

Judge's Commentary

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Une étude sur Odilon Redon, *Dans le Rêve* (1879) : l'interprétation de l'ambiguïté des portraits

Nakajima's study presented a new interpretation of Odilon Redon's debut lithographic series *In the Dream* (*Dans le Rêve*, 1879). While a number of previous studies have investigated the image sources for various elements of this print series, they have remained as fragmented comments spread across a wide array of viewpoints, including visual, literary, legendary, evolutionary theory and physiognomy, with no unifying thread across the whole album.

Nakajima used an iconographic study approach and referred first to the photographs and illustrations found in the anthropological and theory of evolution publications of Redon's era. From these materials she discerned a close connection between the faces seen in plates 1 through 4 and period-concepts of primitive man or savages. She discerned that through this usage Redon presented faces of barbarians or inferiors that contrast with those of Western civilization. She also discerned a connection with psychiatry in the facial images found in plates 6 through 10, indicating that Redon used the facial types of different forms of mentally ill patients. Then she tried to answer two questions, why Redon introduced the facial characteristics of such marginalized figures that deviate from the normal or civilized, and regardless of such factors, whether these prints carry a sense of aesthetic saintliness or divinity.

Nakajima considered that Redon had a special affinity with such social outsiders, given his own suffering from epilepsy as a child and later marriage to a Creole woman, someone from a culture outside the mainstream of Western norms. She believes that he then conflated those sentiments with his use of photographs of hysteria patients of the extremely influential psychiatrist of the

day, Jean Marie Charcot, as saintly expressions evoking a sense of religious ecstasy.

Nakajima's research sought out published illustrations and photographs that resemble Redon's works, noted the possibility that he referred to those images, and then indicated the high probability that he was interested in those other disciplines. In this regard her evidence is persuasive and accords with the intellectual interests and trends of Redon's day.

During the latter half of the 19th century, the display of "primitive people" from around the globe at world expositions heightened interest in anthropology and ethnology, while interest in the workings of the human consciousness and spirit was concurrently leading to advances in research on dreams and mental illness. It is well known that large numbers of illustrations were included in related publications, and we can agree that Redon created his own images through the use of such imagery. Undoubtedly the question of how to consider such an existence was also an important topic for consideration by the intelligentsia of the day. These factors all reveal how Redon's vision was closely linked to the issues of the day.

Overall, Nakajima's research, through her reconsideration of Redon's arts, using imagery from anthropological and medical fields, can be highly praised for its originality in clarifying the duality of Redon's aesthetics and his conflation of the irrational and the sacred.

Conversely, we can also offer the opinion that her evidence of resemblance between presented sources and Redon's imagery is not always convincing. The question remains of a composition's overall meaning in instances where a face is not the principal motif, and the desire for more specific proof that Redon in fact had access to, or awareness of, the source materials cited.

Despite these caveats, Nakajima's study is a superb work in terms of its references to numerous preceding studies, its intricate organization and logical

cohesiveness, and its breaking of new ground on the subject from an original vantage point.

For these reasons we have awarded the *Bijutsushi* Article Prize to Ms. Nakajima.