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Jewellery & Objects

School of Design

“Unearthing Patriarchal Catholic Oppression in Art Through the Perspectives of Those Opressed”

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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Introduction

The deeply interwoven relationship between Christianity and Art is widely believed to go back almost as far as Christianity itself with evidence of sculptures from the 2nd Century. Since the 1970's however, there has been many explorations by Contemporary Artists focusing in on, recognising and protesting the Patriarchal Oppression which is so strongly upheld by the Catholic Church through their art. As an Irish student who was raised by a strongly Catholic family and as a woman of Transgender experience the dialogue between Contemporary Art and Patriarchal oppression both equally fascinated and interested me because it is something that is deeply personal to me and informs my approach to creating. I hoped, through my research project to better understand the thought process and perspectives of Contemporary artists of a similar experience and therefore have a better conscious understanding of how it influences my own methods of creation. I also wanted to explore the context behind art which is viewed to address oppression directly and in turn is demonised, silenced and censored by the Catholic patriarchal oppressor, unlocking an almost back and forth dialogue between artist and oppressor. I aimed to unearth the dialogues around oppression by delving deeper into the personal context held by each artist through interviews and essays which directly chronicle and contextualise their personal feelings and reasoning behind creating. I also wished to explore the beginning and history of Patriarchal Oppression through the context of Christianity and explore the enduring experience that it had created for people in the past which it is still present today.

Chapter 1 I explored the beginning of Patriarchal catholic oppression through Biblical characters and passages which I uncovered by exploring the perspectives of writers who directly delved into the subject. I also explored the perspectives held

by two female artists through their art as a reaction to that Patriarchal oppression and the impact it had on them today.

In Chapter 2 I explored the perspectives of two LGBT artists whose work directly reacts to the Patriarchal Oppression upheld by the Catholic Church. I also contrasted their perspectives with the perspectives of the female artists from Chapter 1 to further explore how sexuality and identity inform art in comparison to gender as the oppression experienced or explored is intricately different yet similarly painful.

In my third Chapter I then took three artists who had experienced Catholic oppression from the perspectives of Female and LGBT and explored how their art in turn became a space for dialogue between art and oppression. I examine the way in which the work of these artists further generated oppression through vandalism, censorship and religious protest which contextualised the way in which we view their work when looking back on it. Finally, in my conclusion I redefined the link of oppression based on my findings and explained it through the research I completed for my project.

Chapter One:

A Woman's War: Unoccupied History;



(Fig. 1) *"Mary Magdalene"* (1524) by Andrea Solari

In my first chapter I am aiming to explore the perspectives of two female artists who use their art to explore and react to patriarchal Catholic oppression. By exploring two female artists I aim to contextualise the birth of Catholic oppression and explore art as an initial reaction to that oppression. I am also intending to explore how it has influenced and affected women throughout history through the viewpoints of artists who have directly addressed patriarchal Catholic oppression with their work.

Mary Magdalene is a figure throughout history who's nature and narrative have been constantly redefined that her story from healer to prostitute within history is almost fluid and undefinable in a sense. According to James Carroll, a writer for the Smithsonian Museum's digital historical blog; "from the New Testament, Mary of Magdala was a leading figure among those attracted to Jesus." (2006, n.p.) Though it is now believed she would have been closer to a modern day doctor with her ability to heal people using medicines. The claim that Mary was a 'sex worker' comes from Pope Gregory I, who declared her to be a penitent prostitute in the year 591 (Smith, 2018, n.p.). This inaccurate labelling has undeniably clung to Mary

Magdalene's name even after the church redefined her narrative by "clearing" Mary's name in 1969 and again in 2016 when Pope Francis formally identified her as the "apostle of the apostles". (Smith, N, 2018, n.p.) Magdalene's legacy is still a tragic one in the sense that her history is generally blurred between the polar states of "healer" and "prostitute". Her legacy is also still viewed as unimportant by most people.

The question of why Magdalene's narrative has been deemed insignificant and changeable is arguably answered when one looks deeper at the history of the Catholic Church. According to William Kennedy, a writer for *Grunge* magazine it's generally believed that her portrayal in history was diminished to project the patriarchal nature of the Catholic Church as her outsized influence on Jesus may have been threatening to the reputations of the other apostles and Catholic narrative as a whole. (Kennedy, 2021, n.p). The origin of this patriarchal narrative from which my findings explore is so deeply rooted in the Catholic Church and is said by Jane Williams, an author and lecturer at Kings College in London, to have come from the first book of the bible "Genesis". The biblical book "Genesis" was described by Williams as "a patriarchal narrative, through and through. Its world is one where women exist entirely as adjuncts to men, and where safety and success for women lie in marriage and reproduction" (Williams, 2011, n.p.).

