

THE REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN

IN

RELIGIOUS ART

BY

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The Representations of Women in  
Religious Art with specific reference  
to Eve, the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene.

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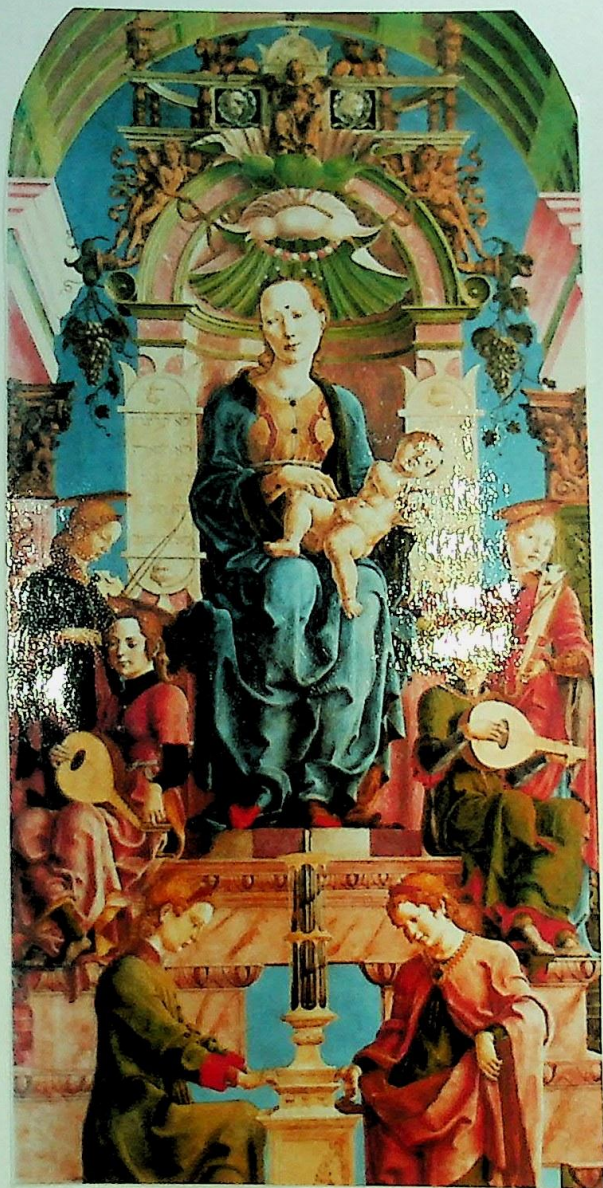
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## Introduction

This paper sets out broadly to look at how the Judeo-Catholic religion has dealt with issue of women through art. How the lay person perceived women was of the utmost importance, this is illustrated by their emphatic manipulation of her image. To try and assess just how and to what extent this proposition is verifiable, I have chosen the three most prevalent women in the Judeo-Catholic religion, Eve, the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. I will examine how they have been portrayed at different times and by different artists.

Each woman is treated in a separate chapter, although by implication the control of each one had repercussions for the other. The most accomplished means of analysing this process is through the medium of religious paintings and sculpture. This was a mode which held a more functional role in society for church goers who up until the Modern Period would have been on the whole illiterate with paintings as their main access to the bible. Consequently artists had a considerable lack of freedom concerning the iconography used in the painting of religious scenes. This was held under strict control by the Church authorities.

It is interesting to study just how much control they used, and autonomous hierarchy that artists have not had to deal with for a few hundred years.



These artistic rules and regulations have never the less had influences on what we consider art to be today. Also contributing to the usual language of the acceptable portrayal of women, as the Virgin Mary.

On the contrary the disobedience of Eve was seen as a catastrophe, this evil trait was recognised as being particular to all women, consequently spiritual leaders like St. Augustine and St. Ambrose did everything in their power to make women aware of this guilt. For example the majority of paintings about the Fall contain Serpent/Satan having a female face, often in the likeness of Eve, as the notion of Evil and women became interlinked (figures 1,7,9).

These ideals of women are not purely the creation of the Catholic ethos but have roots in the classical myths and contain aspects of older religions or pagan beliefs. Like the first woman of classical myth Pandora whose story has distinct similarities with Eves.

Again, mother-goddesses played a significant role in the modeling of the Madonna and Child, like the Egyptian statuettes of Isis and her son Horus. There was in fact initial antagonism towards the veneration of the Virgin purely because of her gender. Her power to intercede was emphasised negating the idea of her autonomy. When artists gradually looked to the Apocryphal Gospels for research material as they lacked enough information to paint a true picture of her life.



This assertive independence was fervently quashed by the Council of Trent in 1545. One example of Church exerting its power.

As will be seen, the more imperially enthroned the Madonna became, the more evil Eve was represented to be. Mary became known as the purified reincarnation of Eve.

Like Eve, Mary Magdalene is infamous because of her temptful sexuality while Eve tempted Adam and so forfeited 'mankindss' right to Paradise, as did Magdalene by her profession tempt men to risk their place in the afterlife. With regards the depiction of the Magdalene, artists appeared to have more control of their interpretation of her unlike Eve and the Madonna. Artists such as Titian (fig.26), chose to visualize the Magdalene as an alluring nude contrary to the more restrained view expressed by Carravaggio (fig.29).

This study has chosen a more chronological path in viewing the images of these female archetypes who were formulated by religious men and translated into paintings by male artists.







## Chapter 1.

### Eve

The story of the Fall is an ancient myth written by priestly writers in the C4 and C5 before Christ as a way of accounting for the squalor and evil around them, and the demoralising briefness of 'mans' life on earth'.

By the time of Christianity, attitudes had changed little, the story of the Fall seemed more than fitting. Considering that God, was all love, how could he allow his people to be surrounded by evil tyrannies. Because of the Fall it was held that man through the gift of free-will was to blame for the state of the world.

This is yet another exquisitely complex form of mental bondage, allowing the Church it's ultimate power. For how could mankind blame God for the harshness of life, having been taught that they were the root of all evil through Adam and Eve. The most satisfactory way to control a person must be psychologically.

The rich images that abound when reading of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden seem at odds with the relatively few subsequent paintings. As for Lilith Adam's first wife, I know of only one example by Bosch where she is shown as a black woman. In Jewish myth it is said that the female created by God in the first chapter of Genesis was not Eve, but Lilith.

Adam and Lilith never found peace together, for when he wished to lie with her, she took offense at the recumbent posture he demanded. "Why must I be beneath you?" she asked.<sup>2</sup> "I also was made from dust and am therefore your equal".

And because Adam tried to force her to comply with his wishes she rose into the air and left him, to live by the Red Sea.



Angles were sent to fetch her back but she refused. Said to prey upon children, Jewish families well into the Middle Ages placed amulets around the necks of babies to protect them. This unnatural mother was replaced by Eve a more docile substitute. The equality which Lilith demands confirms the view that the later story of the rib gives Adam precedence in creation.

Adam is given the power to name Eve and like Eve, Pandora, the first woman of classical mythology is created, does not name herself and inspires desire rather than experiences it. Their identity is formed through the eyes of others. Their beauty and desireability forming their condition of Otherness, a state identified according to Simone de Beauvoir in - "The Second Sex."

St. Augustine at the end of the C4 proclaimed that everyone is born with Original Sin, the stain is then cleansed by the sacrament of Baptism, but the temptation to sin is still there. And so the need for forgiveness through God's never ending mercy is established. Augustine proved this to be so by highlighting the fact that Adam and Eve covered their genitals, not their hands and mouth after the evil deed. Implying their inner knowledge of concupiscence. He argued that the sexual act could not be performed without passion, the act itself was not sinful but the lust was.<sup>3</sup> This covering of genitals can be seen in nearly all renditions of Adam and Eve, even retrospectively with the C16 practise of painting in fig leaves. figure 1.



The instance of the Immaculate Conception because of Original Sin was of the utmost importance making Jesus the product of a virgin womb.

St. John Chrysostom warned "The whole of her bodily beauty is nothing less than phlegm, blood, bile, rheum and the fluid of digested food."<sup>4</sup>

This is not a unique example of one man's rantings but finds echoes in later writings on priestly celibacy. There are scores of illustrations of such contradictions where woman's glory for man is visually recognised and then denied through insults. As regards displaying these sentiments, there are carvings of Eve on the outside of Churches in France and Italy dated between the C12 and C14. She is either overtly seductive or disturbingly ugly. The devil is often incorporated in the guise of a serpent on Reims Cathedral. Figure 2. The carvings often depict women in degrading positions with animals or entwined by the devil who assumes an intimate relationship with her. Many of the reliefs of this period have a strong misogynist imprint. It is believed that these gross carvings outside Churches and Monasteries had a particular function in destroying any lustful thoughts the priests and general public might have.<sup>5</sup>

Eve owes much to the Greek statues of the Goddess Aphrodite, sculpted in a range of poses, for example a sculpture of the Venus Pudica, created about 200 BC (Florence) by an unknown artist. She too attempts to hide her breasts and genitals, back to 'pre-Christian' times with the Greeks.



The naked figure of Eve and the few nude studies of Mary Magdalene fall into the legacy of the nude in Western art. Paintings of Adam and Eve by such artists as Titian's Fall of Man were not as few as the Church was concerned revealing the sensuousness of the body but was a symbol for spiritual content.

It is difficult to comprehend how the myth of Eve is immersed in resentment and shame, when the text in the bible is analysed.....so that when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. (genesis 111, 1-6).

Her action was progressive, wanting to acquire knowledge and equality for herself and Adam. Eve who had initiated the action, rebelled against inequality by wanting to become like God. This aspect does not receive any attention in the interpretation of the Fall, more important is the temptation, this sinful act was what the Church wanted to drive home to its followers. Since the Church was a rich patron of the Arts, painters were told in what way they should depict a particular narrative. A substantial number of people were visually rather than textually literate, therefore relied on paintings in Churches for access to the Bible. People like the Abbot Suger of St. Denis laid out certain rules for the visual adaptation of religious stories. He worked in the C14, and believed in the stimulation of humility through pictures he possessed a distinct flair for translating theology into images.



