

Karen von Veh

**The Role of Beauty and Perfection in Marian Iconography
Contemporary Responses to Controversial Images of Virgin Mary
by Chris Ofili and Diane Victor**

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This paper considers the reaction of audiences to images of the Virgin Mary in contemporary art that deviate from historically sanctioned ideals of beauty. Twelfth century monk, Bernard of Clairvaux, for example states that Mary was chosen as the mother of God *because of her physical beauty* which supposedly illustrates her moral and spiritual worthiness. It follows that the physical beauty found in images of Mary is inextricably tied up with notions of her “divinity” and her efficacy as an intercessor. The contemporary examples discussed in this paper are atypical, one might say transgressive examples of Marian iconography. They have both received very strong negative reactions from the public. The examples I discuss are *The Holy Virgin Mary* (popularly known as the Dung Madonna) by British artist Chris Ofili and the *Eight Marys* by South African artist Diane Victor. I investigate public reaction to these images and try to ascertain how much of the response derives from historic expectations that imbue images of a perfectly beautiful (and therefore possibly divine) Mary. I argue that the conflation of Mary’s beauty and divinity has accumulated in religious iconography for centuries, to the degree that atypical contemporary images might be considered iconoclastic by those who believe that to undermine her beauty is to undermine her religious significance. Such beliefs could indicate a slippage between icon and prototype, or sign and signifier, that has become entrenched through historic repetition.

Keywords: Diane Victor, Chris Ofili, Marian beauty, Marian divinity

I begin this paper with an overview of the historic construction of Marian divinity and how it must be expressed in physical beauty. I then consider two contemporary examples of Marian imagery, by Chris Ofili and Diane Victor, which do not conform to expected parameters, and have been negatively received by the public. Despite contemporary secularism there is a residue of belief in the sanctity of certain imagery. This might explain the persistence of a conflation between sign and signifier amongst the more conventionally religious, who invest the image with a “supernatural” potency.¹ As David Freedberg explains, the level of belief in a viewer is the deciding factor of whether a sign can become the living embodiment of what it signifies.² The strength of outrage expressed in recent responses at perceived lack of reverence towards religious imagery appears to indicate that such imagery remains inherently sacred for some viewers. I argue that the conflation of Mary’s beauty and divinity has accumulated in religious iconography for centuries, to the degree that atypical contemporary images might be considered iconoclastic due to the historically entrenched perception that to undermine her beauty is to undermine her religious significance. Peter Schafer explains that as early as the fifth century AD the church came close to a deification of Mary, believing that because she was the willing instrument of God’s plan of redemption it follows that “it is only ‘through her’ that the Holy Trinity is venerated; it is only ‘through her’ that the fallen creation returns to heaven; it is only ‘through her’ that the dead rise from death, and so on”.³ According to this doctrine, Mary takes on an active role of redeemer by giving birth to God in human form, without her consent for this plan, therefore, salvation would have been impossible. According to Schafer at this early stage of church history, she already simultaneously “assumes, together with her son Jesus Christ, the role of *coredeptrix* (‘co-redeemer’)” and by inference assumes a form of divinity.⁴

By the 12th century, sermons given by the Cistercian monk, Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) extolled Mary as the guiding star, the Queen of Heaven,⁵ and representing divinity but, most pertinently, he stated that Mary was chosen as mother of God *because of her "appearance and beauty"*.⁶ He suggests that her physical perfection was a reflection of her "inner beauty" and spirituality, and this beauty (both inner and outer) is what appealed to the "God of love" as explained in Clairvaux's sermon where he states, in decidedly erotic terms: "in his great desire he came to the Virgin, whom he loved, whom he had chosen for himself, whose beauty he desired".⁷ The Benedictine nun, Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), reinforced the deification of Mary through her poetry extolling the Virgin.⁸ She also states that God singled out Mary because of her beauty, and forcefully promotes Mary's predetermined role in salvation, to the extent that she almost welcomes the fall of Eve because it allowed for "the process of salvation, put in motion by God becoming man through Mary".⁹ This attitude results in Mary being given the title of *salvatrix* or "saving Lady"¹⁰ and Hildegard of Bingen describes her, importantly for this discussion, as the *mirror of God's beauty* who reflects His beauty to the earth. According to this doctrine Mary not only heals but *recreates* the world, thus inferring that she is God's equal and must therefore be represented as perfect in every way - including physical perfection and beauty - as this infers divine perfection.¹¹ Worship of Mary as a Heavenly Queen was further promoted by the Franciscan order in the Middle Ages and supported by the *Golden Legend*, written in the 13th century.¹²

