

## Postmodern Heretics

*It is no coincidence, the author asserts, that the majority of artists attacked in recent years by the religious right share a Catholic background.*

BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

Despite the fact that the modernist creed was often framed in quasi-theological terms, contemporary artists have tended to be squeamish about religion. Professions of religious belief have seemed somehow antithetical to the individualistic, socially progressive mentality that pervades the art world, an antithesis apparently confirmed by the virulent "culture wars" between artists and Christian fundamentalists. Polemical language aside, few art worlders would disagree with the dichotomy assumed by Pat Buchanan when he railed against the "nihilist, existential, relativist, secular humanist culture" and opposed "those who believe in absolute values such as God and beauty" to "those who believe in existential humanism."<sup>1</sup>

So what are we to do about the fact that so many of the political and religious right's favorite examples of "secular humanist culture" were raised as Catholics? Andres Serrano, Robert Mapplethorpe, Karen Finley and David Wojnarowicz, all vilified in public controversies initiated by right-wing politicians, come from Catholic backgrounds. Of course, what distressed the self-appointed guardians of American morality was not these artists' Catholicism per se, but their focus (inspired or reinforced, it will be argued here, by that religious background) on the body and its processes, on sexuality, carnal desire, transgression and death. If one casts a wider net, beyond those who have been demonized by the Christian right, it turns out that quite a few other artists of similar sensibility share a Catholic or partly Catholic background, including Mike Kelley, Kiki Smith, Janine Antoni and Joel-Peter Witkin.

Is there something about the Catholic perspective that pushes certain artists toward the corporeal and the transgressive? And if so, does that fact cast a different light on the culture wars? What would happen if the battle were redefined not as a standoff between believers and atheists, but between a Protestant, puritanically inclined fundamentalism and a more sensual and complex Roman Catholic-based culture?

A stress on the physical body has long been a key element in Catholicism. While Protestants view the kingdoms of God and Man as essentially separate, Catholicism stresses the continuity of the divine and the human.<sup>2</sup> All the major mysteries of Catholicism—the Immaculate Conception, the Crucifixion and Resurrection, the Transubstantiation of the Host into the Body of Christ, the Ascension and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary—emphasize the role of the human body as vessel of divine spirit.<sup>3</sup> In his famous study of the sexuality of Christ, Leo Steinberg recognized a connection between Catholic doctrine and the focus on the physical body of Christ in Renaissance representations of the Madonna and Child. Steinberg argued that the many images of the Virgin Mary pointing to or otherwise emphasizing her child's penis were

intended to stress the Catholic doctrine of the humanity of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Given this history, it's no wonder that art made to convey Catholic doctrine should represent the human body with such explicit physicality; and it's no wonder that such physicality has served as a source of inspiration for many contemporary artists.

This article will examine how the residue of a Catholic upbringing influences the work of four highly visible contemporary artists: Andres Serrano, Kiki Smith, Joel-Peter Witkin and the late Robert Mapplethorpe. It will also suggest that such new interpretations have implications for current political debates over religion's place in American society. None of the artists under review are (or, in the case of Mapplethorpe, were) practicing Catholics. Instead, Catholicism pervades their work as a more-or-less-conscious undercurrent. Frequently it emerges in a mixture of the sacred and profane which may appear as blasphemy or sacrilege to fundamentalist viewers.

The Catholic question haunts writing about Mapplethorpe. But although commentators have long acknowledged that the artist's Catholic background is important to an understanding of his work (Mapplethorpe's parents were church-going Catholics, and religion classes played an important role in his upbringing), they seem unable to pinpoint exactly why that might be so. The artist himself was not terribly forthcoming on the subject, though in a 1988 interview with Janet Kardon he acknowledged the formal impact of Catholicism on his work: "I think . . . that being Catholic is manifest in a certain symmetry and approach. I like the form of a cross, I like its proportions. I arrange things in a Catholic way. But I think it's more subconscious at this point."<sup>5</sup> In the same catalogue, Kardon argues that Mapplethorpe's flower photographs offer the greatest evidence of his Catholic background. "Because [Mapplethorpe's] flowers are presented in a state of absolute perfection," Kardon writes, "they suggest a realm more sacred than profane. These blossoms seem to emerge from a rarefied atmosphere in which Nature, like Heaven, is in array."<sup>6</sup> The quest for perfection Kardon perceives in the flower photographs is also visible in many of Mapplethorpe's figure studies in which he seems to promise his subjects (Lisa Lyon, Thomas, Ken) a kind of photographic immortality through images that emphasize the magnificent perfection of their bodies, which he lights and poses like pieces of classical statuary. Later, their bodies will decay, but these glossy prints have preserved them in a modern version of eternal life.