Recently, this image of a woman whose chronicle is at the mercy of the patriarchy is an image which has been appropriated by singer Tahliah Debrett Barnett who is known professionally as Fka Twigs for her 2019 album entitled "Magdalene". Throughout the album, Fka Twigs (Twigs hereafter) delves into the story of Mary Magdalene in her own idiosyncratic and fascinating way as a reflection of her own life. When speaking on the

nature of Mary Magdalene's storyline and history Twigs said "I found a lot of power in the story of Mary Magdalene; a lot of dignity, a lot of grace, a lot of inspiration" (Dunne, 2019, n.p.). Within her lyrics on the album Twigs explores Magdalene's "unoccupied history" and uses it to explore her space in the world as a woman today. When speaking further on the use of Magdalene as a motif for her album Twigs stated that "She's a male projection and, I think, the beginning of the patriarchy taking control of the narrative of women" (Lowe, 2019, n.p.). Twigs also feels suggests that "Any woman that's done anything can be subject to that" and that Twigs herself has also been subject to that rewriting of history to fit a patriarchal image (Lowe, 2019, n.p.).



(Fig.2) "*Magdalene*" Album Cover by Fka Twigs
with Art By Matthew Stone



(Fig. 3) Detail of "*Magdalene*" Album Cover

Twigs describes the period of making the album as a growth period and says she drew upon the story of Mary Magdalene as an inspirational figure whose story was rewritten like Twigs's own story in the media. Speaking on Mary Magdalene 'the woman', Twigs' said she feels that she "sees Mary Magdalene as Jesus Christ's equal" (Lowe, 2019, n.p.). This much denied belief is why Twigs' believes it's easier

for people to just view Mary Magdalene as a harlot because, according to Twigs, when “you call a woman a whore, it effectively devalues her” (2019, n.p.).

This exploration of Magdalene is directly tackled in Twig’s song “Mary Magdalene” where she explores all of the different historical views of Magdalene and further toys with the narrative further while exploring the notions of intimacy which might be considered detrimental to the story of Jesus. With the lines “I’m fever for the fire / True as Mary Magdalene / Creature of desire / Come just a little bit closer to me” (Mary Magdalene, 2019) FKA Twigs places herself in Magdalene’s shoes and expresses the prolific power of women while also expressing the way in which she became a major problem for the patriarchal narrative of the saviour of Jesus. Twigs performs emotional fragility fully aware of the space she occupies as a woman in music without falling into the tired trope of female martyrdom. This approach to Magdalene as an icon of transformation and female strength is echoed in Fig 2. the album’s cover by Matthew Stone. The cover features the likeness of Twigs three-dimensionally rendered onto a painterly yet masculine form with a braid which turns into an aggressive snake at the end. On the surface, this snake might seem a prolific nod to Medusa, the greek mythological character, but in actuality, is described by Stone as a reference to the asp that purportedly poisoned Cleopatra, the Egyptian pharaoh, throwing her kingdom into disarray (Ong, 2019, n.p).

The intricate process Stone uses to create an image by first painting, then three-dimensionally rendering and finally printing on linen echoes the vast and intricate digital production processes which Twigs goes through to produce the accompanying music. Twigs’s skin on the cover is depicted with a hyper-saturated golden hue which arguably speaks not only to the highly emotive content from the album but in my opinion also evokes a feeling of red clay which, in turn, echoes the clay-like malleability of Magdalene’s history. Collaborating with the artist Leonor Fini

(whose work is often described as ‘sexual surrealism’) Twigs and Stone further generate a prolific sensual nature (Ong, 2019 n.p.). When describing the album cover’s form, Ryan Waddoups’ a writer for art magazine *Surface*, described Matthew Stone’s depiction of Twigs as featuring a “strength [that] is unrelenting” with “The figure’s exaggerated muscle definition [which] bucks gender, while her marble-like eyeballs, glazed with gentle brushstrokes, suggest a casual conviction.” (Waddoups 2019, n.p.). These notes again echoing the fragile and emotive yet simultaneously strong nature of the album’s namesake.