Idealism, as expressed in early examples of Marian imagery, was couched in a hieratic absence of physicality which rendered a schematic version of the Virgin's physiognomy to preserve her divinity and emphasise her lack of transient mortality. However by the time of the Renaissance with its resultant humanist glory in physical idealism, we find many examples of Madonnas who illustrate chastity, humility, meekness and piety presented within the framework of a serene and exquisitely ideal physical presence.¹³

Schafer explains that the veneration of Mary as divine rather than human was supported by the belief that by mending Eve's sin through her actions Mary manages to heal and bless both heaven and earth and is therefore worthy of glorification.¹⁴ This is the origin of apocryphal traditions that arose as early as the end of the 5th century, which suggest that instead of dying she ascended bodily into heaven, like Christ.¹⁵ Despite the fact that Mary's ascension was only officially proclaimed as doctrine by Pope Pius XII in the 1950s,¹⁶ there are many Renaissance paintings depicting this event, a well-known example being Titian's altarpiece, the *Assumption of the Virgin* (1516-1518).¹⁷ This indicates that by the 16th century the notion of a pure and perfectly beautiful Virgin, as the mother of God and a woman worthy of veneration in heaven and on earth, was woven into the daily fabric of church politics, reinforcing her status as divine rather than human.

This tradition of beauty and divinity has been reinforced since then by centuries of repetition in both doctrine and imagery. Expectations are thus created, which perhaps explain people's reactions to atypical examples of Marian imagery. For example there is a carved wooden Maori statue of a Madonna and Child (c. 1845-1890) on display in the Auckland Museum, New Zealand (fig. 1). This figure has the traditional *rauponga*¹⁸ spiral carvings and distorted bodily proportions typical of a Maori human image.¹⁹ The accompanying information explains that the carver was a recent convert to Christianity, and had offered it as a gift to the local Catholic church.²⁰ The priest, however, viewed the figure as "objectionable"²¹ and he rejected the offering on the grounds of its unsuitability as a holy image. In other words it did not fit into the circumscribed parameters of a religious icon according to church tradition and therefore was not considered "spiritual" in any Christian sense. This is an example of the strength of visual tradition, as the perceived ugliness of an image of Mary, from a Western aesthetic, has been equated with the spiritual impact of that image. The fear of pagan superstitions and non-Christian spiritual potency possibly entering the church through a Maori inspired image also cannot be dismissed, which might indicate a belief in the negative possibilities of slippage between icon and prototype. The power of the image for good or evil is thus ultimately identified in the image itself, particularly ironic in this case as the artist apparently intended to honour Christianity rather than undermine it.²²



1 *Madonna and Child (Whapakapoko)*, 1845-1890, wood, paua shell, 83x15cm (reproduced with kind permission from the Auckland Museum, New Zealand)

A similarly negative response has been identified in public reactions to contemporary examples of perceived “ugliness” in images of Mary.²³ Chris Ofili’s *The Holy Virgin Mary* (fig. 2), for example, is an image of an unusual, expressively painted, black Madonna, spotted with carefully placed resin-covered elephant dung (her exposed breast is made of dung for example) and surrounded by what appear to be cherubs or angels. On closer inspection the angels are found to be collaged images from pornographic magazines showing female genitalia and buttocks. Ofili comes from a Catholic background and asserts that he was not aiming specifically to offend religious viewers with this work but to re-evaluate traditional expectations of religious imagery from the viewpoint of his culture and ethnicity.²⁴ He states that he was exploring the exploitation of black people through racial and sexual stereotypes²⁵ and thereby attempting to provoke issues around race and ethnicity. Carol Becker explains: “As a black artist in a predominantly white art world, he is aware that there is an expectation that his work will in some way reference blackness. He plays with this and takes it to an even further point, back to the elephants of