Earlier works like the C12 mosaics at Monreale, concentrated more on the Creation of Eve, the majority of these renditions show Eve physically arising out of Adam's ribs. She was created from the generosity of Adam's spare rib. While he is created from the soil, the consequences of the Fall is 'mans' mortality and dissolution back to the earth. So Eve is born from Adam contrary to the biological reproductive functions of women as in Michelangelo's Creation of Eve in the Sistene Chapel (1508-12) figure 4. Adam coyly sleeps facing the viewer in an oblivious state while God with his out-stretched hand commands the crouched Eve from his side. What is interesting about Adam is the fact that Michelangelo has refused to contrive some artefact to hide his genitals. In William Blake's work he has taken the action a step further, Eve floats over the sleeping Adam fully formed. She is not shown as half a body emanating from his side, although it is clear that the afore mentioned has just happened. Blake's God stands in the same position as Michelangelo's with his arm as the symbol of authority. These beautiful paintings allow for the concept of the subordinate woman, as the after-thought of God. The reason why St. Paul wrote that women should keep their heads veiled because they were not like men, created in the image of God, but were the glory of their husbands.

To expand on the story of Pandora for a moment, she was the first woman in classical mythology, while Eve represents the first (official) woman in the Judeo-Christian religions. Pandora like Eve was warned not to open a vessel/box containing the evils of the world.



"Pandora is also one personification of the earth goddess Phea, the 'all-Giver' and the first woman in an anti-feminist fable by Hesiod, who tried to blame war, death, disease and all other evils on women". In both myths, the "mother of all living" is blamed for disobeying an order. Images of Pandora are few.

The ones that are known are usually painted on urns. figure 6. Created around 450 BC. this illustrates the fact that from a very early period men have felt the need to keep women subordinate and have gone to great lengths by using theology and philosophy.

In early European works illustrating the story of Adam and Eve some show the different phases of the Fall in the same painting, in a cartoon-like manner ie., The Expulsion from Paradise by Pol de Limbourg 1410. It contains four scenes. The snake is depicted as a woman, very much in the likeness of Eve, this is the case with many paintings of the Fall, as the idea of evil and women become synonymous.

The apple can be seen as a symbol for Eve's sexuality and the consequential concupiscence which Adam and therefore all men feel for women. There are very few painting that fail to contain the apple. Whilst Adam's punishment was physical toil with the land, Eve's was to do with her sexuality, her essential femaleness and all it's resultant bodily functions from menstruation to child bearing. Her body was her damnation, her curse.

"....will greatly multiply thy sorrows and thy conception.....and thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee". (Genesis 3:19.16). So Eve was cursed with pregnancy rather than blessed with the gift of life.



Women were encouraged to remain virgins spareing themselves the sorrows and hardships of childbirth and children. This had repercussions on the cult of the Virgin, for if women were considered inferior because of their subjection to biology then images of the Virgin suckling revealed her feminine humility.

During the Renaissance Leonardo Da Vinci wrote at lenght on the conventions an artist should adhere to in displaying the body language of each character in order that the viewer can have a greater insight into the work. "The most important things in the discussion of paintings are the movements proper to the mental condition of each living being.<sup>6</sup> Distinguishing one gesture from another in order to describe different emotions. The language of gesture came into it's own during the Renaissance. Masaccio is credited with advancing giotto's move towards naturalism in painting. In his "Expulsion from Paradise", two emotions are expressed: it is Adam who shows shame and Eve grief. The translation of this movement left room for misinterpretation for example a Benedictine monk of the time, according to his language of signs developed in the order for use during periods of silence, stated that a hand on the heart and eyes raised to Heaven indicated joy not grief. Even so Masaccio's emotive portrait, inspired artist of the day to reinterpret Biblical scenes with emotional flair.

"Then the eyes of both were opened and they saw that they were naked". (Genesis 3:7)

This sentiment is important in creating the link between the naked body <sup>as</sup> and something sinful and evil.



Because they are now aware of their nakedness they see each other in a different light. Even though as Augustine pointed out, their genitals were covered, Eve's bare breasts would have allowed the (male) viewer a degree of voyeurism. Also many small paintings in the Medieval period were in religious manuscripts, available to religious scholars and rarely seen by the public. As Umberto Eco describes in his intellectually accomplished book The Name of the Rose.

During the Renaissance Adam and Eve were portrayed in a more monumental fashion, usually shown standing as in a double portrait, concentrating on their nakedness. Generally Eve is shown in the act of tempting Adam, offering him the apple (figure 9) as in Masolino. Adam and Eve, where the female-headed serpent looks on. In comparison with Masaccio's work, where the blame is not bestowed on Eve as they are shown as equal in their Expulsion. (figure 8). Masolino worked in the Brancacci chapel at the same time as Masaccio, but his figures are much stiffer and more awkwardly posed.

Durer created two separate paintings of Adam and Eve like a number of other artists. Again the serpent is depicted as a woman. Durer wanted to achieve two aims - firstly to illustrate the story of the Fall with two beautifully painted nudes, he wanted their beauty to suggest the Garden of Eden from which they were banished and at the same time to show his new techniques that allowed for anatomically correct figures.



But he had a strange sexist practise of taking the male bodies proportions as the norm and using these measurements when drawing the woman's body. An obvious contradiction if trying to attain anatomically correct figures. He was not alone in this practise as is obvious from Michelangelo's paintings and sculptures of women such as his portrait of Eve who's bulky body is really a man's with breasts painted on. He was overtly impressed by the male body having little time for the females.

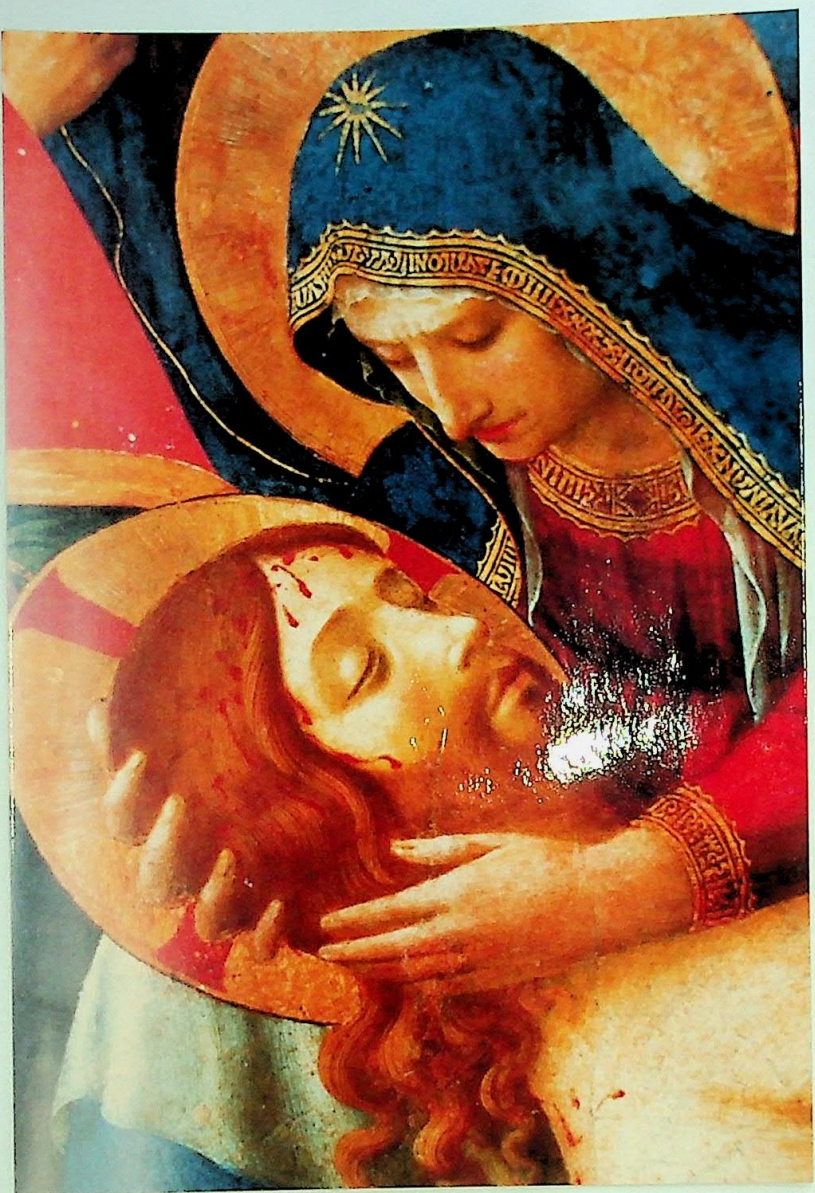
With the Church's reading of the Fall, as the reiteration of woman as evil, as has been seen with the depiction of the serpent as female. The Church felt the need to create a creature which was vaguely female but removed as possible from the evil type personified by Eve. So arrived another reason for the effort to venerate the Virgin Mary. Because she was to be held in the highest regard by Catholics so the Church had to keep a tight rein on how people perceived her. This kept theologians extremely busy in interpreting the rare occasions when the Madonna appeared in the Gospels and censorship over the Gnostic Gospels as well. The congregations had to be surrounded by her pure image, another awesome means of reinforcing the psychological subjugation of women.



#### Footnotes

1. Marina Warner, Alone of all her Sex, p.53.
2. Numeri, Rabba a Midrash, edited by R. Graves and R. Data, Hebrew Myths, p.65
3. B. Breseen, Nature and the Role of Women, p.65.
4. Dorothy Penn, The Staging of the Miracles of Notre Dame, by Personages of Ms Carge, p.32.
5. Norma Broude and Mary D. Gamard, Feminism and Art History, p.45.
6. Micheal Baxandall, Painting and Experience in the C15 Italy, p.43.







The myth and glorification of the Virgin Mary throughout Western civilisation is a considerable force to be reckoned with. She accounts for a major female ideal which colours the Western perception of the essential woman. The magnitude of her visualised presence even in non-Catholic domains could not but impress on our psyche.

The evolving popularity of the Virgin was due to various progressions. The mother and child is an iconographic figure of antiquity. For example the Mesopotamian Madonna of the (fig.10) late Sumerian period dated 2000 BC is a carving of a stately young woman nursing a young infant. A more animated statuette, is an Egyptian work around the same time, of Isis seated on the ground placing her breast in the mouth of her son Horus.(fig.11) Such pagan images of the great mother-Goddesses played a significant role in the shaping of the earliest Christian Madonnas. In its attempt to win over pagans, rather than totally eradicating their beliefs, it was often more effective to Christianise them.

