

Cloth and Body Metaphors
in
Medieval and Contemporary Art

Charla Y. Gaglio
AR 592 Art History Seminar
Professor Chris Nelson
April 1998

Cloth and Body Metaphors
in
Medieval and Contemporary Art

“I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God.”
- St. Bernard

Symbolic of the humanity and suffering of Christ, the use of cloth as relic and body metaphor became a significant source of symbolism in late medieval art that continues to resonate for artists of today, as seen in the work of Ewa Kuryluk. Whether used to conceal or to expose, cloth in its relationship to the body spoke of familiarity and intimacy then as now. In historic and contemporary art, cloth - in the form of garment, veil or curtain - and skin share real and symbolic associations in their relationship to the body and the spiritual self. The medium of cloth was and continues to be used to express cultural interpretations of the cycles and transformations experienced throughout the course of a lifetime and speculation of what may follow. Images of cloth represent metaphors of protection, memory, time, chastity, birth, and death. In Western Christianity, we see the “clothing” of God as Christ in the body of Mary. Throughout Christ’s life and subsequent death, cloth/body metaphors have been used in art to depict the literalism of these events as interpreted by late medieval writers, and the joining with or “clothing” of the divine in humanity. With the origins of this imagery traceable to Greek philosophy and sculpture, and with innumerable representations found in art since, the metaphoric use of cloth in art and iconography grew during the later Middle Ages, representing the Incarnation of Christ from birth to death and Resurrection, and offered answers through imagery to questions about gender and the “cultural construction of the body,” (Bynum 19) at that time that continue to be asked today. What follows is offered as a brief overview of an area of research and study that is vast; therefore, this work is not meant to be considered complete in its scope. It is intended, rather, as a point of departure, a beginning place for further questioning concerning the use of cloth/body metaphors as they relate to the art of the latter Middle Ages and their continued use in contemporary work.

To analyze cloth/body metaphors and imagery found in the art of the latter Middle Ages, the body must first be considered from social, political and theological perspectives and philosophies of that period, and how these relate to ideas about body and gender identity. Using the female-gendered Mary as an allegorical image for humanity, and her body as the clothing in which the divine was made human had political and theological benefits that extended beyond the

view of her as a source of virginal purity or her biological role in procreation. Since she was female, Mary's ascension from earthbound human to Mother of God and the Queen of Heaven was not seen as a threat to the power of a patriarchal deity. Continued belief in Aristotle's rationalization (duBois 184) of the "less-ness" (Bynum 109) of women, made the image of Mary ascending to the realm - if not to the status and power - of God an idea that was palatable to early Christians. It was the male-gendered Christ, born of humanity as God Incarnate, who was then seen as Savior and Redeemer; the savior and redeemer from sin as represented by humanity in the form of Mary's female body. Without divine intercession through the use of Mary's virginal/female/human body, Christ would have been viewed in the untenable position of a separate entity from the one God. By perceiving Christ as passing through and consequently sharing the veil of humanity/flesh with the female Mary (fig. 1), however, Christ could be worshipped as God Incarnate, and not as a deified human, as was often the case in Roman imperial tradition (Belting 162). As Bernard J. Cooke observes in The Distancing of God: The Ambiguity of Symbol in History and Theology;

... having no historical precedent of their own for development of an iconography, Christians inevitably tended to take over themes and artistic compositions from pagan sources, with the consequent danger of representing Christian faith in misleading images or of allowing pagan notions and attitudes to infiltrate Christian understanding of its own mysteries. (98)

Therefore, late medieval artists, with a lifetime of social and religious indoctrination in a belief system that celebrated the Incarnation, the Resurrection of Christ, and thereby the promise of their own resurrection - and that of their patrons who were often represented in their work (fig. 2) - as literal, material events, were in need of visual metaphors that could be used to interpret and illustrate this complex interrelationship of beliefs and persons to their deity and His manifestations as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As a time of political and social unrest, plague, war, and dissension within the Church that led to mounting concerns about heresy and witchcraft, the later Middle Ages was a period during which cloth imagery took on crucial importance (Camille 202). The Bible, with the writings of saints, clerics and beguines, was a rich source of cloth/body metaphors upon which artists could draw, (Bynum 157) either directly or through interpretation by their patrons, in their attempts to visually marry the divine with humanity, and thereby portray religious events through a culturally

universal set of images and symbols, one of which being that of cloth to body. Therefore, that the sharing of veils and cloth between representations of Mary and Christ in the work of artists such as Veneziano, Gaddi, and the unnamed makers of illuminated manuscripts (figs. 3 - 5), in addition to use as compositional devices, metaphorically allude to the shared flesh and being of Mother and Son, of female and male, of matter/humanity and the divine.

In “Metaphysics of Cloth,” Ewa Kuryluk, a contemporary artist who uses cloth/body imagery in her work, offers an overview of body/cloth associations in art from ancient Greece through the Renaissance. Citing the work of artists including Duccio, Fra Angelico, Giotto and Dürer (figs. 6 - 9), she illustrates the “synonymity between garments and body” (81) found in Christian art and symbolism, seeing it as derived from the ancient Greeks and their allegorical approach to the veiling/unveiling of representations of the female figure in sculpture. She contends, for example, that the heavily draped statues of females “suggest chastity and allegorize blank matter, traditionally perceived as female, that is given form and meaning by masculinity” (81). Kuryluk sees this as the precursor to the image of the veiled female, “an important subject of European art and literature, who either functions as an ideal, an immaculate, spotless virgin, *anima*, and muse, or represents the dumb blankness of natural femaleness” (81). And it is in this role of “spotless virgin” that Mary, representative of matter or “blankness,” is symbolically joined with the divine in the form of her son Christ, and sharing humanity with Him through the medium of cloth (fig. 10).

Caroline Walker Bynum, in *Fragmentation and Redemption*, offers additional insight into the philosophies of body and gender identity that influenced medieval thought. Seeking balance within inequity in interpreting the ancient Greek rationalization of gender, she states that:

Ancient biology, especially in its Aristotelian form made the male body paradigmatic. The male was the form or quiddity of what we are as humans; what was particularly womanly was the unformed-ness, the stuff-ness or physicality, of our humanness. Such a notion identified woman with breaches in boundaries, with lack of shape or definition, with openings and exudings and spillings forth. But this conception also, we should note, put men and women on a continuum. All human beings were form and matter. Women were merely less of what men were more. (109)

From this perspective, therefore, gender in Christ, while depicted as physically male, can be interpreted as including both male and female qualities and characteristics, representative to, and

of, humanity as a whole.