In his interpretation of Mapplethorpe's Catholicism in *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*, Dave Hickey seems closer to the mark when he sug-

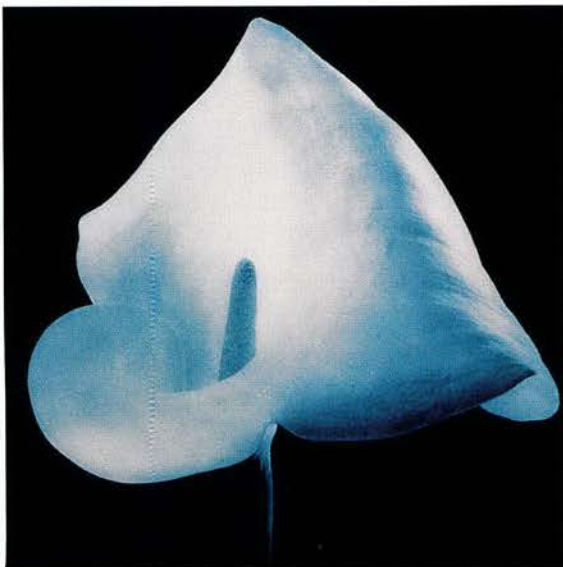
gests that Mapplethorpe's "X Portfolio" (1978) demands of the viewer an "aesthetic submission" analogous to sexual and spiritual submission.<sup>7</sup> Arthur Danto, in his 1995 study of Mapplethorpe, finds Catholic content, as well as form, in one of Mapplethorpe's most notorious photographs. Danto analyzes the infamous image of *Jim and Tom, Sausabito* (1977), a triptych depicting one man urinating into another man's mouth, in terms of the Baroque theme of "Roman Charity" in which a daughter gives her breast to her shackled father so that he will not starve. Despite the initial incongruity of the two themes, Danto's comparison allows us see how the daughter/father pairing of "Roman Charity," a scenario not without its share of transgression, is strangely refracted in Mapplethorpe's tableau of unorthodox sexual pleasure. Danto strengthens the argument for linking Mapplethorpe's work to the history of religious art by noting how the triptych format in this photograph recalls traditional altarpieces. He also points to the near Baroque theatricality of the light in which *Jim and Tom, Sausabito* has been shot.<sup>8</sup>

Both Hickey and Danto have seized on important pieces of the puzzle but, ultimately, such formal and iconographical interpretations alone do not fully explain the impact of Catholicism on Mapplethorpe's art. Danto points beyond iconography when he reminds us that on being asked what was sacred to him, Mapplethorpe once replied, "sex," an answer which Danto insists must be taken completely seriously.<sup>9</sup> He's right: sexuality was so sacred to Mapplethorpe that he allowed it to subsume his reputation, his art, his life. And here we arrive at the radical collapse of the spiritual and corporeal realms that is the ecstatic essence of Mapplethorpe's work.

This collapse deserves the label "radical" because it exhibits a brand of ecstasy that runs counter to so much in American spiritual life. A number of factors have tended to undermine our recognition of the ecstatic side of religion. These include America's Puritan heritage, with its focus on self-control and self-denial; the persistence of utopian ideals which "rationalize" religious life by locating the extremes of good and evil outside the ordinary human condition; and the secularization of daily life. Despite some notable exceptions ranging from Southern Baptists to Hasidic Jews, American religious practitioners tend to shy away from the release of intense emotions. Nor do they seek the dissolution of individual consciousness into a larger oneness with God, nature or the universe. What America, at least fundamentalist America, finds impossible to tolerate in Mapplethorpe's work is not just his celebration of sexual practices which embrace physical pain, submission and degradation, but the state of quasi-religious ecstasy that his subjects appear to thereby achieve.

