Portrait of Fyodor Dostoyevsky: An Analysis of Art

Posted on May 9, 2018

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The following paper analyzes the artistic aspects of the above-given art piece titled "*Portrait of the Author Feodor Dostoyevsky*" painted by Vasily Grigorevich Perov. The portrait was painted in 1872 and carries the underlying approach of realism. It was made on canvas with oil. Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky was born in 1821 and is widely known as the most celebrated Russian writer. He wrote several short stories, essays, novels, and different pieces of philosophy and journalism (Perov; WikiArt).

Dostoevsky, Perov, and Russian Realism

"Crime and Punishment," "The Idiot," "The Brothers Karamazov," and "The Gambler" are the most eminent works. Dostoevsky explored the essence of human psychology in the chaotic societal, spiritual, and political environment of the 19th century in Russia and elaborated on the religious, realistic, and philosophical dimensions of that era. Meanwhile, Vasily Grigorevich Perov was born in 1834 and was a Russian artist who painted the prominent personalities of the Russian realist movement; he was also acknowledged as the pioneer of Peredvizhnik. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, owns the subject portrait of Dostoevsky.

The Commission and Historical Context

Before analyzing the art elements of the portrait, it is imperative to know the context of the artwork. This painting was painted after Dostoevsky had written "The Idiot" and "Crime and Punishment." His popularity and fame among people evoked Pavel Tretyakov to commission Perov because he was eager to place the portrait of Dostoevsky in his gallery under the category of "those dear to the nation." Consequently, Perov created this masterpiece by keeping all the interrelated attributes of Dostoevsky, his era, and his writing in mind. Evidently, Dostoevsky's writings illustrate the human soul's profoundness and depict its dark, ironic, as well as scathing and funny aspects. His work demonstrates an old-fashioned, vintage tinge that is apparent in the portrait.

A Muted Palette and Urban Realism

The elements of art are color, lines, shape, value, form, texture, and space, which play a significant role in the visual aesthetics of any artwork. Similarly, colors, lines, texture, and somehow space are integral elements that enhance the quality of the portrait of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Perov pursued an undisciplined color palette, which led him to use a grayish and brown palette for the subject portrait. The selection of colors makes it an authentic portrayal of urban lower-strata life. Moreover, the use of titanium white, raw umber, ivory black, and yellow ochre oil paints augments the old-fashioned feel of the overall painting.

Composition, Clothing, and Curved Lines

The portrait features a simplistic approach as it focuses only on the background and the main object, which is the figure of Dostoevsky, who is sitting and holding his knees casually. The background is relatively dark; meanwhile, the face is painted with lighter colors to give an impression of illumination. The lines are curvy and used to depict the waves of the fabric of a trench coat that is painted with a combination of brownish-gray paints. Trench coats were in fashion in Russia then and, therefore, are the best tool to entice that epoch's legacy. Dostoevsky used to dress in white, buttoned shirts and pants; therefore, a white shirt also peeps out from his trench coat in the portrait. However, Perov altered the color theme of his usual pants and gave it a lined pattern. As a result, the pants represent black lines and are complemented by a dark brownish, amber color.

Facial Expression and Psychological Depth

The overall texture of the portrait also boosts the effect of facial expressions and realism. Dostoevsky was a slim man with a somewhat shabby beard; his eyes provided a feeble hint of purple, and their sharpness gave them a jagged and crafty look. When it comes to his personification, he always exhibited a sound quality of calmness, which can be addressed as the epitome of confidence. Moreover, intelligence was Dostoevsky's most outstanding trait, and such a level of wisdom was also visible in his eyes. All these aspects are artistically incorporated within the portrait. A marvelous blend of light and dark hues enhances the efficacy of the overall facial features and gives him a thoughtful stare. Furthermore, realism facilitates a substantial focus on hands and faces, adding photographic value to the painting.

Balance, Space, and the Rectangular Frame

Balance and space are also essential components in a visual artwork, and by incorporating a dark and shadowy background and a relatively lighter and colored foreground, Perov created balance in the overall frame. It is also a point to observe that Perov created a balance between the visage and hands

of Dostoevsky and placed them in synchronization. The underlying balance, in turn, complements the figure's posture, and the focus is divided equally on the objects. The portrait is made on canvas and portrays a rectangular frame that is a perfect medium and shape for portraits, elevating the subject portrait's attraction.

A Realistic Portrait of Dostoevsky's Character

All the art elements, including colors, shapes, lines, textures, and their balance together, give the portrait a vintage feel and a pure sense of realism. The facial effects, scruffy, grown beard, tranquility in posture, and sharpness in eyes all demonstrate the essence of Dostoevsky's original personality. Further, the sitting style, atmosphere, outfits, and ambiance suggest old Russia's urban lifestyle.

Work Cited

Perov, Vasily. "*Portrait of the Author Feodor Dostoyevsky*, 1872 – Vasily Perov." Www.wikiart.org, 1 Jan. 1872, www.wikiart.org/en/vasily-perov/portrait-of-the-author-feodor-dostoyevsky-1872.