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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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PROMOTER

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VENETIAN CAROUSEL

Iconography of the Carousel and Venice As Motifs in Contemporary Culture

SUMMARY

As largely seen in amusement parks and city squares, the Venetian carousel garners a unique history. As a matter of fact, even after a century of it being known, historians cannot pinpoint who first coined the term. These days, on social media, - Instagram, for instance - over seven hundred photos worldwide use the hashtag #venetiancarousel. From a culturally sociological perspective, these photographs likely reflect the surest illustration of what defines the Venetian carousel, in large part reflecting its character traits and appearance.

In the early decades of the 20th century, the carousel became a showcase intended exclusively for children as a form of playtime recreation. In this era, cars, motorcycles, and airplanes for travel purposes would soon to replace horses. It was not until the mid-1930s when Giorgio dal Bo, a Venetian, concocted and commissioned a new type of carousel, which he coined La Bella Venezia. It proved to be a great success, and spawned many replica models. Gondolas would even have its carousel on a float instead of wooden horses. The Venetian carousel reflects its mysterious origin. The carousel in the Venetian mask seems more attractive.

Film has often utilized the iconography of Venice, carousels, and amusement parks effectively. Woody Allen, the American writer and director, is a prime example of someone who routinely – and masterfully – has utilized these motifs I reference to often. In this dissertation, I argue Allen’s implementation reflects a most unique type of originality and character, in what can best be described as a “temporary world,” or respite from reality – one in which everything is possible, and this “fantasy world” is limitless. I also provide many other examples of brilliant

artists, like Mirosław Balka, Victoria Vesna, and Gyula Várnai, who effectively implement carousel themes.

My primary intention in this dissertation is to present specific iconographic examples I have found to be the most interesting to best highlight the rich cultural importance of the carousel within society. It would not be feasible nor scholarly to merely just catalog all examples I may have found in my research.

As a painter myself, the subject of the Venetian carousel is personal. I often focus on various levels of senses and feelings. I also lived in Venice, understanding its deep cadence and sensibilities. I learned that by living there, and seeing the Venetian carousel up close and personal, and with devoting many hours to my research, I can confidently argue that the carousel can be seen as an allegory of travel. Its consistent rhythm and it going round and round reflect a passage of time. Its repetition is like the seasons and life cycles.

Furthermore, the carousel's circle platform reflects infinity of ideas, limitless possibility, and potentiality. Impressions are vital for artists, as they conjure up something far beyond ideas, but touch on image and smell. These sensations, whether warm or cold, invoke specific memories within us that may have long tucked away. Above all, the Venetian carousel, in its specific imagination and character, makes us regain our own past. These are some of the prevailing motifs I touch upon routinely during the course of my dissertation.

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Poznań 2020