(Fig.4) Instillation by Allison Lowry in the National Museum of Ireland



(Fig.5) Detail of Instillation by Allison Lowry

Similar to Twigs’ exploration of the hidden patriarchal oppression of women throughout religious history Allison Lowry who is a Northern Ireland based glass artist created an artistic response to the legacy of the mother and baby homes and

Magdalene laundries with her exhibition *(A)Dressing our Hidden Truths*. The exhibition, which opened at The National Museum of Ireland in March 2019, features multiple glass installations which explore and bring to light elements of the suffering women and children have endured at the hands of the Catholic church in Ireland. The Laundries which operated in Ireland throughout the 18th and 19th centuries were described by Lowry herself as being places meant to “rescue and rehabilitate ‘fallen’ woman,” (Houlihan, 2019, n.p.). The term of ‘*fallen*’ women refers to that which Rosalind White, a PhD Student from Royal Holloway College London, describes as “an irrevocable loss of innocence, a concept originating in the biblical fall in the Garden of Eden” a concept which is an antiquated and misogynistic way of describing a woman who participated in sexual activity out of wedlock. (2016, n.p.) Lowry continues to explain the way in which “quickly the laundries became commercially driven and women and girls were committed to the laundries as ‘inmates’ for no real reason and used as free labour by the religious orders who ran them” (Houlihan, 2019, n.p.). It’s slightly ironic that the laundries were named after Mary Magdalene as I believe that the way in which they were operated echoes Twigs’ sentiments of Magdalene being a figure which is an early example of “the patriarchy taking control of the narrative of women” (Lowe, 2019, n.p.). The exhibition itself features sculptural glass installations which eerily detail some of the methods of catholic oppression on ‘fallen’ women. One installation in Fig. 4 and 5 entitled *Instead of the fragrance there will be stench; instead of a sash, a rope; instead of well-dressed hair, baldness; instead of fine clothing, sackcloth; instead of beauty, branding (Isaiah 3:24)* uses cast glass scissors suspended by traditional rosary beads over human hair to convey the methods used to dehumanise the women who were admitted to the Magdalene Asylums.

Another installation (Fig. 6) from the exhibition entitled again with a bible

quote *His clothes became so white they shone. They were whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them (Mark 9:3)* features a white apron, covered in glass and left unfired so it remains glittering under light. Lowry expresses wanting to explore the idea of a uniform, similar to that of the military uniforms within the museum of Collins Barracks (Houlihan, 2019, n.p.). I believe this exploration of the idea of a physical uniform reverberates the statements of the American art historian, Linda Nochlin, around the concept of '*fallen*' women and the sexual asymmetry when she stated "fallen in the masculine sense means killed in the war and in the feminine sense given over to a particular kind of vice" (Nochlin, 1978, p.p.139-153). This display of a shiny white uniform which represents those oppressive ethics of "cleanliness next to godliness" which were upheld by the Laundries, to contrast that of the military uniforms within the museum at Collins Barracks is really effective. Along with the laundry workers names and hair being taken from them to represents the uniform worn by these women.



Chapter Two:

God Is Trans, The Queer Perspective;

In my second chapter I am aiming to explore the perspectives of two queer (in the reclaimed sense) artists who use their art to explore and react to patriarchal catholic oppression against LGBT people and the queer experience. By exploring two queer artists I aim to further contextualise the effect Catholic oppression on othered groups and explore their art as a reaction to the oppression. I also am aiming to contrast how the oppression affects a group of people based on their identity and sexuality in comparison to their gender.



(Fig.7) Screen Capture from Sophie's "It's Okay To Cry" Music Video

"God is Trans" is the response of recently deceased, Scottish, music producer, Sophie Xeon who is known mononymously as Sophie (Sophie hereafter) when asked if she believed in god in an interview for *Paper Magazine's* pride issue. (Moran, 2018, n.p.).

While this statement can seem on surface level like a simple provoking nudge at the patriarchal image of a cisgendered heterosexual white male 'God' which is held by the Catholic Church, I feel it also displays the way in which as Sophie herself described her gender expression as "taking control to bring [her] body more in line with [her] soul and spirit so the two aren't fighting against each other and struggling to survive" (Moran, 2018, n.p.). Fig 7. Is a still from Sophie's 2017 music video for her self-produced song *It's Okay To Cry* which paints Sophie as a God-like figure in the clouds further reverberating the ideas of God being a mirror for personal experience. In a contextual sense, 'It's Okay To Cry' represents a shift in Sophies own career as it marks the first time her own image was attached to any promotional material for her music. On her pervious anonymity Sophie herself said that in her work "The intention has always been to be how I want to be and how I'm comfortable in the world, never to be anonymous" (Greenwood, 2021, n.p.). The video itself begins in darkness, echoing the biblical book of Genesis before softly turning to light as if Sophie is a god in her own world saying "Let there be light" as the song reaches the chorus. A rainbow is projected in the clouds behind Sophie as she becomes more outwardly expressive in her movements which could possibly represent her first expressions of queerness.

