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# The Dance Of Death (Dover Fine Art, History Of Art)



## Synopsis

Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543), remembered today for his insightful portraits, was better known in his own time for his varied and extensive graphic works, the most celebrated of which was *The Dance of Death*. This work, from the woodblocks of collaborator Hans Lützelburger, was first published in book form in 1538. The theme of the dance of death was a popular one of the sixteenth century. Holbein captured the feeling of death, the leveler, in its attack on all classes, both sexes, and all ages. A stylized skeleton seizes the child from his mother's breast. The skeleton snatches, plays, tugs, and cavorts throughout the rest of the book. The king, emperor, pope, and cardinal must cease from their functions. The skull is thrust into the face of the astrologer. The hourglass runs out onto the floor. Countess, nun, sailor, peddler, senator are all stopped by the common force. Forty-one finely cut, highly detailed woodcuts capture the single motif, *Memento mori*: "Remember, you will die." Although the theme is common, the variety of expressions, social groups, backgrounds, styles of dress and architecture, and calls to death are so varied that each one is unique in its power. This edition, reprinting the unabridged 1538 edition, is the first in a series reprinting great rare books from the Rosenwald Collection. Besides the woodcuts, the book contains a prefatory letter by Jean de Vauzelle and various quotations, depictions, and meditations on death, deaths of men, and the necessity of death. A repeated series of the 41 woodblocks follows the reprinted work and contains English translations of the quotations and verses. Art historians and social historians will find this to be one of the best depictions of class life caught at its fateful moment. The collector will find this to be the finest reproduction of one of Holbein's major works.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Text: English, French, Latin

Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543), remembered today for his insightful portraits, was better known in his own time for his varied and extensive graphic works, the most celebrated of which was *The Dance of Death*. This work, from the woodblocks of collaborator Hans Lützelburger, was first published in book form in 1538. The theme of the dance of death was a popular one of the sixteenth century. Holbein captured the feeling of death, the leveler, in its attack on all classes, both sexes, and all ages. A stylized skeleton seizes the child from his mother's breast. The skeleton snatches, plays, tugs, and cavorts throughout the rest of the book. The king, emperor, pope, and cardinal must cease from their functions. The skull is thrust into the face of the astrologer. The hourglass runs out onto the floor. Countess, nun, sailor, peddler, senator are all stopped by the common force. Forty-one finely cut, highly detailed woodcuts capture the single motif, *Memento mori*: "Remember, you will die." Although the theme is common, the variety of expressions, social groups, backgrounds, styles of dress and architecture, and calls to death are so varied that each one is unique in its power. This edition, reprinting the unabridged 1538 edition, is the first in a series reprinting great rare books from the Rosenwald Collection. Besides the woodcuts, the book contains a prefatory letter by Jean de Vauzelle and various quotations, depictions, and meditations on death, deaths of men, and the necessity of death. A repeated series of the 41 woodblocks follows the reprinted work and contains English translations of the quotations and verses. Art historians and social historians will find this to be one of the best depictions of class life caught at its fateful moment. The collector will find this to be the finest reproduction of one of Holbein's major works. Dover unabridged republication of the original 1538 edition of *Les simulachres & historiees faces de la mort*.

The Dance of Death ("dance macabre" in French, "Totentanz" in German) is one of the most enduring art forms of 15th-16th Century Europe. And the most popular and famous Dance of Death series is that of Hans Holbein the Younger - a set of 41 woodcuts depicting death interrupting the lives of men, women, and children from all walks and stations of life in order to make its unwelcome and ineluctable claim. Holbein's series also draws from and incorporates a related pictorial tradition

of human mortality - the "Memento mori" ("remember that you will die"), which emphasizes the need for the devout to always be prepared for death. What makes Holbein's series so striking is his depiction of death in the form of mocking, leering, gleeful skeletal figures. Holbein's Dance of Death was first published in collected book form in 1538 in Lyons, France. The greater part of this Dover edition (the first 104 pages) consists of a facsimile of that 1538 book. Inasmuch as it was written and published in 16th-Century French, few modern native-English-speaking readers are likely to be drawn to it. The attraction of the Dover edition is the last 41 pages, in which Holbein's 41 woodcuts are repeated in order, with English translations of the original Latin Biblical verses and French quatrains that appeared with each print in the 1538 edition. As set forth in this Dover edition, Holbein's prints are small - 2 1/4 inches by 1 1/4 inches (the same size as in the original) - and not as sharp or crisp as one would like (probably the result of deterioration of the original wood blocks used in 1538 to print the particular copy from which this facsimile was made). Still, this Dover edition is the only relatively affordable edition currently available that I know of, and the prints are of sufficient quality to make Holbein's genius and the underlying 16th-Century milieu readily accessible. Enhancing each print is the English translation of the lively and sometimes caustic quatrains from the original 1538 volume. For example, here is the quatrain for Print XVIII, "The Judge", which portrays skeletal death prying away the staff of office from a seated judge who is deciding a case between a poor man and a rich man, the latter reaching into his purse for some coins to give to the judge: "From out thy seat thou shalt be taken, So oft bribed to iniquity-- Thy ill-got gains must be forsaken' No bribe can buy thy life from me."

The woodcuts in this book are tiny. They're not even a full two inches high. As such they're terribly hard to see. Save your money. Find a collection of these woodcuts with larger pictures.

I got the Kindle version for free. Awesome!!! No illustrations at all in the Kindle version I received. That seems utterly ridiculous. Is that why it's free? Because the only reason to get the book is for the illustrations.

Holbein's illustrations are brilliant and fascinating. This book is very inexpensive. These two factors should make it a great addition to any library. But the images are something like 2 inches square. You can't see any detail really. I was disappointed and I guess I'll have to find another book as I would like to enjoy this macabre and fascinating series.

I know this was a free book, but can't quite imagine why I would want a "version" of a visual book with no illustrations! Perhaps it would be fair to tell the 'buyer" about the product's useless characteristics before it is ordered.

Unfortunately, the subject matter of this book, while interesting and desirable for people like me, is a collection of photocopies of various old pages and apparently no effort was made to improve on the copied result or otherwise make them more legible. As a result I am unable to get proper knowledge from about half of this book.

Great OLD Classic

I didn't buy this book for the poetry. I wanted the illustrations! The images are not much larger than 1/8th of the page, and they "bleed" so there is very little detail. Pick another version....

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