From this point of view, the emphasis in

**While none of the artists under review are practicing Catholics, undercurrents of Catholicism subtly pervade their work, frequently emerging in a mixture of the sacred and profane.**



*Mapplethorpe: Flowers (Blue Calla Lily), 1987, photogravure, 20 by 24 inches. © 1987 The Estate of Robert Mapplethorpe.*

Mapplethorpe's work on sadomasochistic eroticism can be read as a mutation of the great mystics' ecstatic submission to Christ (a condition nowhere better personified than in Bernini's sculpture of Saint Theresa, where the saint's expression is one of orgasmic bliss as the angel's golden spear is about to pierce her heart). Mapplethorpe's sadomasochistic imagery also contains a distorted reflection of the Catholic belief that mortification of the flesh purifies the soul, a point driven home repeatedly in the early years of the Catholic Church when gruesome accounts of the sufferings of the martyrs were circulated as a means of unifying the faithful. With this in mind, the images in the "X Portfolio" of fist fucking, flesh piercing and the paraphernalia of S&M begin to acquire surprising echoes of the art and literature of Christian martyrdom and of the practices of contemporary self-flagellating sects such as the Penitentes of New Mexico.

By escaping the banality of daily existence through images of extreme acts of submission and physical perfection, Mapplethorpe replaces God with sex, creating a universe whose order is sustained through sexualized rituals of obedience and surrender. As if to underline God's absence, Mapplethorpe gives over the rule of his realm to a rather whimsical Devil, a role the artist played himself in self-portraits that show him adorned with horns or a bull-whip tail.

Despite the fact that *Piss Christ* (1987) was interpreted by U.S. politicians and others as a denunciation of Christianity, Andres Serrano appears less conflicted about his Catholic background than Mapplethorpe. In the 1990s, Serrano has moved from early works which overtly condemned the politics of the Catholic Church (among them *Heaven and Hell*, 1984, a well-known photographic tableau which features a grim Leon Golub in a cardinal's garb and a nude, blood-streaked woman with her hands bound above her head) to works, mostly of portraiture, which explore a far more personal vision. This move away from polemical content has helped make it clear that Serrano's attraction to Catholicism tends to be visual and esthetic rather than philosophical. Serrano is the first to acknowledge that he gravitates toward Catholic imagery rather than its theological complexities. A recent remark confirms his scant interest in questions of Christian doctrine: "I've heard that the Bible is a damn good book," the artist says, "but I've never read it."<sup>10</sup> Yet even as he denies familiarity with the Bible, Serrano makes work that is permeated with Christian themes of redemption and transcendence.

Although as a child growing up in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn Serrano attended catechism classes, his upbringing was not particularly devout. By his own account, his interest in Catholicism lay dormant until about 10 years ago, when Catholic imagery began emerging in his work. Curiously, the controversy over *Piss Christ* intensified his involvement in Catholic themes and imagery. Five years ago this interest spilled over into his personal life, as he began transforming his Brooklyn apartment into a kind of shrine. Today Serrano, the man Jesse Helms accused of "insensitivity toward the religious community," lives surrounded by ecclesiastical furniture, Russian icons, Church statuary (including a large wooden carving of Saint Anthony), stained-glass windows and a wall of crucifixes.

Serrano's persistent subject is not, as many think, abjection. Viewed by series, his work reveals itself as concerned with transfiguring the mundane, the base and the profane. His 1986-89 photographs, which range from minimalistic monochrome images of milk or blood to *Piss Christ*, used bodily fluids, including an image of semen at the moment of ejaculation, to "paint" with light. Serrano originally thought of these photographs primarily in terms of abstraction, though he also had in mind Barnett Newman's merger of the spiritual and the abstract. "The fluid works only became Catholic to me when I started to submerge religious objects in them," he remarks. "As a Catholic, I was taught that the crucifix is just a symbol. We were never taught to fetishize it as the critics of *Piss Christ* did."

These works were followed by two portrait series: "Nomads" (1990), monumental photographic images of homeless people done in the manner of Edward Curtis, and "Klansmen" (also 1990), pictures of high-ranking members of the Ku Klux Klan in their ceremonial robes. Citing the influence of Renaissance painting in which "there is more concern with light and the way it fell across the robes than with the faces of the figures," Serrano points to the religious content of the photographs: "I saw the Klan in those robes and wanted to show how they see themselves as religious figures."