An example of the use of cloth to symbolize this joining of humanity with the divine, and the female and male in Christ, can be seen in the 14th century work *The Coronation of the Virgin* (fig. 4), by the Giottoesque painter Agnolo Gaddi (Walker 72). In this panel, Mary and Christ, seated on the same level, wear identical garments. While the theme and composition are common to Italo-Byzantine art of this period (Hartt 147), it is the representation of cloth that serves to make the statement regarding the equitable nature of the relationship shared by the two focal male and female figures. Another example of Christ as representative of both the masculine and the feminine can be seen in descriptions of Him by medieval writers as a mother who lactates and gives birth (Bynum 102). Iconography representing these images exists as well, and can be found in other written accounts where Christ's side wound is described as a breast (Bynum 102, fig. 11). Clifton attributes these differences in representations to early medieval Latin Christianity's emphasis on Christ as the resurrected king, versus that of Christ as a suffering human, considered a feminine characteristic, in the later Middle Ages (Clifton 17). In the guise of Christ as resurrected king, cloth was used as a partition to define the boundaries between the human and the divine. It is, however, through the humanizing/feminizing of Christ in the later Middle Ages that cloth becomes a metaphor for the body, and thereby an element unifying humanity and God.

In "Gendering Jesus Crucified," Richard C. Trexler considers the causes behind varied responses to representations of the naked and/or covered crucified Christ. Basing his thoughts on religious and secular writings of the medieval period, he hypothesizes according to the viewers' age and gender in relationship to their response to the "humiliated half man/god" (Cassidy 119). Expanding on Bynum's position, Trexler states that, "torture rendered Jesus like unto a suffering woman, to be worshipped by women, or like unto a powerless man, to be venerated by other powerless males in early modern Europe" (Cassidy 118). This image of the androgynous, "safe" Christ, as a figure empathetic for both men and women, can be seen in the work of Albrecht Dürer (fig. 8). In his engravings of the Passion of Christ, the Christ figure appears as the *Man of Sorrows*, with cloth once again conceivably serving as a symbolic representation of His humanity. Due to its placement on His lower body - the lower extremities being traditionally associated with humanity, while the head and upper body are associated with divinity - the cloth acts as covering and metaphor of His humanity and its loss to Him in approaching death (Steinberg 27 - 8).

Miri Rubin also offers insight into medieval attitudes toward gender and the body. In "The Body, Whole and Vulnerable, in Fifteenth Century England," she states that evidence of the sources of medieval gender organization can be seen in the work of the second century Greek writer and physician Galen (Hanawalt 20). According to Rubin, Galen saw the body as a complex system of humors, temperaments and inclinations upon which religion and the law attempted to impose a regulatory system of feminine and masculine. Medicinal records from late medieval culture, for example, recognized three physical manifestations of the body and the possible variations therein: male, female and hermaphrodite. While this represents to Rubin a "physical liquidity" concerning the medieval perception of physical gender, she also notes that the mores of the time required that either of the socially recognized roles of male or female be assumed regardless of the original physical manifestation. This attitude of "messy secrets" (21) related to the organization of the body continued through the late Middle Ages, when "devotional and theological emphasis on Christ's fleshly body reached its height" (Clifton 17). Therefore, in a time of fluid attitudes toward the physical gendering of the body, imagery in which Christ is depicted as male, female or androgynous is understandable, when coupled with the growing belief in the later Middle Ages that Christ was the savior of humanity as a whole. This attitude also offers a plausible explanation for why artists needed a symbolic device such as cloth, the natural associations with which - veiling, intercession, joining, weaving, etc. - could give visual representation to these concepts.

Knowledge of the cultural setting and attitudes toward the body and gender therefore allow for a better understanding of the use of cloth as a unifying element, both compositionally and thematically as it relates to the idea of the shared humanity of Christ and Mary. Paintings by artists such as Mantegna, Bellini, and Ghirlandaio illustrate this point. Through depicting images of Christ and Mary in which they are either physically sharing a veil or cloth, or wearing garments of the same fabric and color, these painters provided a visual context expressive of evolving medieval attitudes concerning the humanizing of God (figs. 12, 2, 13).

One can gain a partial understanding of medieval cloth/body metaphors through an understanding of the "cultural construction" (Bynum 19) of gender and the body. The picture is made more complete by further considering the cultural rules placed on the specific body and imaging of Christ, and how these rules effected the makers of such images. In "The Historical

Body of Christ,” David Nirenberg describes regional differences in the depiction of Christ, stating that Eastern Greek Christianity focused on the deified and transfigured Christ, while Western Latin Christianity gave more attention to the crucified image (Clifton 17). In *The Body of Christ in the Art of Europe and New Spain, 1150 to 1800*, James Clifton offers additional historical background concerning the opposing views held in regard to images of God and Christ. He states that the making of any such images was at one time highly controversial: “The depicting of God, or, in fact, the validity of any kind of Christian art, has not always been taken for granted” (12). For medieval Christians, imagery was a source of potential danger based in part upon their beliefs concerning the “mechanism of sight” (Camille 23). During the Middle Ages it was thought that, through sight, an image was “impressed” upon the soul through “rays” that came from the eye and then returned to it (24). Therefore if an individual saw an image that was idolatrous, and therefore sinful, the sin was directly transferred to his/her soul. This belief was so strong that not only were spiritual concerns at issue, but also the physical manifestation of what was seen was feared (24). Pregnant women, for example, were cautioned against looking into the face of “disgusting” animals, such as monkeys, “lest they should give birth to children of similar appearance” (24). This belief and Old Testament warnings against idolatry gave credence to the iconoclasts and their efforts to combat the veneration of imagery during the eighth and ninth century Byzantine debates over iconography (Clifton 12).

For the iconoclasts, the Eucharist was seen as the “only true and admissible created image, the only acceptable object of the worship of the faithful” (Cooke 103). They argued that because God is invisible, incorporeal, and uncircumscribable, he cannot be depicted, and that to represent Christ is to “depict only his human nature, thus committing Nestorian heresy by separating the human from the divine Christ” (Clifton 12). In opposition, the orthodox stance contended that to not allow the depiction of Christ on those grounds was to commit Docetist heresy by believing that the taking on of human form by Christ was only illusion. Monophysite heresy was also committed with this position, by the implication that Christ had only one nature and was therefore not entirely human. Clifton goes on to state that it is in fact the Incarnation (the union of divinity with humanity in Christ - “God’s assumption of human flesh”) that allows for the representation of Christ in His human form, while still complying with Old Testament sanctions against graven images of God: “The incarnate Christ was seen as an earthly image (*eikon*) of God and thus could

be imaged with earthly materials” (12).