Sophie is unclothed from what we can view with her hair curled neatly echoing a roman statue, while wearing hyper feminine cheek implant prosthetics which play with the ridiculousness and mutability of outward



(Fig.7.5) "God the Father" by Giovanni Battista Cima da Conegliano. The Courtauld, London

expression. As the video climaxes the scenario around her turns to rain mimicking the emotional nature of the song as Sophie is revealed to have a female chest due undergoing hormone replacement therapy. The chorus “I can see the truth through all the lies / And even after all this time/ Just know you've got nothing to hide / It's okay to cry” (It's Okay To Cry, 2017) further explores the idea of subverting the “patriarchy taking control of the narrative” that was explored by Twigs but rather than directly referencing a biblical character as Twigs did with Mary Magdalene, Sophie instead paints herself in the position of god within a world so often “hierarchical” where women are banished to hell for not being subservient to men as Williams described (Williams, 2011, n.p.). This exploration mutates the oppressive story of creation from the initial book in the bible into a story of self alignment. The production of the song features traditional pop music structure while Sophie's signature hyper-real creation of sound which Sarah Geffen, a writer for *Pitchfork*, described as “too taut, too perfect, too unreal” in my opinion contains a purity which mirrors her religious imagery. When questioned about her intentions around creating by Julius Pristauz for an interview in *Glam Cult* magazine Sophie stated she aims to create “things that feel like the complete representatives of the chaos and confusion we're all surrounded by at the moment” (Pristauz, 2018, n.p.).

The cover of *It's Okay To Cry's* accompanying album *Oil Of Every Pearl's Un-Insides* (pictured in Fig. 8) similarly features Sophie as an anthropomorphised deity at the helm of her own world. The romantic portrait style cover image features various elements of simulated reality that parallel the music's synthesised avant-pop, bubblegum sound, which Sophie is known for pioneering. Saturated lilac clouds backdrop Sophie's figure posed eloquently in her shiny latex ensemble while molten, mercury-like water, which echoes the fluid transcendence of her ideas, surrounds her. This image feels like a perfect visual of the album's narrative of what Jake Hall, a writer for *Dazed Magazine* described as

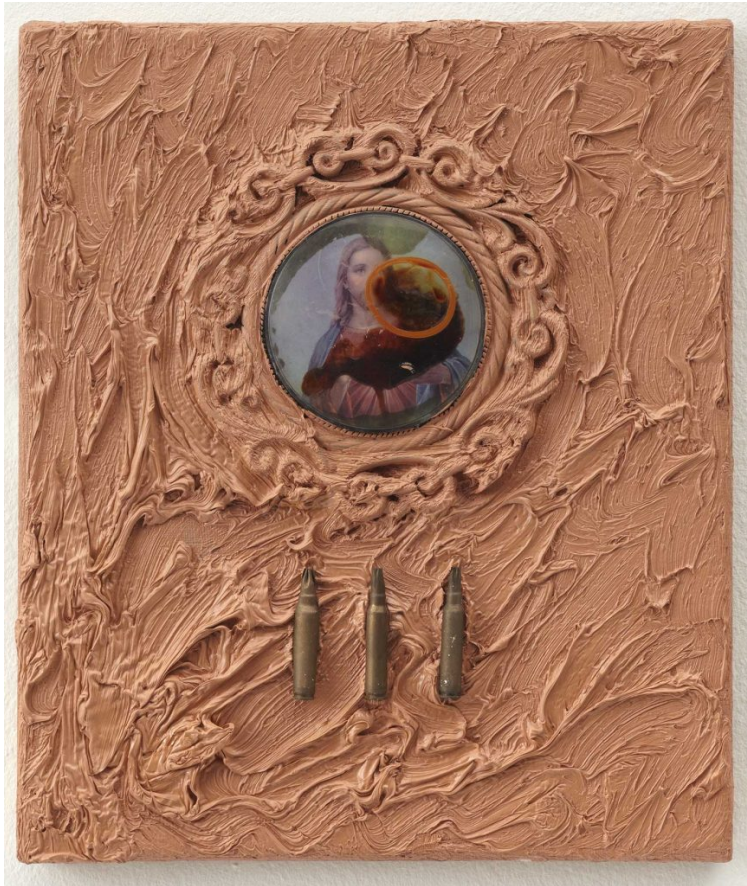


**(Fig.8) Sophie's 'Oil Of Every
Pearl's Un-Insides' Album Cover**

“transcending the idea of being born into a body which then permanently dictates our identity” (Hall, 2018 n.p.). While similar to the work of Twigs and Lowry in the way which Sophie’s work uncovers the patriarchal Catholic oppression behind Christian images and history, I feel her work goes a step further to generate her own narrative that transcends that said oppression because it places a transgender body within that world

subverting the patriarchal vision.

