multi-jointed, almost invisible legs of desire" [27] are the "contrasting weight and space" to the conventional image of the bulky elephants which symbolizes power, to give a sense of paradoxical weightlessness. The obelisk on the elephants back, probably inspired by Gian Lorenzo Bernini's (1598-1680) sculpture bases in the front of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome, is a phallic symbol in the Dalinian universe, and it provides weight. The elements in this work seemingly form a cycle, with both explicit and implicit connections, transforms from life to death. My may be interpreted as follows: the bee—the cause of everything—pollinated the pomegranate and produced the fruit. As the fruit matured and split, the colour and the shape of the seeds baring resembled fish eggs and the yelloweye rockfish somehow in the artists' mind. The intimidating fish transformed to the ferocious tigers and the tigers generated hunting which is represented by a rifle. At last, the rifle is the last stimulus that wakes the dreamer. Or, it is even possible that the nude woman is not the dreamer and the entire work is painted from the dreamer's perspective. Above all, it is difficult to decipher exactly what Dalí meant but we can trace some of the intentions and inspiration from the incredibly elaborate details.

3. CONCLUSION

From the analysis of these capital works, we can conclude that oneiric art is and will always be a vital part in Art History. It allows us not only to better understand the different historical contexts and cultures from a closer and more thorough point of view, but also contributes to discover the inner minds of the great masters, their valuable visions and interpretations of the world from the

most personal and intimate perspective. Through the dreams depicted in these artworks, we view the various styles and art movements emerging in history, permitting us to analyse the states of mind of their authors, influenced both by their personal experience and the political and historical context of their time. The artistic intentions, techniques and experiments combined with the wisdom of these great artists have inspiring values for contemporary artists and art historians. The aesthetic significance of oneiric art is also essential for the public, who will see itself reflected in these scenes, creating a unique trip through history and into the artist's mind.

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