Michael Camille offers further explanation of this transition of attitudes concerning Christian imagery and its makers in his book, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-making in Medieval Art*.. The author points to the fact that the Bible offered both sides of the debate over imagery as “the source for any theoretical attack on and any justification for the production of images” (28). Camille cites the Second Commandment prohibition against idolatry,

Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing [*Ne facies tibi sculptile*] not the likeness [*similitudinem*] of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth. (Exodus 20:4)

as but one of eight places in the Old Testament where this “ban on representation is repeated” (27).

He also points to Biblical references, such as Deuteronomy 27:15, that led to the belief that the makers of such images were also suspect: “Cursed be the man that maketh a graven and molten thing the abomination of the Lord, the work of the hand of artificers (*opus manuum artificum*)” (27). This perception of the artist as a potential source of evil continues in the New Testament, and can be found in the work of early Christian writers such as Tertullian who blamed the maker, rather than the object or the worshiper, for idolatry (28). In opposition to the imagery itself, he points to several other issues associated with makers and images that made each suspect. These include the artist’s distortion of nature, and the association of image making with avarice in its costly use of time and resources during a period of economic hardship (Camille 36 - 41).

Therefore it is because of these associations with “sin,” coupled with Biblical references, that the art profession of the early Middle Ages was “listed among the illicit trades with whores and alchemists” (Camille 47). The idea of the artist as artificer and a potential source of trouble to authority was not a new one in the Middle Ages, since it was traceable to Platonic philosophy (Higgins 2), but caused problems for the early Church as it sought to create and establish its identity through imagery created by artists.

Embracing the philosophy of a pagan culture through the Greek philosopher Plato and combining it with Christianity is just one of the dualities with which the Church struggled in its attempt to define itself through words and images. For example, justification for the making of images can be found in the Old Testament just chapters after the Second Commandment (Camille 28) injunction against imagery. Exodus 31:3 -5 describes Beseleel’s, whose name was

derived from *tselem*, or “image,” making of the Jewish Tabernacle:

I have filled him with the spirit of God, with wisdom and understanding, and knowledge in all manner of work. To devise whatsoever may be artificially made, of gold and silver and brass. Of marble and precious stones and a variety of wood.

In response, therefore, to the precariousness of their position, medieval artists assumed the role of an instrument through which God worked in the making of images and all things, thereby sidestepping the issue. The twelfth-century artist Theophilus, for example, wrote to younger artists to help them cope with this situation that, “You can do nothing of yourself” (Camille 31). In the medieval period, therefore, art was not thought of as the creation of an individual as in a twentieth century sense, but rather as a product of inspiration from the “supreme artist,” God (Camille 33). Such an example also points to an awareness on the part of medieval artists that they walked a fine line with their work. Further evidence of this reformulating of the Second Commandment can be seen in a late thirteenth-century diagram of the Ten Commandments (fig. 14). In this illustration, as commonly found in “late medieval vernacular biblical paraphrases,” the Second Commandment becomes a part of the First which states: “Thou shalt not have strange gods before me” (Camille 31). In this way, injunctions against the making of images could be avoided, and propagandizing imagery that promoted the teachings of the church could be made and distributed. The theological groundwork for the making of Christian imagery, including the metaphoric use/qualities of cloth, was laid out.

The debate over Christian imagery was reconciled when Western European Iconophiles agreed with the Byzantine findings at the Council of Trent in 1563 (Clifton 12). They came to the conclusion, as did their Byzantine counterparts, that the veneration paid to images went directly to the subject of the icon. Of greater significance in the West, however, was the importance of such imagery in educating the illiterate, with art being seen as capable of leading one from the material to the spiritual realm through meditation and prayer (Clifton 13 - 14). It was perhaps this need to communicate Church doctrine to predominately illiterate followers, coupled with the literalism of medieval theological interpretation of the transition from the material to spiritual realm in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Bynum 156), that may also have lent importance to cloth/body metaphors as commonly experienced, and therefore comprehensible, symbols. According to writers of the time, Mary’s flesh was the “garment” into which the Incarnate Christ was born as

man: "They saw the flesh of God as a clothing taken from Mary's flesh" (Bynum 102). And like the body of man, the cloth of that garment promised decay and corruption over time; making it a tangible symbol for the promise of the Resurrection as well. It must be considered that for Christians of the later Middle Ages, heaven and hell were not viewed as spiritual states, and the fear that the self could not survive the loss of its bodily form was very real (Bynum 156). Out of this fear rose belief in a "sense of bodily resurrection not as transformation but as reunion of scattered particles" (Bynum 158). However, these particles, which for some writers of the time represented the organic processes of plants and for others the inorganic substances of mud or ash, with "the irradiating of God's grace" are reconstituted into their original form:

And behold, all the human bones in whatever place in the earth they lay were brought together in one moment and covered with their flesh; and they all rose up with limbs and bodies intact, each in his or her gender, with the good glowing brightly and the bad manifest in blackness...And suddenly from the East a great brilliance shone forth; and there, in a cloud, I saw the Son of Man. (Bynum 160)

According to Bynum, "The body that rises is therefore described as a garment, put down at death and taken up again at the Last Judgment, uncorrupted by moth or decay" (174). "This is, after all, the context within which a particularly privileged body - Christ's own - emerged and dwelt, that of medieval corporeal anxieties and awareness of shapelessness and loss" (Rubin 20). Standard representations of the Last Judgment during this period showed the dead rising naked from the earth and then clothed (literally) with the "garments of salvation" (Bynum 225, figs. 15 - 17). Out of this imagery of resurrection and the humanity of Christ, a greater importance began to be placed on the relics and bodies of saints as intercessors between humanity and God (Clifton 17), with cloth often serving as the medium through which these ideas were expressed.

