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Mis-Education: Subversion of Female Roles in Catholic Religious Depictions.

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INTRODUCTION

The body of work for this exhibition is centred around the hybridism of my own religious practice. I am Hindu by birth, and follow the Hindu religion at home. However, I attended Catholic schools, where I practised the Christian religion. This has resulted in my own hybrid religion. As a result of this upbringing, I try to find harmony between these two religions, but am often left asking questions. I feel there is a tension in this hybrid position, where the one religious set of norms and values is quite dramatically different to the others. My title, *Mis-Education: Subversion of Female Roles in Catholic Religious Depictions*, refers to this tension and relates to my experiences with the religious depiction of Mary.

The purpose of this dissertation and my work is to reflect on and investigate aspects of Catholic religious representation. Furthermore, the thesis serves to probe a new area of research and its impact on the images I produce, as discussed later. This area of research is concerned with my relation to Catholic images of Mary.

I initiate my study with a look at portraits in general. I then move on to the notion of 'likeness' within this genre and its effects

on portraits, specifically images of Mary. Looking at images of Mary, I discuss how these images are visually codified in order to present a constructed ideal of the female. Through my research and discussion with my peers, it became clear that one must emphasise that these images of Mary are not *real* depictions of Mary, but rather images that set up ideals to aspire to. Such factors were problematic with regard to my notion of portraiture. Looking at portraiture in terms of religious depiction, I focus on exactly how these ideals are pushed to the forefront of the images, and how they instruct women.

In addition, I explore how mainstream and orthodox Catholic traditions express the issues surrounding women. I interrogate the way in which women in religious depictions are shown as subordinate, inferior, virginal and demure.¹ I have chosen to research this because religious depictions can be seen as centres of power: they project ideals for women to follow and inform the way in which women are treated and viewed. This has been reinforced through the gradual

¹ The Bible (a male account) illustrates how a patriarchal society views women. For example, the reference to women in the book of Proverbs is limited and stereotypical: women are seen only as wives, mothers and others. The mother is depicted as a nurturer, educator, reproductive vessel and source of wisdom. This is crucial when discussing the female in religion: the woman is often seen as submissive and wise; however, this wisdom is not intellectual, but social or of the body. Similarly, Sita in the Ramayana, a figure who has had a great impact on Hindu society, is known for fidelity and devotion.

establishment of the power of the Christian Church during the centuries following its acceptance by the Roman Empire.

The resurgence of misogynist attitudes toward women and the limiting of their social freedom was further reinforced by theological disparity. Henry Kraus delineates the church's conception of women in the Bible – such as Eve, whom St Bernard called “the original cause of all evil” (Broude and Garrard 1982: 5). Kraus investigates the controlling use made in medieval monasteries of artistic images that reflect this identification of woman with evil, vice and the devil himself. In direct contrast to the fallen Eve was her theological opposite, the pure and saintly Virgin Mary. It is precisely this depiction of Mary that I intend to scrutinise.

I then discuss postcolonial and subaltern studies in an investigation of the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Ranajit Guha, Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said. These theorists discuss the subaltern extensively, and their writings underpin my argument surrounding the gendering of women.

In the next section, I move on to contemporary references. The various artists discussed here provided guidance, and contextualise the framework for the production of my images.

This brings me to the discussion of my practical body of work. An area that influences the production of my practical work is the comic. I explore the comic format and explain how this has influenced the format and content of my own work. I explain the focus of my prints, and the implications of looking at images of Mary and aspiring to the ideals presented in

them. I try to foreground how the concepts and strategies laid out in the thesis are seen within the practice.

Before I proceed to the body of the dissertation, I would like to give a brief introduction to my work in terms of its background, processes and intentions. I try to create a unique, personal visual language by using images that relate to me not only visually but also conceptually. The images form two series. The Catholic series focuses on my response to the alienation I feel when looking at images of Mary. I deal with this response by inserting myself into the images. This process is soothing, almost therapeutic, because I gain a sense of the person in the image and thus gain access to something of myself. Rather than adopting the images whole and pasting my face onto them, without preconceived intention, I crop and enlarge each image and incorporate my presence to create a unique, visually codified artwork.

However, I am ultimately separate from the female ideal presented to me by the original image. When looking at the Catholic images, I can relate to them, yet at the same time I feel alienated from them, as though I could never achieve the ideal presented to me. As a child, I projected role-model qualities onto the image of Mary. I saw her as ‘Mother’ and as a woman of superior moral character. Today, I see certain similarities between these images and myself as a woman. My residual childhood conceptions still exist, and these still cause feelings of alienation, but because I am able to see myself so much more clearly in these images now as an adult, I rupture the dynamic between the image of myself and the image of Mary.

The Hindu series stems from my relationship with the Hindu religious images I was confronted with at home. This series focuses on the mother and her interaction with the child. This series is a collection of hybrid images, in which the Catholic and Hindu religions are often construed as binary. The Catholic images I have chosen focus on Mary as 'mother', while the Hindu images, as backdrop, support this central image, simultaneously creating a paradox. The images are glorified through the use of bright colours. I create images that speak of the tension between the two religions, but I also try to show an acceptance of both. Thus I create a hybrid dualism in the images that I produce, showing the instability of the image of Mary.

In my practice, I attempt to erase the likeness of Mary in the images I use. I also aim to exaggerate the differences between the images of Mary, Hindu religious depictions and myself. I rupture the image one expects to see – the constructed ideal of woman. Catholic images present ideals of the constructed female. I insert myself into the Catholic depictions to make the viewer aware of the instability of the received religious image. By reconstructing predefined images, I create an awareness of this religious and gendered complexity.



THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A. Portraits and the problem of religious depiction

In this section, I shall be discussing the genre of portraiture and religious depictions, specifically referencing the images of Mary as 'special portraits'. For those who practise a religion, religious depictions serve to instruct one on how to behave and on what sort of qualities one should have in order to be accepted. It is the way in which this instruction happens that interests me here.

Portraits provide a strategy and entry into discussing the image of Mary. The genre of portraiture is important to my own work, as religious portraiture goes against what we classically expect from a portrait. Instead of a supposedly accurate representation, the viewer is presented with a constructed persona of Mary, moulded for other concerns. She is shown in this manner in order to instruct women on what kind of women they should be, rather than being depicted as, say, a woman with a strong will and independent nature – an image that reflects an actual historical person. Therefore one is never presented with a true image of Mary.

I am not arguing that the 'true' depiction of Mary has never been correctly created, for who really knows what Mary was like? I am arguing that only certain facets of Mary have been allowed to be depicted. It is these facets – demure, fragile and inferior – that have for centuries been associated with womankind. We are always given a constructed persona: that of the ideal female. The female ideal here makes reference to how women should behave. Women should be pure and humble, not flirtatious or assertive. They are told, through religious imagery, how they should conduct themselves and which emotions are proper for them to have.

Herein lies the problem of religious depictions. These images instruct our understanding of the ideal female. I want to look at how this ideal is pushed to the forefront of the image, and discussions on portraiture provide a springboard for this.

What is the art of portraiture? "It is the representation of a real individual, or part of his [or her] body only; it is the reproduction of an image; it is the art of presenting, on the first glance of an eye, the form of a man by traits, which it would be impossible to convey by words" – J.C. Lavate's understanding of portraiture (Brilliant 1997: 97). I acknowledge that the portrait is also a work of visual art with special powers of representation. Any legitimate attempt to

understand what portraits are, as artworks, involves a discussion of the meaning of portraiture and, for the purpose of this dissertation, a look at likeness and the representation of the sitter.

There is no precise answer to these questions. Portraits are not readily defined. The word 'portrait' is derived from the Latin *portrahere*, meaning, 'to draw forth'. The Oxford Dictionary (1995) defines the word as "1. A painting, drawing or photograph of a person especially of the face alone, 2. A description or impression of something". There are many definitions of what a portrait is; today these definitions take a less formative approach.

E.H. Gombrich (1977: 188) wrote:

All art originates in the human mind, in our reactions to the world rather than in the visible world itself ... the correct portrait, like the useful image, is an end product on a long road through schema and correction. It is not a faithful record of a visual experience, but the faithful construction of a relational model ... the form of a representation cannot be divorced from its purpose and the requirements of the society in which the given visual language gains currency.

In order for me to define portraiture, I have used the idea that portraits usually portray the bust of a person, focusing on the face. I further identify with how Brilliant has defined portraiture:

Simply put, portraits are art works, intentionally made of living or once living people by artists in a variety of media, and for an audience. Portraits may survive as physical objects for a very long time and their images may be transferred to other

media and even replicated in vast numbers (postage stamps) with significant consequence in reception (Brilliant 1997: 8).

Although I concur with this quote, I also see that it raises some predictable problems. Portraits are traditionally made in the likeness of a person. There are certain issues regarding the likeness of the image to the sitter. These issues need to be addressed if one is to understand how likeness in religious depictions of women in the Catholic and Hindu faiths is problematic.

Similitude

In this section, I look at likeness and shed light onto why this subject is important to my practical work. Furthermore, I investigate the issue of likeness when interrogating Catholic representations of Mary, as this is one of the problems of religious depiction.

Coupled to portraiture is resemblance. "Likeness', 'resemblance', or 'correctness' may never be satisfied when looking at this genre, it may only be agreed upon if it is an approximation of the original" (Brilliant 1997: 25). Here, the original refers to the sitter of the portrait or the person who is being portrayed. If the resemblance is not identical, then likeness presupposes that the artist may inflate certain qualities of the sitter. This exaggeration or manipulation of the sitter's features and physical appearance by the artist is done in order to suggest personality or create an emotion in the viewer.

Therefore, likeness may imply falseness. But what is this obsession with making portraits in the likeness of the portrayed? The term 'likeness' is

confusing. Portraits do not typically capture the exact physical appearance of the person being portrayed, but rather try to capture a sort of *character essence*.

Traditionally, Mary was represented as a constructed ideal and this reflected an exaggerated, pure ideal of women. The viewer has to take into account the artists' influences – such as the person who commissioned the portrait or religious depiction. Often, the patron would have stipulated how he wanted the image to be received by an audience or congregation. The viewer would need to have an understanding of what the patron wanted to convey, and furthermore, the part of the Bible that the artist was depicting.

When looking at religious imagery, one not only thinks that one is seeing the portrayed but also that one is in the presence of the portrayed person. When the viewer sees the image, they also see the recorded ideals of a society.