One reason for the initial apathy towards the Virgin has been highlighted by Alaster Smart in The Dawn of Italian Painting. He notes that since in the early development of the Christian tradition, veneration of saints focused on their remains and the sacred sites which were significant to them. So relics and sanctuaries are all component parts of the same language of prayer and makes addressing a saint much easier.



Because there were no relics of the Virgin, the worship of her was less tangible. Here the legend of the icon which was said to be painted by St. Luke of Mary came in to play in 438. In Solonika, a basilica was built to house another icon of the Virgin proclaimed to be "untouched by human hands", painted by the angles.

This type of relic is not restricted to just two such unusual articles but accounts for a number of statues and painting all over the Catholic world. These pictures were not seen merely as paint on panels, but as truth, they were thought to be real. Numerous stories come to mind of bleeding paintings and our own recent phenomina of "moving statues". In mediaeval miracle stories they are constantly coming to life. In Syracuse 1953 the Virgin allegedly shed tears. The early Fathers professed much opposition to her for example Anastasium proclaimed "let no one call Mary the Mother of God, for Mary was but a woman". There were frequent theories attacking her motherhood, to the effect that she didn't bear Jesus at all but he materialised fully formed from the heavens. A couple of Church fathers went so far as maintaning that Mary was not only a mere mortal but also a sinful woman. St. Ambrose asked "Would the Lord Jesus have chosen for his mother a woman who would defile the heavenly chamber with the seed of a man, that is to say one incapable of preserving her virginal chastity".



In response to the fact that Jesus' brothers and sisters are mentioned in the three gospels (Matthew 12:46; Mark 3:31; Luke 19:21:) throwing up the embarrassing implication that Mary was not a virgin. Hence various solutions arrived. The Greek Church claimed they were Joseph's children by his first marriage explaining the appearance of Joseph as an old man in a quantity of paintings.

The definition of Mary as not just the Mother of Jesus the man but of Jesus as God at the Council of Ephesus in 431 helped with her popularisation. 3. This formal declaration highlighted her position legitimising the multiplication of her image in Churches. Now Mary was acknowledged for bringing salvation through Jesus. She became the symbol of obedience and reverence but was important as intercessionist rather than in her own right or authority.

One of the first major art movements to concentrate on the Madonna took place in Byzantium. This empire which existed in the Eastern Mediterranean from 330 to 1454 was the centre of the Christian world after the demise of the Roman Empire. The Byzantine style is quite recognisable by its stylised treatment. (figure 12). The Virgin generally acquires an unearthly appearance, creating a spiritual awesomeness for the congregation. The figures are obviously not painted from life. The attempt at creating folds in the drapery is purely decorative, barely giving the impression of bodies underneath.



This formula was later adopted in Europe by Medieval artists. The scene is more likely to 'be in heaven' than on earth. The throne encompasses Mary who in turn surrounds the infant. Divine light is symbolised by the Gold background.

Imagery in the Bzyantine church was used as an aid to devotion not as in the West for instruction. It had to adhere to strict instructions laid down by the ecclesiastical authority.<sup>4</sup> At no other time did the concept of the function of art in society recieve more attention in Byzantium than during the period of Iconoclasm covering a period of 100 years begining in 726. During this time the making and display of Icons was banned by successive rulers believing that the venerations of such idols was erronerous and potentially idolotrous. This concerted effort to set-up a society without a figurative religious art did not prosper however, before its revival. In the year 753, Constantine V called a council offically banning the use of Icons. During this period many artists left for the West, finding their way to Sicily and Rome. In contrast Rome was busy building new churches, decorating them with fresco's, mosaics and Icons. Pagan buildings were being taken over and converted into places of Christian worship installing Mary as the prime cause for inspiration. The popes of this time each contributed a monument for her veneration. Gregory 111 (731-41) commisioned a basilica at the tomb of St. Peter with Christ and the Virgin.



Stephen 111 had a golden effigy of Mary made for the same basilica. Later Paul 1 dedicated two chapels to her.

One of the forces, making an impression was the Cistercian Order whose founder St. Bernard of Clairvaux expounded at length on the Virgin's virtues, and attempted to promote the Virgin's standing in the Church. With the influence of the Cistercians, narratives surrounding the Virgin like her death, (Dormition). Assumption and most interestingly of all her Coronation by Christ in Heaven became widely reproduced culminating in the Renaissance. Increasingly she was seen as an object of veneration in her own right being endowed with such titles as Queen of Heaven and the Bride of Christ.

Duccio's Maesta was the harbinger of the Renaissance. (fig.14) This impressive work was also the climax of Duccio's career. It consisted of 58 panels(now reduced to 46) housed in Siena. It left his workshop in 1311 and remains one of the most complex and richest altarpieces created in Italy. It was carried in a triumphant procession to the altar in the Duomo. It's main panel consists of the Madonna and child enthroned amid a company of angels and saints. The Maesta was commissioned to replace an earlier Madonna, to whom the Sienese attributed their victory over the Florentines at Montaperti in the duecento of 1313. After the Battle the Sienese ritualistically placed their city under the protection of the Virgin.



Duccio's Maesta became the cities crowning glory to that testament as the Madonna was titled the Queen of Siena. This regal Virgin is enthroned in a palace. The size of the work meant that he could exploit the possibilities of applying large areas of colour, but at the same time painted in delicate details. The theme of the whole work is one of thanksgiving and supplication to the Virgin, as the Patron of Siena, the inscription on the Virgin's throne emphasizes this, 'Holy Mother of God - may you give peace to Siena - may you give life to Duccio - who has painted you thus'. The story of Christ was reserved for the back of the alterpiece.

Another well known work of his is the Rucellai Madonna painted in 1285, it is often compared with the work of Cimabue's. The Byzantine element is the most conspicuous characteristic of early Sienese painting and it is in this style that his first works would have been carried out. He took over Byzantine conventions and forms and then added his own details and personal interpretation. In the Rucellai Madonna he is preoccupied with the areas of pure pattern, the rich carving of the throne is highlighted in gold, the scene bears little relation to the natural world. The expanse of the Virgin's dark robe is broken by the gold embroidery on it's edge. The softer pastel shades of the angel's garments act as a foil to the weight of the Virgin on her gilt-encrusted throne. As Cecchi wrote of Duccio's Madonna...."It is the meeting of a beauty steeped in sentiment, like the impassioned beauty of a woman, with the soverignty of the angel or the cherub, creating together a sort of sexless idol".



This quotation merits a digression as it has something in common with a theory articulated by Catherine Clement who talks of "an androgynous Mary, a woman who conceives by herself, an autonomous asexual being!"<sup>6</sup>. As identified by many cold interpretations of her particularly some early painting like Segna di Bonaventura's Madonna and Child (figure 15) or the later work by Piero della Francesca's The Annunciation (1452).

In the same book Formations of Fantasy, Victor Burgin elaborates "the monstrous figure of the Virgin she is the occultation of the feminine principle beneath the masculine ideal, a man-made fantasy, a vehicle for oppression and contradictions coming from a culture where the male principle dominates". A perfect example of this is the bizarre practise employed by both Michelangelo and Durer in using the proportions of the male model as a guideline for painting the female figure. A manifestation which is discussed in greater detail later in the Chapter.

By the C14 the cult of the Virgin was one of the central aspects of religious life throughout Europe. During the C13 her theological significance had been defined by a number of scholars such as St. Anthony of Padua, St. Albertus Magnis and St. Thomas Aquinnas, their intellectual reverence was matched by their emotional devotion to the Madonna. In Italy attention was being focused on the compassion of Christ as Saviour and on the mediating power of his earthly mother in a bid to attract the populace which were steadily expanding their cities.



Visually the emphasis was straying away from the images of Christ as teacher and more towards his pain and suffering. Consequently these paintings included the lamenting mother and representations of the Madonna and child. In the C13 the Bells of the Angelus arrived and the Office of the Virgin was recited daily.

The stories of the Apocrypha in the C13 had been another phase in the popularising of the Madonna. Educated minds found the information on the Virgin in the Scriptures too meagre to give a full account of Mary's life. There were not enough stories which could be visually interpreted by painters. The books of the Apocrypha were later to be affected by the Council of Trent which was set up in 1545. It was established to reaffirm basic doctrines which were being attacked by the doctrine of the Reformation and lays down fundamental guidelines for sacred art. The stories of Apocrypha, many of which were concerned with the Virgin and her childhood, were declared unsuitable to be rendered by artists.

One such tale was of the conception of Mary by her parents Anne and Joachim. Giotto was the first Italian artist to depict this legend in a monumental way. The interesting aspect to this legend is the assertion that Mary was conceived like Jesus 'sine semine vri', (without the seed of a man) or 'sine semine' (immaculately) that is without stain. Their embrace at the golden gate was the moment when Anne conceived. This fresco by Giotto is one of a number of works in the Arena Chapel.



The Gospel according to the Pseudo-Matthew is known to be his source material, this gospel with the earlier book of James had always been excluded from the New Testament.

The concept of presenting Mary in a more humane 'down to earth' manner was met with the simple solution of portraying her as a mother. In Italy and France, Mary left her lofty throne in the heavens to sit on the ground like a peasant woman with her child. This image began to appear around the middle of the C14. The Western artists showed a more sympathetic treatment than their Eastern counterparts. A typical example in a painting attributed to Masaccio 1425. Here both still have their halo's and there are two angels holding a backdrop, but she is sitting barefoot on the earth, holding a large baby. There is no austere background, rather it is beautifully simple containing very few elements and the figures are solid and real.

It was in fact due to the Franciscan's that the Madonna of Humility was born. It applied particularly to a Virgin who cared for all and especially sinners. The Sienese painters such as Duccio who has been discussed previously was the first to catch on to this new phenonamon although many of these paintings are entitled The Madonna of Humility certain symbols began to be introduced so as not to totallly negate her royalty, such as keeping the halo's, the twelve stars, angels and the extensive use of gold and dark blue (prepared from the semi-precious stone lapis lazuli) which were the two most expensive colours.



Gioranni Bellini, was influential in the development of Venitian art, his workshop was noted for its devotional paintings of the Madonna, showing a beautiful unsmiling woman, simply dressed in a dark robe which hides her hair, holding a naked child.