Cloth relics which gained importance in this climate of literalism and Old Testament injunctions were *acheiropoietai*, images "not made by human hand" (Camille 30). Famous examples of *acheiropoietai* are the *Mandylion* of King Abgar, also known as the cloth of Edessa, and the Veil of Veronica (Belting 208, figs. 18 - 20). While both images are essentially indistinguishable from each other, they are attributed to different legends and geographic origins, with the *Mandylion* being venerated in the East at Constantinople, and the Veil in the Roman West. The *Mandylion* is said to have been commissioned by King Abgar from an artist with Christ serving as the live model, with the veil of Veronica being reported to have been brought into being

by Christ himself. While in each form the legends surrounding them merge and/or support differing views concerning the production of Christian imagery, both of these images played important roles in the continued development of cloth/body metaphors as a means of depicting interaction between humanity and the divine; “visible reality with an invisible mystery...The image and its beholder, in ultimate terms, related to each other like archetype and copy, like Creator and creature. The material image, as a mediator, thus became a tool for a contemplation of the lost beauty of humankind.” (209).

Kept at Constantinople with other authentic relics of the life of Christ, The *Mandylion* (fig. 21) was first reported to exist in the sixth century, and was brought to the Byzantine capital from the town of Edessa in northern Syria during the tenth century (208). Legend states that King Abgar’s painter/messenger failed to capture the likeness of Christ (211). Washing his face with a cloth, Christ left an imprint of his features, which he then sent to the King. Upon seeing the image, the King is said to have been cured of an illness. The image was then mounted on a column, and an idol on a nearby column is said to have then fallen in its presence. So powerful was the image that, when a bishop had it walled up behind tile for its protection during a Persian invasion, it was said to have left a perfect imprint of itself on the tile, referred to as the *keramidion* (211). The *Mandylion* remained in Constantinople until the city was sacked in 1204, after which “the West promoted a new miraculous image with the genuine features of Christ;” the veil of Veronica (208).

The story of the veil of Veronica popularized in the West (Belting 208, fig. 22) began with the *sudarium*, or handkerchief, held by the Romans and reportedly used by Christ on the Mount of Olives or on the way to the Cross (209). This cloth, which had no image, was merged with the legend of the Mandylion, at which point it was said to carry the image of Christ and to work miracles (209). The veil of Veronica, which was kept at St. Peter’s in Rome, became in the West what the *Mandylion* had been in the East: “the undisputed archetype of the sacred portrait” (208). The story then evolved to include the legend of a pious woman named Veronica who, wishing to have an image of Christ while he was away preaching, was taking a piece of linen cloth to a painter upon which to have the image made. The story recounts how she met Jesus while on her way, who, after hearing her intentions, took the cloth and caused an image of His face to be imprinted on the fabric (208).

Another story associated with Veronica which is important to the subject of cloth/body imagery is described in the Bible by Matthew (9:20 - 22), Mark (5:25 - 34) and Luke (8:41 - 48) (Kuryluk 26). Written by each of these apostles is an account of Christ's encounter with an unnamed woman who has suffered from a twelve year flow of menstrual blood. In Mark's version of the event, cloth becomes the intermediary between Veronica (humanity) and Christ (the divine):

And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years,
 And had suffered many physicians, and had spent all that she had,
 and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse,
 When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment.
 For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.
 And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt
 in *her* body that she was healed of that plague.
 And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him,
 turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?
 And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee,
 and sayest thou, Who touched me?
 And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing.
 But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her,
 came and fell down before him and told him all the truth.
 And he said unto her Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole;
 go in peace and be whole of thy plague. (King James Version)

This same Veronica (whose name in Greek is, *vera eikon*, or "true image") has over time been identified as the same woman who wiped Jesus' face as he carried his cross to Golgotha:

The man who stopped the female flux of blood had before his death his own flux of blood; partly stopped by Veronica's intervention, the blood created a miraculous image, Christ's only true portrait. Thus, an intimate transference of blood took place. And with the blood, the material, earthly and female part left the incarnated god. (Kuryluk 28)

Based upon this imagery, Kuryluk offers the interpretation that this exchange of blood is symbolic of intercourse, pregnancy and the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary: "The menstrual blood of Mary "stopped" by the interference of the Holy Ghost, impregnated the cloth of Veronica whom Christ cured from menstruation as if by intercourse" (28). While Christ left no children, she contends, he did leave a "true likeness" of himself on the veil, a symbol of the hymen, of a female, and with it, "the image of his earthly self, his female *anima*" (28). Through cloth/body metaphor in Kuryluk's interpretation of the Veronica legend, therefore, one can again see cloth as a unifying element and transitional symbol. Cloth, as symbolic of humanity, is aligned with the female body in a manner

similar to that of Mary's in images depicting the sharing of cloth/veils between herself and Christ, as the veil or garment form that allows for human interaction with the divine.

While the truth of either the Abgar legend or that of Veronica as relate to the making of a likeness of Christ on cloth may never be proved, these two explanations of possibly the same event served as important touchstones in the medieval struggle concerning Christian imagery. By sending his likeness to Abgar, it could be argued that Christ wanted images of himself to be made and distributed (Belting 208). In addition, the King Abgar story, in its form of a commissioned painting of the living Christ, also supports the idea of the Son of God as a real historical figure versus an invented pagan deity (208). However, in its form as an image sent to the King and produced by Christ, it could also simultaneously be a miraculous image, and like the veil of Veronica, an *achiropiite* not made by human hands, and therefore not an idol similar to the images worshipped by pagans (208).

Artistic consideration and inspiration from medieval use of cloth/body metaphors, whether it is believed they are humanly or divinely executed, continues today. An artist, in whose work as both writer - as has been noted above - and maker these associations are particularly strong, is Ewa Kuryluk. It is because of her self-reported inspiration from medieval sources and cloth imagery that her work and writings are used in this paper as a contemporary interpretation and perspective on medieval cloth/body imagery.

With precise lines and naturalistic rendering, her cloth drawings of self and friends - both male and female - act as skin, fabric coverings, and flayed emotions. Unlike their medieval predecessors however, these images do more than allude to shared flesh; they act as flesh, covering walls, chairs, trees, bushes and ground like so many. Anything but ideal, these renderings of the nude body are both sensitively executed and unflinchingly honest. Having remained in the United States as a voluntary exile after the declaration of martial law in her native Poland, Kuryluk created an art form from materials that reflected her need to be able to pack all of her belongings in one bag and move on. The resulting cloths simultaneously evoke familiar, physical closeness and ritual cloth associations of birth and death, the present and the ancient: the fresh sheet, the shroud, the veil of Veronica. Cloth and its long history of utility intentionally, as can be gathered from her writings, coexist with Christian myth in her work. Memory associations manifest in the rendered skin of her subjects; marks of time and materials that equally capture

archetypal imagery and commonplace moments; the crucifixion of Christ and a flick of cigarette ash (figs. 23 - 25).