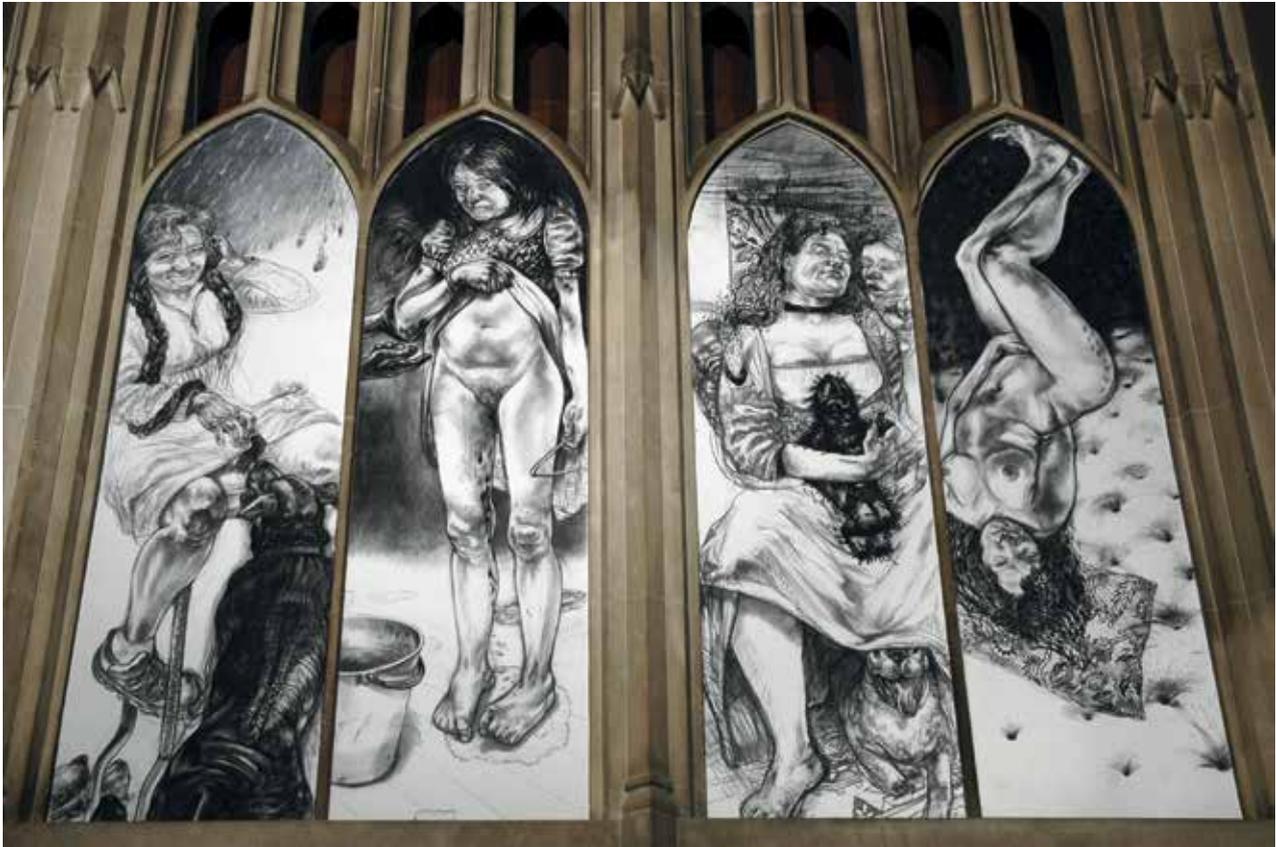


2 Chris Ofili, *The Holy Virgin Mary*, 1996, acrylic, oil, polyester resin, paper collage, glitter, map pins and elephant dung on linen, 243.8x182.8 cm (courtesy of the artist and Victoria Miro, London, © Chris Ofili)