When one looks at religious depictions, one can see that more is at work than the mere presentation of the original image of the person portrayed. When looking at these images, the viewer needs to ask questions, such as: why is Mary represented in certain ways? Why is she depicted as maternal? And what is the purpose of this and its religious meaning? In order to answer such questions, it may help to look at an example. The portraits of Mary by Leonardo Da Vinci in particular are good examples. One such is *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (1508-10). (Figure 1)



Figure 1:
Leonardo Da Vinci, *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* (1508-10)
Oil on Canvas 168x130cm
Marani date: 284

The Virgin and Child with St. Anne 1508-10 is an oil painting by Leonardo Da Vinci depicting St Anne, her daughter the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus, commissioned as the high altarpiece for the Church of Santissima Annunziata in Florence. Its theme had long preoccupied Leonardo.

I would like to extend my reading of the painting through looking at the readings of Kenneth Clark and Heinrich Wölfflin, two art historians, aestheticians and theorists. As they have noted, there have been two representations of the *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne* by Leonardo Da Vinci – the oil painting and the cartoon. The cartoon some think drawn as a study for a painting which is now lost, and the unfinished painting in the Louvre.

"All the figures have contrasting movements and the opposing directions of the main forms are resolved into a compact, closed mass which can demonstrably be contained within an equilateral triangle" (Wolfflin 1954: 33). In this classical pyramid structure of figures, we see that Saint Anne looks fondly at her daughter and the baby Jesus, while Mary looks at her child, gently reaching for him as he plays with the lamb. "The shadowy, smiling heads, the tender mysterious glances, the pointing hand, and those two high-sounding devices, chiaroscuro and contraposto, all are present in their most acceptable form" (Clark 1988: 137).

Through the use of the devices listed by Clark, Leonardo has achieved what Wolfflin calls a perfect balance.

Leonardo attained complete lucidity and his principal motive – the bending forward of the virgin – is of enchanting beauty and warmth, with all the minor beauties. Consider the way in which the lines of shoulder and head, light on dark, stand out in relief, and retain their wonderful softness. How calm, yet how full of movement! The restraint of St Anne provides a most telling contrast, and the group is closed below, in the happiest way, by Child glancing upwards, and His lamb (Wolfflin 1954: 33).

The image emphasises motherhood, harmony, family and unity. The image confirms the image of Mary as life-giver of Jesus, over and above her personality. It shows a warm and intimate family, and further, it displays the woman's role as mother, giver, and humble. These analyses foreground the portrayal of the

family and mother figure, and furthermore, make this scene seem natural.

However, the images contain elements that signify more than just a warm scene or a happy mother. These signs are seen in Mary's slanted head, the gentle look on her face and the tilting of her shoulders. These devices help to depict Mary as maternal, soft and gentle. By representing Mary as maternal, the church offers an example of what women should look like, how they should behave and what sort of emotions are acceptable in them.

The manner in which Leonardo has presented Mary reinforces the way the viewer receives the image. Through the classical pyramid, the smiling heads and the tender glances, the woman is further pushed into the role of mother, caregiver and child-bearer. In other words, the image sets a standard for women to follow.²

In my work, I am trying to erase some of the likeness in religious portraiture. I mean to exaggerate the difference between the portrayed (Mary) and the viewer (myself). In this way, I rupture the image one expects to see, creating an experience for the viewer that is similar to my own. The ideals imposed upon me make me aware of the fact of the constructed female within the Catholic images.

² So why do I not experience difference when looking at Hindu images? This may stem from the fact that these Hindu images were always in my home, facing us every day, and there was little connection to the real human form. Krishna is blue; Shiva has an almost lilac complexion, and some deities are animals, such as Hanuman, a monkey and Ganesh, an elephant. I could not see myself in these images. But when looking at the Catholic images, I felt I could relate to them more. I was indoctrinated into believing that they were better. Yet I still felt alienated. As a child, I saw these images as accurate pictures of people.

Looking at likeness in relation to my practical work, I understand that the images of Mary are more myth, a construction of the female archetype, than an accurate representation of a substantial self. The field of portraiture has helped me to subvert religious depictions. This subversion is apparent in my work, where I manipulate the Catholic images of Mary to create a varied understanding of the image.

Reinventing the self

In this section, I shall briefly look at the representation of the sitter, and focus on why I have chosen to investigate Catholic images as apposed to Hindu religious depictions.

One of the duties of portraits is not only to portray a physical appearance, but also an identity; artists may use symbolism to depict identity. For instance, when Mary is depicted, she is not only portrayed physically, but through use of stance, pose and emotion, a personality is presented to the viewer. It is exactly these elements that I use when manipulating and superimposing my face onto the religious depictions of women.

Our mental image does not always agree with what we see in photographs, paintings or prints of people we know. It is precisely the rupture of my religious experience and gender identity that I try to illustrate within the layers of the prints produced. Although, as viewers we know that portraits require some apparent connection between the visible image and the person being portrayed in order to legitimise the similarity, some degree of resemblance is normally posited.

In this section, I have looked at portraiture, likeness, reinventing the self and the construction of Catholic images of Mary. Through portraiture, I have established a framework for looking at the images of Mary, and this has highlighted the issues surrounding likeness within religious depictions. Some might argue that the images of Mary are not portraits, as she could not have posed for the many replications of her image; but I have taken portraits as an entry point into discussing the images of Mary because, in a way, portraiture is a prime form for the visualisation of identity, and the concept of identity is a useful shorthand or framework for many of the issues that I interrogate.

The concept of likeness has been discussed in order to underpin the strategy of alienation employed within the layers of my work. I try to create a visual language in the images, and this is achieved through pose, cropping, layering and colour manipulation. The images I produce are my response to the alienation I feel when looking at images of Mary. The alienation is dealt with through inserting myself into the images. Implementing such a strategy allows me to begin to access something in the image, so as to regain something of the person portrayed and in that way regain something of myself.

Moreover, the images test different reactions to the tensions that I experience. In the images where I insert myself into the classic Catholic images, I try to take the images to a point where I can identify with the figure and almost become her – testing what I would look like in this context, how would I react in these situations, what it would feel like to switch places, whether I actually recognise my own likeness in these images, and if this is

enough to confirm my relationship with the original image.

B. Subaltern and the postcolonial

In this section, I would like to focus on the term 'subaltern'. This term was originally developed by Antonio Gramsci and reworked later by the scholars Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. I have chosen to look at their writings in order provide an understanding of the position I take when making my images. Furthermore, they point to the alienation I feel when looking at religious depictions.

I shall firstly scrutinise the term 'subaltern', looking at the constructs and context of the term, as examined by Spivak and Gramsci. Secondly, I briefly investigate Gramsci's understanding of the negotiation of hegemony and the implications of this for religious depictions. Lastly, I explore Spivak's question, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'

The subaltern

The Oxford Dictionary (1995) tells us that the word 'subaltern' stems from the Latin word *subalternus*: sub, meaning under, and alter, meaning another. Its meaning is: "ranked successively: subordinate; individuals who are marginalised, oppressed, or subordinated in some way". There are various writers who have discussed the subaltern and I shall start with one of the first, namely Antonio Gramsci. His work provided important ground for understanding the subaltern. According to Sophia Phoca and Rebecca Wright, this "Italian Marxist, militant and theorist [who] employed the term 'subaltern' in 1934, he developed a theory

of hegemony to explain why an exploited or subaltern class accepts domination, when according to Marxist theory it should oppose it" (Phoca and Wright 1999: 112).

Gramsci first wrote about the subaltern in the *Prison Notebooks 1929-1935*, at a time when Mussolini's fascist government was in power. Gramsci used the word interchangeably with 'subordinate'. At the time, the term referred to unorganised rural peasants who lacked a political conscience. As a result of this lack of organisation and political consciousness, this group was susceptible to the ideas of the ruling class, their culture and leadership.

It is at this point that I would like to briefly point out why I am looking at the subaltern. I am Zimbabwean, having ancestors from India. Both of these countries have been colonised by the British and I feel I fall into the category of the subaltern. The ruling class has imposed its ideals on the 'peasants', so to speak; my Catholic upbringing is a testimony to this. This has resulted in my hybrid religion, but also in confusion about whether or not I can speak – who will hear? I consequently I see my art as providing a platform for me to speak.

The Subaltern Studies Collective³ extended the terms of Gramsci's definition to include India's context: "The general attribute of subordination in South Asian society, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (Guha 1988: 35).

Spivak has always been interested in the struggle to find a "critical vocabulary that is appropriate to describe the experiences

³ The Subaltern Studies Collective was started in the 1980s. Its goal was to rethink and rewrite the history of India.

and histories of particular individuals and social groups who have been disposed and exploited by European colonialism" (Morton 2003: 45). Spivak believes that 'master' words such as 'the woman', 'the worker' and 'the colonised' do not do justice to the people that they describe. These words often tend to further oppress individuals. Spivak called these 'master' words 'catachreses'⁴ or improper words – the master words claim to represent all women, workers etc, "when there are no 'true' examples of the 'true worker,' the 'true woman,' the 'true proletarian'" (Spivak 1990: 104).

Spivak's understanding of the term is multifaceted. It further takes into account a variety of different positions and these positions are not affected or predefined by political discourse. "The term 'subaltern' is useful because it is flexible; it can accommodate social identities and struggles (such as woman and the colonised) that do not fall under the reductive terms of 'strict class analysis'" (Interview published in U.S journal *Polygraph*).

I like the word 'subaltern' for one reason. It is truly situational. The term subaltern began as a description of a certain rank in the military. Gramsci used the word under censorship: he called Marxism 'monism', and was obliged to call the proletarian 'subaltern'. "That word, used under duress, has been transformed into the description of everything that doesn't fall under strict class analysis. I like that, because it has no theoretical rigor" (Spivak 1990: 141).

One can see that for Spivak, the subaltern is at odds with Gramsci's understanding of the word. Spivak is very aware that any

⁴ Stephen Morton explains the term catachreses denote the misuse or abuse of words.

theoretical writings and statements made on behalf of these people "may overlook crucial social differences between particular subaltern groups" (Morton 2003: 46). One can see that Spivak is highly aware of this in her own writings and is very critical of the attempts made to understand, explain and know the experiences of the subaltern.

Another member of the Subaltern Studies Collective Study is Ranajit Guha. I have briefly included his writings as an aid in understanding the dilemma of appropriating a religion and the imposition of a culture on a society.

