



Zwan

An Interactive Exploration of the Life and Works of Hieronymus Bosch

Urustar S.r.l.

C.F./P.IVA: 01966270991

Sede legale: Corso Europa, 632/15 – CAP 16148 Genova (GE)

<http://urustar.net>

INTRODUCTION

We didn't want just to make a game set inside Hieronymus Bosch's paintings. We also wanted to depict our own interpretation of this great and controversial artist.

We started by reading in a sort of chronological way the renowned triptych named *The Garden of Earthly Delights* keeping in mind the few certain facts we know about the artist's life. The certain condemnation Bosch reserves for human beings is quite clear since in a chronological order we find the Garden of Eden, we move to an Earth full of sins and aberrations just to end up in a burning and scary hell with no chance of redemption.

This way of thinking was quite common during the 15th century, especially among penitents brotherhoods, and we know for sure that Bosch was part of the *Illustrious Brotherhood of Our Blessed Lady*. From this derives the link between the pain and the monsters, the catharsis and the visions. In our game you control a swan that for many reasons can be seen as a Bosch's alter-ego. The swan in fact is not only a reference to the rituals of the above mentioned brotherhood, it is also a universal symbol for purity and it's greatly present in Bosch's production.

CONCEPT

Zwan is an interactive exploration experience where you navigate a slowly decaying world and discover the works of Hieronymus Bosch hidden into it. The main idea is to give life to the works of Bosch, while enacting a metaphor of pain and madness. The more pain the player inflicts to themselves, the more dangerous and wicked the world becomes.

You take control of a white swan, flying through a three dimensional space. At first this world is extremely calm and peaceful, as it is in the first part of *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. While you roam the space (you can only fly) you can collect some objects, which are indicated by a beacon of light. You explore the world looking at all the strange creatures that are inside of it. Some elements in the world, though, can harm you. Every time you are harmed by a creature or a feature of the world, it goes one step further towards decay.

The green fields start to wither and the friendly animals are slowly replaced with strange, wicked creatures. The more the world decays, the more the creatures become vicious and start attacking you. Some of the objects you can collect disappear, replaced with new ones.

Eventually the world will crumble to hell, and after some time you will die. At this point you find out that the objects you've collected are in fact parts of some of the most famous works by Bosch. How many works will you complete?

THE WHITE SWAN

The White Swan is the main character in the game. It is also the only playable character.

The swan constantly flies through the world. Its speed is not controlled by the player, but it changes as a reaction to the surrounding environment. If the swan senses some kind of danger, it accelerates, while it slows down when the situation is more peaceful. The player controls the steering of the bird and its altitude (basically, you can make the swan turn left, right, and point up or down). It's possible to think of non-traditional controls, like Kinect or motion-sensing technology.

The swan can be harmed by several game elements, like static hazards (e.g. spikes, blades, fires) and animated Bosch-inspired creatures. When the swan is hurt the world starts decaying.

THE WORLD

The world is a direct representation of some of the most important works by Bosch. It starts as a peaceful environment, like the part of Eden in *The Gardens of Earthly Delights*, but it slowly decays as the swan is hurt. Regardless of the current state, the world will present some static hazards which will hurt the player. The decay process can never be reversed; the world will eventually end in hell, bringing the game to its natural conclusion.

The decay process is meant to be perceived as continuous by the player, but in fact it will have 3 to 5 steps. Upon reaching a new step, the objects currently present in the world will disappear and be replaced by new ones. Since collecting these objects could be interesting for the player, they have to pay attention to when being hurt and bring the world to a new phase.

GAME GOALS

There are no defined goals in the game. The main objective is to enjoy and experience Bosch's world in a different way, seeing it decaying to hell and being populated by stranger and stranger creatures.

Of course the more competitive players could challenge themselves to collect some (of all) the objects, or to complete one specific painting by finding all the objects related to it. Nevertheless, there won't be any form of scoring or reward for the players.

TECHNOLOGY

The game will be built in real time 3D, by using Unity 3D as the core game engine. It will run on Mac and PC (and probably Linux), both natively or via browser after the installation of the Unity Plugin.

The game could be then ported to tablet devices, taking advantage of the accelerometer for controlling the swan.

ART STYLE

The art style tries to recreate the feeling of being into a painting. The 3D world will be textured accordingly, with every object clearly showing brush strokes, as if it was directly painted in 3D.

A possible alternative could be a low-polygonal style, with pastel colors and a strong use of ambient occlusion and global illumination so to give a paper diorama style.

OTHER IDEAS

The peculiar control system of the game will make it possible to create more immersive versions, to be used – for example – as installations in museums and festivals.

Moreover, the game could be controlled with motion sensing devices like Kinect or PlayStation Move/Wii Remote. Plus, by using microcontrollers (like Arduino) it would be possible to extend the experience to the surrounding environment, controlling external light, music and projections during the gameplay.