
All Souls' Day at the Camposanto, Pisa

Depicted in Pierre Auguste Cot's most notorious painting, All Souls' Day at the Camposanto, Pisa, a woman and her two children mourn the death of her husband/their father. Painted in 1872, All Souls' Day at the Camposanto, Pisa emphasizes the Catholic church, and the role it played in everyday life. This painting includes many practices from that time period, as well as numerous Catholic practices, still used in modern day. This painting includes numerous symbols and illusions, forcing the viewer to think and ponder. Cot himself was a classical French painter. Cot is most well known for The Storm and Spring. Cot studied under many notable artists. These artists include Leon Cogniet, Alexandre Cabanel and William Adolphe Bouguereau (Rubin).

Cot began his career in 1863 when his works debuted at the Salon in Paris, France. During his short lifetime, Cot became well known for his artistic abilities. Cot enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle, and his artwork earned him critical acclaim. At the age of 46, Cot died. His fame and artistic achievements earned him a monument which can be seen at Bédarieux (Rubin). Though All Souls' Day at the Camposanto, Pisa is not as famous or widely known, Cot's style and artistic capabilities are evident in this painting. Some of Cot's most notable achievements include being named the Chevalier of Legion of Honor, as well as his marriage to the daughter of Francisque Duret; a famous sculpture of this era (Rubin). Often times when grieving the death of a loved one, one wears black. The logic behind wearing black relates to one's religion and views on death and the afterlife. Black, a symbol of mourning, is often worn at funerals or when grieving a death (Quartier, 31). It is also common for widows and family to continue wearing black for days or even weeks after a death. Dating back to the Roman Empire, grieving people wore the color black, to symbolize loss of a loved one. This tradition has been adapted by Christians and continues to be a regular occurrence in the west.

A medieval tradition, also depicted in this painting, is for a widow to wear a solid black veil (Quartier, 31). Wearing a black veil indicated the loss of a loved one, and that the person was going through their mourning process. More specifically in the painting, the black veil indicates the loss of her late husband (Quartier, 31). In the east, however, many individuals wear white while mourning. This symbolizes purity and love for those lost. Wearing white while mourning often occurs in Buddhism as well as Hinduism; though many have transitioned to black in modern culture. Many times throughout history, white funerals have occurred, even in Europe. One significant aspect of this painting is the white border on the widow's dress. In medieval times, it was common for widows mourning the loss of their husband to wear a white border around the trims of their arms. This indicated that the person who has passed was this woman's husband. The child being held by the woman in the painting indicates the recent

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passing of his father. Although this child is not a newborn, it is obvious that the child is still quite young and not older than a toddler. This recent passing may be able to describe the tone of the painting, as this may be this family's first or second All Souls' Day. The family may still be coping with the loss of a loved one, which makes the tone of this painting very melancholic. As seen in this painting, the youngest child is wearing grey. Though the color white is normally associated with purity, it can be assumed that this child is wearing a shade of grey in order to symbolize its youth and innocence. The color grey could have been chosen, as the child has just dealt with death for the first time; stripping him of some of his innocence. Purity is important within the Christian religion, as one strives to remain pure until death, in which the soul should ascend to heaven. However, many believers often commit sin. This can be seen through the child's older sibling and his mother. Cot's painting emphasizes the grief and humility of this day. The facial expressions on the woman's face create a very foreboding and uneasy feeling. It is as if the viewer can feel her grief and remorse. The painting is heavily reliant on shadows and darkness, providing the grim setting for this scene. Dressed in dark and dreary colors, this family emphasizes the loss of a loved one. Cot's intention was to showcase both the sadness and the love associated with All Souls' Day. Although the family looks sad in the painting, the true nature of this day is to remember loved ones. Without the love and the memory, there would be no purpose for this day. An interesting aspect of this painting is the grave itself. Made to form a cross, this grave emphasizes Christian beliefs and ideals. The cross itself is a symbol of the Christian religion (McGrath 266).

However, the cross predates Christianity. Prior to its Christian significance, symbols drawn in hieroglyphics that were similar to the cross were used in ancient Egyptian religion. The Ankh, Djed, and Was are all examples of figures holding symbols similar to the cross in ancient Egypt (McGrath 266). The Ankh was associated with the Goddess Sekhmet. Sekhmet symbolized life and living (McGrath 266). This symbol was soon picked up by Egyptian Christians, who began incorporating it into their religious beliefs. From this point on, the cross began to appear in early Christian paintings. By the third century A.D., the cross, as it is known today, was readily being used by the Catholic church as a symbol of their religion. In back of the grave, in the midst of trees, there is a heavenly light beaming from the sky. This angelic scene is not evident upon first glance. Masked in a cluster of trees, this heavenly image presents an interesting scene. It appears that this beam of light takes the place of the father in this painting. The positioning seems to indicate that this celestial scene is somehow representing the father's presence within the painting. This scene consists of trees encased in a thick fog with beams of light protruding through it.