Ranajit Guha wrote about the elementary aspects of peasant insurgency in India. He placed important emphasis on tertiary education in India, and identified the problems and problematic of the historical writings of India. He noticed that Indian schoolchildren were given problems to solve in maths, for example, which involved the geography of England. A popular maths problem, for example, refers to the Cambridge boat race. Both Guha and Edward Said's⁵ writings point to the problems of received education. This issue is relevant to my argument, as I draw a correlation between received education, imposed culture and religion.

Spivak generally agrees with the writing of the Subaltern Studies collective. However, she also believes that this approach "privileges the male subaltern subject as the primary agent of change" (Morton 2003: 48). In comparison with Gramsci's model, Spivak has created a more flexible and multifaceted definition, one that takes into account the lives, struggles and

⁵ Said was an American literary theorist known for describing and critiquing Orientalism. Orientalism was described by Said as the "Subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture" (Windschuttle 1999).

histories of women. As I shall discuss in the section on Spivak's question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" it is necessary to discuss Gramsci's understanding of the hegemonic, as it feeds directly into an understanding of the subaltern.

The hegemonic

For Gramsci, comparably to Michel Foucault⁶, domination does not simply depend on 'state repression,' but on the way in which the ruling class persuades the whole of society that the prevailing thinking of the ruling class is the only natural and normal one, thereby gaining its hegemony" (Phoca and Wright 1999: 112). Religious imagery and depictions of Mary as a white European woman would be a device in such hegemony.

Gramsci's hegemony means leadership over a particular group, a social class or part of it. This is exercised in society through the winning of influence over other groups. This influence is manifested through received knowledge, given by the colonists. This results in a false sense of identification with the colonial power and hence the submission of leadership to the colonists.

Gramsci was interested in how a leadership came into power and was accepted, not just as rulers but also as guides that people looked up to, thus exercising moral leadership. Gramsci understood that in order for hegemony to be achieved, the leaders have to understand that they need to give intellectual and moral leadership to the "hegemonic group, in other words, it is hegemonic because it has gained the

⁶ Foucault's book *Knowledge and Power* makes reference to the foundation of imperial knowledge. It also underpins the earlier writing of Ranjit Guha.

consent of other groups to its leadership of society. The term 'subaltern' is used to refer to the groups who are not hegemonic, and means lacking in autonomy, being subject to the hegemony of another group" (Arnold 2000: 34). It is through understanding Gramsci's meaning of the term 'hegemonic' that we can see how religious depiction could be used as a device of received education to gain power and influence over the people.

A central issue that arises from attempting to apply Gramscian ideas to the specific historical context of the Indian peasantry is that of autonomy. As we have seen, Gramsci's emphasis was upon the strength of the coercive domination and hegemonic direction which ruling groups exercised over subordinate classes. His purpose was to explain why state power, especially in modern capitalist societies, was so difficult to overthrow and why the subaltern classes appeared to accept their subordination. He saw little evidence of autonomy in peasant movements, both in the specific sense of their failure to general their own leadership and organisation and to formulate their own demands effectively, and in the broader sense of being unable to mount an ideological and political assault capable of overthrowing the domination and hegemony of the ruling classes. 'Subaltern groups', we are reminded, are always subject to the authority of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up (Arnold 2000: 34).

Gramscian ideas of autonomy, specifically why the subaltern group was willing to be subordinate and how this subordination occurred, allow me to grasp that it is through coercive domination that the subaltern cannot speak.

Gramsci drew parallels between the division of labour in Mussolini's Italy and the colonial division of labour in India.

Gramsci believed that, through class-consciousness and through an alliance with the urban working class, the oppression of the peasants in Italy could be quelled. This shows how Gramsci's writings reflected Karl Marx's thinking. However, what sets Gramsci apart from Marx is that Marx believed that the working class was united and coherent, while Gramsci believed the opposite: that there was lack of coherence and unity among the peasants. We shall see later that this point is critical to understanding the writings of Spivak.

Can the Subaltern Speak?

The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with 'woman' as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish (Spivak 1988: 104).

Through the publication of the essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak furthers her critique of Western models of class-consciousness. Here, Spivak takes to task Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze. Spivak sets out to prove that the notion of representing subaltern groups effectively appropriates the voice of the subaltern and thus silences them. Spivak understands that the voice of 'the woman' and 'the worker' is usually given as proxy in political discourse. This political discourse speaks on behalf of the disempowered; it speaks for them as if they were a unified political subject. Spivak does not agree with this process and states that it is "always already an effect of the dominant discourse that represents these groups, rather than a

transparent portrait of the true worker, or the true woman" (Morton 2003: 35).

Spivak starts her critique by stating that it is political structures that help to underpin the aesthetic and political representation of the subaltern. Spivak's problem is that, by critiquing such groups, Deleuze and Foucault do not represent them. Deleuze and Foucault seem to fall back on a transparent model of representation. The understanding of the term 'transparent model' is that the "oppressed subjects speak, act and know their own conditions. This fall back is noticed through the discussion of social and political struggle" (Morton 2003: 30).

"Deleuze's reference to the workers struggle is equally problematic; it is obviously a genuflection: we are unable to touch [power] in any point of its application without finding ourselves confronted by this diffuse mass, so that we are necessarily led ... to the desire to blow it up completely. Every partial revolutionary attack or defence is linked in this way to the workers struggle" (Foucault 77: 205-17). This quote by Foucault, taken from Spivak's writing, illustrates her point that the transparent model of representation is used as a fallback to understand the peasant.

Spivak underpins this criticism by discussing Karl Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). Here, Marx gives a description of small, peasant proprietors in nineteenth-century French agrarian society. Marx states that these people do not represent a collective, coherent class. "Their conditions of economic and social life prevent them from having class consciousness. For this reason, the (absent collective) consciousness of the small peasant

proprietor is symbolically depicted by a political representative or proxy from the middle class, who speaks on their behalf" (Spivak 1988: 104).

Through an investigation and discussion of subaltern women, Spivak shows that European theories of representation are not readily adapted to the lives of disempowered women in the 'Third World'. This goes back to the notion of political representation. Spivak argues that unless the intellectuals are willing to take this into account, the voice of the subaltern will be silenced and there shall be no exchange between those who listen and those who talk. In a later contribution, she clarifies this: "within the definition of subaltern as such there is a certain ability of not being able to make speech" (Spivak *et al* 1996: 290). It can be said that if one argues that the subaltern cannot speak, we have simultaneously silenced her.

This essay signified a shift in subaltern studies. The Subaltern Studies Collective had generally ignored Spivak's focus on subaltern women, their voices and social and historical location. Through this investigation, Spivak managed to push the boundaries of what 'the subaltern' meant in order to include women. "Spivak's feminism produces a deconstruction of the coloniser/ colonised polarity, pointing to the neglect of gender found in that conceptualisation" (Williams and Chrisman 1994: 105). Spivak tried to give an agency to women, which did not exist before, and further tried to give women a voice. Spivak advocated that by being given a voice, the subaltern might no longer be dependant on Western intellectuals to speak on her behalf.

This section is important as it shows that Western writings do not have sufficient

experience to talk about subaltern women. Western institutions have such a great influence over the disempowered and can shape their beliefs and culture through a hegemonic society and through received knowledge given by the coloniser.

As Western institutions possess the power to influence those who have given them the autonomy to do so, I have chosen a visual language with which to challenge the very institutions that cannot represent me. It is through researching and looking at comics that I have found a possible medium in which to speak. I address this in my section on method and process.



CONTEMPORARY REFERENCES

There are various artists who have engaged with the issues of representation and likeness. In this section, I shall discuss some of the artists who have had an influence on my way of thinking about these issues as well as other aspects of my work.

A. Paul Wunderlich

Paul Wunderlich, born in Hamburg, has produced a variety of artworks; however, the greater part of his portfolio is made up of lithographs. I shall be discussing his lithograph *George Sand* (1983) (Figure 2). George Sand was Aurore Dupin, a female writer. The work demonstrates how an artist can play with taking on another persona. The face of the Mona Lisa being erased from the image achieves this. Through using this device, one is able to imply a hidden persona and comment on the truncated or split identity not only of the subject but also of the self. Viewers instinctually recognise people by face and name and Wunderlich plays on this. The viewer is disoriented when they cannot put name to face and vice versa. "Wunderlich played with the dominance of the face as a denotative key in a display of the nuances of concealment" (Brilliant 1997: 64).

I have also made use of this device of effacement in my previous works (Figure 3). It precisely the missing face and the implication of truncated identity that I try to use when manipulating my face onto that of Mary's. Wunderlich's image further speaks to the alter ego, and this is cleverly done through reference to the pseudonym 'George Sand'. This speaks of assuming a different identity, leading to "the idea that identity and naming are inextricably bound together in the art of portraiture" (Brilliant 1997: 64).

The removal of Mona Lisa's head from her face in Figure 2 expresses the separation of one identity from another. Philosophically, the picture implies a turning on the name, which logically requires the viewer to be far more cautious about taking portraits at face value. We are so used to recognising people from their face that we feel disoriented when the person we expect to see is absent.



Figure 2:

Paul Wunderlich, *George Sand* (1983)

Lithograph 10.5x14.8cm

Brilliant 1997: 64



Figure 3:

Nalisha Gulab, *Postcards* (2002)

Colour Photographic Digital Print a5

B. Senzeni Mthwakazi Marasela

Another artist that I have found interesting is Senzeni Mthwakazi Marasela. It is her subject matter and strategies in particular that I find useful. "Although deeply political, Marasela's work bespeaks an ambivalent attitude towards past atrocities from which she was protected and guarded. Her sense of place as a black woman educated at a Catholic school in a white Afrikaans suburb gives her work an edge rarely encountered" (Smith 2000). Although her work stems from a different genre, the way in which her background informs her work is what I take from this artist when making and investigating my own work.

Impatient with labels and pigeon-holing, Marasela uses photography, photocopy transfers, silk-screening and handicraft to explore collective and personal memory. Her choice of 'raw' (unprocessed) fabrics like calico, set against the highly worked quality of lace has, for her, strong ties to colonialism. The labour-intensive process of hand stitching is her way of inscribing herself into this past she wishes to explore, as well as attempting to elevate her chosen imagery into a realm of the cherished and respected (Smith 2000).

Studying Marasela's intentions and the images that she has produced has helped me to try and penetrate my own images, as her sense of place is similar to mine.