After the "Nomads" and "Klansmen" series came

"The Church" (1991), a series of photographs, never shown as a group in New York, of Catholic churches, priests and nuns in Italy, Spain and France. In these photographs priests and nuns appear as emissaries from an earlier time. Serrano has accentuated this metaphysical atmosphere by concentrating on symbols of his subjects' vocations—robes, tabernacles, rosaries and other devotional objects. In a number of images he crops out the head entirely and zeros in on hands, religious accoutrements or the robes the nuns and priests wear. For instance, in *The Church (Soeur Yvette II, Paris)*, the nun's face turns away from the camera so that the photograph focuses on the flat black form of her draped veil. While *The Church (Father Frank, Rome)* does include the sitter's face, the real point of the image is the red cross stitched on his black robe.

Serrano's interest in the transfiguration of the subject is most clearly revealed in his series called



*Smith: Bloodline, 1994, 100 units of blown glass, each unit approx. 8 inches in diameter, overall dimensions variable. Courtesy PaceWildenstein. Photo Ellen Page Wilson.*



Serrano: *The Church* (Soeur Jeanne Myriam, Paris), 1991, Cibachrome print mounted on Plexiglas, 60 by 49 1/4 inches. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery.

"The Morgue" (1992). These extreme close-up fragmentary views of the corpses of people laid low by such grim ends as drowning, rat poison, gunshots and AIDS, are infused with a gorgeous luminosity. Many evoke religious paintings of the Renaissance, and all the images radiate a beauty that may have eluded their owners in life. "I never saw the bodies as cadavers or corpses," Serrano says. "I called them my models, my subjects. I was interested in the way they still had a human presence, that something of their soul was still intact."

While it is impossible to deny the element of provocation in Serrano's choice of subjects, the power of his work derives largely from his ability to take the basest of subjects—body fluids, abandoned corpses, Klansmen, homeless people—and enact an esthetic transformation which lifts them into the realm of spirit.

While Serrano, having left behind the anger of his early work, seems to have made peace with his Catholic heritage, Joel-Peter Witkin mounts a radical challenge to the Christian belief in resurrection and an afterlife, bespeaking a spiritual despair. The child of an orthodox Jewish father and a Catholic mother, Witkin was raised as a Catholic (although he has retained a fascination with aspects of Jewish mysticism). Witkin has been extremely voluble about the influence of Catholicism on his work. His master's thesis for the University of New Mexico, completed in 1976 and reprinted in the catalogue for his 1995-96 retrospective (seen in Italy at the Castello di Rivoli, Turin, and in this country at the Guggenheim Museum), is titled "Revolt Against the Mystical." It chronicles Witkin's desire to "bring God down to earth" by creating photographic images that make the invisible visible.<sup>11</sup>

Unlike Mapplethorpe, who sought to capture an eternally frozen perfection through photography,

Witkin uses the camera to enthusiastically depict the deformities and inevitable decay of the physical body. Instead of flawless physiques, he prefers models who are deformed, maimed, tattooed, obese, insane. He is particularly fond of bodies which suggest dual realms—hermaphrodites, Siamese twins, fetuses, corpses. Witkin's work stakes out the threshold between life and death, which for a Catholic believer provides the ultimate border between the human and the divine.

From a Catholic perspective, there is almost too much material in Witkin's oeuvre. An early series from 1974 carried the title "Contemporary Images of Christ" (one of the photos addressed the theme of "Christ Mocked" through a Christ-like figure wearing World War II kamikaze goggles and women's high heels), and Witkin has frequently based works on Christian iconography, albeit bizarrely transformed. In one photograph, a crucified nude man, masked and pierced with what appear to be threads, is flanked by two smaller crucifixes suspending the bodies of dead rhesus monkeys, tattooed for laboratory experiments. The work is entitled *Penitente, New Mexico* (1982), an allusion to the New Mexico sect which every Easter reenacts Christ's flagellation and crucifixion. Another work, which shows a man's severed head on a plate, refers unmistakably to the martyrdom of John the Baptist, while an image depicting a hooded nude woman surrounded by torture devices is titled *Choice of Outfits for the Agonies of Mary, San Francisco* (1984).