Documenting Kuryluk's work from her first installation entitled, "The Villa dei Misteri," through a then more recent piece, "Fall in Princeton," Jan Knott takes the reader through the artist's use of historic and religious imagery (Kuryluk 9 - 12). With descriptions as well as quotes from Kuryluk, Knott also outlines the artist's interest in depicting memory through the use of cloth and skin associations (9). In writing about Kuryluk's work in her article entitled "The Membrane of Memory," Elzbieta Grabska describes the artist's earlier pieces as leading toward issues surrounding the idea of "vera icon" or a true image (21 - 25). Outlining the four Christian and Byzantine categories required of a vera icon, Grabska describes how the artist's work includes the concepts of revelation, resemblance, transcendence and reflection (22).

Ed White adds another dimension important to cloth imagery, when he writes of Kuryluk's sheets that they cover, in addition to lovers, "the sick, the operable, the dying, the dead" (17). Experiencing the cloth works of Ewa Kuryluk is no less intimate because of their presentation within a gallery space, as opposed to a visceral body, on a bed or in a grave. Through her work, Kuryluk continues within the traditional associations of skin and cloth; life cycles and transformations, the physical and the spiritual. All the while, however, she challenges the viewer to look at often disturbing images and consider their traditional interpretations in new ways.

Through psychological associations of comfort and familiarity and shared literal qualities of covering, protection, and decay over time, cloth as a body metaphor became a significant source of imagery during the Middle Ages that continues to inspire artists of today. Medieval artists, in need of visual metaphors that could interpret and illustrate the complex interrelationship of beliefs and persons in connection to their deity and His manifestations, found in the metaphoric literature of the time rich resources of visually interpretable material, coupled with rulings for and against themselves and their work. More than the compositional devices of visual artists, representations of shared cloth and veiling metaphorically alluded to the shared flesh and being of Mother and Son, of female and male, of matter and the divine. Symbolic of the Incarnation of Christ and therefore of humanity's strengths as well as flaws, imperfections and weaknesses, cloth offered the early Christians a medium of expression and objects of veneration capable of providing imagery that could walk the fine guidelines of established doctrines, prohibitions, and social mores with the

same skill that was expected of them as believers. By perceiving and pictorializing the male Christ as passing through and sharing the veil of humanity/flesh with the female Mary, the medieval Christ could be worshipped as God Incarnate, and not as a deified human. In the contemporary work of artist Ewa Kuryluk, cloth offers a medium through which to explore current physical and spiritual relationships, while simultaneously echoing traditions of imagery that began during the late Middle Ages. Therefore, cloth/body imagery serves as a source of artistic symbolism for medieval and contemporary artists, and is deserving of further research. Such imagery allowed both the medieval viewer and the viewer of today to find comfort in the familiarity of cloth and “return(ed) to the body as a secure site of certainty and truth, as a grounding place for that which might connect people across their many differences” (Rubin 19).

Works Cited

- Belting, Hans. Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion. New York: Urzone, Inc., 1991.
- Bynum, Caroline Walker. The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200 - 1336. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Camille, Michael. The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-making in Medieval Art. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Cassidy, Brendan, ed. Iconography at the Crossroads. Princeton: Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, 1993.
- Clifton, James. The Body of Christ in the Art of Europe and New Spain, 1150 - 1800. Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 1997.
- Cooké, Bernard J. The Distancing of God: The Ambiguity of Symbol in History and Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.
- duBois, Page. Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Grabar, André. Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- Hanawalt, Barbara A. and David Wallace, eds. Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth - Century England. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Hartt, Frederick. History of Italian Renaissance Art. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987.
- Higgins, Kathleen M. Aesthetics in Perspective. New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996.
- Kuryluk, Ewa. The Fabric of Memory. Wilmette: Formations, 1987.
- Kuryluk, Ewa. "Metaphysics of Cloth: Leonardo's Draperies at the Louvre." *Arts Magazine* May (1990): 80 - 82.
- Steinberg, Leo. The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and Modern Oblivion. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Walker, John. The National Gallery of Art Washington. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1984.
- Weithaus, Ulrike ed. Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993.

Illustrations

- Fig. 1 Venice, private collection; *Madonna of Mercy*, 14th century.
Venice, *S. Maria Mater Domini*; stone icon, c. 1200.
- Fig. 2 Jacopo Bellini, *Madonna of Humility with Donor*, c. 1430.
Panel, 23" x 16". The Louvre, Paris. Perhaps commissioned by Lionello d'Este.
- Fig. 3 Paolo Veneziano, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, dated 1364.
Wood, 39" x 30 1/2". Samuel H. Kress Collection.
- Fig. 4 Agnolo Gaddi, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, probably c. 1370.
Wood, 64" x 31 1/4". Samuel H. Kress Collection.
- Fig. 5 Workshop of the Boucicaut Master, *Annunciation*, c. 1410.
Tempera and gilding on vellum, 6 5/8" x 4 7/8". Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation.
- Fig. 6 Duccio di Buoninsegna, *The Virgin and Child with Saints*, c. 1315.
Egg tempera on poplar, 61 cm. x 39 cm.. The National Gallery, London..
- Fig. 7 Fra Angelico, *The Madonna of Humility*, c. 1430 - 35.
Wood, 24" x 17 7/8". Andrew W. Mellon Collection.
- Fig. 8 Giotto, *Madonna and Child*, Painted probably between 1320 and 1330.
Wood, 33 5/8" x 24 3/8". Samuel H. Kress Collection.
- Fig. 9 Albrecht Dürer, Engraved Passion (*Man of Sorrows*), 1507 - 12.
Engravings, each approximately 4 5/8" x 2 7/8". The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.
- Fig. 10 Lorenzo Monaco, *Madonna and Child*, dated 1413.
Wood, 46" x 21 3/4". Samuel H. Kress Collection.
- Fig. 11 Louis Cousin, called Primo, or Il Gentile, *Saint Catherine of Siena Drinking from the Side Wound of Christ*, c. 1648.
Oil on lapis lazuli, 9 1/2" x 10 3/4". The Barbara Piasecka Johnson Collection Foundation, Princeton.
- Fig. 12 Andrea Mantegna, *Enthroned Madonna and Child with Saints* (S. Zeno alterpiece) 1456 - 9. Panel, height 86 1/2". S. Zeno, Verona.
- Fig. 13 Domenico del Ghirlandaio, *Nativity and Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1485.
Panel, 65 3/4" square. Sassetti Chapel, Sta. Trinita, Florence.
- Fig. 14 The Ten Commandments, late 13th century.
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, M.S. fr. 9220 (*Vrigit de Solas*), fol. 14r.
- Fig. 15 Receiving the Garment of Salvation, c. 1255.
Miniature, from the Bamberg-Eichstätt psalter.