Derek Jarman is another artist who, similar to that of Sophie’s work, addresses the patriarchal Christian oppression from an LGBT experienced perspective. Jarman, who died of HIV in 1994, was a multidisciplinary artist whose mediums included painting , set designing, film-making, and writing. His work’s influence on the gay community in London is described by author Mark W. Turner as being a significant ‘Gay Londoner’ because of the way in which Jarman’s art and life were increasingly bound up with the politics of gay life in London during the 1990’s (Kerr/Gibson, 2003, p.50). In the context of Jarman’s work the patriarchal Catholic oppression he suffered came from the churches views around HIV/AIDS in the 1990’s. According to Elizabeth Rosenthal a writer from *The New York Times*, the Pope at the time John Paul II upheld the Church’s traditional views around a prohibition of condoms favouring chastity as a means of preventing the transmission of AIDS (Rosenthal, 2005, n.p.). These absurdly outdated upheld beliefs would have sentenced “millions to death” according to Jonathan Clayton, a writer from *The Times*



(Fig.9) Photograph of Derek Jarman's "*Flesh Tint*"

London by encouraging the spread of HIV through patriarchal religious oppression stating that use of condoms was "sinful" (Clayton, 2009, n.p.). Values such as these would have been extremely alienating and frustrating to Jarman as indicated by some of his painted works. Fig. 9 is a photograph of Jarman's oil painting entitled *Flesh Tint*, which was completed in 1990. This piece which features a sacred heart of Christ and a rotten blood toned condom behind

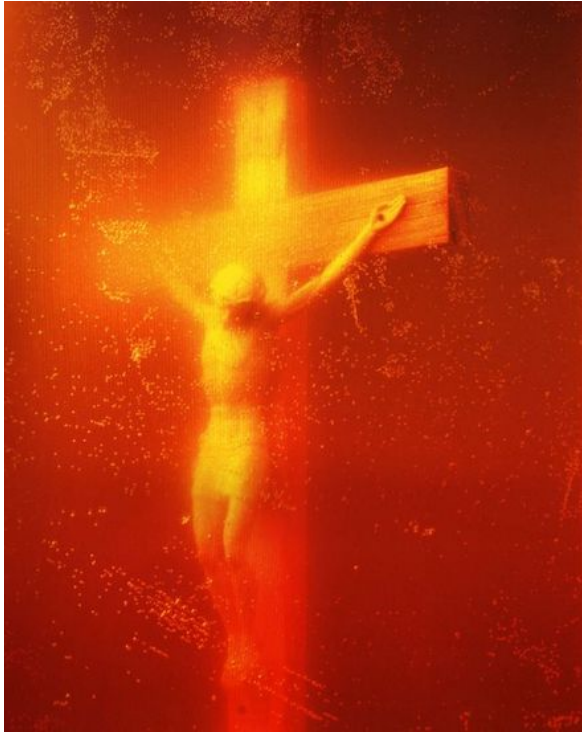
glass, in an ornate baroque frame. The painting also has three bullets, which possibly symbolise Jarman's impending premature death due to having the AIDS virus in a time unlike today when a cure or medication to creating an undetectable status. The entire painting is backgrounded by a textured fleshy paint bringing an almost unnerving, human element to the image. By placing the bloodied condom over an image of Christ surrounded by a textural sea of flesh Jarman creates a direct and visceral reaction to the churches dehumanising oppression which heavily affected homosexual men in the 1980's and 1990's.

Jarman's *Flesh Tint* is similar to Lowry's *(A)dressing our hidden truths* Exhibition in the sense that it amplifies the Catholic oppression of a minority group of people and acts as a memorandum of a time in the past. There is however, an immeasurable dissonance

between Lowry and Jarman in the way that Jarman's work is based in something personally experienced and lived through by him, whereas Lowry's work is based on a subject matter where she is looking back on in history that others lived through. In my opinion the context which is created by an artist living through the subject matter of their art makes it eerily more heart-rending because it feels like the truest depiction coming from their mind in its totality.

Chapter Three:

Transgressive Subversions; Art Provoking Oppressive Response



(Fig.10) "Piss Christ" by Andres Serrano

In my research so far I have explored art as a reaction to Catholic oppression by two othered groups within society. However, I wish also to make an exploration into art as a reaction to Catholic oppression while exploring some artworks which provoked counter reactions from their oppressor. These counter reactions further enforce the patriarchal catholic oppression experienced by those artists through methods of censorship, vandalism and misinformed protest. I

will be attempting to do this by exploring

three artists from those othered groups of

women and LGBT individuals who's art has

directly suffered Catholic oppression. I will also explore how that oppression shifts the context in which we view the art and opens up a dialogue between artist and oppressor.