Yet for all its profusion, such iconographical evidence does not firmly establish Witkin's interest in Catholic themes—the images could be seen as a subset of his larger interest in re-creating motifs from Western art history, as in his hermaphroditic version of Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. Instead, the key to Witkin's despairing, pessimistic Catholicism seems to lie in the ambiguous course of his search for the sacred. In his 1976 thesis, he tells

how, at age 17, he sought out a rabbi who was reported to have seen God. In what would prove the first in a series of failed efforts to make direct contact with God, Witkin found only "a tired, sleepy, little old man sitting in a corner of a large dusty study."<sup>12</sup>

The black humor which runs through Witkin's work is an expression of the artist's rage at God, who not only refuses to show himself but dispenses death and deformity among mankind. In his master's thesis, Witkin alluded to his feelings toward God—a "love-hate would manifest itself in all the visual work I would create."<sup>13</sup> By reveling in the monstrous and repulsive, Witkin mocks God's supposed mercy and challenges the promise of universal redemption.

Women who partake of a Catholic sensibility often seem to approach Catholicism in a very different way from men. The sources of such differences have been elucidated by historian Caroline Walker Bynam, who holds that the Western association of woman with flesh and man with mind or spirit, equations whose vestiges continue to haunt us today, was tempered in medieval Catholicism by an identification of woman with the body or humanity of Christ. Bynam offers this symbolic identification as one reason women were more susceptible to mystical visions.<sup>14</sup> She also cites the connection of women and Christ's body in explaining medieval Catholicism's hospitality to religiously inclined women. This corporeal symbolism is especially striking when compared with later, Protestant versions of Christianity which relegated the human body unambiguously to the realm of base matter, carnality and sin.

For certain contemporary women artists, Catholicism's vision of continuity between the corporeal and the divine seems to offer an alternative to '70s-style feminism with its insistence on what now seems a false dichotomy between female and male, body and mind, nature and culture. The legacy of



Serrano: *The Morgue* (Gun Murder), 1992, Cibachrome print mounted on Plexiglas, 49 1/4 by 60 inches. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery.



**Wilkin:** *Head of a Dead Man, Mexico, 1990, gelatin silver print with encrustation, 25 1/4 by 32 1/4 inches.* © Joel-Peter Wilkin, courtesy PaceWildensteinMacGill, New York, and Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco.

Catholicism's female mystics also offers an alternative to more recent feminist stances which assert that gender is simply a construct and that representations of the female body are merely reinforcements of patriarchal power. Such notions dissuaded a generation of theoretically inclined women artists from considering the body as a source of knowledge and meaning. The work of Kiki Smith provides an example of a woman artist who has found a middle way between these two extremes. Not surprisingly, one of her sources is Catholicism.

The daughter of a nonpracticing Catholic father raised by Jesuits and a mother who converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism and later became involved with Hinduism, Smith freely admits her attraction to Catholic imagery and themes. She notes that many of her works draw on religious iconography. "One reference for the body parts is the reliquary," she remarked in a recent interview. "And the fluids I refer to—blood, milk and tears—are made holy in Catholicism. And, of course, once I started making sculptures of whole bodies rather than just insides, my main models were dolls and religious statues." The impact of religious statuary was evident in her fall '95 show at PaceWildenstein Gallery in New York, where one of the exhibited wall sculptures, a female figure with extended arms, was based on traditional representations of Christ's descent from the cross. Other Catholic subjects that Smith has taken up include Mary Magdalene (shown covered with hair and attached to a chain to reflect her status in German art as the wild woman of early Christianity), the Holy Spirit rendered as a glass dove and the Virgin Mary. The latter two figured in her 1993 New York exhibition at Fawbush Gallery. Envisioning the gallery space as a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Smith centered the show on a life-size bronze depiction of the Virgin with her skin stripped away. Speaking about this écorché figure, Smith says she was thinking about how Mary's role as a bodily vehicle for God's will essentially robs her of her own flesh.

