

Beauty: a grotesque old woman by quentin massys

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Since antique times beauty as the concept interested philosophers and artists of different schools. Thinkers attempt to measure, calculate, describe an absolute beauty, but it continues to escape notice of pedantic attempts to summarize and submit it, leading thinkers to the common point of view – beauty is subjective and ephemeral issue. What appears to be perfect in the eyes of one person, may be ugly to another, and a variety of shapes and forms of beauty inspires artists to create great works, raising question about what is beauty and why people consider something as beautiful? What is the main criterion of beauty? Quentin Massys in his work A Grotesque Old Woman toss a challenge to the general perception of beauty.

A satirical look at the appearance of the woman compels attention to the key aspect in understanding of beauty as the aesthetic concept that should be formed individually rather than to be imposed by society. Appearance of the women depicted in the painting cause a sensation of antipathy during the first view. Nevertheless, after further examination the portrait reveals its intrinsic meaning. Dubious manifestation of fashion as a false mas of ugliness and unnaturalness can be understood from the image of a massive hat that Duchess put on. Disharmony permeates the entire portrait. Wrinkles and folds on the woman's body emphasize importance of youth and freshness as the natural criteria of beauty by Jane Martin.

Facial features are horrible in combination. Moreover, revealing dress looks irrelevant and ridiculous, since it is worn on the old woman. However, portraits in the arts of the Middle Ages were made according to the certain standard, so the portrait of Duchess is unique (Treier, 2007). Therefore, revealed individuality could be understood as the inner beauty. There is

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another reason, why the painting is beautiful and unique - there is no false beauty in it. Rose in Duchess' hands deserves special attention.

This small bud seems vulnerable and fragile. The image of this rose can be analyzed from different points of view: on the one hand, a rose can symbolize the former beauty of Duchess, which she tries to carry in the twilight of her years. On the other hand, the bud symbolize inner beauty of the woman, unnoticed, unexpanded bud of her inner, spiritual beauty, kindness that she tries to convey to the viewer. The art movement, named caricature has much in common with this painting (Wilson, 2009). Massys tried to reveal the character of this woman by hyperbolizing her features.

This art movement is a distorting mirror for society that helps emphasize misapprehension hidden in a human mind, helps to perceive this painting not only as a portrait, but also as the inner world of this person, highlighting spiritual qualities as the main criterion of beauty. In conclusion, it should be said that generalization of criteria that should identify the beauty is impossible, since the individual perception of beauty is the only possible. However, naturalness, harmony and inner sense tend to develop eternal ideals. The painting A Grotesque Old Woman is ugly from the first sight as disharmony of her features is hyperbolized. The Duchess looks ridiculous and manlike.

Her large hat looks as the attempt to hide natural disproportion under the doubtful mask of fashion. Nevertheless, the portrait depicts her inner beauty, kindness, and charity. Her soft glance and the small flower in her

hands reveal her natural intention. She tries to bring the beauty to the world, society that cannot identify the beauty of her soul under the thick shell of grotesque.