Troy Paplomatas

ETLA 320

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Art Analysis Paper II: *Waterfall* (1961)

For this art analysis, I will be describing one of Escher’s impossible world pieces, *Waterfall* (1961). Escher created the lithograph, *Waterfall* (1961) with the intentions of creating a watermill that turned into an illusion that projects an impossible figure. *Waterfall* (1961) projects a structure that is only possible to be seen legibly at a certain vantage point. The structure is only seen to be possible while looking from only one vantage point. For example, if the figure of *Waterfall* (1961) is rotated in anyway the figure would be distorted and incomplete. Escher’s pieces *Waterfall* (1961) and *Ascending and Descending* (1960) are two of his works where vantage points is what makes the structures look to be complete.

Beginning at the bottom of the piece, there are two individuals, one is leaning against a railing looking up at the watermill, and the other is a woman hanging laundry on a clothes line. The woman hanging clothes may be a symbol of the running water being used for these people for washing clothes and their water source. There are two structures that look to be potential homes for the two people in the piece. Also, the bottom left of the piece, looks to almost be vegetation you would only see underwater. Resembling a coral reef or seaweed bed that is clearly not underwater. Three staircases are applied to the piece which all lead down to what looks to be the continuance of the living compound. I believe these stairs were added by Escher to help make the structure look more compatible to living. The background of the piece looks to be in an older time period that resembles almost a stadium setting with the implementation of steps and ledges that others may observe the waterfall structure. The background is a much lighter shade than the actual waterfall structure. I believe Escher brightened the background to bring more emphasis on the actual waterfall structure itself.

In 1961, M.C. Escher created the lithograph, *Waterfall* (1961) which was created with the intentions of the water flowing from the bottom to the top that is created by an illusion. The water is being generated by a large wooden wheel that is being turned by the water falling from above. The biggest problem with this, is the water being generated by this wheel is flowing uphill and eventually ending up directly above the water wheel. Creating an impossible infinite cycle of water flow. Also, the brick waterway gives a downward illusion due to the depiction of descending brick structure. Very similar to Escher’s piece *Ascending and Descending* (1960). Due to gravity and basic physics, this is clearly impossible to construct. The center of the piece is where an illusion takes place where Escher created an aqueduct that is deceiving to the eye. An aqueduct is a bridge constructed to direct watercourses across valleys or ravines. The aqueduct structure looks to be a flooded walk-way or man-made stream that turns left, back straight, then turns left again. The deceiving part of the stream is at each corner, there are four columns that look to be holding up the other corners of the stream. As it has a natural presence to the structure, the structure itself is physically impossible to create due to the columns not connecting directly from top to bottom. This is where Escher applied vantage points to be the only way to view this structure to make it possible. The way Escher created this piece, he makes the viewer look down at the scene diagonally, which makes the aqueduct appear to be flowing upward. Escher’s change in vantage points and perspective created these impossible figures that gave a natural presence.

Not only is the structure as a whole physically impossible to construct, on top of the two top columns there are two polyhedras implemented by Escher. One is a compound of three cubes while the other is a dodecahedron. A dodecahedron is a polyhedron with twelve flat faces. You could argue, that Escher added these two dodecahedrons just to justify that the columns that are beneath the objects are holding up an impossible object. Escher was famous for his mathematical artwork and applying mathematics to create impossible figures like *Waterfall* (1960).

This piece has been used for examples of optical illusions many times due to the piece’s natural appearance. Escher wanted to create an image that is perceived to be a natural construction that still tricks the human eye. I found this piece by Escher was one of his most fascinating pieces that purposely fooled the viewer’s eye. With the two people in the piece, Escher wanted to add some realistic depiction to an impossible structure. The addition of the vegetation that looks to be underwater vegetation, also helped create some realistic figures in the piece. The lightened background really brings focus on the watermill that the piece is primarily focused on. With Escher’s implementation of vantage points, he was able to create an illusion of upward water flow. Applying the same illusions as *Ascending and Descending* (1960), Escher successfully created an uphill water flow illusion. All in all, Escher’s piece *Waterfall* (1961), is a very deceiving piece that depicts an impossible figure of a watermill and aqueduct.