Immersion also known as *Piss Christ* is a 1987 Cibachrome print by Andres Serrano which is almost impossible to omit when discussing artworks which provoked counter reactions of catholic oppression. The photograph, which on first viewing simply depicts a warm glowing image of a crucifix submerged in orange hued liquid that evokes the feeling of a powerful, warm impression of christ. When looking closer at piece and exploring it's context it's revealed that the photograph

actually depicts a crucifix submerged in the artists own urine. According to a blog post by *Artsper* magazine “The artist wanted to pay tribute to Jesus Christ and remind everyone of the suffering he endured for humanity. However, Serrano’s work was not perceived in the way he had hoped” (Anon, 2017, n.p.). It’s also stated that his initial intention for creating the work was to “explore the context of the Roman Catholic Church revealing that it was a work that came from his own conflicted emotions and complex experiences.” (Siedell, 2012, n.p.). This intention of an artist being twisted is interesting as I believe the strong reaction which the art received almost informs the way in which we as an audience view the work.

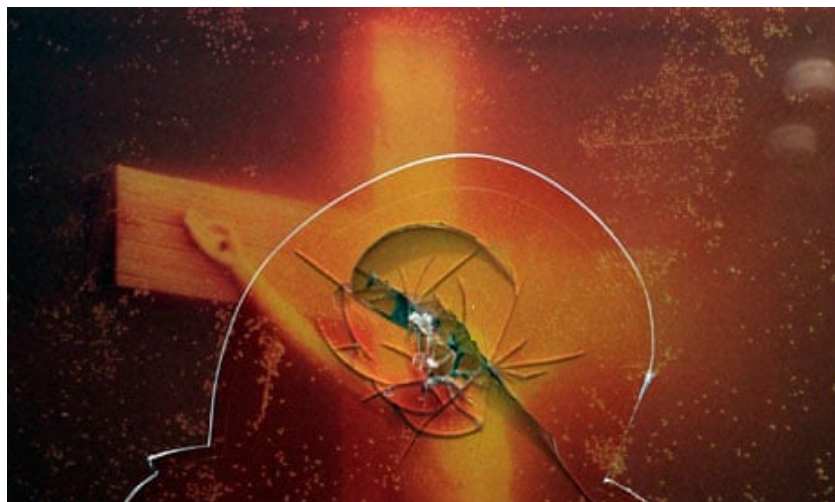
From my research *Immersion* is often seen and credited as an excellent example of ‘Transgressive’ art or art which seeks to provoke reaction but in actuality it’s more similar to that of Twigs as according to the artist ‘Immersion’ is more of an appropriated symbolic image which contemplates the difficulty and tension between the experiences of queer sexuality and Catholic spirituality (Anon, 2017, n.p.). ‘Immersion’ is in this way what Jonathan Jones, a writer from *The Guardian*, described as being “distinguished by its calculated offence and rhetorical nature – the way it sets out to be unmissably outrageous and adopts that offence as part of its meaning” (Jones, 2011, n.p.). It’s clear from this example that the piece is believed by many to be poking fun and provoking which is contrary to the artists intention.

Fig. 11 Shows damage the print recieved due to the piece provoking such a strong reaction in 2019. The piece was hit with a hammer or a similarly blunt object, leaving smashed glass where the face of Christ was. Ironically I believe this newly created image feels more sacrilegious than Seranno’s original glowing yet dark

depiction. The space that *Immersion* has generated, which is unique in the way it exceeded the scope of Serrano's ambivalent and conflicted intensions, has in turn become a space for dialogue between the beliefs of oppressor and oppressed.

While the piece itself is ominous and exciting it's story of oppression doesn't just remain within being vandalised with a hammer by

Christian fundamentalists rather the piece itself has also been subject to many questions around ethics of tax payer money funding art. According to Coco Fusco Serrano received a total of \$20,000 from the taxpayer-funded "National Endowment for the Arts" or NEA, which was then pulled due to his work, along with other performance artists being defunded due to its subject matter. When responding to Fusco's questions around the removal of his funding, Serrano told Fusco "As far as I am concerned, I wasn't going to let Jesse Helms or any other politician dictate what direction my work should take. If I didn't directly respond to it, it was my way of ignoring them and continuing my own merry way" (Fusco, 2009, n.p.). I feel Serrano's reaction further explains this idea of art becoming dialogue between oppressor viewing the art as indecent and oppressed as Serrano ends the conversation by not allowing the patriarchal Catholic oppressor to dictate his work any further.