This illusion takes the place of the father and gives a lighter and happier feeling compared to the rest of the painting. Looking at the remainder of the painting, the viewer feels discouraged and disheartened. This scene provides a sense of divine intervention within this piece. In regard to All Souls' Day, it seems this scene in the background is depicting the father's ascension to

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heaven, which is the purpose of All Souls' Day. Cot uses shading to emphasize certain aspects of the painting. The parts of the painting with more light draw the viewers' attention, while the areas with less light seem to blend into the background. Though the areas with less light seem to fade into the background, there are important aspects of the painting hidden within the darkness. Behind the family are other graves, similar in structure, with lamps just like the one in the foreground. The background also incorporates the forest scene, which depicts a heavenly glow descending from the heavens. Single women during this time were not well off. In the 1800s, it was very hard for women to earn an income for themselves, nonetheless earn an income to support two additional children. During this time period, women did not have very many options. Women would either need to remarry a man who could provide for them and their family; though it would be hard to find a man who would marry a woman with children (Smith).

Without a man to provide for her, this widow may have no money, and may not be able to provide for her children by herself. It was believed in this time that women belong in the home. Men often believed that women had a sphere of influence solely in the home. Due to this belief, work for women was scarce, and did not pay well (Smith). This painting showcases and draws upon the idea of human mortality. The death of a loved one can reveal just how vulnerable and fragile the human body is. This reminds the viewer that life should be cherished and enjoyed. Painted in 1872 and set in Italy, this painting emphasizes the church's power. Painted in a period which showcased divine authority, the Catholic church possessed immense power and authority over everyday people (McLeod). During this period, the Catholic church was able to dictate everyday life for those living under its influence. Italy was the home of the Catholic church, as the Pope and the most important figureheads of the church lived in Rome. These figureheads exerted dominance and power over those who lived in Italy and those practicing Catholicism around the world. Christianity, the largest religion in the world, dates back to the birth of Jesus Christ, and the beginning of the common era. Since then, Christianity has risen to become the largest religion in the world, encompassing nearly two billion followers (McLeod). In 1872, Catholicism, which is a sect of Christianity, had much more power over the individual. Though new sects were gaining attention, Catholicism still had a very large following. All Souls' Day at the Camposanto, Pisa was painted toward the end of Cot's life in 1872. This was also a time in which the Catholic church was able to exert immense power in Europe. However, Protestantism was a notable rival to the Catholic church at this point. A few hundred years earlier, a sect of Christianity, birthed primarily by Martin Luther, emerged (Haupt).

This new religion quickly picked up momentum, and quickly became adopted in Germany and soon after, Britain (Haupt). These two powerful nations truly encased the Catholic church's struggle for power. Though Catholicism remained strong in most of Europe, Protestantism showcased the need for reform within the Catholic church. By the time Cot painted All Souls' Day at the Camposanto, Pisa, the Catholic church remained extremely powerful. In the mid 1800s, the Catholic church waged war against the liberalist Georgia, beginning a culture war

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between Georgia, Germany, Italy, Belgium and France (Haupt). Though the Catholic church was losing followers, it still remained strong, with loyal followers. Catholics often have strict funeral practices (Quartier, 31). Those who wish to be buried on a Catholic site often must be devout Catholics. In order to be buried in a Catholic burial ground, one must be free of sin. By setting this painting in Italy, Cot provides a large amount of Christian, specifically Catholic, influence (Haupt). This influence is extremely evident in this painting. Figures like the grave, and the title itself convey extreme Catholic practices (Haupt). The grave itself is in the shape of a cross, which is one of the most recognizable and most important Catholic symbols.

The name of the piece, All Souls' Day at the Camposanto, Pisa, depicts a Catholic holiday, All Souls' Day, and emphasizes the spiritual and emotional significance of this day within the Catholic church. The setting of this painting is located at the Camposanto in Pisa, Italy. The Camposanto itself is a part of a very large church, the Cathedral of Pisa, and served as a cemetery for many years. The Camposanto is a famous cemetery in Pisa. Translating the name to English, the Camposanto means the "Holy Field." Built after the third crusade, the Camposanto hosted many tombs and many bodies. The exterior of the Camposanto can be seen in the background of the painting. Some of the oldest tombs date back to 1360. Famous minds have ventured to the Camposanto. Galileo Galilei travelled to the Camposanto, and calculated pendular motion using a small incense lamp. Also located at the Camposanto are 84 Roman sarcophagi. These elaborate tombs are very unique and old. Numerous frescos were painted throughout the Camposanto through the years. The earliest dates back to 1360. An interesting aspect of the Camposanto came in its' construction. Holy dirt from Golgotha, the location Jesus Christ was crucified, was brought to the Camposanto during the Crusades.