Fra Fillippo Lippi during the Renaissance period painted a portrait of the Madonna and child. (figure 17). It would appear that they are painted from life. The mother shows a restrained maternal concern for her child. The figures are more earthly in keeping with the desire to humanise Medieval Christianity. Both look solid with light and shade being effectively employed. Their royalty is subtly hinted at by a sculpted niche in which they are seated.

In the pre-christian Roman Empire the virgin birth was a common idea, because of the dozens of virgin births in classical mythology. The virgin birth of heroes was frequent in the Hellenistic world, Plato, Apollo and Alexander were all believed to be born of woman of the Holy Spirit. It became the claim of a spiritual leader: the prophet Simon Magus, a contemporary of St. Peter that his mother was a virgin.

In an effort to make Mary's impregnation as sexless as possible some peculiar ideas were circulated. Sacred art showed semen emanating from God's mouth and passing through a long tube that went under Mary's skirts. 7. Some theologians claimed God's seed was carried to Mary in the beak of a Holy Dove.



An alternative belief states that the seed came from Gabriel's mouth to be filtered through the sacred lily before entering Mary's body by way of her ear, this dates back to a C6 hymn. 8.

St. Ambrose decided that impregnation occurred not by human seed but by the mystical breath of the Holy Spirit. Artists used this iconographically to illustrate the miracle. Usually having the winged Gabriel appearing before the Virgin as in Domenico Veneziano's Annunciation simply set in an architectural setting, incorporating a number of symbols from that erotic poem, The Song of Songs (which will be examined later) like the closed gate at the end of the garden making reference to her virginal chastity. The rose bush alludes to chastity, and the lily purity.<sup>9</sup>

The success of Christianity itself was held to hang on the immediacy of the Madonna. "The Church seemed doomed to failure destined to go down to bloody death.....when the people discovered Mary. And only when Mary against the stern decrees of the Church was dug out of the oblivion to which Constantine had assigned her and because identified with the great Goddess was Christianity finally tolerated by the people". This idealised woman did little to enrich the lot of the ordinary woman presenting her with an unreal glorification. This fact was truly driven home through the thousands of paintings where not only is depicted Mary as pure in mind and spirit but she is physically the personification of beauty. Painted as the essential woman an obvious example is Raphael who claimed to hold in his mind the image of an exquisitely beautiful woman, a woman which he failed to find on earth.



And so this is the image he painted in all those many paintings of the Madonna. The classical essence which he gives the virgin in The Small Cowper Madonna, (figure 18) was undoubtedly influenced by Leonardo but her distanced aloofness can be attributed to Raphael. His portrayal of the Madonna tends towards that of perfected beauty. They are sweet seductive images this popular element has destined them.

Here I would like to investigate some of the pagan roots which find themselves in religious art. Some paintings dealing with the Annunciation such as Christ in the Virgin's Womb 1400 Germany (figure 19). Shows Mary weaving, this was inspired by the legend of Persephores, (she was the queen of the underground who had the keys to heaven and hell). Both hers and Mary's impregnation were simular. Persephone was weaving a tapestry of the universe when Zeus appeared as a phallic serpent to beget the Savior Dionysus on her<sup>10</sup>. While Mary sat in the temple and began to spin a blood-red thread representing life in the tapestry, on Fate when the Angel Gabriel came into her (Luke 1:28) the biblical phrase for intercourse. Gabriels name literally means 'divine husband'. The Church adopted a few stories and symbols which they duly christianised; the mother Goddesses and the legend of the Unicorn for example will be discussed later.

Along with the title Queen of Heaven Mary began to be known as the Bride of Christ, here lies an unusual twist in the multi-layered legacy of the Madonna. Much was made of the reversal of Mary's latin name Ave as it resembled Eve.



Here started the concept of the second Eve. It fired the imagination of Mediaeval Christians who delighted in riddles and puns. Mary was said to be the purified re-incarnation<sup>12.</sup> of Eve and so the same could be said of Jesus and Adam.

Somehow theologians failed to recognise that the new association reversed the child/parent relationship of Mary and Jesus suggesting a sexual dimension. In a legend ascribed to St. John, Jesus welcomed Mary into heaven with the words, "come my chosen one and I shall set thee in my seat for I have coveted the beauty of thee",<sup>13.</sup>

An elaborate mosiac was created in S. Maria in Trastevere, Rome 1140 depicting the lover of the Song of Songs, Christ embracing Mary as His queen and bride, her elaborate gown consists of gems and gold, animating her as she catches the light. Mary holds up a phylactery that reads 'His left hand should be under my head: and his right hand should embrace me'. In turn Christ's book exclaims 'Come my chosen one I shall place thee on my throne.'



Consistent with the theme of the Madonna as the Bride of Christ, there is a small painting in the gable of a 14th-century Florentine church where Christ and Mary hold hands surrounded by celebrating angels with trumpets.

Another example of this nuptial union is a well executed fresco (1436-43) also in Florence by Fra Angelico (fig. 30). The couple are seated in a heavenly surrounding, both draped in Virginal white robes. Jesus with a beard and long curly hair looking distinctly old before the Virgin who leans hesitantly forward as he places a crown on her head. Below is a semi-circle of adoring saints.

One source for the concept of Mary of the Bride of Christ can be attributed to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. His particular terms of reference was the infamous poem the Song of Songs/Solomon, a lengthly erotic poem which was inserted into the bible in a bid to Christianise it. From 1135 until 1153 he gave a number of famous sermons concerning this poem professing Solomon's bride to refering to the Virgin. The sensual descriptions of their mystical marriage taken to be that of Jesus and Mary's.

The Middle Ages saw an enthusiastic employment of the allegory with particular reference to Mary since many themes surrounding her were difficult to translate into direct images. A fascinating construct for example was developed to allegorize the mystical conception, that was the fable of the unicorn. There are a few paintings and some exquisite tapestries that concern themselves with this narrative. The origins of the legend are mysterious and probably have eastern roots.



The unicorn was known as a fierce animal with one long horn on its forehead. In order to capture the unicorn a virgin would be placed in a field/garden, the unicorn would place its head on the Virgin's lap being unable to resist, suckle at her breast, be so overcome he would then be easily captured by the huntsmen.

Pope Gregory the Great in 604 was the first to associate this story with Jesus.<sup>13</sup> The unicorn is Christ who is strong and beautiful and the Virgin who attracts him is Mary. Once he has been fed from her breast he becomes her son and of course his fate is destined. The hunters know they will be successful, his death is assured.

Two series of tapestries have immortalized this allegory. (fig.20). The first in the Hunt of the Unicorn in the Cloister in New York. The other being the Lady and the Unicorn, now in Paris. Both were woven in the late C15. The Archangel Gabriel is the huntsman. The Virgin is fused with the ideal Lady in mediaeval romance poetry. They are beautifully decorative, displaying an opulent scene of animals and flowers. It seems fitting that Christ's conception should be visualised by a beast whose phallic horn is pointed at Mary's womb.

Many legends depicted Mary as the true source of the milk of human kindness. Because the Christian tradition has so ostensibly focused on sexuality as an occasion of sin - symbolizing the Fall as the recognition of their nakedness. So the many paintings of the breast-feeding Queen have a charged sexuality. Since a woman's only function was perceived to be as a mother, child-birth and nursing gave a legitimate reason for the existence of such an illusive gender.



Mary not only suckles her infant but symbolically is mother to and nourishes the Church. This image provided scores of artists with a metaphysical source of spirituality. Nursing is the only time that the sexual side of her is displayed and then it is thought of in biological terms. The most consistent theme in the progeny of Mary is her motherhood. It is used to accentuate her humanness. This accent has always been present from the early Byzantine Icons to her popularity in the C14 and C15.

The nursing mother did not begin with Mary but has deeper roots in places like Egypt where there are statues of the Goddess Isis feeding the young Horus about 1000 years B.C. (fig.11). These carvings depict a cold mother and child with no hints towards sentimentality unlike some later Virgin and child renditions. The action doesn't try to be anything other than symbolic.

Breast milk was always held in reverence, one reason for this was people's ignorance of how the body functions and the almost miraculous way in which the milk manifests itself, allied to the total dependence of the child on the milk for its survival. Consequently the significance of the Madonna's milk became even more revered.

The simple fact that the life of the Son of God should depend so heavily on His mother. This was used as an instrument to highlight the previously underplayed importance of Mary's milk predictably enough took on a metaphor for the gift of life. In the Old Testament milk and honey were used to symbolize the Promised Land.



One of the first miracles ascribed to the Madonna tells the story of a monk who lay dying of a disease which was destroying his nose and mouth. In a prayer he tells the Madonna of his inimitable obedience to her through the years. Mary sufficiently affected appears at his bed-side. This tale is recounted by Gautier de Coincy in 1223 in France.

"with much sweetness and much delight, from her sweet bosom she drew forth her breast, that is so sweet, so soft, so beautiful and placed it in his mouth, gently touched him all about and sprinkled him with her sweet milk".<sup>20</sup>

And miraculously the monk recovers fully. This event is illustrated in the C14 English Queen Mary Psalter. A small and simple illumination, drawn by someone who had little knowledge of the female form, as Mary's breast is not in proportion with her body.

One painter who never painted the lactating virgin was Carravaggio although he did a number of Madonna's. His Madonna of Loreto painted in 1604 (fig.21) shows an unusually active Madonna who is not enthroned and there is almost no symbolic paraphernalia. Her heightened sense of reality is in accord with the church's teaching at the time which sought to draw the supernatural into the realm of the real. In the subsequent popular imagery of the Roman church however it was the prettiness of Raphael's Madonnas rather than the more real interpretations by Carravaggio that won out.(fig.18&21).

Mary's baring of her breast is not always as food but there are some works containing both Mary and Jesus baring themselves. The latter baring the wounds he received on the Cross in order to save humanity. Where as Mary exposes her breast that nourished the Saviour.



In a Florentine painting (1402) the Virgin pleads for mercy for sinners huddled on the ground below. It is interesting that Mary's whole breast has been amputated from her body which she holds out like a symbolic piece of flesh. It is quite a brutal gesture. The inscription reads "Dearest son, because of the milk I gave you, have mercy on them."