Africa, a place so primal and unexpected that either people accept the work as African and exotic, or they question why he insists on using dung everywhere, even to portray the Virgin Mary".²⁶ The work was one of the exhibits at the Royal Academy in London, in a widely publicised group show from the Saatchi Collection entitled *Sensation* that ran from 18 September to the 28 December 1997. The show initiated a media frenzy denouncing the content and execution of many of the works, which ironically engaged public interest to the degree that a total of 284,734 people saw the exhibition in London alone.²⁷ Marcus Harvey's portrait of the notorious child murderer, Myra Hindley (1996-98), which was composed from children's handprints, for example, was considered particularly tasteless, as was the Chapman brothers' ostensibly paedophilic *Tragic Anatomies* (1995), consisting of fibreglass mannequins of young girls, many with phallic noses and rectums or vagina mouths. *Great Deeds against the Dead* (1994), also by the Chapman brothers, offended in a different way, with gory life-size castrated and decapitated people referring to Goya's etching of the same name from his *Disasters of War* series. John Molyneux considered these and other Chapman brothers' works to be "genuinely offensive to human values".²⁸ The shock or sensational value, therefore, mainly lay in works that flouted bourgeois social sensibilities by using gore, kitsch, sex and vulgarity. The Hindley portrait was vandalised²⁹ during the exhibition,³⁰ protests were held outside the venue, windows of the Royal Academy (Burlington House) were broken during the exhibition, but Ofili's work, in comparison, went unnoticed by the British public and press alike.³¹ It was only in New York, while the *Sensation* show was on display at the Brooklyn Museum of Art from October 1999, that Ofili's work received public notoriety when it was denounced by the Mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, as "anti Catholic".³² On 16 December, 1999, it was defaced with white paint by a 72 year-old Catholic man, Dennis Heiner, because he believed it was blasphemous.³³ In America, because of the Ofili work, the exhibition caused ongoing debates in the media, and lawsuits from both sides of the fracas³⁴ largely due to Giuliani threatening to remove funding from the Brooklyn Museum.³⁵ There is a question mark that hangs over the reason for this reaction in America and not in England³⁶ or Berlin (where the exhibition was also shown). Despite the separation of state and religion in America, Steven Dubin identifies religion as one of the main points of discourse referred to in America whenever social standards and practices are being debated, noting that: "Religion remains a primary source of values and identity".³⁷ Perhaps a residue of fundamentalist Christianity pertains in America that no longer exists in the arguably more secular society of Britain and Germany.³⁸

To return to Ofili's *Holy Virgin Mary* and its reception in America, Becker points out that the image itself as an artwork "both sacred and profane, capable of manifesting herself as white, black and brown"³⁹ engendered very little debate in the media. Brent Plate explains that the use of dung as something dirty, in Mary Douglas' terms a "taboo" substance sullyng the purity and holiness of the virgin, became the incendiary aspect for western viewers.⁴⁰ Becker concurs and further notes that the possibility of race, as a more provocative aspect than the use of dung, was never even suggested.⁴¹ Similarly the small vaginas scattered over the image, which might imply inappropriate sexuality, seem to have received very little attention in any of the debates. Michael Davis posits that Giuliani's response appears to be "based on the narrow definition that art should only be beautiful and an equally narrow picture of a Virgin Mary who looks like Ingrid Bergman".⁴² This notion attests to the cumulative effect of religious imagery and its supporting dogma, in constructing a specific identity for the Virgin Mary that is imbued through a particular aesthetic. Yet there is still a query over whether the controversy in America is due to a genuine disturbance of religious sensibility or to the expedience of a canny politician exploiting a niche agenda.⁴³ Cynicism aside, the fact remains that, by raising the spectre of iconoclasm with reference to a religious icon, Mayor Giuliani was able to tap into what is obviously a sensitive issue amongst a substantial number of his constituents. His condemnation engendered heated debates in the media and in subsequent academic articles. This furore equalled if not surpassed the more understandable reaction in Britain over what might be seen as tasteless paedophilia and gratuitous violence evidenced in many of the other works on the show.