Whether or not the afterlife is real, All Souls' Day allows living relatives of the deceased to remember and reminisce about fond memories regarding their past loved ones. This practice also allows for the living to receive gratification, as they feel as if they have aided their loved ones soul ascend to a better place. Currently being presented at the Appleton Museum of Art, this painting depicts an annual ritual known as All Souls' Day. This annual tradition, practiced by Roman Catholics, aims to shine a light for the deceased. The light, depicted by the lantern hanging on the grave, aims to guide souls toward salvation in heaven (Holms, 611). When looking in the background of the painting, the viewer can see several other candles and lanterns lit in remembrance of loved ones. All Souls' Day is a day of remembrance in the Catholic religion. This is a day in which families come together and remember those who were lost, and pray for their ascension to heaven. Throughout the world, similar traditions are practiced. With minute differences, the overall goal and aim of these practices around the world are very similar to those of All Souls' Day. The tradition of All Souls' Day is similar to that of the Day of the Dead, practiced in Central and South America (Amoruso).

Both practices intend to remember the dead, however, there are distinct differences between

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the two. All Souls' Day is primarily practiced and was founded in Europe, while the Day of the Dead is in Central and South America. All Souls' Day's focus is toward the soul's entrance to heaven, while the focus of the Day of the Dead is to remember the life of loved ones (Amoruso). On the Day of the Dead, it is common for descendants to dine in graveyards and cherish the memories of those lost (Amoruso). Often times, altars are created in memory of family members with pictures and food offerings. Both ritualize eternal life, however All Souls' Day is often more reserved, while the Day of the Dead is a celebration (Amoruso). Many religions have similar concepts to All Souls' Day. To this day, many similar practices occur in Japan, India, China, and throughout the world (Holms, 611). The Japanese practice the Bon Festival, which is a famous festival that honors one's ancestors (Ashikaga, 217). This festival, which lasts three days, was created by Maha Maudgalyayana, a prodigy of Buddha (Ashikaga, 217).

Alongside the Bon Festival, the people honoring graves often perform a dance, known as the Bon Odori (Ashikaga, 217). This dance is meant to overwhelm the dancer with joy and happiness, in memory of ancestors. The people who participate in this festival often wore traditional yukata and light colored kimonos (Ashikaga, 217). On the other hand, the Ghost Festival, practiced in China, believes that ghosts can walk amongst men on the fifteenth night of the seventh month. This gives the belief that one can come into contact with one's past ancestors (Teiser, XI). On this day, the realms of heaven, hell, and the living are at their closest. Similar to the Day of the Dead, the Ghost Festival offers food to the spirits (Teiser, XI). Though all of these traditions have very distinct and separate roots, the practices involved in these traditions are very similar. The same overall principle is distinct in all of these practices. It is evident that the idea of helping a family member's soul ascend to a better place is a concept people all across the world are passionate about. All across the world, people practice traditions similar to All Souls' Day.

The concept of being able to aid in or possibly see one's family again is quite an appealing idea. This would present the family with gratification and fulfillment. Flowers play an important role in All Souls' Day. Flowers are a reminder of a family's love for the person they lost. The flowers act as the pathway toward salvation as seen in this painting. Historians currently believe that the origins of All Souls' Day can be traced back to the Roman holiday of Lemuria (Beard et al. 50). Lemuria, also known as Lemuralia, was an ancient Roman practice which was made to ward off evil and malevolent spirits (Beard et al. 50). Lemuria required that the head of the household was to throw black beans over their shoulder and chant "I send these; with these beans I redeem me and mine" nine times (Beard et al. 50). The household would then join together in banging bronze pots together and reciting, "Ghosts of my fathers and ancestors be gone!" nine times (Beard et al. 50). It is believed that this practice was witnessed by Pope Boniface IV and later Christianized.

Though many aspects of this practice were changed and adapted into Christian theology, the

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basic meaning behind this tradition remained the same. Although no new techniques or artistic styles were used in this painting, Cot managed to create a piece of art unique in itself. Compared to Cot's other works of art, this piece is much darker, and ominous. This piece seems to directly deal with religion, which is unusual for Cot, as most of his most famous paintings have religious undertones, however never directly address the topic. This painting, however, is set within a Catholic burial site, and directly addresses a Catholic holiday. Though many painters and artists prior to Cot have depicted celestial scenes, Cot has not. Cot seems to rely heavily upon lighting and shadows within this painting, drawing the viewers eye toward the focus, while attempting to blend together the background. Overall, this painting is quite intriguing and thought provoking. Including hidden symbolism and illusions, this painting captures the eyes of its audience. With a massive Catholic influence present in the painting, Cot emphasizes spirituality and the presence of the divine. By including a real structure in the painting, Cot emphasized the meaning and realism of this painting. The underlying significance of religious structures like the cross in the painting are important symbols of the Christian faith. The symbols and incorporation of All Souls' Day plays a very important role within this painting, as it creates the reason for the painting, and adds religious emphasis. The context of this painting is also very important. Understanding All Souls' Day and its religious affiliations adds to the depth of this painting. Overall, Cot created a masterpiece that is dark yet extremely thought provoking.

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