- Fig. 16 Resurrection, 13th century.
Miniature, from the Würzburg psalter.
- Fig. 17 Giotto, *Last Judgement*, c. 1305 - 10.
Arena chapel, Padua.
- Fig. 18 *Mandylion of Christ from Novgorod*, 12th century.
State Tretjakov Gallery, Moscow
- Fig. 19 *La Sainte Face*, 13th century.
Cathedral of Laon, Laon.
- Fig. 20 *Pillar with the Veronica*, after a print by Pietro Mallio, 1646.
St. Peter's, Rome.
- Ugo da Carpi, Alterpiece for the Veronica chapel, c. 1525.
St. Peter's, Rome.
- Albrecht Dürer, *Veronica* (detail), 1513.
- Fig. 21 S. Bartolomeo degli Armeni, Abgar legend, 14th century.
Silver chasing. Genoa.
- Fig. 22 Hans Memling, obverse, *St. Veronica* ; reverse, *Chalice of St. John the Evangelist*,
c. 1480. Wood, 12 1/4" x 9 1/2". Samuel H. Kress Collection.
- Fig. 23 Ewa Kuryluk, *Cloth and Curtains*, 1978 - 79.
- Fig. 24 Ewa Kuryluk, *Still Lives*, 1978 -83.
- Fig. 25 Ewa Kuryluk, *Theatre of Love*, 1981 - 87.



Fig. 1 Venice, private collection; *Madonna of Mercy*, 14th century.

Venice, *S. Maria Mater Domini*; stone icon, c. 1200.



Fig. 2 Jacopo Bellini, *Madonna of Humility with Donor*, c. 1430.
Panel, 23" x 16". The Louvre, Paris. Perhaps commissioned by Lionello d'Este.



Fig. 3 Paolo Veneziano, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, dated 1364.
Wood, 39" x 30 1/2". Samuel H. Kress Collection.



Fig. 4 Agnolo Gaddi, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, probably c. 1370.
Wood, 64" x 31 1/4". Samuel H. Kress Collection.



Fig. 5 Workshop of the Boucicaut Master, *Annunciation*, c. 1410.
Tempera and gilding on vellum, 6 5/8" x 4 7/8". Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation.



Fig. 6 Duccio di Buoninsegna, *The Virgin and Child with Saints*, c. 1315.
Egg tempera on poplar, 61 cm. x 39 cm. The National Gallery, London..



Fig. 7 Fra Angelico, *The Madonna of Humility*, c. 1430 - 35.
Wood, 24" x 17 7/8". Andrew W. Mellon Collection.



Fig. 8 Giotto, *Madonna and Child*, Painted probably between 1320 and 1330.
Wood, 33 5/8" x 24 3/8". Samuel H. Kress Collection.



Fig. 9 Albrecht Dürer, Engraved Passion (*Man of Sorrows*), 1507 - 12.
Engravings, each approximately 4 5/8" x 2 7/8". The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.



Fig. 10 Lorenzo Monaco, *Madonna and Child*, dated 1413.
Wood, 46" x 21 3/4". Samuel H. Kress Collection.



Fig. 11 Louis Cousin, called Primo, or Il Gentile, *Saint Catherine of Siena Drinking from the Side Wound of Christ*, c. 1648.
Oil on lapis lazuli, 9 1/2" x 10 3/4". The Barbara Piasecka Johnson Collection
Foundation, Princeton.