The work of South African artist, Diane Victor, also initiated controversy in America when her drawings of *The Eight Marys* (2004) were exhibited in New York at the Cathedral of St John the Divine as part of the *Personal*



3-4 Diane Victor, *The Eight Marys*, 2004 (panels 1-4 and 5-8), charcoal and pastel on paper, each 170 x 51cm, Hollard Collection (courtesy of the artist)

Affects Exhibition in 2004 (figs. 3, 4). Victor's work consists of eight panels, drawn in charcoal and pastel on paper; presenting us with a very individualistic interpretation of the major transitional stages in the life of a mythical Mary/everywoman. Her decision to irreverently reinvent Mary in a way that points clearly to her humanity rather than her divinity, was influenced by the Cathedral setting as she wished to disturb viewer expectation enough to provoke a re-evaluation of the traditional images of Mary and their implications for women. Her aim was to question the roles that females have been allocated within Christianity, and to expose ongoing mechanisms of patriarchal control (particularly relevant in South Africa at the time as it had just emerged from a repressive patriarchal regime under the Afrikaner Nationalist government). Victor thus engages with "the patriarchal Catholic myth of the 'one perfect woman' and thoroughly demythologizes her".⁴⁴

In opposition to ideal constructions of the Virgin these drawings emphasise unidealised humanity partly because they resemble Victor herself, thus conflating the idealised iconic Mary with the daily life-experience of women in general. Through this strategy they undermine representations of the Virgin that are designed to advocate female subordination by presenting an impossible, divine, role model. "Victor's Mary is not a virgin but a complex sexualized being; not the pure, meek, perfect woman constructed by the Christian church as the only woman worthy enough to be venerated by men."⁴⁵ The drawings are performances of the stages of identity during Mary's life from a rather sly pre-pubescent child in panel one to an aged, pitiful, naked crone in a wheelchair in panel eight. Not one of these manifestations of Mary can be described as beautiful and certainly none of them are exhibiting demeanours that can be associated with divinity.

While in situ, in the ambulatory of St John the Divine cathedral they engendered public criticism from a Catholic schoolteacher, C.J. De Stefano, who was outraged by this work and its presentation in what he considered to be a "sacred space".⁴⁶ He wrote to the Episcopal Bishop of New York, Mark Sisk, to say how he and his students were "sickened" at the choice of works and to ask "why art that not only disrespects some of our sensibilities but also demeans our beliefs is being officially sanctioned by the Episcopal Church?" Diane Victor's *Eight Marys* was singled out for comment as the most disturbing and distressing of the works on display. Bishop Sisk's reply was circumspect and stated that while there were controversial aspects to the exhibition it was "not blasphemous or demeaning to religion".⁴⁷ Mr De Stefano then wrote to the Reverend Tom Miller, Canon for Liturgy and the Arts, whose enlightened reply included the understanding that Victor's work "is an autobiographical critique of the way in which feminine imagery has been manipulated to suppress and control women in many cultures". He goes on to explain that "these works are rooted in the artists' truthful engagement in South Africa's struggle and in their experiences not only of hope, but also of the suffering from which this hope is revealed as grace upon grace".⁴⁸ Victor may not have intentionally sought to engender a spiritual interpretation but it is an example of the wide-ranging effect of thought-provoking art that artistic intentions do not limit the work's reception.⁴⁹

In conclusion, a long history of images idealising the Virgin Mary has been employed by the church to express her divinity and spiritual worthiness in visual terms. Public acceptance of these values is so entrenched that any atypical contemporary images might be considered iconoclastic; particularly by those who believe that to undermine her beauty is to undermine her religious significance. While both contemporary examples discussed contain sexualized imagery that would detract from the purity ascribed to the Virgin, it seems that the aesthetic expectations are so circumscribed by historic repetition that *any* deviation from the norm is problematic. The construction of Mary as divine rather than human is, however, apocryphal so Victor and Ofili are merely manipulating an iconographic tradition to make a statement about contemporary identity construction, rather than trying to iconoclastically undermine religion. It appears therefore that the strength of the reaction to their works is indicative of the inherent power of images to carry meaning and promote ideologies; in other words it is an affirmation of the power of art.