In Figure 6, *Stompie Seipei, Died 1989*, the artist tries to give voice to her political concerns. Here the viewer is presented with Stompie Seipei.⁷ "He got caught up in events that he did not fully understand. The way Stompie lived and died was and still is a burden to so many people. History is making him exclusive to memory" (Smith 2000). Marasela tries to grapple with these emasculating ideologies. It is in

⁷ Ms. Madikizela-Mandela returned to South Africa in 1986, after she had been banished by the South African Government. She helped disaffected youth by forming The Mandela United Football Club. (MUFC) She assisted the youth through giving them refuge and in return they served a bodyguards to her. In 1987 the community and residents of the 'Mandela Residence, made allegations that the MUFC's actions were violent and they were further said to have a 'reign of terror.' It was between August 1988 and February 1989 that Ms. Madikizela-Mandela and the MUFC, were "implicated, directly or indirectly, in a range of incidents including assaults, abduction, murder and attempted murder of 12 individuals. Ostensibly these attacks were against suspected informers who were betraying the cause of the War of Liberation." (*stompie 2005*) On December 29 1989 four youths, one being Stompie Seipei, were accused of having sexual relations with Reverend Paul Verryn the man who ran the shelter for the MUFC. Seipei was accused of being a police informer. It is said that a journalist saw Ms. Madikizela-Mandela stab Seipei three times. Seipei's body was found in river-bed much later. His body was severely beaten and three stab wounds were found in his neck.

the way this work is constructed that she deals with such ideologies. She creates an 'absent presence', bordering on the sentimental, which is also a memory and tribute to Stompie. I felt it necessary to include this work as it demonstrates how she deals with her past and how she explores the political world of South Africa.

However, works dealing with her relationship with her mother I find more interesting, as they deal with the role a mother is generally required to play out. The work *Our Mother* (Figure 4) 1997 is an example of this. As Marasela's mother was schizophrenic, she did not get to see her often and so she had a non-existent relationship with her. *Our Mother* explores this. The work depicts a dress her mother discarded; underneath this dress are pictures of Marasela and her siblings.



Figure 4:
Senzeni Mthwakazi Marasela, *Our Mother*
(1997)
Mixed Media
www.artthrob.co.za

Pinned into the breast area are pins, indicating the loss of her mother. I found this piece interesting as it focused on the role of the mother, which is one of the issues that I deal with in my work.

This artist also brings in some of the aspects of the subaltern and the postcolonial that have been discussed, because she subverts her subject. Marasela's approach to dealing with her past – going to a Catholic School and growing up in an Afrikaans suburb – is what I admire in her work, and I have learned from her process.



Figure 5:
Senzeni Mthwakazi Marasela, *Stompie Seipei, Died 1989* (1998)
Silkscreen on calico, lace. Each unit
28x28 cm.
www.artthrob.co.za

C. Cheri Gaulke

American feminist artists such as Ilse Greenstein, Cynthia Marman, Alice Neal and Cheri Gaulke have all produced works of art and in most instances performances that challenge, re-examine and manipulate Christian myth, Christian stereotypes and Christian patriarchal traditions. Here I shall look specifically at the artists Cheri Gaulke and Ilse Greenstein.

Performance artist Cheri Gaulke has recreated Christian images in order to question their relevance. A compelling example of this is a performance piece she did during 1982 and 1983, entitled *This is not my body* (Figure 6) and presented in museums and a church. "This work set out in eight tableaux and reinterprets the Christian passion through a feminist revision, using the body of woman as the central figure. The whole piece charts the Christian story from the fall from grace to the crucifixion; from sin to redemption" (Meskimon 1996: 56).

In her performance, Gaulke adopted multiple roles. As seen in Figure 6, she was Eve while in others she was Christ or the serpent. Through the projection of slides onto her body, she challenged the patriarchal nature of Judaeo-Christian tradition. This was achieved through reversing its standpoints. She further counteracted the position of women's roles in these stories and re-empowered herself as female. The assertion 'this is not my body' was critical, as Arlene Raven points out:

This work also commemorates the crucifixion of Christ: His is a death normal and mortal for being human, but a transcendent death which marks the beginning of the patrilineal tradition from which she seeks healing. ... she is able To be able to say, simply, 'this is my body', is to have journeyed through the (Christian) faith of her father(s) to her authentic self (Raven 1988: 49).

Gaulke's work has allowed me to see that through manipulating Christian symbolism, one can also address female identity and the power of women.



Figure 6:
Cheri Gaulke, *This is not my body*
(1982-1983)

Performance photographed by Shelia Ruth.

Meskimon 1996: 57

D. Ilse Greenstein

Greenstein is an American artist who centres her production on the re-examination of Christian myths in relation to women. Greenstein and other female artists contributed to a work entitled *'Sister Chapel'* (1973-1974) Artists Alice Neal, Judy Blum and Cynthia Marlman all produced works for this exhibition. Neal painted a portrait of Bella Abzug, Blum painted Betty Friendmann as a prophet, and Marlman painted a self-portrait as God. Marlman's work is especially notable as it "challenged both Western fine art tradition and religious orthodoxy by introducing a reinterpretation of goddess mythology into women's self-portraiture" (Meskimon 1996: 56).

Although I am not speaking about the goddess myth in my prints, the manner in which Marlman inserts herself into the position of God has informed the power of substitution to effect subversion.

E. Marcel Duchamp

French American artist Marcel Duchamp's influence continues into the twenty-first century. He is most often associated with the "Dada and Surrealism movements, however he barely participated in Paris Dada after being involved in New York Dada, and his participation in the Surrealism movement was behind the scenes" (Duchamp 2005). Duchamp is well known for his ready-mades, including *Fountain* (1917). I shall, however, be looking here at the photographs taken by Man Ray of Marcel Duchamp's alter ego, Rose Sélavy.

In 1921, Duchamp's alter ego, Rose Sélavy, emerged. This alter ego had her own passport, clothing and signed many of Duchamp's works. Duchamp's play with identity is featured in many of his works. Here I shall look at *Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy 1920-1921* (Figure 7). This image followed Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.* (Figure 8), a mockery of the identity of the Mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci. In *Marcel Duchamp as Rose Sélavy*, Duchamp's alter ego was captured with a soft focus. It depicts Duchamp masquerading as a woman. "This photograph coyly captures Duchamp's play with the signs defining sexual identity, and by extension, identity in general" (Judovitz 1995: 44).

This process of assuming a different identity, the play of gender and the taking on of another name is what I

found interesting in Duchamp's work. "... [I]t is neither the presence nor the absence of signs that generates gender, but rather their active interplay" (Judovitz 1995: 44).

This image also underpins the argument I have made regarding the subaltern. Duchamp's alter ego reveals the 'other' – it is this coexistence that permits us to understand how these two people can be one.



Figure 7:
Marcel Duchamp, *Rose Sélavy alias Marcel Duchamp* (1920-21)
Photograph by Man Ray Silver print. 5-78 inches x 3-78 inches
Judovitz 1995: 144



Figure 8:
 Marcel Duchamp, *LHOOQ* (1944)
 Rectified ready-made: reproduction of
 Mona Lisa to which Duchamp added
 moustache. 19.7x12.4cm
 Schwarz 1967:304

F. Andres Serrano

One can clearly see how an artist has the power to provoke, probe and engage with religious depiction in the photographic work of Andres Serrano. This American artist is notorious for artworks that deal with the Catholic faith. "Serrano has a half Honduran, half Afro-Cuban background and was raised a strict Catholic" (Serrano 2005). It is thus no wonder that he probes his faith.

The immersion of Catholic objects into bodily fluid allows Serrano to blur the boundaries between sacred and defamatory. Through his use of body fluids, he tries to show how the church views the body as impure. Serrano's use

of urine in *Piss Christ* 1989 is a prime example (Figure 9). This is perhaps Serrano's most controversial piece of work. A soft-focus light reflects on to the thirteen-inch high, wood and plastic crucifix placed in a four-gallon, eighteen-by-twelve-inch Plexiglas holding tank filled with the Serrano's urine, which he saved for several weeks.

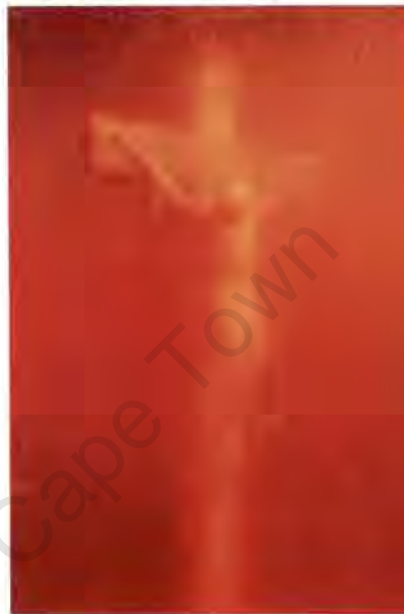


Figure 9:
 Andres Serrano, *Piss Christ* (1989).
 Photograph of Statue of the crucifixion
 of Jesus placed in a vat of the artists'
 urine. 40 x 60 cm.
 Edition of ten.
 Steiner 1994: 62

"When Serrano immerses a classical or Christian statuette in urine or blood, the body turns the tables on art. Rather than art ennobling the body, bodily fluid ennoble a degraded, plastic reproduction" (Steiner 1994: 14). Steiner suggests that this submersion into a vat of urine almost seems to baptise Christ. This may seem blasphemous, but it suggests a greater point: that Christ was a man who died on a cross and bled from a body like ours.

Through making these images Serrano deals with his feelings of his Catholic upbringing and in so doing he is able to tailor his relationship with Catholicism. Given the artist's upbringing, one is not surprised by his preoccupations. Although my work does not deal with bodily fluids and their conjunction with religious statuettes, I find Serrano's thinking intriguing. This thinking has influenced the manner in which I view my images as I resolve my feelings toward my Catholic education.

The title *Piss Christ* is interesting – the term is vulgar and has associations with anger and offensive expressions. This has impacted on my own titles, as they are taken from sayings and song lyrics that also have a degree of irreverence. This helped to emphasise what was going on in the images, and provided an association with the stereotypical roles that women are given.

The above artists' strategies are similar to mine, and they have influenced me. I try to employ such strategies in my theoretical writing as well as in the practical work produced.

The lithograph *George Sand* speaks of assuming a different identity. This idea is something that I have looked at when producing my own images. My work speaks about the religious meaning given to the image and the notion of identity in Mary's constructed persona. Marasela's strategy is to show her frustration with labelling and pigeonholing, and her indifference towards it and towards her background. I, however, look at her background and use it to understand the production of my own images.

