

## Fantasy Art

“The fantasy illustrator takes the pictorial conventions of realistic portrayal and then manipulates and inverts them to create marvellous worlds for which there can be no earthly analogy” 1

### Introduction

Fantasy art has been a part of all human society throughout history. It is found in ‘abnormal’ forms, folklore, mythology, fairytales, religion and science fiction. Fantasy art is a genre that has evolved through the past centuries. Many could say the start could be found in surrealism, however mythological stories are based in fantasy, as it helps you tap into your unconscious mind and explore meanings to things you could never imagine. This essay will help us understand what leads us to present fantasy art factors such as films, media ... etc. may have effected this.

Fantasy has always existed in people’s thoughts throughout time. All ideas and stories of fantasy have been developed and shown through art and fantasy literature both have always been and still are very strongly linked. With recent hits of ‘new age’ themes and a high interest in fantasy. Fantasy art is now one of the most profitable areas in art. Fantasy artists, great modern artists enjoy the great fame inside their field, yet they are often unknown and unnoticed outside it.

Fantasy art looks really easy and fun but it is one of the most challenging genres to depict successfully. To create a fantasy you take an untrue element and mix it with a reality, that does sound easy, but the hardest part is mix the two elements in such a way that they look very convincing to the audience. It is easy to pick up a pencil and paper and draw up with a man with horns, but to make the sky feel like an eerie atmosphere, to tone the man up to make him look like an overgrown ape is actually challenging as you do not have a primary source to work from. Fantasy art is mainly done through the imagination. The way in which artists accomplish these feats will be investigated, as well as the artists who have surpassed simply reaching these goals to create truly spectacular work.

### **High Fantasy**

“I mean by a picture a beautiful romantic of something that never was, never will be – in a light better than any light that ever shone – in a land no one can define or remember, only desire” 2

“Fantasy may be almost all things to all men” 3

It is hard to describe what fantasy is exactly to a pinpoint as it is a very broad subject, but to break it down for us to understand it better there are two main fantasies, high fantasy and low fantasy.

High fantasy, in terms of art and literature, is one of other worlds and other worldly creatures. They include a lot of fantastic elements and gain more credibility in that these other worlds don’t need to adhere to the science and rules of the primary world. Fantastic events and creatures may be everyday occurrence. Hence low fantasy

includes all mythology, fairytales and fiction that includes fanciful and non-rational phenomena, but exists within our world.

### **Realism and Fantasy**

The use of a secondary world is just one element of high fantasy to achieve the effect of creating something so fantastic in theme, but plausible enough to not only be dismissed, but to fool the audience into thinking its real and there is a world out there in existence of such fantasy.

“Realism and naturalism, for example, are defined by those elements of the real world they retain; fantasy, on the other hand, is defined by those aspects of reality it denies by representation that are not merely improbable or untrue...but patently false”<sup>5</sup>

For many artists drawing a fantasy creature only gives out half the effect, the other half is in the ‘fact’. There has to be an element of the picture where the viewer can find a common ground e.g. a beach stones, a window, a cloudy sky etc. If one element of the picture is ‘grounded’ the artist can safely put out the picture and hope to lure them into a false reality.

“The base line of reality, therefore, is always implicit in even the most errant fantasy, and in the tension between these solid, familiar unalterable givens of experience and the particular denials of the element that constitute the fiction is generates the special delight that fantasy afford us”<sup>6</sup>

Artists tend to use humans to tie together fantasy and reality, the basic human form is altered, many features added on, mammals are tend to be used a lot in high fantasy realms, fairies, mermaids, centaurs, anamorphic beings, the artist always leaves enough human form to tie us back to reality.

The relatively new occurrence of the “secondary worlds” has given artists vast freedom to create within the theme of fantasy. Elements from their imagination, from myth, from stereotypical fantasy merge and grow to create vivid new worlds on canvas, on paper and more recently digitally.