- 1 This is explained in Chapter Two of the book by D. FREEDBERG, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp 27-40.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 40
- 3 P. SCHAFER, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine images of God from the Bible to the early Kabbalah*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 148, 149.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 149
- 5 His student, Guerric (c. 1070/80-1157) also states that once she has ascended to heaven “she resides in gilded apparel as the crowned Queen to the right of the King” (quoted in P. SCHAFER, *op. cit.*, 2002, p.161).
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Bingen repeatedly describes the beauty of Mary: “O resplendent jewel and unclouded beauty of the sun which was poured into you... you are that luminous matter through which his very Word breathed forth all virtues” (quoted in P. SCHAFER, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 165).
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 168.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 According to R.M. WRIGHT in her book *Sacred Distance: Representing the Virgin*, Manchester, NY, Manchester University Press, 2006, p. 13. The apocryphal gospels dealing with the infancy of Christ and the life and death of Mary dated from as early as the second century and were in general circulation by the end of the sixth century. They were subsequently compiled as the *Golden Legend* by the Dominican, Jacobus de Voraigne in the 1260s. This book was an immensely popular clerical guide for sermon preparation and included a synthesis of current Marian mythology relating to the major religious feasts during the year (R.M. WRIGHT, *op. cit.*, 2006, pp. 84-85).
- 13 Neo-Platonic themes prevalent during the Renaissance may be partly responsible for the development of this idealism as they tend to identify “the beautiful, the good and the true as one and the same.” R.B. HARRIS *The significance of Neoplatonism*, Norfolk, Dominion, 1976, p. 3. But, as discussed thus far, the equation of beauty and divinity has a more complex construction in religious terms.
- 14 P. SCHAFER, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 150.
- 15 The deification of Mary reached its climax a little later in the Western world in the 11th and 12th centuries. Influential reformer and Benedictine monk, Peter Damian (1007-1072), connects Mary with the wisdom of God when he states that she was “chosen and pre-selected before the creation of the world in the deliberations of eternal wisdom” (quoted in P. SCHAFER, *op. cit.*, 2002, p.153). He moreover, assigns her a seat in heaven next to the throne of God and included in the Holy Trinity (*Ibid.*, p. 154). It was in the 12th century, however, that her deification and physical beauty were first linked by the major figure of monastic reform the Cistercian monk, Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153).
- 16 Pope Pius XII defined the dogma that Mary, the Virgin mother of God, was assumed body and soul into Heaven in *Munificentissimus Deus* (Washington D.C. 1950) as quoted in M. WARNER, *Alone of All Her Sex: the myth and the cult of the Virgin Mary*, New York, Vintage Books, 1983, p. 374. Four years later he officially proclaimed Mary Queen of Heaven in an Encyclical letter, *Ad Caeli Reginam*, October 11, 1954. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
- 17 This painting hangs in the church of St Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in Venice.
- 18 *Rauponga* is a traditional form of Maori carved decoration. The word means the “frond of a fern tree” and refers to the spiral patterns carved into statues and other cultural artefacts. A. THORNTON, “What is Maori Carving?”, in: *Te Ao Hou. National Library of New Zealand*, No. 29, December 1959, pp. 41, 42, available at: <http://teaohou.natlib.govt.nz/journals/teaohou/issue/Mao29TeA/c18.html> (accessed: 12 February 2010).
- 19 TE KAKANO [Sa]. Taonga database: Auckland Museum, available at: <http://tekakano.aucklandmuseum.com/objectdetail.asp?database=maori&objectid=86> (accessed: 12 February 2010).
- 20 The carver is listed as possibly Patoromu Tamatea.
- 21 TE KAKANO, *op. cit.*
- 22 This attribute is also typical in African cultures where masks and figures are believed to contain a spiritual life-force under certain conditions (known as animism) and are therefore treated with reverence and respect within the culture.
- 23 It must also be noted here that these images are made as art, rather than for purposes of spiritual worship.

