

Review

In the Garden of Earthly Delights

In the Garden of Earthly Delights. Three poems by Amy Lemmon, Steven Gentile, and Rich Turnbull. Multiple color intaglio prints with hand paintings in watercolor, gouache, and ink by Mindy Belloff, printed on Somerset cotton rag papers. New York City, NY: Intima Press, 2015. 12 copies: printing and design by Mindy Belloff. Liberty, Caslon, Centaur, Lydian, Old English, and Bodoni types. Concertina-sewn spine binding in quarter-bound pink buffalo skin over Somerset papers with leather tip corners and leather onlays, bound by Celine Lombardi. The book is protected by an elaborate white cardboard chemise; a slipcase is also covered in pink buffalo leather with a gourd in the lower corner. 10 ¼ x 7½ inches. Un-paginated. US \$3,500.

REVIEWED BY JEAN-FRANÇOIS VILAIN

Hieronymus Bosch's triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, painted between 1490 and 1510, and now at the Prado Museum in Madrid, is as famous as it is beautiful and horrific. Its vision of hell in the right panel still has the power to disturb, and with its intricately, dare I say lovingly, painted depiction of the various tortures eternally inflicted on the damned, it must have frightened to death his audience, for whom the possibility of dying unshriven was a constant worry.

The structure of this book parallels that of the triptych. Each section begins with three brief poems referring at times obliquely—and in the case of Rich Turnbull's poem hilariously—to the theme of Bosch's panels: the Creation, with Adam and Eve at each side of God in the left panel; the vast progeny of Adam and Eve disporting itself in a phantasmagoric landscape in the central, larger panel; and finally, in the third panel, an apocalyptic hell. In addition, artist/designer Belloff has brilliantly chosen to print her illustrations on paper of three different colors echoing the structure of the triptych: pure white for the Creation, tan for those of the central panel, reflecting the loss of purity that followed the expulsion from Eden, and gray for the scenes of hell. The prints are interpretations of elements from each panel.

The book, as befits the garden of its title, is a delight to hold and peruse. Each opening poem is printed in colored inks: green and black for the Creation; gray and brick red for the second section; and black, brick red, and green for hell, which contains the longest poem in



the book. Bold and boldly colored section numbers occupy a large part of the page. These numbers are clearly inspired by the brilliant ornamental letters Belloff has admired in the medieval manuscripts at the Morgan Museum & Library in New York City.

The 11 illustrations—multicolored intaglio prints with ink applied in a painterly manner with hand-painted gouache and watercolors, on thick, sensuous Somerset cotton rag—are stunning, compositionally and visually. The artist has taken some sections of each of Bosch's panels and translated them into luscious miniatures. The effect is achingly beautiful. It is worth noting that Belloff's last illustration of hell includes a recognizable male face, adapted, supposedly, from Bosch's self-portrait.

Not content with the colorful section openers and the prints, Belloff has, following the tradition of medieval illumination, included small details as bas-de-page on the blank pages before each section.

This book is a major accomplishment of an artist in full control of her powers. My only quibble is with the very limited number of copies printed, which makes the book a *rarissima avis*, available only to a very few lucky people. Perhaps, as with many manuscripts in museum collections, a facsimile will be made by some adventurous and generous soul.

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