Even though Mary's milk was revered the fact that artists showed her exposing her breasts was often shunned. Eve's punishment influenced the way people perceived the suckling Madonna. The nursing Mother went through phases of popularity and decline. By the C15 the Virgin's regality was being reinstated. A snobish element appeared towards showing Mary as subject to her own body, as the employment of wet-nurses increased. A rejection and embarrassment at the naked female body contributed to its demise. Pope Paul IV (1555-9) ordered that the bare-breasted Virgins in the Sistine Chapel were to be over-painted.<sup>21</sup>

There were some artists who were thought to be taking liberties and making almost blasphemous images. For example a painting was commissioned by King Charles VIII of his mistress Agnes Sord as the Mother of God, 1450 (fig.22) It shows a rather overtly sexual young woman baring a firm round breast, fashionably attired with a luxurious crown. She does not look particularly maternal but young and distant, the infant looks very precariously balanced on her knee. She is enthroned and surrounded by a few red and austere looking angels. It was painted by Jean Fouquet. This example is not alone and is one of an array of such risqué works.

Also in the C15 a controversy was growing about the Immaculate Conception.



Because she had been spared the stain of Original sin, the idea of her as a feeding mother was seen as a contradiction for it was an aspect of biological motherhood. Although the image of the lactating Mary ceased it had, and still does have repercussions in very Catholic countries like Ireland. Where the Church advocates 'natural' feeding even though it might not be the best method for the mother. One is reminded of the popular slogan 'breast is best'. Natural childbirth and the natural 'rythm method of contraception is expounded upon, disallowing 'unnatural' forms of contraception. Churching was still practised in many parts of Ireland up to the 1960's, a ritual where the woman goes to the priest to be ('forgiven') cleansed after having given birth.

The symbolic importance of Mary as a mother is complex. To some she is a humane figure in a male religion. Yet hers was an essentially submissive role as mother. When she was visited by the Holy Ghost she allowed herself to become the Mother of Christ. She was a channel used by God to create his son and so later to be worshipped as the Son of God. Mary negates her role by being his servant "I am the servant of the Lord". As Simone de Beauvoir claims:

"For the first time in human history the mother kneels before her son: she freely accepts her inferiority. This is the Supreme masculine victory, consummated in the Cult of the Virgin - it is the rehabilitation of woman through the accomplishment of her defeat.



## Footnotes

Marina Warner Alone of All her Sex P.292.

Encyclopedia Britanica definition of the word 'Mary' P.11.

Heather Child and Dorothy Colles,  
Christian Symbols, Ancient and Modern P.87.

For more elaboration see, Hall's  
History of Ideas and Images in Italian Art P.110

Allastair Smart The Dawn of Italian Painting P.41.

Edited Victor Borgin and Cora Kaplan,  
Formations of Fantasy P.70.

Ibid P.71.

G. L. Simon, Sex and Superstition 1973.

Robert Hughes. Heaven and Hell in Western Art P.59.

Joseph Campbell: The Masks of God Primitive Mythology P.101.

Barbara Walker, The Women's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets  
P.607.

Emile Male, The Gothic Image in Religious Art in France in C13  
Page 249-50

Marina Warner Alone of All her Sex P.122

Ibid P.201

Ibid P.198

Ibid P.203

Simone de Beavoir The Second Sex  
P.203.







Mary Magdalene became an important female figure for Christian society because of her human failings, she filled an oppressive gap between the Virgin who was free from all sin and Eve who was seen as the epitome of the evil failings of women. Magdalene was seen as a much more humane figure in comparison with the remote Virgin. Before her popularity people were left with the two most prominent examples of woman, Eve and Mary, who were at either ends of the sexual spectrum, Mary Magdalene was a lesser known entity which whom they could identify.

The stories of her in the New Testament are familiar, her prominence was helped by the frequency and significance of her appearances in the Gospels. A close investigation of the passages dealing with her challenges the traditional assumption that she was a woman of great beauty, or indeed a prostitute.

While having supper with a parisee named Simon, a woman enters the house, kneeling at Christ's feet washes them with her tears and dries them with her hair. This action is met with indignation as he exclaims she is a sinner (Luke 7:39) Jesus states "her sins which are many, are forgiven for she loved much....." (Luke 7:47) The term that she loved much referred to the generosity of her anointing Jesus but was generally interpreted as a reference to her sins. He used the verb diligere, which has no erotic connotations.

Mary Magdalene became the epitome of the sinful human that was saved.



2

The repentent prostitute became very popular in the middle ages through to the High Renaissance. She was used by the Church as a last hope for sinners, that one so wayward as her repented and was forgiven by God, she held out hope for even the most wicked.

Iconographically her symbol was her ointment jar which is reminiscent of Pandora's vessel. The jar is full of the precious ointment which shows her love for Jesus.

It became established that the sins of Magdalene were carnal that she was a sinner because she used her sexuality which God had pronounced as a punishment to all women as an economically viable asset. The church thought of her in terms of her sexual activity like the Virgin who was pure and unsoiled, while Magdalene was a prostitute. This morally 'sinful woman' was no real role model for women as the conditions of her forgiveness was the total denial of her sexual needs. Once she was seen to forsake her carnal activity, she was no longer a threat to man and so became acceptable. Like Eve, Magdalene shows up the sexual temptful side of women highlighting the dangers of the flesh.

The Gospel says Jesus cast seven devils out of the sacret harlot Mary Magdalene yet she was the first person to whom he appeared after his ressurection (Mark 16:9). St. John Chrysostom argued the point that the Madonna should have been the first human that the resurrected Jesus appeared to; Drigen before him was more specific in his condemnation of M.Magdalene feeling that she was a wholly unsuitable first witness.



A relatively popular theme for paintings of the Magdalene, usually entitled Touch me not as in the work by Martin Schongaver (1493) Germany (fig 23). Fra Angelico translated the notorious happening in a piece of work. Jes agilely escapes her embrace turning away as she kneels in worship before him. It is an emotive and powerful image. In the scene Jesus calls her by her name, seeing him she exclaims "Master". Touch me not he commands (John 20:17)

The suggestion of love between Christ and Mary had been celebrated in the Gnostic books of the C2, later eliminated from Christian teachings. One such book was the Gnostic Gospel of Philip, dwelling on the union of man and woman as a symbol for healing, he examines the relationship of Mary and Jesus stating that He often kissed her.<sup>2</sup> An avant-guarde scholar William Phipps wrote a book entitled Was Jesus Married?, speculating on the idea that M. Magdalene may have been his wife. And even more recently in the Last Temptation a big budget American film directed by the famous director Scorsese examines a similar theme. A film felt by many Catholics to be blasphemous because of the intimate relationship between the two.

The depiction of the Magdalen by various artists fall into two broad catagories, first the serious treatment which she is given generally and secondly the more vulgar romantic naked interpretations which were not as common. Some artists took advantage of the oppertunity to paint a naked woman. Two such examples are picked out by the critic John Berger In Ways of Seeing.



One by Baudney (fig.24) 1859 the other by the artist Van der Werff (late C17) fig. 25. they do not even attempt to portray the biblical Mary who repented for her 'immoral' ways of the flesh but hypocritically display a naked desirable woman, who is decoratively arranged for the voyeuristic pleasure of the male viewer. They don't look out at the on-looker neither do they seem aware of any male gaze which might perturb the viewer. Both have drapery delicately obscuring their genitals. They are beautifully sensual women who know the art of erotic pleasure. Romantically placed in a landscape setting, hinting at her oneness with nature and her more animalistic leanings. One reason Magdalene was made a saint was her rejection of her sinful past and the subsequent tough life of denial which she set herself. These paintings go nowhere near a portrayal of the biblical Magdalene.

The more established painter Titian (fig.26.) chose to depict the desirably naked Magdalene. The sensual appeal of the female nude was his unmistakable intention in this work. The pose is said to be based upon a pose of Venus by He was the greatest exponent of the Venetian School in the C16. He studied under Bellini and was greatly influenced by Giorgione but it was not long before he abandoned the latter's elegant melancholy and sought a more robust classicism. Here Magdalene's long luxurious hair is used to emphasise her sumptuousness as her breasts are teasingly displayed. Vasari the first Italian Art Historian and Cardinal Federico Borromeo agreed that such 'Magdalene's were without reproach as the Cardinal himself had one.

3



5

Nearly a century after Titian, Carravagio painted at least three paintings dealing with Mary Magdalene (fig.27), treating her in a much more earnest manner. In the Conversion of the Mary Magdalene she is captured at the moment of her conversion.

Martha her sister is dressed modestly in comparison, she reproaches Mary, enumerating the miracles of Christ.<sup>4</sup> The tense expression which he gives herself and Martha probably refers to the words spoken by Jesus when he visited the two, "Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful and Mary has chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41:42)

Traditionally Martha and Mary symbolize the two types of religious life - the active and the contemplative.<sup>5</sup>

This theme was popular in the Lombard painting of the Cingincento. The cosmetic bowl and comb refer to the Saint's sinful life. The mirror could also make references to the male allusion of her vanity.

In The Magdalene in Ecstasy figure 28. her reddish-blond hair is untied as is generally the case. Her body and head thrown-back, as tears erupt from her half-closed eyes. It is a privately emotional scene even though it is imaginable that the intensity of her feeling would make her oblivious of another's presence. Tension is expressed in the position of her neck and strained forehead. This work is sometimes known as the dying Magdalene and is the most widely copied of his works.



All attention is concentrated on her clothed body as it catches the light, the dark background allows for no distractions. It is a much stronger piece than his earlier Repentant Magdalene fig.29. There is an interesting argument regarding his work pertaining to the fact that he only painted life-portraits, then stratigically placing some minimal iconography to a portrait study into a religious painting.<sup>6</sup> This painting would correspond to this theory as it is known that he painted out part of her skirt, painting in some jewellery. The figure does look like an ordinary woman and not explicitly like a prostitute unlike previously mentioned attempts.

The rependent Magdalene was a characteristic theme in the Comtes-Reformation, sad and humble after a life on sin. Penance was demanded by the Church as early as the C3. It was the image of the reformed sinner and not the rite itself that the Church used to support its teaching, the tear-stained apostle Peter became a very popular theme in devotional painting with Mary not too far behind although Peter's denial of Christ was considered a worse sin than being sexually deviant. She was a supreme example of repentance, a sacrament particularly emphasised at that time as the Church wanted to welcome back those who had strayed over to Prodistantism. She became celebrated as the 'blessed bride of Christ' as example of one drawn from paganism to the light of Christiandom. Carravaggio seemed unusally enamoured by Mary, he was no doubt aware that her harlotry was often dismissed.