- 24 *Religion, Art, and Visual Culture: A Cross Cultural Reader*, S.B. PLATE (ed.), New York, Palgrave, 2002, p. 2.
- 25 I-MUSE, 2010. *I-Muse The Arts: The Holy Virgin Mary – Chris Ofili*, available at: <http://imuseafrica.blogspot.co.za/2010/02/imuseartsholyvirginmarychris.html>, (accessed: 24 May 2016).
- 26 C. BECKER, *Surpassing the Spectacle: Global Transformations and the Changing Politics of Art*, Oxford, Rowman and Littlefield, 2002, p. 54.
- 27 *Sensation* was shown at the Berlin Hamburger Bahnhof museum (30 September 1998 – 30 January 1999) and proved so popular that it was extended past its original closing date of 28 December 1998. The show subsequently went to New York and was shown at The Brooklyn Museum of Art from 2 October 1999 to 9 January 2000. Statistics provided by BBC NEWS, Sensational Hit for Royal Academy. *BBC Online Network: Entertainment*, Tuesday, December 30, 1997, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4301.stm> (accessed: 27 January 2010).
- 28 J. MOLYNEUX, Molyneux, "State of the Art: A review of the 'Sensation' exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, September-December 1997", in: *International Socialism*, Issue 79, summer 1998, available at: <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj79/molyneux.htm> (accessed: 27 January 2010).
- 29 According to Becker, the Hindley picture was splattered with ink and eggs and required protection behind a perspex screen (C. BECKER, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 44). Some of the Academy staff also resigned because of the controversy this exhibition caused as reported in ICONS, Damien Hirst's Shark. *ICONS: a portrait of England*, [O]. Available: <http://www.icons.org.uk/theicons/collection/damien-hirst-shark/biography/sensations> (accessed: 29 January 2010).
- 30 BBC NEWS, *op. cit.*, 1997.
- 31 There is a lengthy and particularly scathing review written by J. Molyneux (1988), for example, where he discusses many of the 110 works by 42 different artists on the show in some depth (the ones Molyneux considers significant in both negative and positive terms) but he makes no mention at all of Chris Ofili's work.
- 32 Online News Hour 1999.
- 33 C. BECKER, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 43.
- 34 C. RAPP, "Dung Deal - Brooklyn Museum of Art's 'Sensation' exhibition" in: *National Review*, October 25, 1999, available at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1282/is_20_51/ai_56220691/ (accessed: 27 January 2010).
- 35 M. DAVIS, "Dung-Covered Madonna Sparks Controversy: Art Professor Michael Davis Takes a Look", in: *College Street Journal*, 2007, available at: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/offices/comm/csj/991008/madonna.html> (accessed: 20 August 2007).
- 36 This is ironic as Britain is one of the few countries in the world to have a law against blasphemy in any form, dating from the early seventeenth century. The British government can thus ban "any contemptuous, reviling, scurrilous or ludicrous matter relating to God, Jesus Christ or the Bible' that is presented in an indecent and intemperate way." Quoted in S.C. DUBIN, *Arresting Images: Impolitic Art and Uncivil Actions*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 82.
- 37 *Ibid.* p. 79.
- 38 In the introduction to *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art*, for example, N. MacGregor states that "most of the National Gallery's visitors today, like most of the population of Europe and America, are not believing Christians" (N. MACGREGOR-E. LANGMUIR, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 7). Conversely S. Harris, in his book *The End of Faith* notes: "Many members of the U.S. government currently view their professional responsibilities in religious terms" (S. HARRIS, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, New York-London, W.W. Norton & Co., 2005, p. 154). Harris goes on to give numerous examples of Christian dogma used to legitimate decisions made in the American government and to uphold restrictive laws that prevail in many states, thus indicating the continuing adherence to Christian principles in so called "secular" America (*Ibid.*, pp. 153-169) for a detailed discussion of specific examples.
- 39 C. BECKER, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 46.
- 40 S.B. PLATE, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 2.
- 41 C. BECKER, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 46.
- 42 M. DAVIS, *op. cit.*, 2007.
- 43 Cynics have pointed out that Giuliani used his very public condemnation of the work to win the Catholic vote for his political aspirations (C. BECKER, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 46) so the artistic merits of the image were sidelined for a personal agenda. The ensuing media debate was entered into by high profile church and political figures as well as entertainment personalities. This not only aided the purposes of Giuliani but it also ensured the museum a maximum number of viewers.

