The Myth Of Daedalus And Icarus: The Fall Of Icarus Represented In Paintings

Ancient art has many analytical and strategic components that are still being unfolded to this day. In the 16?th? century, From the type of paint that the artists used to the small features in their painting, the significance will forever be taught and learned by many. The Fall of Icarus was an oil painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder in 1555. This painting was inspired by the Greek mythological character, Icarus, who was the son of the craftsman Daedalus. In this painting, Icarus was attempting to fly into the sky but tumbled into the ocean. The Fall of Icarus has many significant analytical aspects which include the landscape of the painting, the characters in the painting and the meaning behind the legs and feathers. In the poem, “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus” Daedalus built wings for his son Icarus so that he could attempt to fly away from their imprisonment. With the excitement that he had the ability to fly, Icarus tries to soar into the sky but fell into the ocean when the sun melted his wings. The sun in the background overshadows the painting and provides warmth to the paintings. The sun could also be there to signify the melting of the wings. In the painting, you can see two little legs sticking up out of the ocean. This is significant because Bruegel does not put too much emphasis on Icarus’ legs. Surrounding Icarus are the feathers from the artificial wings that his dad constructed for him. This draws back to one of the components of landscape painting. that gave more attention to was what in the foreground rather than what was being portrayed in the back.

Ancient painters were unlikely to use large characters in the foreground of their paintings. Bruegel was known to utilize larger characters in his foreground and smaller ones in the background. He also specialized in adding colourful and detailed scenic views to his paintings. This form of art is called world landscape painting. Its significance is to bring the importance of the natural scenery. Landscape paintings also give prominence to the lower subjects rather than the higher and notable subjects. In the Fall of Icarus, Bruegel draws more attention to the ploughman in the forefront, the natural scenery and the ships sailing in the ocean. Many researchers believe that the characters in the paintings are oblivious to Icarusdrowning in the ocean. In the painting, there are three noticeable characters, a ploughman, a fisherman and a shepherd. The ploughman is paying attention to what he is doing, the fisherman is continuing to catch a fish and the shepherd is looking into the sky. It is controversial that the shepherd is looking into the sky because he thinks that he witnessed God’s in the sky when Icarus attempted to fly into the sky. Also, it is very controversial because he probably saw Icarusfall out of the sky or even heard him fall out of the sky but he acts like he didn’t. Another character or characters in the painting that is noticeable are on a ship right next to where Icarus is drowning at. This ship is right above Icarus and is sailing in the direction of the ancient city in the back of the painting. This really shows the flaw of man not being able to process someone’s else’s suffering because the ship could’ve stopped and helped him out from drowning and possibly saving his life. Another noticeable thing about the ship is that when Icarus fell his feathers were everywhere and some are on the ship but the feathers lead an eye trail directly to Icarus but of course no one cared.2

There are many themes that could be said about the Fall of Icarus. One common view is man's inability to adhere to others’ suffering. In the painting, no one was there to help Icaruswhile he was suffering in the ocean. Everyone stayed where they were and tended to their own tasks.

This is an important view that could be used in today’s society. Bruegel was more concerned with putting emphasis on the ploughman, shepherd and fisherman, in other words, the average, lower working class. This is significant because many would not expect them to be the centrepiece in this painting due to the title.