



Venus, Cupid, Folly, and Time (The Exposure of Luxury)

Agnolo di Cosmo (Bronzino)

1546

Oil on wood

National Gallery, London

Agnolo di Cosmo (1503-1572), referred to by the name Bronzino was a Florentine portrait painter. Based in Florence he often painted portraits and mythological scenes of figures and symbolism.

Bronzino painted in a Mannerist style. The characteristics of the style placed a lot of emphasis on being stylish, cultured, and elegant.<sup>1</sup> His paintings, like The Exposure of Luxury, often are filled with symbolism and include acute attention to detail of the heads, hands, and feet. These are considered as evidence of artistic skill in the Mannerist style.

The Exposure of Luxury is a painting that was designed as a puzzle, and incorporates symbols, and objects through mythological ideals. Cupid fondles his Mother Venus which is the focus of our attention, while Folly intently clenches a handful of roses to shower their foolish pleasure. Time, appears in the upper right corner as he draws back the curtain to reveal their incestuous play, unaware that their love is of a destructive nature.<sup>2</sup> Other less prominent figures in the painting include, Envy and Inconstancy. At Venus' feet, lie the masks, symbolizing deceit, which was a favored symbolic device of the Mannerists. Interestingly the symbolic meaning of the painting suggests that “love-

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<sup>1</sup> Christin J. Mamiya, & Fred S. Kleiner. (2005). *Gardners Art Through The Ages, Twelfth Edition*. USA: Wadsworth / Thompson learning.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Cole. (1994). *The Renaissance*. London: Dorling Kindersley Limited.

accompanied by envy and plagued by inconstancy is foolish and that lovers will discover its folly in time.”<sup>3</sup>

The Exposure of Luxury was painted in 1540 but not exhibited until 1546. This painting now belongs to the collection of The National Gallery in London. Stylistically this painting is evident of an influence from Michelangelo’s style, and this technique of painting in the stylized manner can be shown throughout painting in the High Renaissance.

The Exposure of Luxury is a work measuring approximately 5’ 1” x 4’ 8<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>” and is an oil painting on wood.

[292 words]

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<sup>3</sup> Christin J. Mamiya, & Fred S. Kleiner. (2005). *Gardners Art Through The Ages, Twelfth Edition*. USA: Wadsworth / Thompson learning.