Through looking at some of the American feminist artists, I have seen that through the use of Christian symbolism, there are various methods such as artistic persona, iconography and image construction that also guide the construction of my prints.

The way in which Marcel Duchamp takes on another identity points to the notion of playing with ambiguous identity. Serrano brought me back to the Catholic image and the ways in which I have also tried to deal with my Catholic upbringing.



METHOD AND PROCESS

The body of work consists of two series. There are six prints altogether, all printed digitally onto gloss-laminated foil. The images are constructed in Adobe Photoshop, allowing me to work spontaneously.

The works are informed by the Catholic and Hindu faiths. While the Catholic-influenced images focus on my response to the alienation I feel when looking at the image of Mary, the Hindu-influenced images focus on the various roles of women; these are more theatrical images.

The images are installed to reflect onto each other. This is done to create a dialogue between the two contrasting images and faiths. It is through the production and installation of the prints that I try to confer the historical and theoretical writings. I have included all the images created during the production of the body of work. I felt it was important for the reader to gain an understanding of where the final six prints came from.

Firstly, I shall discuss the comic, as it has been an important influence in the design of the prints. Secondly, I explain some of the techniques used in making

the images, the choice of paper, and the presentation of the images and the structure of the images. Thirdly, I discuss the body of work in detail.

A. The comic and its impact on my prints

As I previously worked in print media, I am not surprised that I am fascinated by the comic. This medium has impacted on my art-making and on the printing process of my images – particularly the manner in which the printed form conveys a narrative to the reader through pictures. In this section, I look at how the comic has impacted on the production of my images, why sequential art is useful to my cause.

There are a number of well-known books that discuss comics as a medium. One such is Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* (1991). Here comics are defined as 'sequential art'. Scott McCloud, in *Understanding Comics*, expands and formalises that definition: "comics (kom'iks) n. plural in form, used with a singular verb. 1. Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud 2000: 9). Such definitions for me exclude key aspects of the comic, namely the notions of space and time. I look at the notion of space and time only to enhance a dialogue that I try to create between my two series, which I will discuss later.

“Comics have often been a print-based medium and we know that to define a comic is a difficult task” (Sabin 2000: 46). In *Adult Comics – an introduction*, Sabin (1993: 5) offers this definition:

The fundamental ingredient of a comic is the ‘comic strip’. This is a narrative in the form of a sequence of pictures – usually, but not, always, with text. In length it can be anything from a single image upwards, with some strips containing images in the thousands. A comic per se is a publication in booklet, tabloid, magazine or book form that includes as a major feature the presence of one or more strips. Comics are usually published regularly, weekly, monthly or quarterly and are generally cheap in order to be accessible to the widest possible audience.

It is necessary for me to understand the meaning of the comic, as it has provided the initial foundation of my art-making. Investigating graphic novels has impacted on the format of my images. Comics are seen as a lowbrow, mass-media form of art, and they are secular – these notions have also furthered my art-making. The influence of comics can be seen in the manner in which my images are constructed, the type of paper chosen for printing, the format of the images and the inclusion of smaller images into the larger ones.

The comic strip (or pictorial narrative, banded dessinee, are other preferred terms) has existed as a printed form throughout Europe and Asia

since the fifteenth century. It developed into a medium for the representation of continuous movement in the nineteenth century with the introduction of the looser, more exaggerated line associated with caricature (Bukatman 2002: 133-4).

McCloud (2000: 100-102) discusses the movement of the comic as being from moment to moment rather than scene to scene or action to action. Such transitions are crucial for illustrating movement through time and for narrative. I have tried to incorporate this rhythm of narrative and movement in my images. This is evident in the placement of my images across from one another, and the consequent dialogue created between the two opposing images.

I shall now look briefly at the online comic, which makes use of the Internet to take the comic from the printed form into the realm of the computer. This relates to my work, as I use new media to come to the final product, the printed image. I have found my process to follow a similar route to the revolution of the comic, as it is conceived and produced on the screen.

When asked what an online comic looks like, most people imagine clicking one panel so that the next appears. Yet the medium offers a much wider scope for the artist to play, including animated text and moving images, so that the constraints of the panel are broken. Digital technology like Adobe Photoshop and Macromedia Flash allow one to represent motion, insert text and create mood, allowing panels themselves to take on a physical presence (Mc Cloud 2000: 146-147).

McCloud's comic, *The Right Number* (2004) (<http://www.scottmccloud.com/comics/trn/intro.html>), evokes a sense of being dropped or a sense of helplessness as one navigates through the panels. When the reader clicks on the panel, it begins to move forward, expanding into the four corners of the screen, rushing towards you. At first one may find this exciting and new, but it becomes quite gimmicky.

The viewing 'window' or 'page' is simple: a single black-framed window. Each panel in turn has a tiny panel in its centre, as seen in Figure 10. When one clicks on it, the tiny panel increases in size until it fills the viewing window. This happens in a smooth animated sequence. The navigation of the comic produces a strange feeling; as one progresses, one panel after another, it begins to have a hypnotic effect. One is moving deeper and deeper into something, becoming lost and trapped within it.



Figure 10.
Scott McCloud, *The Right Number* (2004)
Digital Comic
<http://www.scottmccloud.com/comics/trn/intro.html>

This reinforces McCloud's concept of the 'infinite canvas'. This is not merely a large canvas; it can take any shape and can move. *The Right Number* (2004) is certainly a work that grapples with the changes in the medium of comics, which

McCloud has considered at length in his book *Reinventing Comics* (2000).

Not only has McCloud's online comic influenced my process, it has also influenced the installation of my work. The manner in which Mc Cloud sets up a narrative aids me in understanding and creating a dialogue within my series. The extent of McCloud's influence is also evident in the format of my images, which emulate the comic – for example, the black frames that surround the panels within the large images of the Catholic series. From investigating the online comic, I have realised that digital media are particularly suited to the manner in which I make and develop my images and my installation.

Movement, narrative

New media and the digital map have changed my experience of being in a hybrid religion. These media help me to express notions of hybridism by allowing me to morph and reconstruct the subject of the images, facilitating the bringing together of two separate elements. Furthermore, it allows me an agency to be heard.

The investigation of movement and narrative in the online comic has guided me in making the work. Movement from panel to panel or from page to page is linked to movement in narrative and movement through space. Michel de Certeau (Carrier 2000: 26) defined all narrative as a space narrative, a travel narrative. According to Louis Marin, for example, if we look at maps they are trapped on the paper. It is the following of a particular trail that brings to life the process of change; it is the temporal

mapping that allows travel through the space.

But at the very moment that I look at the map – when I follow with my finger the route of a road, a contour line, when I cross here and not there a frontier, when I jump from one bank of a river to the other – at this moment, a figure is extracted from the map ground, the figure of a projected journey, even if it's an imaginary one, a dreamed one. With that figure a narrative begins, with a before and an after, a point of departure and a point of arrival, a happy coming-back or a final permanent exile. The locus has become space. Directions, speeds travel-timing give motion to the map with the tracings of various routes. With all these temporal processes, these potential action programs, with all these proximities and distances, space 'awakens' to the narrative and loci are opened up to various practices that change and transform them through variations, transgressions, and so forth (Marin 1993: 413-14).

In his book *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich, a prominent new-media theorist, discusses "the key element of the modern interface – the computer screen" (Manovich 2001: 94). He places the computer-screen interface in a wider context historically, and then proceeds to trace its growth or stages of development. This informs my work, as the computer screen provides a door to different places where the mind can travel – whether it is to get information, play games or read a newspaper. More importantly, the screen provides new spaces for artistic

exploration. By sitting in front of the screen, the user experiences the "illusion of navigating through virtual spaces, of being physically present somewhere else or of being hailed by the computer itself" (Manovich 2001: 94).

To end this section, I quote from McCloud: "And even art destined for the screen can benefit from the study of the old masters – but to choose computers as one's primary art-making tool is to choose an almost superhuman palette of options – and to devote it to merely imitating their predecessors is a bit like hunting rabbits with a battleship" (Mc Cloud 2000: 144). This quote shows the movement I make from the screen to the printed image. The comic has provided me with a means of understanding the subject and context of my images. Comics are a lowbrow, secular artform, and I invoke this language as a comment on and subversion of traditional Catholic images. My images are created in a similar style to the comic, in panels; but my images speak of the reified image, the expensive and inaccessible images of the church. The comic form also allows me to provide some narrative between the images.

I would now like to discuss the process of making the images and expand on the choices made when making and printing my images.

B. Choice of material

I have tried to find an appropriate paper to print on, one that extended and amplified the meaning of the print produced. The paper chosen was foil-based. I wanted the prints to literally evoke the luminosity of the subject, and in an ironic way to make reference to the tradition of stained-glass windows. This

luminosity refers to enlightenment, and to the inspiring quality of the religious subject matter. The metallic silver of the foil paper further plays on the grandeur of the subjects. This grandeur and luminosity, however, is also subverted by using this type of paper, as it suggests cheap wrapping paper or incense paper.

C. Source material

I have drawn from mainly the early Renaissance fresco painters Fra Angelico and Giotto. I have also referenced Titian and Cimabue.

Fra Angelico (born Guido di Pietro, 1395-1455) was a friar of San Domenico, where the friars were known to follow strict rules. In 1436, he was transferred to the Dominican convent of San Marco in Florence. It is his paintings in the San Marco convent that I have chosen to reference. Fra Angelico decorated most of the friars' cells, the hall of the chapter, the corridors, the colonnade and the church altarpiece. He used to say, "He who does Christ's work must stay with Christ always" (Rossetti, William Michael 1911). This motto gave him the name "Blessed Angelico", because of the "perfect integrity of his life and the almost divine beauty of the images he painted, to a superlative extent those of the Blessed Virgin Mary" (Rossetti, William Michael 1911). I chose to use Fra Angelico's images because of his said ability to capture the image of Mary. The images further suited my needs, as he often painted very flat-looking figures, which reminded me of the images in the comics I was reading.

Giotto, an Italian painter and architect (born Giotto di Bondone, 1267-1337),

was considered a great contributor to the development of the Italian Renaissance. "It is said that he stands as the link between the Byzantine art of the late Middle Ages, and the more realistic and humanistic art which flowered in the Renaissance" (Levey 1962). I was drawn to Giotto because he painted flat, symbolic figures, but was further able to give them weight and dimensionality. His ability to achieve this is seen in his major work in the Arena Chapel. The Cappella degli Scrovengi (1305) in Padua depicts the life of the Virgin Mary and the passion of the Christ. Giotto painted a hundred scenes, some of which I have referenced in my work.

