



## **A Macabre Decay of the Human Body: A Study of Select Black**

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### **Abstract**

The horror of the human experience during the Black Death was captured by artists in their paintings. As opposed to the art that existed for centuries before the plague, the Black Death paintings presented grotesque images of the human body which became the primary site of suffering. From the dark motifs of people helplessly witnessing their bodies decay to skeletons ruling over the living, artists offered a macabre eye to view the lived experiences of the pandemic through art. The grotesque is evident not only in the effects of the plague on the physical body but also on the human mind. Many abandoned their families who were infected by the disease for fear of contracting it. The apocalyptic approach adopted in these works posits a marked departure in the perception of religion from the times before the plague hit Europe. The pandemic, which appeared to be the devil's slaughter, led to a general disillusionment with religion. The beliefs that Christianity formed the centre of human existence and that it triumphed over death were overturned with the advent of the plague. The artists brought to life these grim sights around them. The gradual decaying of the bodies of one's neighbors, the streets filled with corpses, and the victory death had over life occupied the canvases, thus providing evidence for posterity on how the pandemic caused decay of the human body, and through it, the breaking down of established orders and belief systems.

**Keywords:** Death, Grotesque, Human Body, Otherness, Religion.