

Visual Analysis of 'The Last Supper' Artworks & Parody's Effect on Them

Abstract

This essay aims to analyze and compare the visual context of the artworks with 'The Last Supper' as their subject matter created by various artists at different epochs of times across centuries in various styles and methods, and concludes with an analysis of parody's effect on them.

The author intends to answer the main research question which is: Has 'The Last Supper' been the favorite theme of artists merely during Christianity's peak when religious affairs were of paramount importance or it is still a favored one for the painters, print makers and photographers even after the decline of focus on religious issues? Then the paper continues to explain whether choosing such subject by different artists across the world leads to a unified result, or it yields diverse ones based on the social and cultural perspectives of the creators and the variety of their cultures, customs and traditions.

Anyways, the research findings indicate that as time elapsed, affected by the diversity of cultures and human societies from one hand and the technical developments and progresses on the other, the subject underwent significant changes unprecedented in many of the foregoing eras. Thus, specific differences and similarities aroused between these works of art calling for more deliberation upon.

The study then reaches this conclusion that in the beginning, the subject was merely religious. But afterwards, it developed into a paradoxical issue to be followed by a parody which is "apparently" a satirical and humorous perception of a very solemn religious issue. In fact, parody is not always employed to burlesque or reject the values of artworks; on the contrary, some artists apply it in the form of tragedy or comedy to awaken the society and inform it.

As believers in Christianity – particularly western artist believers of the faith living in different epochs of time – have paid great attention to 'The Last Supper' and as a result, started visualizing this tragedy or lament using different techniques in various styles. They have created artworks that not only narrate the story of this tragic event but also reflect the depth of their individual religious and spiritual philosophies.

Another group of artists have made use of the subject for propaganda purposes. In this case, the artwork does not present any type of mystical or divine belief; it is mainly created as commissioned by religious leaders to be displayed in churches and cathedrals of the time or in aristocratic mansions.

Yet there is another group of artists who have "apparently" ridiculed 'The Last Supper' and represented it paradoxically (in contrast and against public views) in the form of parody.

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Hence, so as to understand the role of time and place and various cultures, traditions and customs of different nations in the creation of artworks as well as the social perspectives which play a powerful, definite role in this regard and finally, to become acquainted with the core implications and meanings hidden in these works of art, the author briefly addresses the research questions, reviews literature and explains the research methodology, to be followed by elaboration on the terms 'parody', 'catacomb' and 'cubiculum'.

Subsequently, he expounds the process of formation of this subject during the olden times and accordingly, endeavors to make a visual comparison of different artworks. Eventually, he touches upon the issue of the effects of parody on those works of art known as 'The Last Supper'.

Conducted through desk study of library resources and use of some reliable internet sources and databases, the paper has taken a descriptive, analytical and comparative approach to deal with a variety of inexplicit factors.

Moreover, the paper lays emphasis on taking an analytical approach to elucidate and establish the relations clearly. It particularly highlights the role of diversity of cultures, sociological, traditional and ethnic viewpoints in this regard.

In fact, the analysis has been established upon the study of 'The Last Supper' theme reflected on murals, sculptures and easel paintings, mosaics, miniatures, printmaking, photographs and few cinematic creations to present a well-defined upshot by finding resemblances and differences as well as the inspirations taken from parody or humor - known as burlesque – within these works of art.

Keywords: The Last Supper, Leonardo Da Vinci, Salvador Dali, Parody, Emil Nolde, Stanley Spencer.

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