Another painter I found interesting, for the same reason, was Cimabue. Cenni di Pepo (Giovanni) Cimabue (c1240-c1302) was a Florentine painter and Giotto's teacher. He is regarded as "the last great painter working in the Byzantine tradition" (Vaughan 2000). His art is also relatively 'flat'. I have referenced his altarpieces as they depict the Virgin Mary and because they demonstrate this flat quality.

When constructing the prints, I have also referenced Titian (Tiziano Vecelli c1488-90). I was initially drawn to his use of paint and colour. I have referenced only one image of Titian's, *Mary Magdalene* (1560), which depicts Mary Magdalene crying.

Most of the images I use are taken from Fra Angelico and Giotto, which form part of the tradition that influences the manner in which I see the image of Mary. I have also included Hindu imagery, taken from postcards and holy cards used in the temples Hindus have

at home. The collage of images in the final prints thus deals with the hybrid nature of my religious experience.

D. Installation

The installation of the exhibition space is greatly informed by my investigation of comics and of the subject of the Virgin Mary. The large-format images are constructed so that each reflects the image opposite it, due to the shiny paper on which they are printed. The images, placed across from one another, thus create contrasts in subject and meaning. This is seen in the Hindu images being placed across from the images of Mary. The Hindu images are given Gujarati titles while the Catholic images are given titles in English. This is done in order for the viewer to reflect on the kind of inner duality I experience as a result of my upbringing.

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BODY OF WORK

Preceding the six final prints are various images which I produced as I searched for an image that would reflect a harmony between myself and the image of Mary. This image did not have to be perfect in colour, scale or dimensionality; rather, I was looking for an image that embodied what the image of Mary looked like to me. I have included these images into the final prints, and many are repeated throughout the series.

Throughout this paper, I have only referred to my practical body of work superficially. However, in this section, I shall try to illuminate the ways in which the artworks illustrate the concepts and issues I have laid out in the paper.

Through looking at images of Mary, I have learnt about the differences between myself and the women presented to me. My images come as a response to the alienation I feel when looking at images of Mary. This alienation is dealt with through inserting myself into the images. Mary is depicted as demure, fragile and protective so as to instruct women on the ideal female; further, the religious depictions are intended to illustrate pivotal moments in the Bible. My alienation toward the

images stems from looking at the images, being able to relate to them, but not being able to have or want the attributes that the images imply I should have or desire.

Through inserting myself into the image, I feel as though I am regaining something, because I am moving beyond the mythical construction as such. This is effective, as I can claim to be part of the meaning of the image; it also allows me to challenge the constructed meaning of the image of Mary.

Through refiguring the visual content of the Catholic images, the reconstructed images speak of and directly engage with the representation of women as solely positioned in the roles of mother and caregiver. I further aim to express the concepts of negotiating positions and voices in the visual narrative of the images produced.

The Hindu images in my works make reference to Hindu postcards. The central figures in the postcards have been taken out and replaced with the figures of Mary and Mary Magdalene. As the religious postcards are made with the intention that they will be used in the temple at home, they often appear theatrical. I have adopted this and exaggerated some of these theatrical features. This can be seen in the use of stronger colours, dramatic lighting, additional figures and intentional

focus on the images of Mary and myself. Through including myself in these images, I have tried to comment on the role of the woman in the family, especially as mother.

A. List of works

Hindu images

Ma Gujarati for Mother

Serrware Gujarati for Caregiver

Wesyar Gujarati for Prostitute

Medium: Digital Print Gloss

Laminated on foil paper.

Dimensions: 100cm x 160cm

Catholic images

Mother

Caregiver

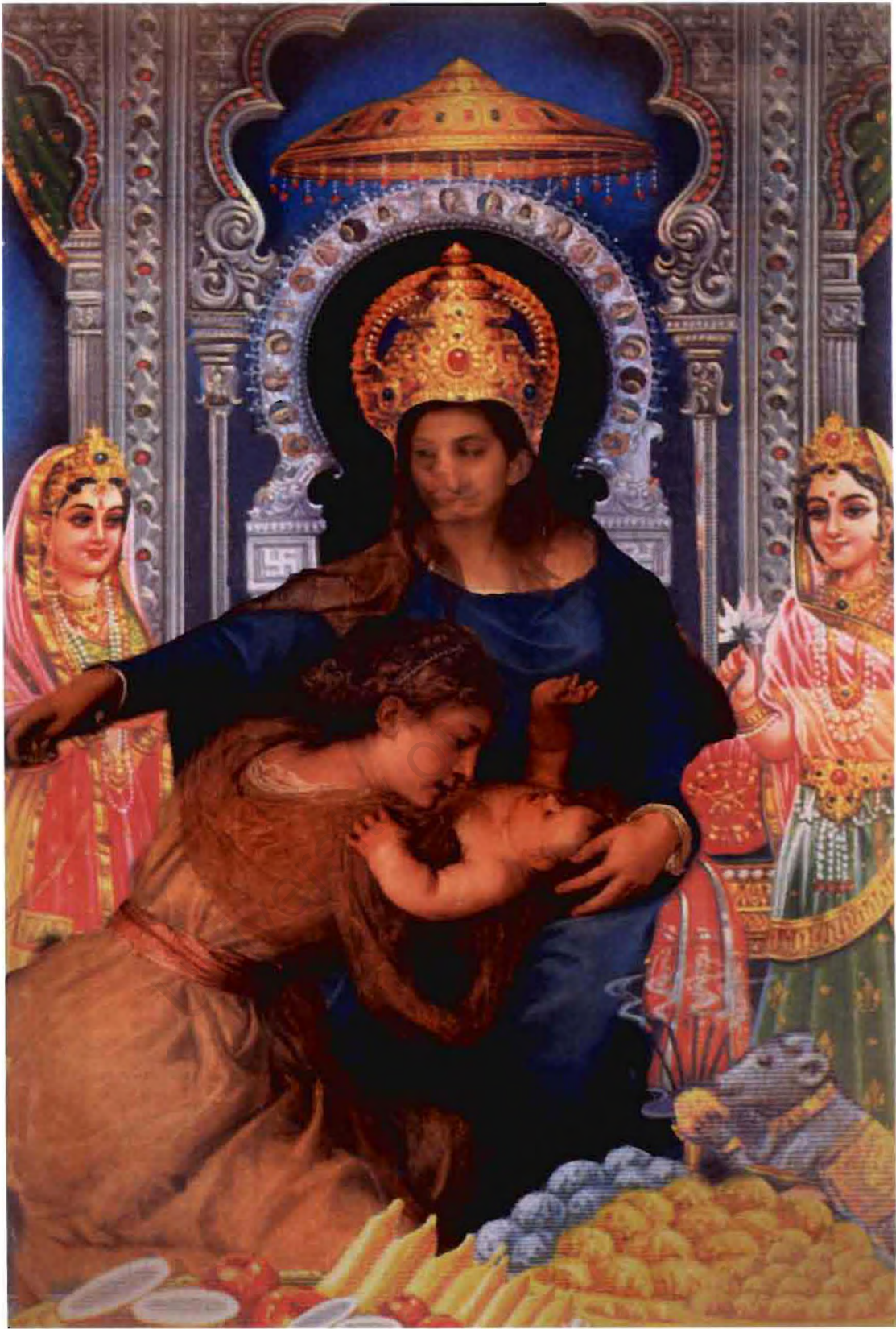
Prostitute

Medium: Digital Print Gloss

Laminated on foil paper.

Dimensions: 100cm x 160cm

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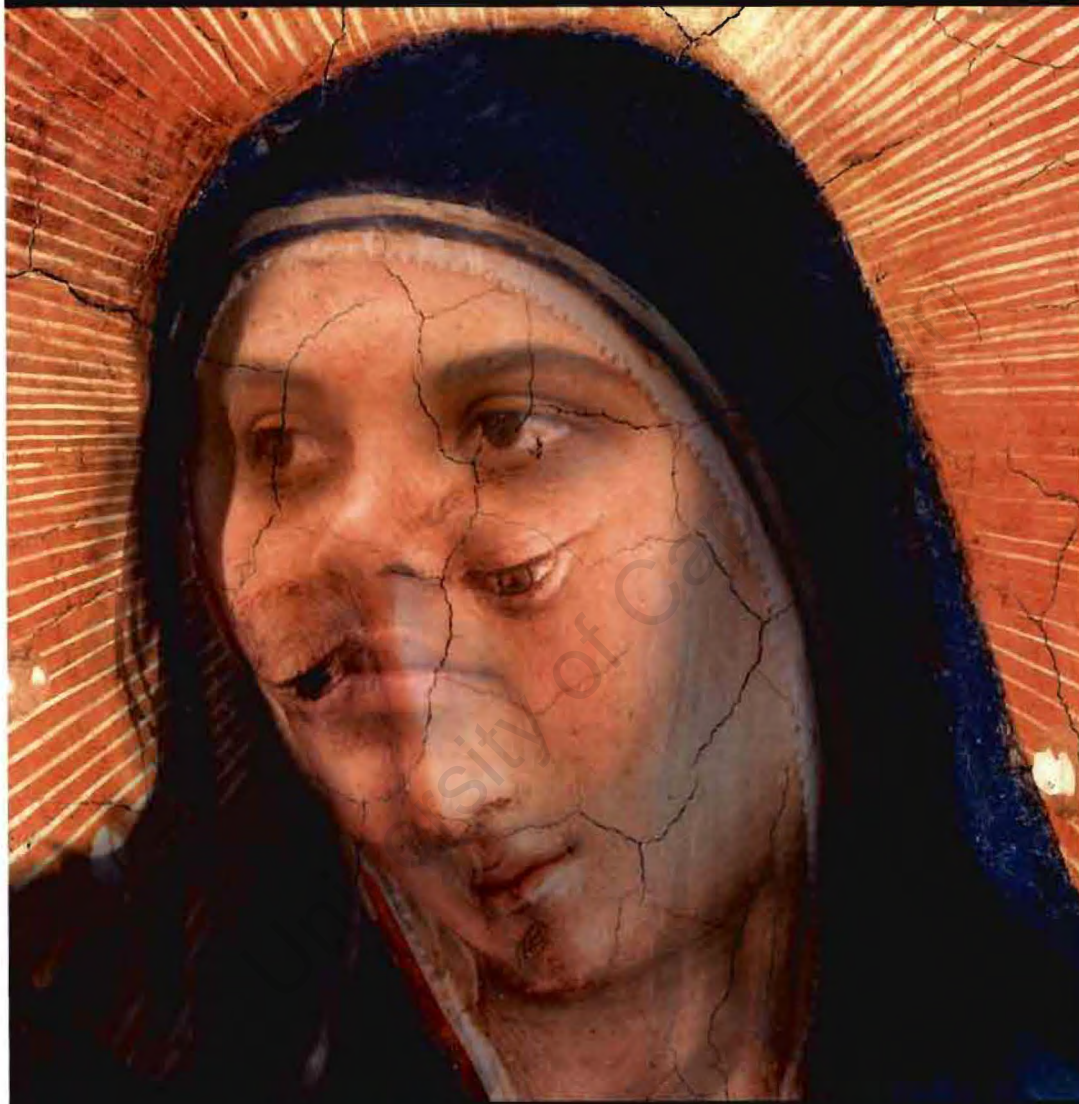
Ma