While Smith feels deeply connected to Christian symbology, she also shares her mother's ecumenism and willingly draws imagery from other belief systems into her pantheon. Thus, her Fawbush "chapel" show also included figures drawn from European folklore, Classical myth and the Old Testament. For Smith, these forms, which included an assortment of faeries, the Greek nymph Daphne and Lot's Wife, embodied different kinds of "female God attributes." Appropriately, she found a different material for each sculpture: the *Faeries* were small winged figures of tin, the plaster figure of *Daphne* sprouted branches of blue glass, and *Lot's Wife* was made of plaster and salt.

As in the work of the other artists discussed in this article, iconography doesn't tell the whole tale. Smith's Catholic roots are most strongly revealed not in her

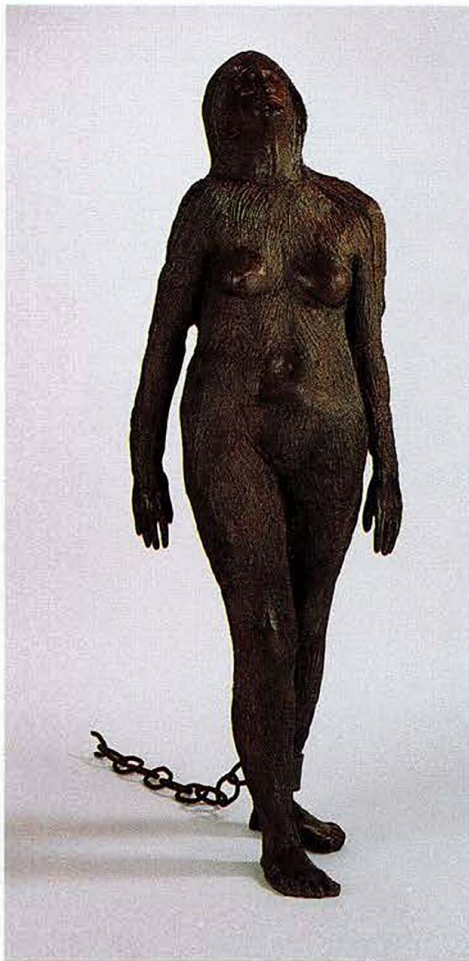
borrowings from art history, but by her attitude toward the body as a vessel of the soul. While Smith, like Serrano, has made works dealing with bodily fluids, she seems more interested in the problems of the flesh. Underlining this point, she observes, "Catholicism is a ritual religion, and as such it romanticizes the pain of flesh." There is a markedly visceral character to her late-'80s representations of body fragments, works which include red-soaked paper shells resembling flayed fragments of human bodies, severed hands made of latex, as well as bronze and ceramic replicas of internal organs (wombs, hearts, stomachs). Despite the almost clinical tone of such works, the delicacy with which they are fashioned out of diverse materials precludes any suggestion of the medical school or the operating room. While insisting on the corporeal basis of our common humanity, Smith's sculptures are touched with both pathos and a peculiar allure.

Smith also draws upon what she calls the "pagan side" of Catholicism: modern survivals of belief in the magical power of faith such as the wearing of medals and scapulars to ward off evil, votive candles lit for the dead, money left on the statues of saints as a plea for heavenly intercession, crutches thrown away at pilgrimage sites. In a sense, she sees her works as carriers of this kind of magical force. Just as the human body, fragmented or whole, is a vessel of transcendental spirit, the work of art preserves the miracle of creativity. "I'm an idol worshiper," Smith says; "I believe objects hold power, that they retain the energy you put into making them. That's why I'm an artist."<sup>16</sup>

**W**hy should we care about Catholic references or themes in the work of these four artists? There are several reasons to insist on its significance. First of all, it helps us understand why works like *Piss Christ* and the "X Portfolio" were considered so inflammatory. In Catholicism, the continuum between body and soul, earth and heaven, human and divine, suggests an inevitable corollary—a link between the

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sacred and profane. Earthly pleasures may be man's downfall, but they also allow glimpses of heavenly ecstasy. Although by no means the exclusive domain of Catholics, such themes as the extremes of human sexual expression, the horrors of decaying flesh and death, and the forthright depiction of the body's excretions and physical processes are especially well-suited to the Catholic imagination. This is not to deny the social and political conservatism of the Catholic Church as an institution or its stand against abortion and homosexuality, as well as pre- and extramarital sex. The point, rather, is that Catholicism encourages a multilayered view of the world, a view that tends to persist even if an individual has discarded the Church's orthodox doctrine.