If an artist had to draw a certain world whether it is primary or secondary, they would conform to it. For example, if all fantasy existed only within Tolkien’s secondary world, then an artist could never create a fantasy creature that did not conform to its vivid and strict descriptions. Take for example Tolkiens world, all hobbits painted must have hairy feet, all elves are tall with slightly pointed ears and both creatures are quite small in figure. Artists do not specifically have to conform to the exact size and feature of the creature, they can express themselves freely but they can alter some of the elements, for example hobbits may be slightly taller than elves but they have the distinguished feature of the hairy feet and the elves keep their distinguished feature of the ears but the size or the build can be altered, all false elements can be explained simply by the statement, “in that world, that is the way they are”.

### **Mythology as the Origin of Fantasy**

“The concepts and turns of mind in “religion”, “myth”, “romance”, “chronicle”, “epic” and “mysticism”, among so many other systems, have frequently been rationalisations for the impossible, facades behind which fantasy has brooded unnoticed and unexplored”<sup>7</sup>

In the past our ability to create a secondary world was not always present. Fantasy art did not evolve through secondary world, because there were none. They were created through the depiction of low fantasy, those fantasies that existed through our primary world. Fairy tales, mythology, folklore and legend have always been and still are popular themes of our foundations of fantasy art, through time these tales have evolved and expanded massively and now been adopted in the new worlds of High fantasy.

Myths in fantasy art go right back to cave drawings of imagined beasts, gods and mythical creatures. Mythology arose from a need to explain the unexplainable in the world around us, and the use of art gave the myths a permanence and credence that often only a visual aid can.

A lack of knowledge meant that people made up their own (some can say an exaggerated) version. For example, overgrown lizards could be mistaken by dragons or dinosaurs, horses with horns could lead to unicorns, innocent creatures.

“Such was the pride and ferocity of unicorns that they could not be taken alive. Yet mortals – more prideful still – liked to think they might hold the beautiful beast captive, and so they wove tapestry prisons to contain the unicorns image”<sup>8</sup>

It is merely difficult to tell where myth ends and fantasy begins. Mythological creatures and characters have been depicted in art throughout history, the creatures of myth being, the Harpies, Cyclops, Sirens and Nymphs, the gods of the Pantheos, the Asgard, the Tuathe de Dannon, of all mythology, have been taken from their original context and cultural homes and been given a new home under the broad fantasy genre. It is not the link to mythology that is important to recognised, but the link to all stories. Fantasy art has evolved through the depiction of stories, whether they were at the time believed to be real or simply were thought to be fairy tales.

### ***Hieronymous Bosch – (c 1450-1516)***

For some, though the depiction of myth and stories was just given by description. The main turning point from myth and tales was that artists used these stories and mixed them with their own imagination; to their own work Hieronymous Bosch did this well.

Bosch has been seen as one of the earliest of modern fantasy art. His artwork juxtaposed strange scenes and hellish images. Take for example “Garden of Earthly delights” the themes were linked with religion and myth, while his interpretations were both unique at the time and the precision and detail of the hallucinating images noteworthy. While his work does not contain the stereotypical images and creatures of modern fantasy, it is through his imagination and will adapt, yet convert stories to his own art that marks his work as a turning point into fantasy art.

## **Fairytales and folklore in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

While fairytales and folklore were popular through the middle ages, they experienced a huge renaissance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Britain were mainly puritans and did not accept these fairytales and folklores.

“Folk tales were deemed to be crude, perverse, frivolous and uncomfortable pagan”<sup>9</sup>

“The acceptance and rapid growth of fairytales as a fit subject matter for literature, painting and the stage from the 1820’s to the 1840’s and its survival until at least the first world war is one of the most remarkable phenomena of 19<sup>th</sup> century culture”<sup>20</sup>

Fairies and fairylands have been derived from the fantasy that came from existing stories. The art and illustrations were linked to literature. Fairy has broken away from fantasy and have made a genre of its own, Shakespeare and other authors have been a major influence of the time, but artists also created new worlds for fairies entirely of their own imagination.

Soon fantasy art had been a new focal point in society due to the fact that it had been a new trend and was often seen as a rebellion against the social values of the time.

