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**Saint Sebastian Reimagined
Diane Victor's Gendered Subversion of the Sebastian-Apollo Icon**

In this paper* I consider the figure of St Sebastian as a paragon of male beauty and perfection despite (or perhaps because of) his non-normative identification as a figure of homo-erotic desire. I begin with an overview of the myth of St Sebastian and his religious significance. I discuss selected images of St Sebastian from the 14th to the 16th centuries to follow his development from wounded plague saint to the classically inspired Sebastian-Apollo icon. I then introduce a female parody of St Sebastian called *Martyr*, created by South African artist Diane Victor. I consider the transgressive nature of this image, as non-ideal, non-classical with overtly sexual references that undermine any religious connotation. To frame the comparison between ideal and non-ideal, and to identify the strategies used by Victor to empower her image within feminist discourse, I consider historic western constructions of the male and female body. Texts from Plato and Aristotle are employed to identify how the male body has been historically constructed as whole and perfect whereas the female body is identified as evidence of lack. In terms of this paper I argue that the figure of *Martyr*, in particular, raises fundamental questions about patriarchally sanctioned identities. Sebastian already has an identity that is disrupted historically by his recent adoption as a signifier of both homoerotic desire and male perfection. I argue that Victor is building on his deviation from the norm, creating a further disruption in both heterosexual and homosexual terms, by changing the gender and demeanour of her protagonist to pursue a feminist agenda. In doing so she highlights the double standards applied that idealise the male body (whether homo- or hetero-sexual) in contrast with the approbation historically ascribed to women's bodies and their sexuality.