**Smith:** *Mary Magdalene, 1994, cast silicone bronze and forged steel, 60 by 20 1/4 by 21 1/4 inches.* Courtesy PaceWildenstein Gallery.

Contrast this with the literalism of Protestant fundamentalists, for whom symbols and representations are indistinguishable from the things to which they refer. It was such literalism which contributed to the controversy around *Piss Christ* in which politicians and members of the Christian Right seemed unable, or unwilling, to distinguish between a plastic crucifix and Christ the saviour (just as other kinds of fundamentalists have confused the American flag with the United States and pornographic images with acts of physical violation). It is telling that Serrano's work, even at its most provocative, was never condemned by the Catholic Church. In fact, during an interview with a highly placed church official, Serrano was informed that *Piss Christ* presented less of a problem than his more abstract ejaculation photographs which ran counter to Church interdictions about the unnecessary "spilling of seed."

Pondering the Catholic roots and controversial works of contemporary artists such as Serrano, Mapplethorpe, Witkin and Smith, one is inevitably led to consider larger political questions. As religion remains high on the national agenda, many fundamentalist Christians would like to inscribe their moral vision as the law of the land. Their vision is one that reduces the complex and conflicting demands of religious belief, political discourse, social identity, economic striving, cultural expression and individual relationships to a simplistic formula summed up in the phrase "family values." It erases all shades of gray in the determination of good and evil, finds corporate-sanctioned media violence acceptable but artistic representations of

consensual sexual activity reprehensible, and mistakes image for action, imaginative play or artistic interpretation for real life.

In this climate, the battle between the avant-garde and the religious right has a significance which extends far beyond the cultural sphere. What is potentially at stake is the power to turn sectarian morality into the law of the land. The religious right's success in presenting itself as the moral arbiter of society has unsettling implications for current debates over a range of issues including the regulation of pornography, the legal status of abortion and the death penalty, and the place of prayer in the schools, as well as more general issues like the equitable allocation of resources and the meaning of social justice and personal responsibility.

An acknowledgment of the religious roots of various controversial works of art might help us challenge the reductive tendencies of fundamentalist morality. By the same token, an awareness of the influence which religion has had on certain highly visible artists might explode the myth of the necessary hostility between religion and contemporary art. While conservative politicians and pundits wage war on contemporary culture in the name of purity and innocence, artists nurtured in a Catholic tradition have much to teach about the dark side of desire, the inseparability of body and soul and the necessary complexity of moral judgment. □

1. Patrick Buchanan, "Losing the War for America's Culture?" reprinted in *Culture Wars*, Richard Bolton, ed., New York, New Press, 1992, p. 32.
2. For an interesting discussion of some of the theological

differences between Catholicism and Protestantism see Richard P. McBrien, "Roman Catholicism: E Pluribus Unum," reprinted in Mary Douglas and Steven M. Tipton, eds., *Religion and America*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1983, pp. 179-89.

3. Admittedly, some of these mysteries are shared by Protestants, but they are given a very different spin. For Protestants, for instance, the emphasis of the Resurrection is on the resurrection of the spirit rather than the body, as it is for Catholics, and the Cross is "the emblem of the risen God, not the crucified man," as Harold Bloom notes on page 264 of his study of American Christianity, *The American Religion*, New York, Touchstone, 1992.

4. Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, New York, Pantheon, 1983.

5. Robert Mapplethorpe, interviewed by Janet Kardon in Janet Kardon, *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania, Institute of Contemporary Art, 1988, p. 25.

6. Kardon, p. 11.

7. Dave Hickey, *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty*, Los Angeles, Art Issues Press, 1993, p. 35.

8. Arthur C. Danto, *Playing with the Edge*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1995.

9. Danto, p. 25.

10. Interview with the author, January 1996.

11. Joel-Peter Witkin, "Revolt Against the Mystical," reprinted in Germano Celant, *Joel-Peter Witkin*, Zurich, Berlin, New York, Scalo, 1995, p. 52.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

14. Caroline Walker Bynam, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, New York, Zone Books, 1992, p. 204.

15. Interview with the author, January 1996.

Author: Eleanor Heartney is a free-lance writer living in New York.

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