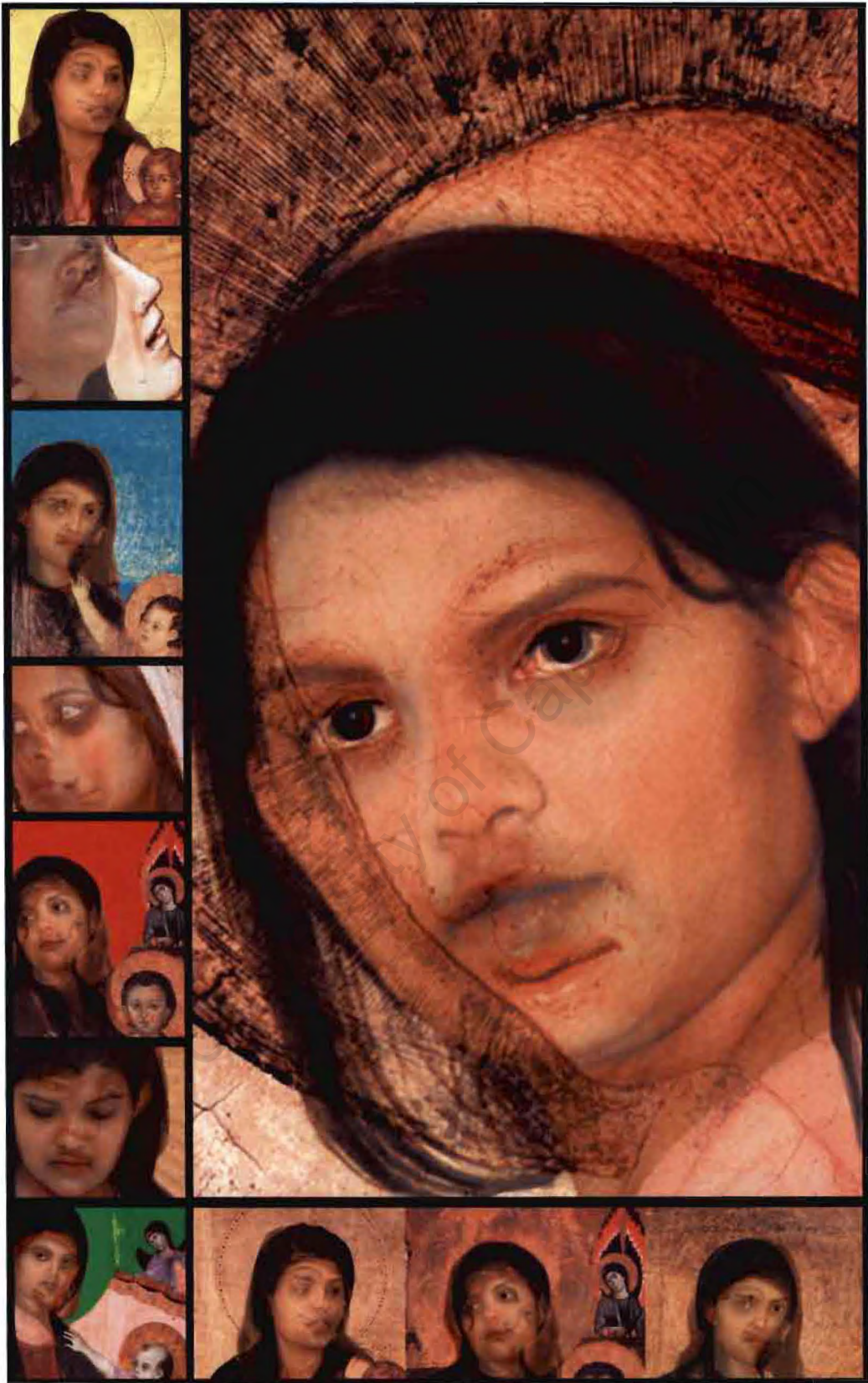
Serrware



Wesyar



Mother.



Caregiver



Prostitute

B. Commentaries

In this section, I discuss individual works produced for my practical body of work. I have tried to give the viewer an understanding of how looking at images of Mary has shaped my practical endeavours.

Hindu Images

I chose to merge the Hindu religious images with the Catholic religious images. I wanted to create theatrical images, as opposed to the Catholic images, which are very structured and play on my identification with the image of Mary. The theatricality is evident in the use of bright colours; the tones and the images focus attention on the centre of the image. The three prints focus on the Catholic image and especially on the faces of Mary and Mary Magdalene. The mixture of Catholic images and older Hindu images create a tension but also a harmony.

The titles of these Images are all in Gujarati as this is my mother tongue. I used Gujarati titles as I wanted to emphasise the ideal female portrayed in the images of Mary and furthermore wanted to comment on the roles of Hindu women being similar to the roles presented by the religious depictions of Mary. *Ma* means Mother and so the image opposing this image is the Catholic images entitled *mother*. This is seen through out the two series. *Serrware* is placed across from *Caregiver* and *Wesyar* is placed across from *Prostitute*.

In the Catholic images, of this series I have merged my face with the faces of

Mary and Mary Magdalene. I have embellished the image of Mary by giving Mary a headdress, and by incorporating my face into the image of Mary, but so as to look away from the viewer. This embellishment is further evident in the use of lavish colours, particularly gold.

I have also chosen to exaggerate some of the features of the original Hindu postcards. If one looks at the image entitled *Ma*, the rat in the right-hand corner has been enlarged. Hindus believe that Ganesh is the remover of obstacles and the patron of letters and learning, and the rat pictured next to Ganesh symbolises Ganesh's ability to destroy every obstacle. The rat also symbolises Atman or soul, which lives inside the hole called intellect which is in everyone's heart. I also enlarged the food offering, as in Hindu tradition the woman is the main caregiver, cooking for the family and teaching and taking care of the children.

In addition, the texture of the paper is clearly visible and is exaggerated to comment on the transient nature of the subject (Mary). This effect also links my images to the discussion on the comic as a lowbrow form of art. When these two forms of art (the religious icon and the lowbrow Hindu religious postcard) are combined, an interesting dynamic occurs.

In the image *Wesyar*, I chose to use Mary Magdalene instead of Mary, as she was often depicted as the opposite of Mary. Mary Magdalene is the patroness of Provence, and is also the saint of sinning and repentant woman. In this image, Titian depicted her crying and nude, but I have played on this by creating a shrine around her and clothing her in a lavish robe. This was done to give Mary Magdalene a

higher status, as she was considered a prostitute

Mary Magdalene is often pictured as penitent, frequently with the cross and skulls. I have taken this image further by introducing the rabbit, taken from another image by Titian entitled *Mary holding the rabbit*. Rabbits, especially white rabbits, symbolised chastity and purity in the Middle Ages. It was believed that female rabbits could conceive without males and thus the rabbit represented the Virgin Birth. I have introduced the rabbit and increased the number of skulls in order to confront the role of sinner that Mary Magdalene has been given.

Within these images, I have also included miniatures of the images in from my preliminary works and the Catholic images. I felt this was necessary, as I wanted to join these two series together. These inclusions also helped to enhance the tension between the two faiths and express the hybridism of my religious experience. One tension is that Christianity is exclusive while Hinduism is polytheistic.

My experience of hybridism, and the conflict between what I want to be and what I am meant to be, has led to my questioning of the image of Mary. In all these images, I have taken out the central figure of Krishna and replaced him with the image of a woman.

These large-format images achieve a hybrid state of the two religious images; consequently the combining of religious images creates simultaneously a harmony and tension between two very different religions. These images also speak of the issues raised earlier concerning the alienation I feel when looking at images of

Mary. It is through manipulating these images and placing my face onto Mary's that I challenge the image of Mary, and in so doing try to discover what Mary looked liked.

This hybrid series offers a different approach to looking at the image of Mary. It allows me to give voice to the issues surrounding women, and lets me engage with Hinduism and its images.

Catholic Images

These are the first images I made, and they concentrates on the Catholic image of Mary. In these images, I have made use of fresco paintings by Fra Angelico and Giotto and altarpieces by Cimabue. This series is my response to images of Mary that depict her as humble, fragile and demure. By incorporating my face into the image of Mary, I declare myself part of a religion that is exclusive.

Through these images, I create a visual language that differs from the original depiction of Mary. For example, in the image entitled *Mother*, I try to provide a clear way for the viewer to understand the mythical construction of Mary. It is a very structured image, as is true of the whole series. Through the use of tone and the placement of my face onto Mary's, I have tried to create ambiguity about what this woman looked like. By manipulating the opacity of the face and enhancing the lips or eyes, I challenge the ideal presented to the viewer.

Mary is often presented with her eyes lowered, never confronting the viewer (as in *Mother*). I wanted to mimic this demure attitude that Mary has been given, and so have also looked away from the viewer. This technique is

employed throughout the two series. The inclusion of both faces creates anticipation – and disappointment, as I look away and Mary lowers her eyes. In the other images I confront the viewer through looking at them. The strong use of orange and yellow in the images refers to bringing light, or shedding light onto the subject of Mary. This use of colour also suggests the effect of light on stained-glass windows, which is further enhanced by the silver-foil print. It also references comic images.

Contrary to the strategy used in the previous work, in *Prostitute* I have imposed my face in such a way that it looks directly at the viewer. The careful use of opacity when merging the faces further suggests a fundamental revision of the image of Mary. I tackle the constructed image of Mary through the use of exaggerated colour in this image. I have also enhanced my black hair so as to reflect the alienation I feel towards the image of Mary. Mary is always depicted as Caucasian, with long blonde or light hair.