(Fig.11) Detail of "Piss Christ" with partial damage Photograph by Jean-Paul Pelissier

Immersion is interestingly given more of a context when contrasted with Fig. 12 *Virgin In A Condom* (*Virgin*, hereafter) a sculpture by Tania Kovats. Alike *immersion*,

'Virgin' received a lot of negative press and was constrained with the label 'Transgressive'. The sculpture which features a three-inch statue of the Virgin Mary, is reminiscent to me of something that would belong in my grandmother's house



(Fig.12) Photograph of "Virgin In A Condom" (1990) Sculpture By Tania Kovats

covered in a transparent latex condom. The context I'd assume to place upon it would be similar to that of Jarman's around the Catholic Churches views of condoms as sinful in the 1990's. The sculpture also could possibly toy with the image of a sexually pure virgin mother of christ juxtaposed within sin, the transparent condom. According to the artist herself however creation of the sculpture came from "the fact that [she] was conditioned by Catholicism when growing up. [Kovats] held strong

feelings of resentment toward

patriarchal structures that influenced how a woman felt about her sexuality and fertility, and the work reflected on that." (Cole, 2017, n.p.) I find these sentiments to be incredibly similar to those explored by Twigs with *Magdalene* and Lowry through *(A)dressing..*

While speaking on the reason for creating *Virgin* and the context her work generated, Kovats said she "really didn't enjoy the attention that the piece generated. I had my own reasons for making it, but it got caught up in a tornado of controversy that I had very little to do with" (Cole, 2017, n.p.). It's interesting from my research into Serrano and Kovat's work I have found that they both have

experienced this shifting narrative of Catholic oppression where the dialogue created around the piece in turn taints the artists original personal drive to create. Alike how Twigs' explored the story of Mary Magdalene as being contradictory to the patriarchal narrative so deeply rooted in the teachings of the Catholic Church, it's almost as if these artists were branded 'transgressive provocateurs' when in reality their objection to the patriarchal narrative is one rooted in personal experience rather than biblical chronicle. *Virgin* also created a range of direct protest and attempted censorship similar to 'Immersion' as Kovats herself detailed "The curator received death threats and the work was stolen and had to be replaced. Mass hysteria broke out, with prayer meetings in the gallery and protests outside" (Cole, 2017, n.p.).

While the artists who I've discussed before all directly referenced catholic symbols or biblical characters in their work Marina Abramović, the 75 year old Serbian born performance artist almost does the inverse of this by using esoteric, occult symbols in her work. Abramović's craft, being performance art is arguably more evocative of physical and visceral sensations from the audience than that of a photograph or sculpture as the medium isn't contained to a small statue or captured moment behind glass but rather her body is the canvas. The medium of a body being more provocative is most likely part of the reason Abramović's work has been subject to intense patriarchal Catholic oppression and censorship to the point where discussing her work without the context of reaction received is difficult.

Lips of Thomas is a 1975 performance by Abramović which as described by Nikola Pešić, a writer who has studied Abramović's work as being a performance "in which she sat naked at a table, ate one jar of honey, and drank one bottle of red wine.



(Fig.13 Detailed Photograph from Marina Abramović's
"Lips Of Thomas" Performance (1975)

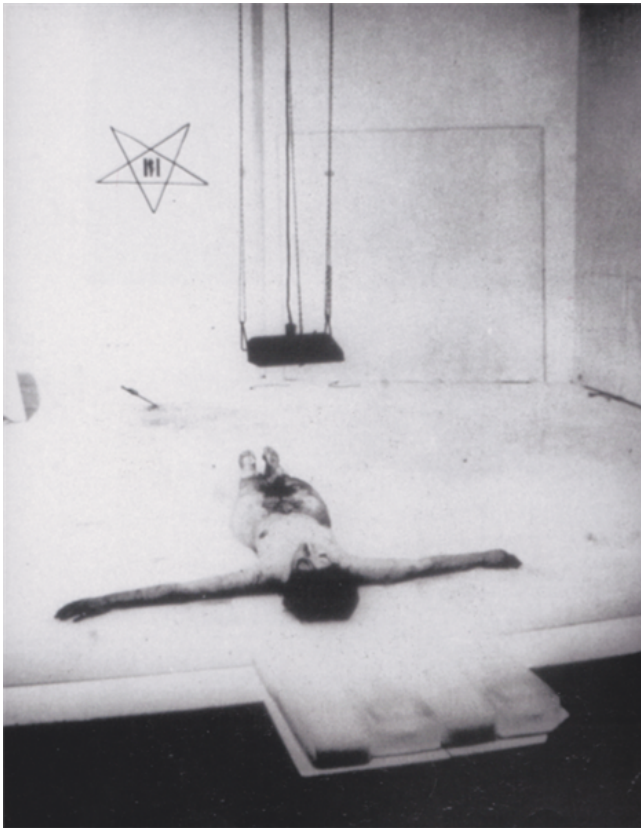
Then she drew on the wall an inverted pentagram around the photograph of Thomas Lips, a young Swiss man she wanted to seduce.." (Pešić, 2017, n.p.). I believe this description of the performance illustrates the way in which Abramović utilised the body as a vessel to display extremely complex and personal emotions of love and desire.

