

Joseph Zampino

Professor Dominguez

Intro to Art

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An Interpretation and Recreation of *Possession on the Beach*

*Possession on the Beach* is a triptych oil painting done by Fritz Scholder in 1989.

The piece follows Scholder's usual style, combining postmodern pop art and native american imagery. It is currently on display in the American Wing of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The piece stands at a remarkable six feet tall and 17 feet wide. It depicts a man drowning on a beach. The man is seen three times across the three panels of the painting; everytime occupying a different area of the canvas. This is done to show three different perspectives, separating the panels from one another. If the man was only visible in one panel, the images of the three panels would merge into one. Scholder changed the position of the man on the canvases to convey that each panel is displaying a different experience. The experience being displayed by the panel on the left is one quite morbid. A woman lays in the comfort of a beach chair while the man drowns in the distance. In this panel, the man is positioned on the right side of the image, further to the horizon than in the others. This means the man is most likely further away in this panel. The panel to the right depicts a dog walking away from the man. This panel has the man on the left side, but closer to the foreground than in the leftmost panel. This means that the man is closer to the dog than he is the woman. The middle image is much more intense than the other two. In this panel, the man is in the

middle of the image, right in the foreground. Standing above him is a humanoid being with massive butterfly wings. The entity and its wings are colored in deep reds, purples, and blacks. Scholder did this to make the being feel cold and threatening, but also to make it stand out against the otherwise saturated painting. The creature feels like something that doesn't belong to the world around it. This is further supported by the fact that even though it is standing just above the drowning man, it is not visible in the other panels, even when the drowning man is. This is why Scholder created the painting as a triptych: to show that these three images, while happening at the same time, do not all show the same thing.

As mentioned, the painting is done with oil on a canvas. Oil seems to be a key component of Scholder's work because of the way he works color and texture into his art. The best example of this in *Possession on the Beach* is the drowning man. Scholder displays motion in a very particular way: with chaos. The water around the man is being tossed around by the man struggling to stay above the water. This is shown through erratic brush strokes and the clashing of blues, grays, and sometimes even pinks. This makes the man's struggle so much more visceral than if Scholder were to paint a freeze frame of man drowning. Scholder's use of color is also shown with the humanoid being painted deep and dark colors that contrast with the saturated world around it, as mentioned earlier. This use of color is a staple of pop art, but Fritz Scholder's creativity and ability to execute unique ideas set him apart from his contemporaries. This is demonstrated perfectly in *Possession on the Beach*.