There are many artists that created an entire genre of “Victorian fairy art”, some of the other artists include Richard Dadd, Richard Doyle, Frances Danby, Joseph Noel Paton, John Astor Fitzgerald, Daniel Maclise, Thomas and Eleanor Fortesque Brickdale. While fairies were making a genre of their own and producing massively artists of fantasy themes painted works rich in nostalgia, in particular, the art of the pre-Raphaelitism. Their work was based in romance, legend and myth, with a beautiful and dreamy aesthetic and fine craftsmanship to counter the ugly side of the industrial age, because at this time in Britain was booming with new technology, especially at the English countryside.

Fairy art became more and more popular, many people had fairy art décor all around the their house in different forms for example wallpapers, draperies, ceramics, stained glass, metalwork etc however only middle class people could afford this, fairytales were at a high point so authors took advantage of this and produced more and more fantasy art, these artists include Arthur Rackman, Edmund Dulac, Kay Nielsen, Jessie M. King, Warwick Goble, Elenor Vera Boyle, and the Robinsons brothers.

## **Tolkiens world**

The fairy vogue soon died down, but the mark it left on the fantasy world is remarkable. Fantasy in literature and art had been influential throughout history and it still continues to do so, movies such as Harry Potter and The Lord of The Rings which continue this trend of fantasy genres that take in mind that they started from myths and stories.

The key event in fantasy genre had to be because of Tolkien. He created a whole fantasy world including fantasy races, mythology, religion, language and landscape that now are often taken as the standard description for fantasy elements. Tolkien did

a great deal more for fantasy than just provide inspiration for artists. In the literary field, his work was considered worthy of the title of literature, and being so closely linked, the new found regard of fantasy literature was also enjoyed by fantasy art.

“A great many, indeed appear to owe little or nothing directly to Tolkien, and some writers may be said to surpass him in imaginative power or philosophical concept. The point is, rather that Tolkien made fantasy “respectable” 12

Tolkien had an enormous impact on fantasy art by inspiring others, not only by his own secondary world, but to also create their own realms of fantasy. Throughout history fantasy art has depicted thorough stories and myths, and now modern fantasy art takes its place on the book covers of modern fantasy author. It seems that fantasy in words and fantasy in images are hard to separate.

Although fantasy art is a very popular genre we do not see much of this in modern galleries. The Internet however has a wide variety of many artists fantasy artwork. A very famous website that view a lot of this artwork is Elfwood (now with more than 10'000 artists) 14. Many people are making more money with selling more and more by selling fantasy products and artwork, such products include Lord of The Rings, Harry Potter films, comics, computer games, role playing games, collectable trading card games and many more, fantasy art is found in more and more mediums, under more themes and in more places at society than ever before.

Fantasy art is said to be more of an illustration than art, purely because it is said to be made for no more reason than to please the eye. Fantasy artists, like fine artists create what they enjoy and what they are interested in. It is the popularity of the genre among the general public, because of fantasy being such a popular theme, many modern artist like to label their work and fantasy even though it many not be just for the sake of making it look more saleable to the general public. Almost all fantasy artists, even though they use their won ideas; most of their work is commercially illustrated by the stories of fantasy authors. It is not so much the artist taking the ideas of the authors, but using the ideas of the authors to make a work of their own. The past and the present have a very clear likeness. In the past artists created images though myths and in present days artists make images through the stories of authors.

“If fantasy is powerfully presented or realised, it can produce an imprint on our imagination deep enough to give it a measure of truth or reality.” 17

With the use of new mediums artists have a more and more wider base to create upon therefore making their art even more successful than those of fine artists.

### **Modern artists**

When the word fantasy is said a clear image pops up in peoples minds. A handful of artists are greatly known through their work, all of them very unique in their way of expressing the style, vision and their success in depiction of fantasy. A number of these artists will be examined in terms of their work, their influences and their effect on the world of fantasy and illustration.