For example in a book of Cesare Baronius published in 1590 it states that the Magdalene was more than likely not a public whore but only impure and vain. A weak attempt at negating the 'soilded' sexual activity of a woman who recieved much attention from Jesus and was also a saint.

The prominence of Mary Magdalene in the New Testament was in marked contrast to the way the Virgin was treated.

Mary Magdalene was not the only prostitute to reform her ways once shown the light to Christianity. She sums up the Church's fear of women, it's association of physical beauty with temptation and it's practice of bodily mortification. Another prostitute that became a saint was Mary of Egypt, born in Alexandria around the middle of the C4. She lived as a prostitute from the age of 12 to 17. Determined to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy land, she paid for her passage on a ship by the only trade she knew well. When she arrived she was over come with grief for her sexual debauchery "she was to let herself dry out as a prune, a remedy that she herself devised against her moral rot and decay"<sup>7</sup> .(Footnote as stated in the Encylopediadia of Catholic Saints). According to legend both Mary's were supposed to retire to the desert in shame for their lives of sin, rejecting the world and it's vanities, removed their elaborate clothing and went naked like the beasts. Her renunciation inspired an early nude panel painting in Hamburg around 1400 showing her receiving communion.



A more faithful and rigerous piece of work in keeping with the legend of Mary Magdalene is in the Bapistery in Florence in a carving by Donatello. As an ardent example of chastisement for christian morality, quant and withered by fasting she is literally skin and bones devoid of any hint of her gender. Her fleshless body covered by her infamous hair which is no longer a symbol of her percieved sensuality but is a symból of her newfound humility. Their unorthadox hairiness is used to identify their seperateness from society first as whores and then as recluses.

The Christian harlot has absorbed to some degree the role of the classical goddesses of love. Like the Virgin, Magdalene is identified in terms of her sexual relationship with men or lack of it as in the Virgin's case. The rise of the cult of the Magdalene through the high middle ages and Counter - Reformation went hand in hand with the reaffirmation of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. Because of the strong reiteration of the Virgins purity, the harden it became for the lay person to find comfort from her. This helped to popularise the veneration of the Magdalene who herself sinned again and again. From the C15 the Virgin reached a higher pedestal, helping to dilute her seen powers of Intersession.



Footnote

1. Marina Warner, Qlone of all her sex  
p.226.
2. R.M. Grant, After the New testament  
p.188.
3. Howard Hibbard, Carravaggio.  
p. 158
- 4 Cumming is responsible for the iconographical  
interpretation of this painting.
- 5.The Metropolitan Museum of New York  
The Age of Carravaggio  
p.150.
6. Howard Hibbard, Carravaggio  
page 231.
7. As stated in the Encyclopaedia of Catholic Saints



This attempt to deal with how women have been represented in religious art, has highlighted what an implicitly complex subject it is. To what degree has the portrayal of these three women been a distinct factor in the history of the West's attitude to women? This I have found an almost impossible question but by analysing the varied changes that the images of these women underwent seems to indicate to what extent their personification was manipulated by the Church.

There are 659 million Catholics in the world today. The more religious countries like Ireland find themselves littered with kitch Grotto's some in the middle of nowhere, adding to their power of mystification, the majority of houses contain a mass of religious pictures, The Sacred Heart and the Virgin enjoying pride of place. Cheap plaster of Paris statues of the Virgin also inhabit our urban and rural landscape. Her influence predominates even to people who are not practising Catholics but happen to live in her jurisdiction.

The Virgin as we have seen appears under many guises, she is the churches female paragon, it's idealised woman, because of her contradictions rather than despite them. Her image went through a number of strategic changes, some confusingly being painted around the same time. The two main types were the Madonna of Humility by Masaccio in 1425, to the austere regal interpretation by Bartolomeo Vivarini, in 1465.....  
Madonna and Child enthroned surrounded by saints.



The Virgin Mary, the harlot Mary Magdalene and Eve were identified through their sexual relation to men. Mary better known as the Virgin because she lacks a sexual relationship with a man. Eve is infamous for tempting man/Adam with her sexuality and consequently mankind is still paying for the Fall through the stain of Original Sin. Mary Magdalene's most famous attribute was her existence as a prostitute and secondly her repentance and forgiveness by God. Their sexuality was seen to be of the utmost importance to the Church.

The paintings of Eve and some of the Magdalene become now immersed in the West's History of the nude. The nude Magdalenes like Titians, had little religious terms of reference.

In the name of religion, many beautifully accomplished paintings and sculpture have added a varied richness to our cultural history.

The majority of paintings of the Virgin which have been cited in this paper have portrayed Mary as beautiful and gentle. There is nothing wrong with these traits in themselves, what is dangerous is the readiness and frequency with which artists took submissive "feminine" traits to describe Mary. Here abound male assumptions, abound sexual differences, and the assignment of certain roles to women. The Virgin is firstly venerated as a pure Virgin and secondly as a mother. This contradictory state finds ultimate respect in Catholic countries. The Churches power in how it sees the role of women even today showed it's unscrupulous head in three of our referenda concerning Contraception, Abortion and Divorce.



It should be added that many Catholic women also voted in accordance with the teachings of the Church. This slight diversion is just to highlight the reality of two centuries of male control over our perceptions of women.

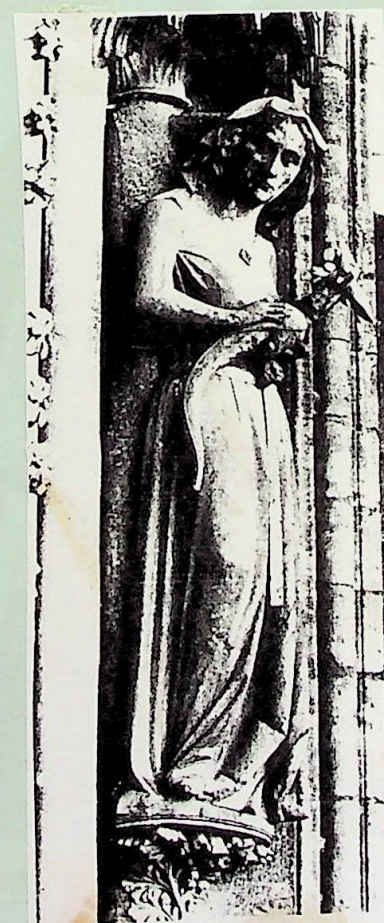
The Church's stamp is implicate to the study of the history of art. It helps colour our attitude to what art is or what it should be.

The translation of these three women into art has been controlled by and large by the Church, as it thought appropriate from a particularly male perspective. Only in the past few years is this misogynist bent being analysed and brought into the open to inform women.





1. Adam and Eve by Durer



3. Eve showing her fondness for the serpent. Reims Cathedral. 13th century (Marburg).





4 The Creation of Eve by Michelangelo



6 Pandora and Epimetheus on Urn





7 The Expulsion from Paradise by Pol de Luxembourg





8 Expulsion from Paradise by Masaccio



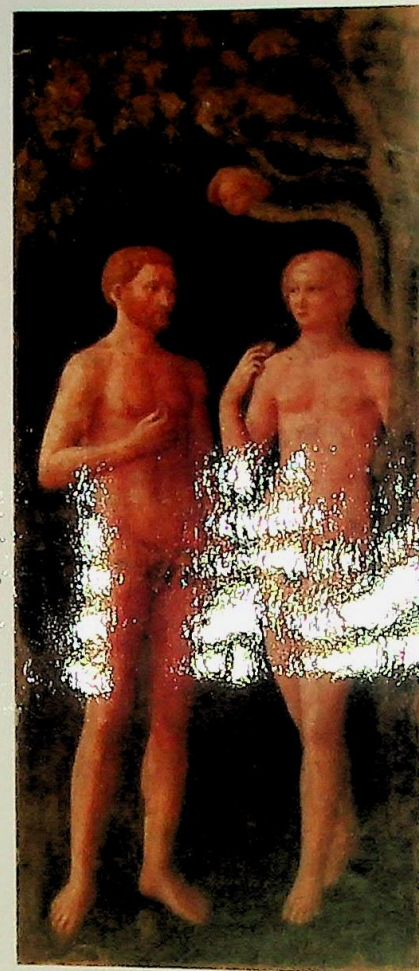
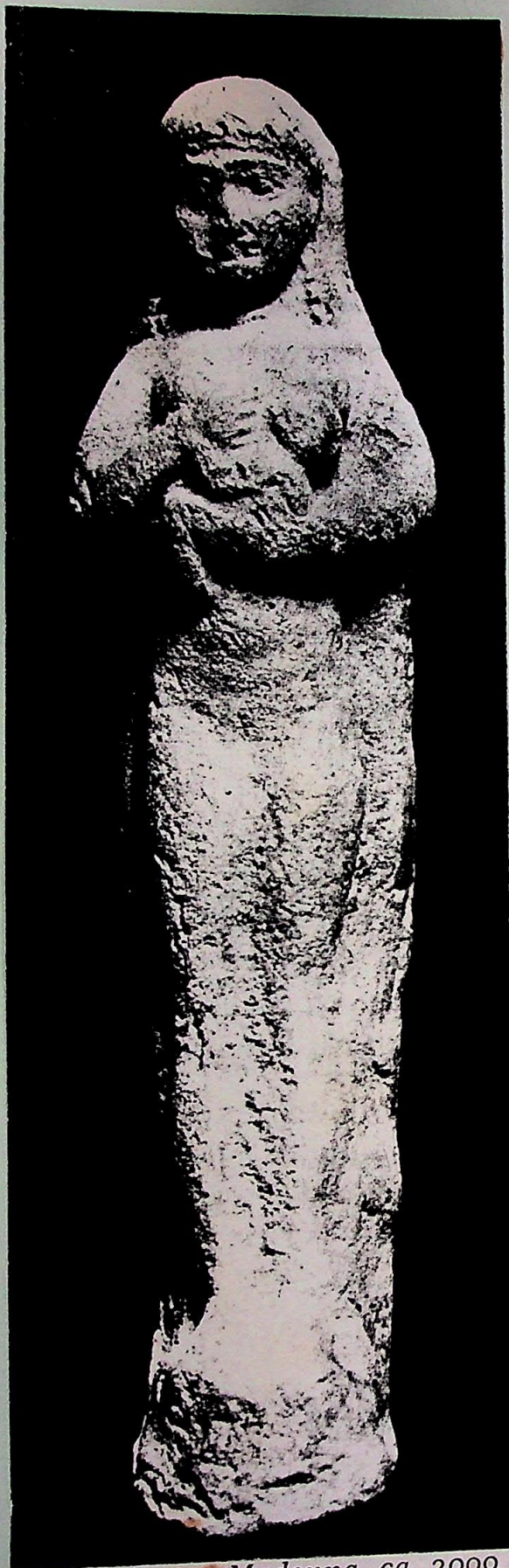