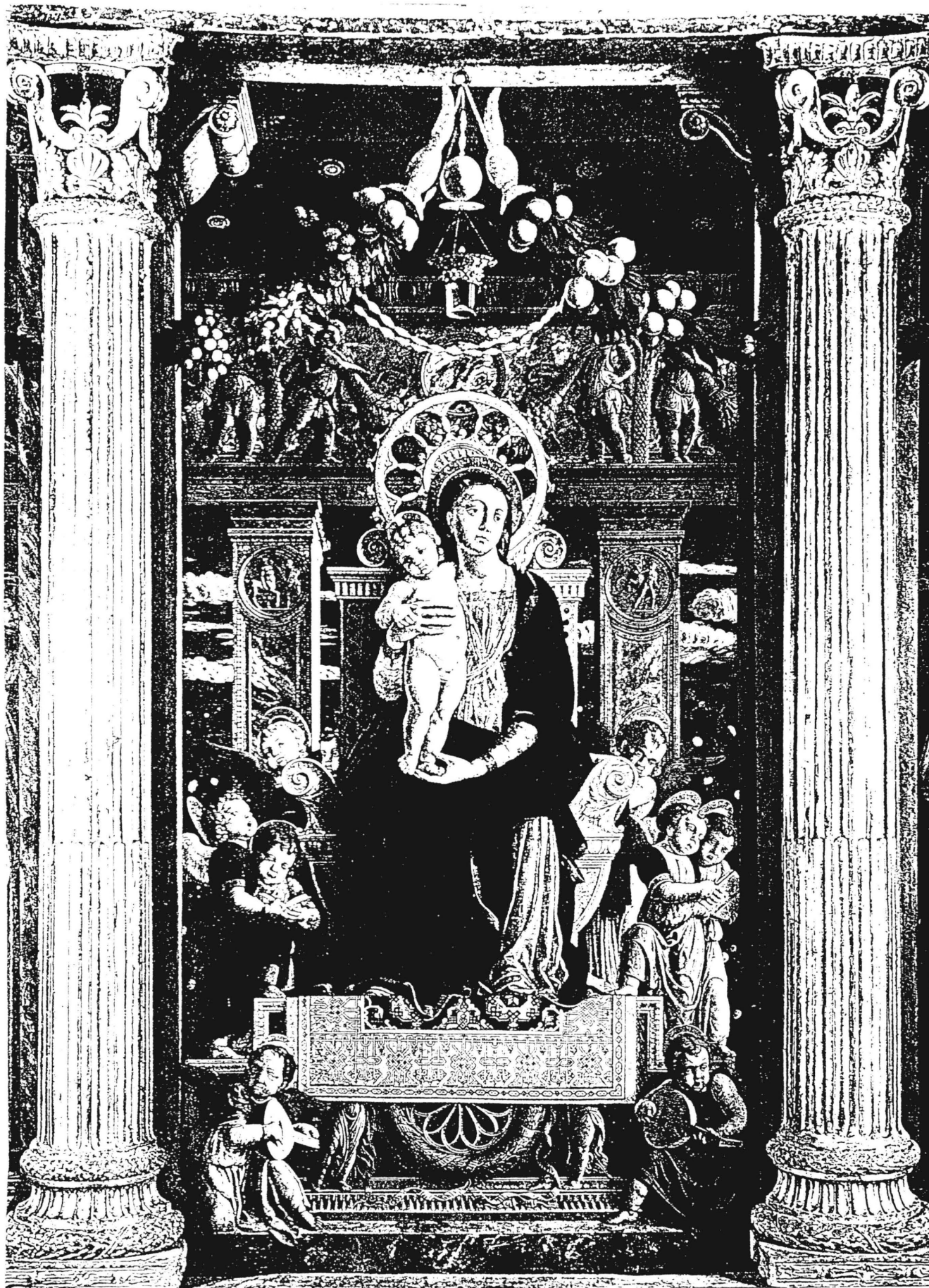


Fig. 12 Andrea Mantegna, *Enthroned Madonna and Child with Saints* (S. Zeno altarpiece)
1456 - 9. Panel, height 86 1/2". S. Zeno, Verona.



Fig. 13 Domenico del Ghirlandaio, *Nativity and Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1485.
Panel, 65 3/4" square. Sassetti Chapel, Sta. Trinita, Florence.



Fig. 15 Receiving the Garment of Salvation, c. 1255.
Miniature, from the Bamberg-Eichstätt psalter.



Fig. 16 Resurrection, 13th century.
 Miniature, from the Würzburg psalter.

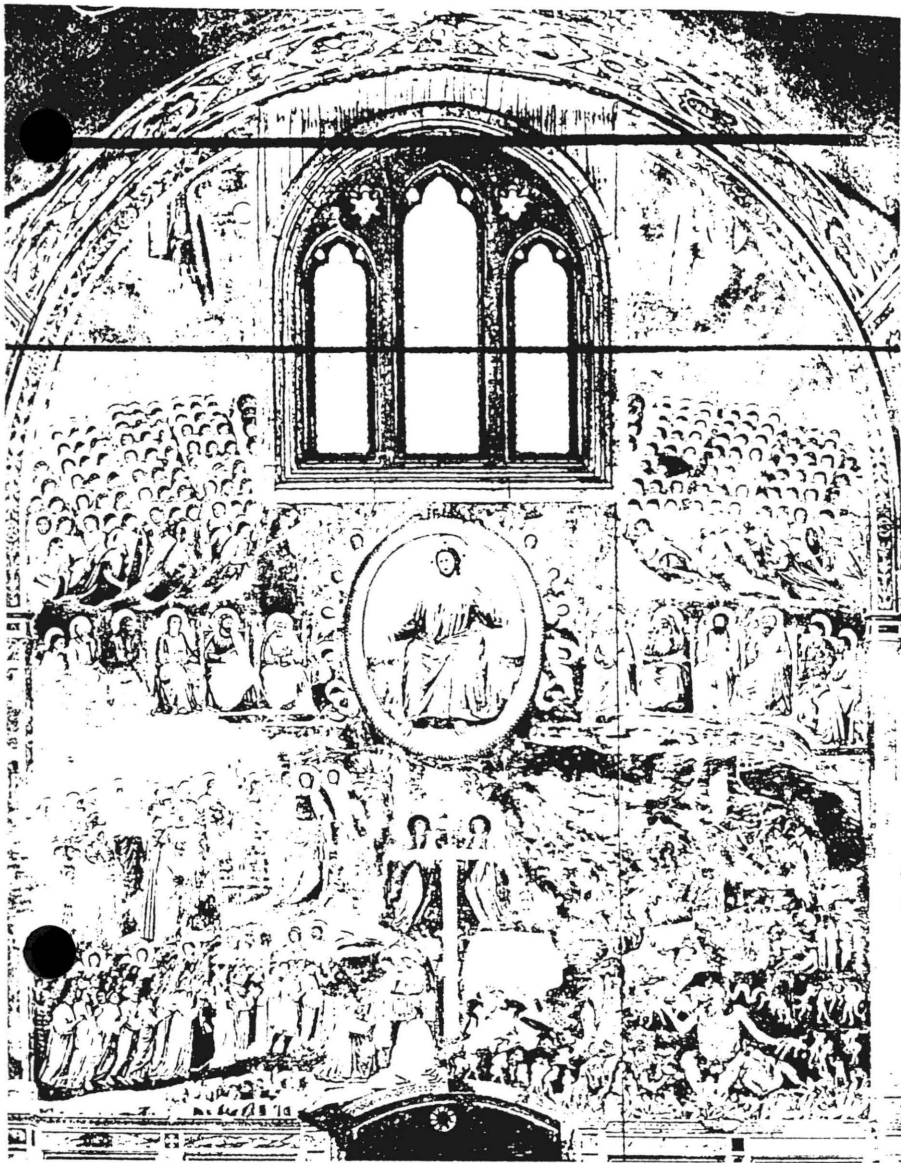


Fig. 17 Giotto, *Last Judgement*, c. 1305 - 10.
Arena chapel, Padua.



Fig. 18 *Mandylion of Christ from Novgorod*, 12th century.
State Tretjakov Gallery, Moscow



Fig. 19 *La Sainte Face*, 13th century.
Cathedral of Laon, Laon.