## **Vallejo and Bell**

Boris Vallejo and Julie Bell, the husband and wife team whose art is so incredible similar to each other in the fantasy genre. Their use of imagination is so wide and creative they can create photo-realism. They can depict a woman in all blue metallic flesh, in an alien landscape with bizarre creatures, and have appeared to be reality. Where most fantasy is often incorporates human figures, for Vallejo and Bell like to produce the perfect human figure in a sensual form. This is shown in most of their work.

Most criticism of modern fantasy is its tendency towards the depiction of poorly dressed women, often in compromising positions. Fantasy art has been branded as exploitative, sexist and cheap. The rise in fame of Julie Bell has been a great blow for these stereotypes, and now these female forms are being portrayed not by men but by woman. This is somewhat a insignificant of the sex of the artist has allowed that art to be seen for it's worth in celebrating the beauty and strength of the female form. The realism of the art of both of these artist are quite remarkable as they are really close to being real life, but they do not stick to the norm of making images like elves or fairies. They tend to look at heroes and heroines in particular, a new branch to fantasy art. The people that inspired both of these artists are "Vermeer, Rembrandt, Leonardo – during my early years I used to study the works of such masters again and again."18. Vallejo and Bell have a unique style that is not been seen throughout history. They have a great strength in their work, have a great attention to detail and use very rich colours to represent characters.

## **Judy Schmitz**

Judy Schmitz is contemporary artist whose work can be viewed on Elfwood, the biggest fantasy site on the internet. From looking at her work we see the connection to the high fantasy art. She builds on Tolkien's secondary world. "Middle earth" We can see the clear link through the dragons and elves. Schmitz has a very creative mind and doesn't fail to deceive us with the great amount of detail she uses in her work. By looking at her work it feels as if movies like Jurassic Park are real. The scales on the dragons are so immense with detail, it's no wonder why we are fooled. She uses a lot of mixed mediums. Being very young in age she uses the newest technology to compose much of her work. These which digitally enhance the work and tends make fantasy art seem more of an illustration than art. Some can say they loose the sense of individuality as you can cheat in some of your work by using some effects. By looking at the work of Schmitz we can clearly see that is not the case. Vallejo and Bell use quite similar techniques to that of Schmitz but he can clearly see the difference in influences, imagination and manipulation.

A few artists were named when I asked her which artist had the most influence over her "(QUOTE)". Although Tolkiens ideas influence many newfound artist Schmitz did not have the same influence. "(QUOTE)"

## **Conclusion**

Fantasy is essential to human life; its imagination helps us be more creative and lets our mind grown. It would be really hard for us to imagine there is no world other than

that upon which we live. Using elements of our real combined with fantasy gives us a place where we can create and examine aspects of life in general.

“The human mind, that is, in its ability to imagine an existence other than that one which it experiences, is permitted to perceive, as if from the outsider, the existence in which it is actually immersed.” 22

So fantasy as a theme isn't simply pure escapism, although it is a definite factor, but also a tool for analysing the real world. In depictions of other worlds and other worldly beings, whether utopian or dystopian, it gives humans an opportunity to compare our existence to another, to see both its flaws and value.

“Fantasy... always exists in a symbiotic relationship with reality and its conventionalised representation, depending on it for its existence and at the same time commenting upon it, criticizing it, and illumination it.”23

There have been many great critics on the importance of myth and fantasy, among which Joseph Campbell stands out. He also notes the importance of artists calling them the “shamans and myth-makers”24 of our modern world. The modern artists of fantasy now have a great task to bear, they must keep alive the themes and magic inherent in the old myths that helped form society, as we know it.

Fantasy art is only now starting to be seen as an area worth analysis, and debate worthy of academic value. Courses in fantasy literature are now found in many colleges and universities, and while fantasy art is still often seen as purely commercial, in this way it enjoys great success. It is more widespread and has a larger fan base than other forms of art. The very fact that modern fine art purposefully detaches itself from the general public, whereas the general public embrace, and are embraced by fantasy art, is evident of its history and close ties to civilisation, and hopefully, it's continued importance and growth as an artistic genre to society.

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Where Mythological Art ends and Fantasy Art begins...

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