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Art

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“The Last Judgement”

Word count

Influencing the Last Judgement

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The last judgement in the Bible is thought to be one of the major events that will occur in the Christian faith. The biblical event occurs after the second coming of Christ, and it is the final and eternal judgement of God for all of humanity. Frans Franken depiction of the Last Judgement in his painting is one of the many depictions whether it be other artworks, books, or even movies. The most like Frans Franken's *The Last Judgement* is the piece by Michelangelo, *The Last Judgement*, which also shows the main motifs of the painting: Jesus, heaven, hell, and the judged.

Frans Franken II (1581-1642) was a Flemish painter who painted during the 17th century. Franken was a versatile painter, and created altarpieces, painted furniture panels, and made small pictures on cabinets. He played a pivotal role in developing Flemish art specifically in the innovation of genre painting and the introduction of new types of subjects. One unique genre that Franken helped develop was the "monkey scene" or "singerie", which portrayed monkeys acting or dressing up like humans. Franken was particularly skilled in painting the human figure, and even collaborated with other artists, painting figures in compositions for landscapes, architecture, and flower painters. Allegorical paintings were also a large portion of Franken's paintings such as his work *Allegory on the Abdication of Emperor Charles V in Brussels*, which depicted an old and sickly Charles V dividing his empire with his two successors Ferdinand I and Phillip II.

The 17th century art popular art movements were the Baroque art movement and Classicism, where the former clearly reflected in Frans Franken's work. Baroque art was characterized by contrast, movement, detail, color, and grandeur. Baroque murals and paintings were found in 17th century period churches and cathedrals because the church realized the

artwork could invoke emotion and give a sense of the church's authority. It is likely that Franken had also been commissioned by the church to produce this painting, as he was known for painting large altarpieces later in his life. You can see influences of the Baroque movement in the expression of the figures in the painting, the portrayal of movement and aliveness of the figures, and the details of the figures (Fleming, 1946). The figures on the left in what represents heaven have an expression of contentment and relief, while the figures on the right show signs of pain and fear as they are sent to hell. The combination of them evokes awe and fear of not being able to obtain salvation and going to hell. The grandeur of the painting also paints the picture of the church's authority and power, and their importance for the sinners who would experience this fate.

One of the biggest influences of this artwork is Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement*, which also shares the same name with this piece and is based on the same Biblical event. A lot of the elements are shared by Franken's painting and Michelangelo's, in both the theme, character's embodied, style, and specifically the musculature form of the figures. Michelangelo's signature style is the musculature form of his figures especially on his famous sculpture on *David*. David was usually depicted as someone weak before his fight with Goliath, but Michelangelo subverted the norm and depicts David as a heroic muscular figure. An addition, a lot of the character's overlap between the two paintings including the main figure of Christ in the middle, the Virgin, and the demons punishing the sinners (Musei Vaticani). As Christ and the Virgin are central figures in the Roman Catholic faith, it would make sense they would appear in the last judgement. However, I believe that the inclusion of the Virgin and the Saints on Michelangelo's fresco are there to just to show they are important figures to the faith, they are not the ones who

will be judging the sinners. Christ as he is placed in the center is the one both artists place in authority in the paintings, and he will be the one to decide the last judgement.

Frans Franken's *The Last Judgement* is a Baroque and slightly classic piece, inspired by Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement*. The painting features the cross central to the painting, with Christ on top with the Virgin and St. John beside him. On the bottom of the painting the foreground is split into two sides: the left portraying heaven and the believers, and the right portraying hell and the sinners. There are two prominent figures in the foreground, one being the standing nude female on the left who represents *Medici Venus*, and the figure on the ground on the right with a snake wrapped around his leg who is an allusion to *Vatican Laöcoon* (Nevola). The figure of Venus is in the same pose as the 1.53 m tall marble sculpture of the Roman goddess of love. The figure of Laöcoon is also a reference to another marble statue called *Laöcoon and His Sons*. Laöcoon was a Trojan priest who tried to warn the Trojans that the Trojan Horse might have been a trap and was attacked by snakes to silence him. The inclusion of both figures might have just been a reference to the marble statues and classicism, rather than relating to the Christian theme. The meaning of the artwork is to represent the final judgement of humanity, and to remind the viewers of the painting that either salvation or eternal damnation is waiting for them depending on how they act. The deliberation of showing the emotion and pain in the faces of the people going to hell with the Baroque techniques, makes the scene more realistic and causes one to really think about their way of life. In contrast, the content expression of those going to heaven, portrays something the audience would want for themselves and the ultimate reward for believing in Christ.

In conclusion, *The Last Judgement* by Frans Franken II has been influenced by many sources. The Flemish painter was influenced by the art of his time, which was largely the

Baroque and Classicism movement, but also specialized in drawing figures like his predecessor Michelangelo. Michelangelo's similarly named fresco was also a large inspiration for this piece, and shared similar figures, themes, and style. The meaning of the artwork was a clear meaning, it's either viewed as a reward for the believers of Christ or a threat on what would happen if you don't believe in Christ.

Works Cited

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