- 44 K. VON VEH, "Is there a place for feminism in contemporary South African art?" in: *De Arte*, vol. 73, 2006, p. 31.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 46 C.J. DE STEFANO, "Challenging Preeminent Authority", in: *Renew America*, January 17, 2005, [O], Available: <http://www.renewamerica.com/columns/destefano/050117> (accessed: 29 January 2010).
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 In deference to the sensibilities of religious viewers, the Canon placed a cautionary sign near the works. This move did not appease De Stefano, however, and his criticism with its response from Bishop Sisk, as well as Sisk's similar response to queries from the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, were repeated in the Catholic League's Arts section of their 2005 report on anti-Catholicism: CATHOLIC LEAGUE, *The Arts, Catholic League For Religious and Civil Rights*, Friday, January 9, 2010, available at: <http://www.catholicleague.org/annualreport.php?year=2005&id=102> (accessed: 29 January 2010). In this publication the *Personal Affects* exhibition, and Diane Victor in particular, appear at the top of a long list of anti-religious expressions identified in theatre, cultural events and art exhibitions. The executive summary report of this volume clearly indicates the limited approach of the Catholic League in vehemently denouncing any form of cultural expression that does not uphold Christian principles. President of the League, Dr. Donohue, makes a revealing statement in the introduction when he says: "...we make no attempt to weigh the motive of the offender. Why? Because in most cases it is impossible to discern with any degree of certainty what the intent was. What matters for us is effect. To put it differently, we must decide whether the outcome is sufficiently noxious as to qualify as bigotry", quoted from CATHOLIC LEAGUE, *op. cit.*, 2010.

Karen von Veh

**Uloga lijepog i perfekcije u marijanskoj ikonografiji
Suvremeni odgovori na kontroverzne prikaze Djevice Marije Chrisa Ofilija i Diane Victor**

Ovaj rad razmatra reakcije publike na prikaze Djevice Marije u suvremenoj umjetnosti koji proizlaze iz povijesno sankcioniranih ideala ljepote. Redovnik Bernard iz Clairvauxa (12. st.) kao primjer navodi da je Marija bila izabrana kao majka božja zbog njezine fizičke ljepote, koja ilustrira njene moralne i duhovne vrijednosti. Proizlazi iz navedenog, da je fizička ljepota u prikazima Marije neraskidivo vezana s idejom njezina „božanstva“ i uspješnosti u ulozi posrednice. Suvremena umjetnička djela, prikazana u ovom radu, predstavljaju atipične, čak i transgresivne primjere marijanske ikonografije. Oba su rada pobudila iznimno negativne reakcije publike. Radi se o *The Holy Virgin Mary* (poznata kao i *Dung Madonna*) britanskog umjetnika Chrisa Ofilija i *Eight Marys* južnoafričke umjetnice Diane Victor. Istražuje se odnos javnosti prema ovim prikazima i pokušava se utvrditi koliko su prepoznate reakcije rezultat povijesno formiranih kriterija, koji prožimaju prikaze savršeno lijepe (i božanstvene) Marije. U tekstu se raspravlja o stapanju i razvoju kroz povijest Marijine ljepote i božanstva u ikonografiji do stupnja u kojem se atipični suvremeni prikazi smatraju ikonoklastičnima, unutar krugova koji vjeruju da se umanjnjem njezine ljepote podcjenjuje njena religijska važnost. Ovakvi stavovi navode na raskol između ikone i prototipa, ili znaka i označitelja, što postaje činjenicom uslijed povijesnih ponavljanja.

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