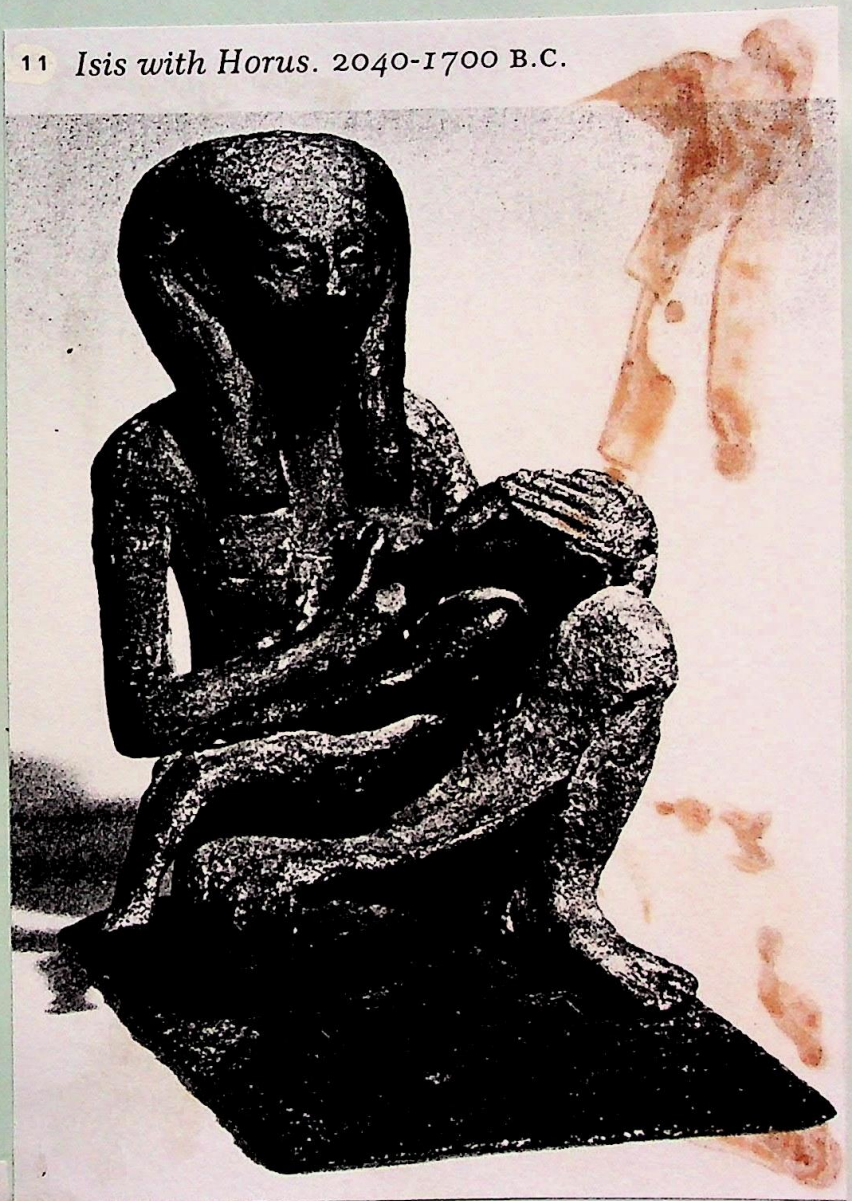
PLATE 3 THE TEMPTATION IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN. Masolino, c. 1427  
Fresco, 208x88 cm, 82x34 in. Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence. See page 41