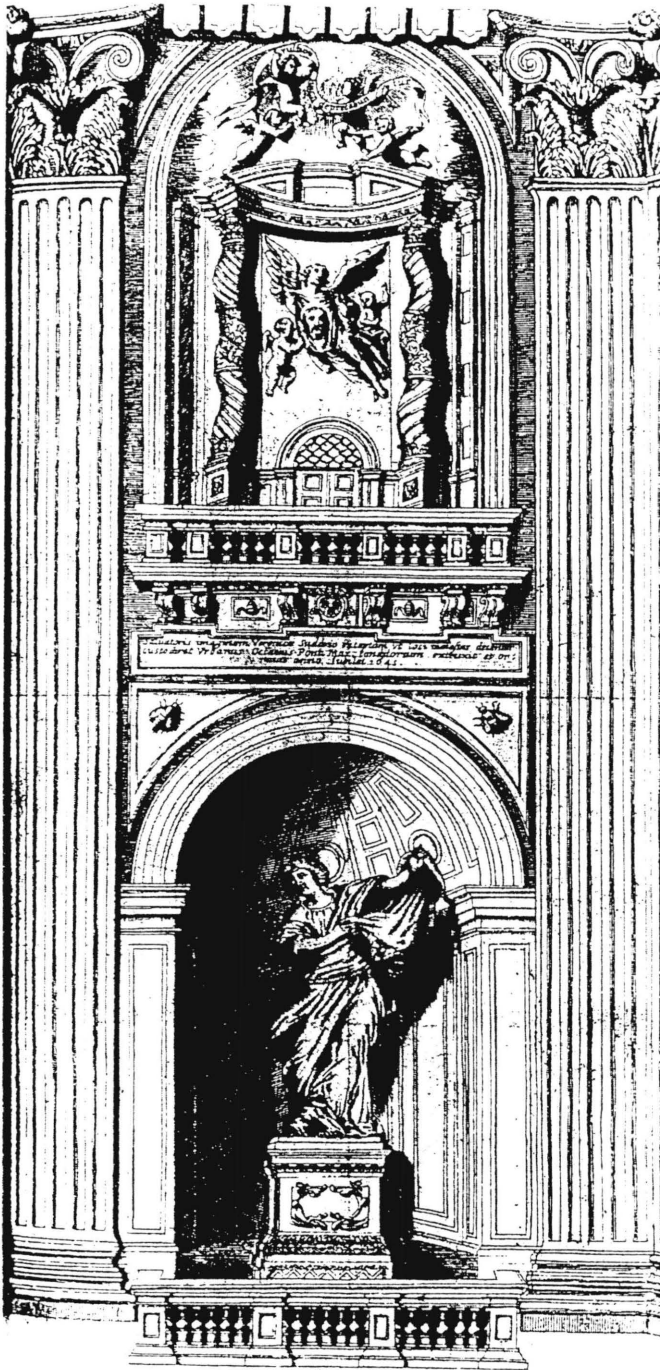


Fig. 20 *Pillar with the Veronica*, after a print by Pietro Mallio, 1646. St. Peter's, Rome.
 Ugo da Carpi, *Alterpiece for the Veronica chapel*, c. 1525. St. Peter's, Rome.
 Albrecht Dürer, *Veronica* (detail), 1513.



Fig. 21 S. Bartolomeo degli Armeni, Abgar legend, 14th century.
Silver chasing. Genoa.



Fig. 22 Hans Memling, obverse, *St. Veronica* ; reverse, *Chalice of St. John the Evangelist*, c. 1480. Wood, 12 1/4" x 9 1/2". Samuel H. Kress Collection.



Fig. 23 Ewa Kuryluk, *Cloth and Curtains*, 1978 - 79.



Fig. 24 Ewa Kuryluk, *Still Lives*, 1978 -83.

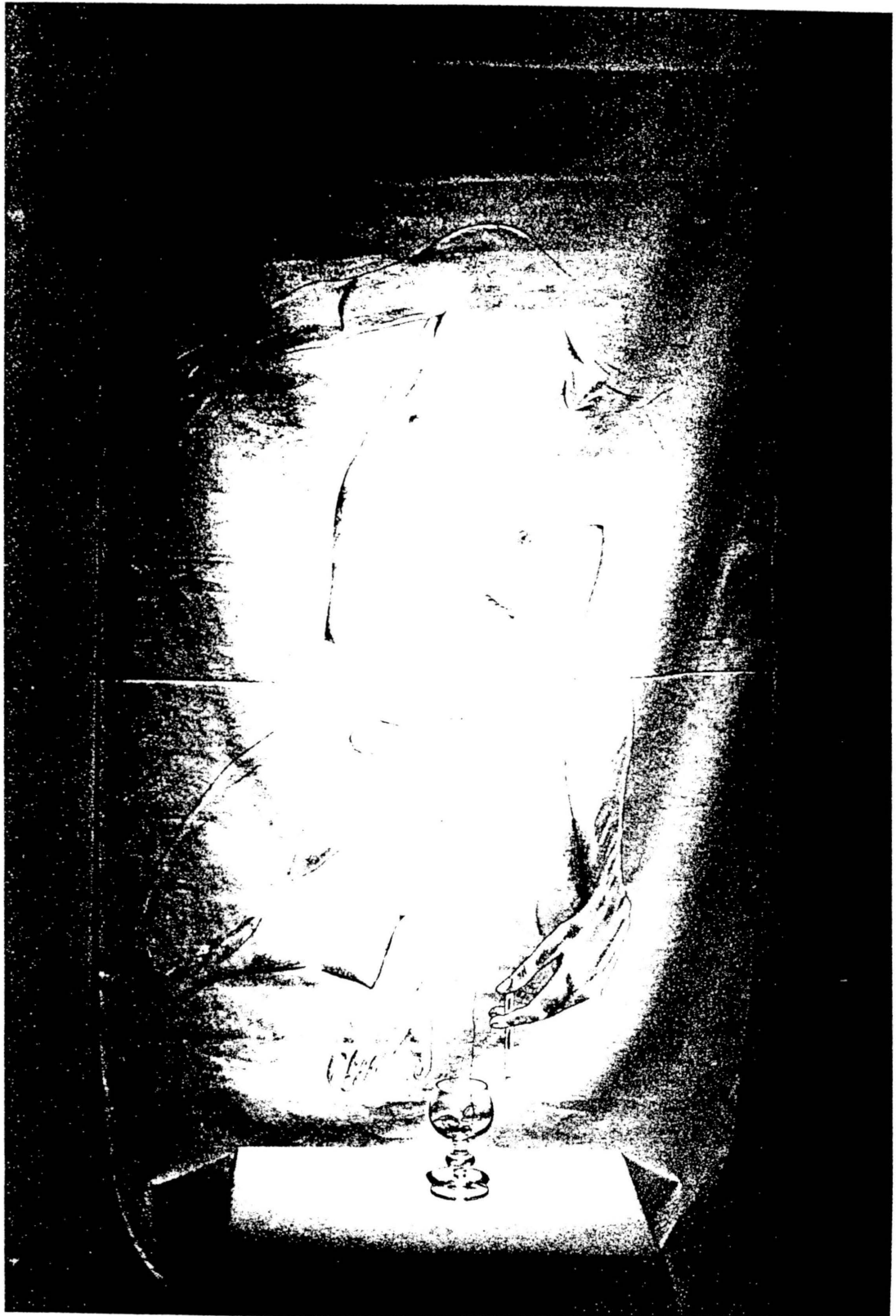


Fig. 25 Ewa Kuryluk, *Theatre of Love*, 1981 - 87.