Fig 13 is a detailed photograph from the second Half of Abramović's performance where she cut an inverted pentagram on her belly with a razor-blade before as Pešić described "flagellated herself until she started to bleed, and finally "crucified" herself on a cross made of ice blocks" (Pešić, 2017, n.p.). While Abramović's method of creating is inherently transgressive and provocative of strong reaction as she cuts through her flesh, the earthly desires for creating are far more personal and chronicle a very humane experience similar to the way in which Serrano dealt with his complex relationships in his art. The use of what seems like occult or satanic symbols on first glance being central to Abramović's *Lips Of Thomas* performance is explained her own words "to invoke a Communist symbol she had grown up with in Yugoslavia, not a satanic pentagram" (Marshall, 2020, n.p.). I feel this is another example of the dissonance and surface level contextualisation

between artist and audience which the *Transgressive* artists that I've explored seem

to all fall victim to. It's tragic in a sense that art which is meant to be understood from a more conceptual perspective and looks deeper than surface level is often judged solely on its visual imagery.

In 2019 Abramović's work was protested by Dozens of Polish Catholics due what Sarah Cascone, a writer for *Artnet* described "panic over a misplaced belief that the famed performance artist worships the devil" (Cascone, 2019, n.p.). While the Catholic oppression and censorship of art received by



(Fig.14) Monochrome Print of Marina Abramović's 1975 Performance "Lips of Thomas"

Kovats for her work *Virgin and Serrano* for his work *Immersion* are specific to pieces which they've created Abramović's artistry as a whole has been demonised and put down by the Catholic oppressor. Conspiracy theorists have what what Alex Marshall a writer for *The New York Times* described as used "some of Ms. Abramović's oldest, most renowned works to bolster their case against her" (Marshall, 2020, n.p.). I believe this silencing and reframing of woman's story and intention echoes directly that which Magdalene experienced as explored by Twigs. Though it could be argued that Abramović has benefited from the conspiracy theories around her being a satanist, as for example Pešić reported an increase in her memoir sales (Pešić, 2017, n.p.). I believe it is no doubt more harmful than good however, because it creates a sensationalist preface of mistruth which redefines the

artists original intentions and adds a muddled lens of patriarchal Catholic oppression over the way the art is perceived.

Conclusion

Throughout my research into Patriarchal Catholic Oppression as reflected in the work of Female and LGBT artists, I found that the artist's attachment to the larger Patriarchal narrative often is rooted in deeply personal experience. These individual experiences which my research focused on are then mirrored onto something as universally understood as a symbol or emblem to connect with the audience of their art. The pain, detriment and sorrow experienced by being an othered person within society, who is an outlier to the Patriarchal narrative is echoed from the story of Mary Magdalene, through to the women of the Magdalene Laundries, the Catholic Churches position on condoms and the idealised view on how a person should identify. I explored the way in which artists can use their work to attempt to transmute the violent Patriarchal and hierarchical oppression experienced into something which can be understood by the viewer or listener regardless of difference in perspective.

I also found however, that through artists branded as transgressive the patriarchal ideal may in turn further contextualise the way which some people view their art. Due to the nature of these artist's medium the reaction can sometimes be misconstrued by the viewers own patriarchally influenced perspective as is such with Serrano, Abramović and Kovats. I found that these three artists had been categorised as purposely provocative or transgressive when their own reasons for creating art that is believed to oppose Christianity and the Catholic Church is not simply just to provoke and offend. In reality, similarly to that of the artists that aren't particularly considered transgressive, I discovered that below the surface level their work is a deeply pure and humanely motivated which goes far beyond the idea of just seeking to evoke a visceral reaction.

In conclusion, I suggest that the various contemporary artists work, when digested upon in the way the artists intended, reflects that spiritual practice is far more diverse, intimate and specific to each individual than the patriarchal Catholic oppressor's idealised vision would like us to believe.

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