9 Adam and Eve by Masolino





*Mesopotamian Madonna. ca. 2000 B.C.*

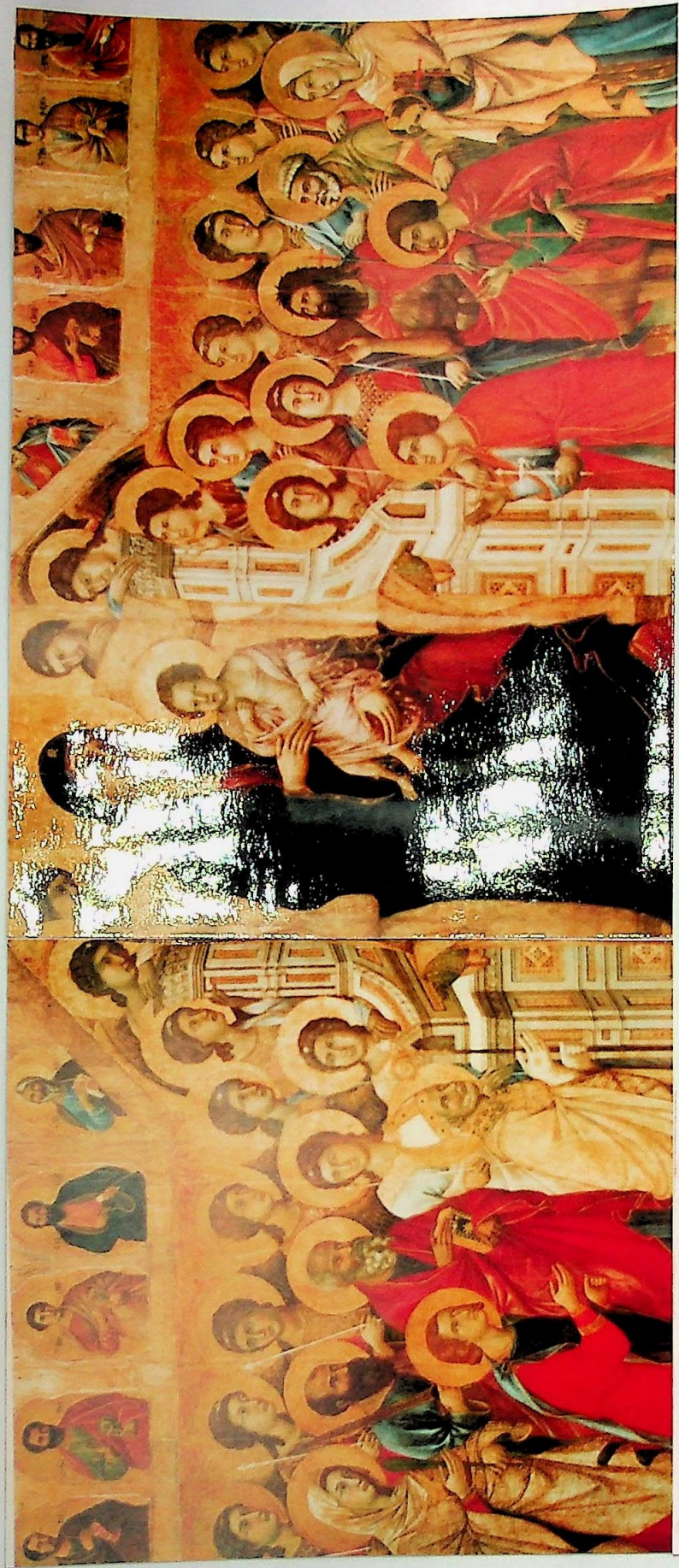






12 .. Bzyantine Madonna





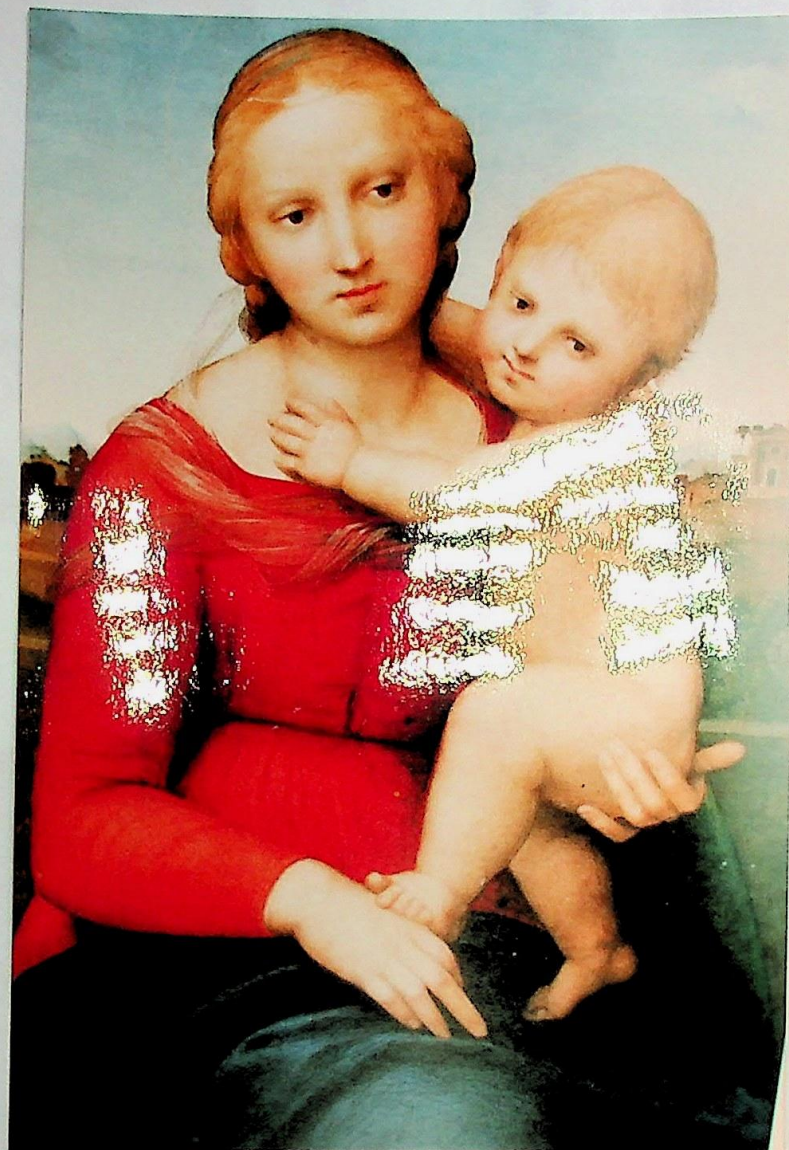
14 Maesta by Duccio





17 Madonna and Child by Fra Fillippo Luppi





18 The Small cowper Madonna by Raphael





*Christ in the Virgin's Womb*



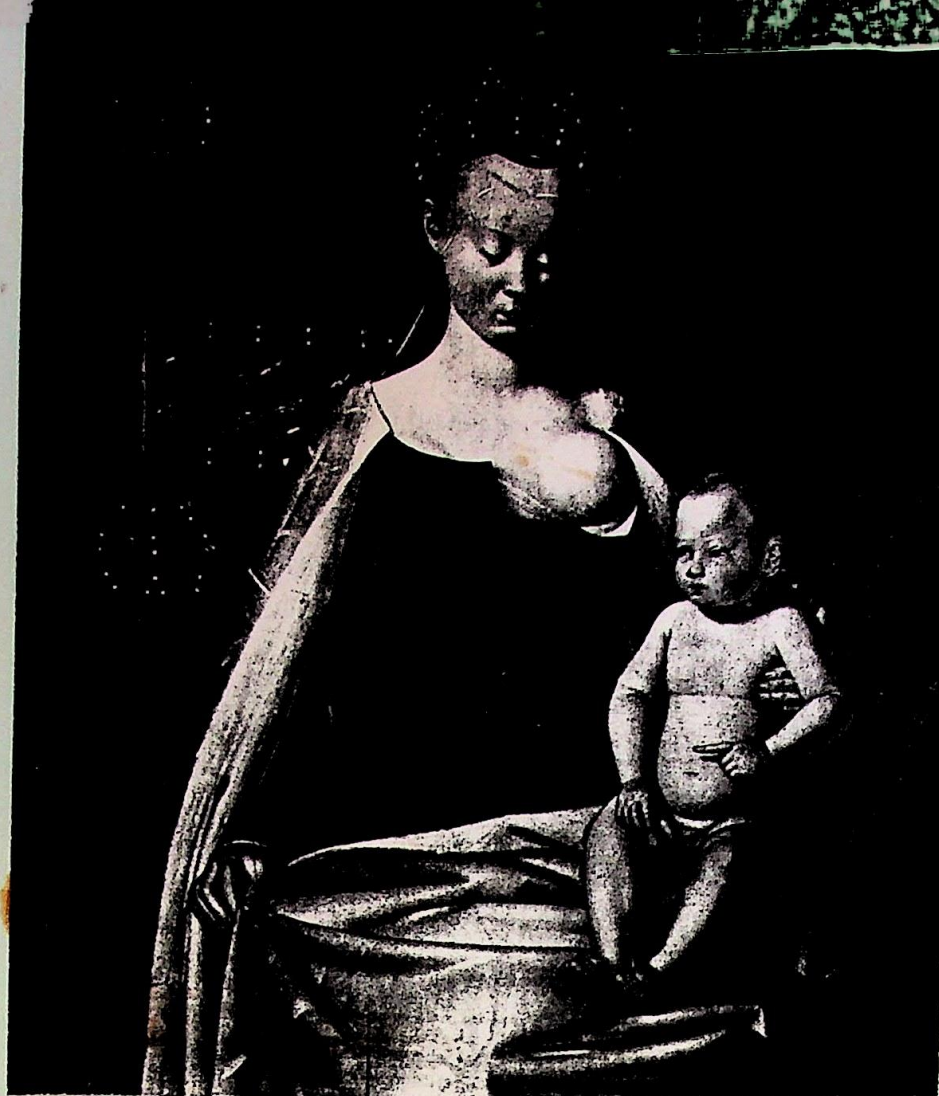


*La Dame à la Licorne. Musée de Cluny,*



21 Madonna of Loreto by Caravaggio





22

**Jean Fouquet**  
*Mary and the Child surrounded by  
 Angels* (right wing of the Melun  
 diptych), c. 1450  
 Koninklijk Museum voor Schone  
 Kunsten, Antwerp



23 Coronation of the Virgin by Fra Angelico





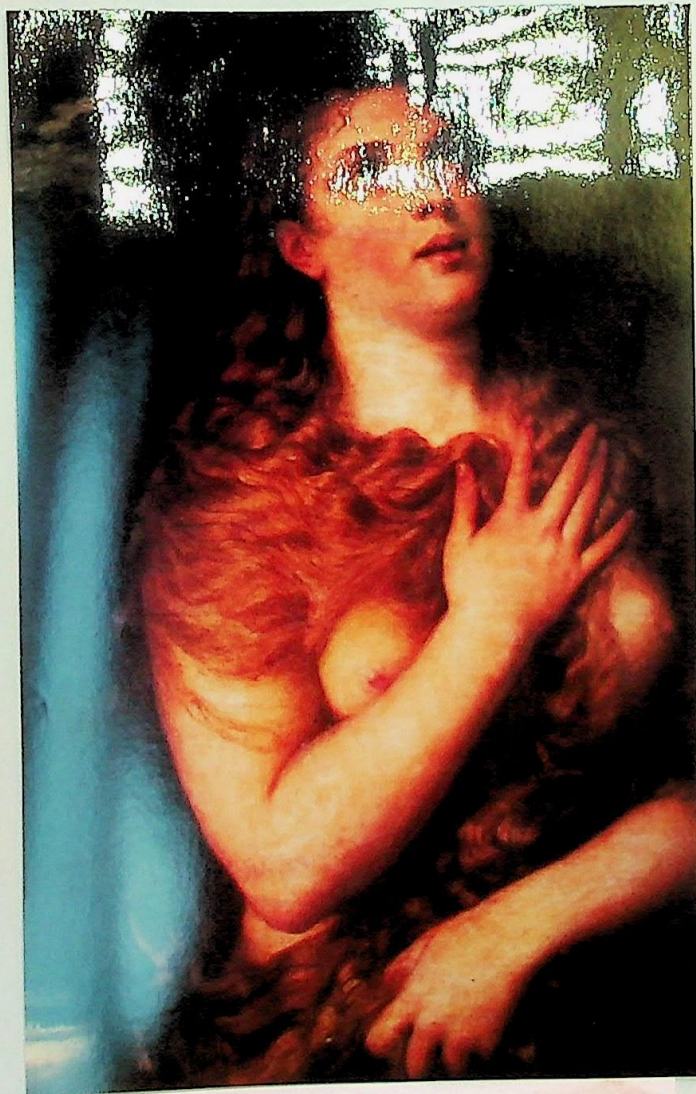
MARY MAGDALENE BY JAN VERMEER  
1639-1727



THE MAGDALEN READING STUDIO OF  
AMBROSIOUS BENSON, ACTIVE 1519-1550



THE PENITENT MAGDALEN  
BY BAUDRY, SALON OF 1859



26 Magdalene by Titian





27 Conversion of Magdalene by Carravaggio





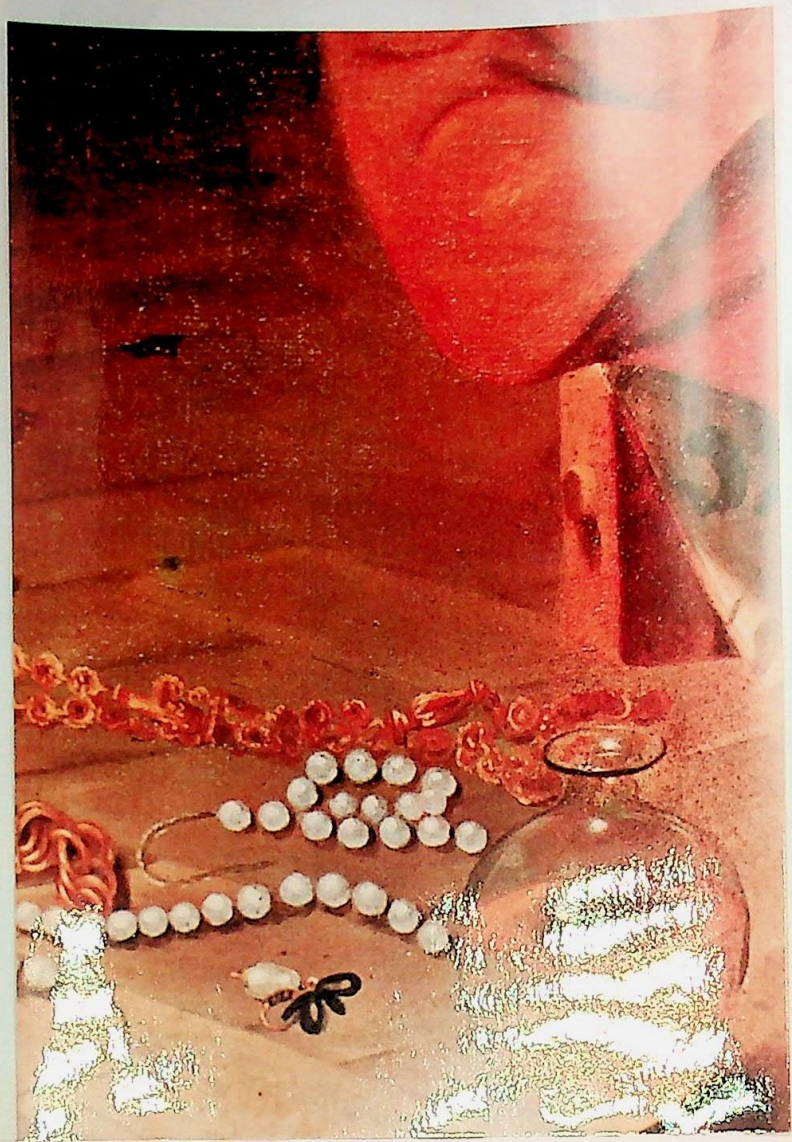
28 Magdalene in Exstasy by Carravaggio





*Repentant Magdalen.* Galleria Doria-Pamphilj, c. 1594–95?





29 Repentent Magdalene by Carravaggio



35. Bartolomeo Vivarini  
*Madonna and Child enthroned,  
surrounded by Saints*, 1465  
Panel, 118x120 cm  
Naples, Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di  
Capodimonte



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