Caregiver, demonstrates the influence of the comic on my art making. I have made use of flat colour and thick black lines to suggest a comic panel. As the comic is a lesser form of art, I use it to 'shake loose' the image of Mary.

In these images, I wanted to express my own awkwardness when looking at the images of Mary. Thus I have tried to recreate this feeling when placing my face onto Mary's. Throughout this series, I have manipulated the eyes of both Mary and myself.

The purpose of placing the images across from one another is to allow me to express the tension between the

religions, by creating and enhancing tension between the two series. *Mother* is placed across from the image entitled *Ma*. I chose to place these images across from one another as the Catholic image *Mother* is very structured – as seen in the panelling of the images and the lack of depth of field – as opposed to the manner in which the Hindu series is constructed. The use of silver foil also helps to reflect the Hindu image into the Catholic image, and vice versa, across the exhibition space.

The colour within the Catholic images suggests revelation and enlightenment – the revelation being my understanding of the image of Mary, and the finding of an appropriate image of Mary for myself. Furthermore, the image of Mary being placed as the central figure throughout the series shows a comfortable association with Mary, and suggests that she is more than the role given to her.

The two series work together to create a dialogue that speaks to my religious experience, and comments on how this experience has affected me. I have created two separate series that comment on separate issues but work together to speak about the image of Mary and the ideal presented through these images. With the inclusion of Hinduism, this process has given me the voice to speak.



CONCLUSION

My work speaks about the tension of my hybrid religious experience. My relation to the image of Mary is told through my images, and I am given the voice to speak about this relation through this production. By producing two series of prints, I have been able to focus on different issues regarding the religious depiction of Mary. The Hindu series has allowed me to include Hindu religious depictions. The images speak of the dynamic between myself and the subject matter, while cross-referencing the religions. I have tried to bring attention to the issues that affect and inform my practical work. These issues include the problems of depicting Mary and the implications of presenting the ideal female through such depictions.

The first chapter dealt with the theories that support the body of work. The first section examined the portrait and the problems of religious depictions. I wanted to investigate how the image of Mary has impacted on me through looking at the conventions of the genre of portraiture. In the second section, I discussed the subaltern and the postcolonial. I outlined the historical and theoretical aspects of the notion of hegemony and then looked closely at the subaltern. Through my work, I am

given the voice to speak about the issues above that affect me.

The second chapter dealt with contemporary references. I did not try to locate my work as exactly coinciding with the production of any of the artists referenced here. Instead, I discussed these artists as they relate to my work by referring to their subjects, technique and background influences.

The last section dealt with the production of the series. I discussed the comic as it impacted on the overall production of the series. I then outlined my choice of materials, provided information on the artists that I referenced in my prints and discussed the installation of the work. Finally, I discussed the two series and made specific reference to certain techniques used.

Through the production of this body of work, I have been able to give voice to the alienation I feel when looking at religious depictions of Mary. I have explored the inclusion of depictions of Mary into Hindu religious depictions, and have thereby tried to find a sense of simultaneous harmony and tension when these two religions are brought together, as they have been in my background. The six images create and present an uneasy depiction of Mary, which interrogates the constructed persona and gentleness of Mary, which I find tedious. I have made these images

so as to assess the woman in the image, and in this way try to regain a part of myself.

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PRELIMINARY WORKS.

Photographic Images

Comic Images

Halftone images

Neon signs

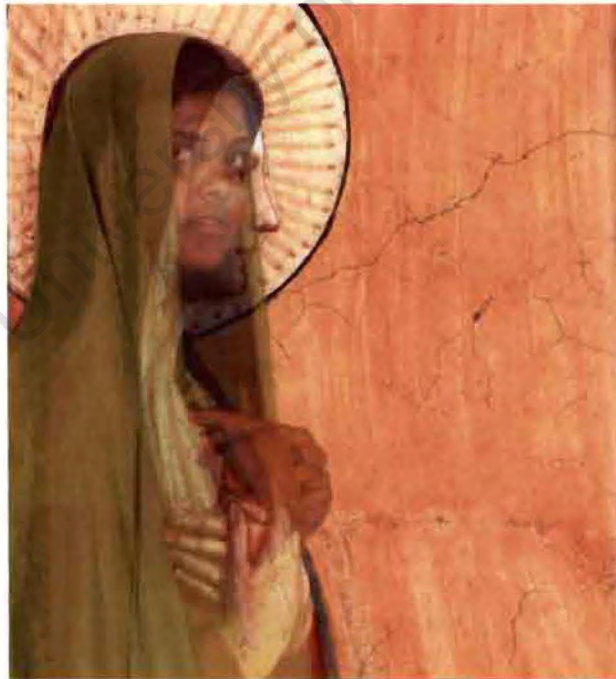
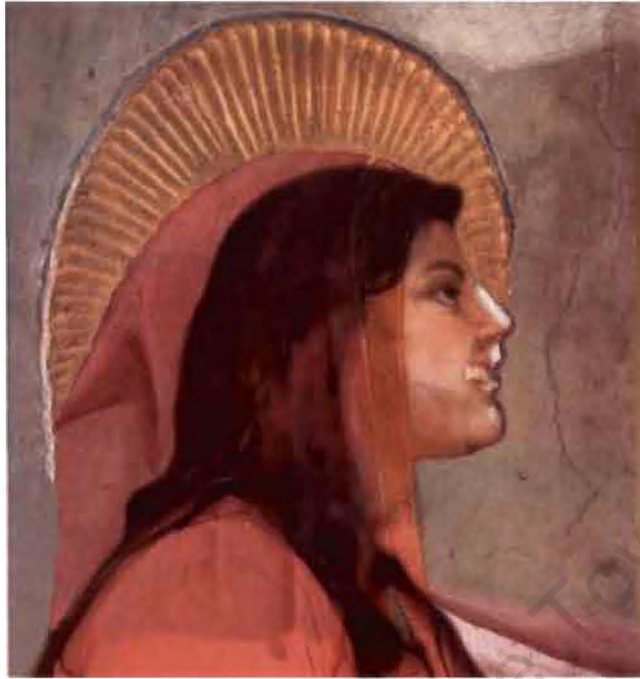
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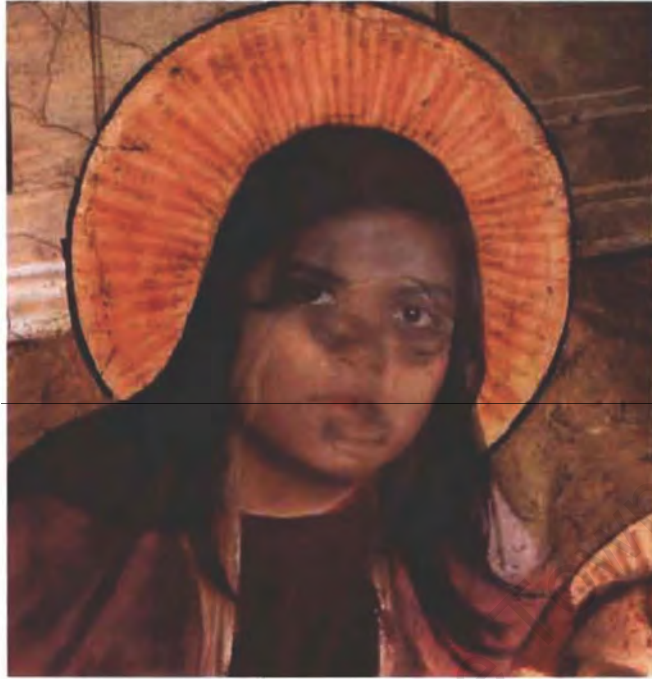
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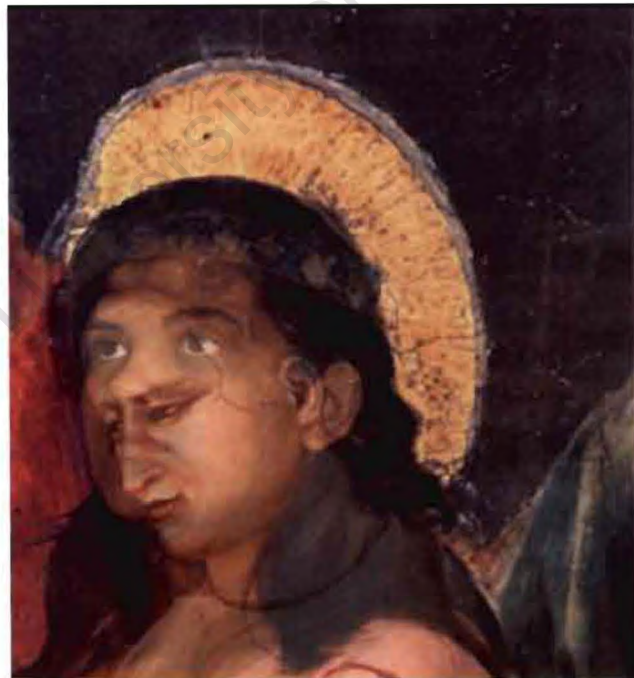
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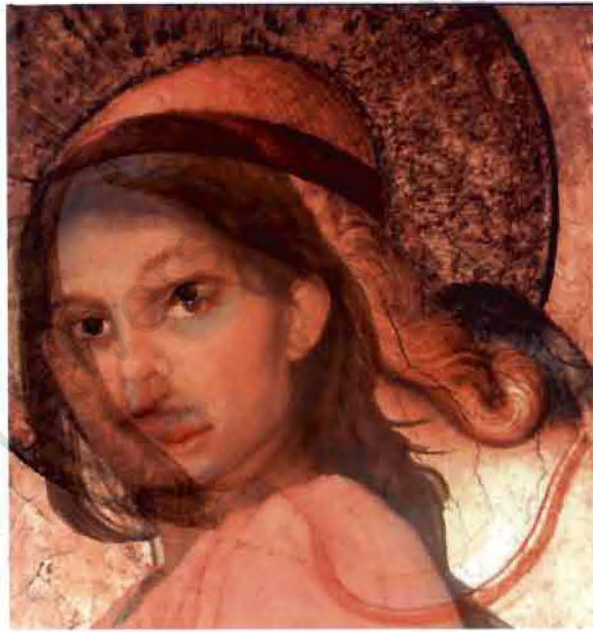
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cell 25

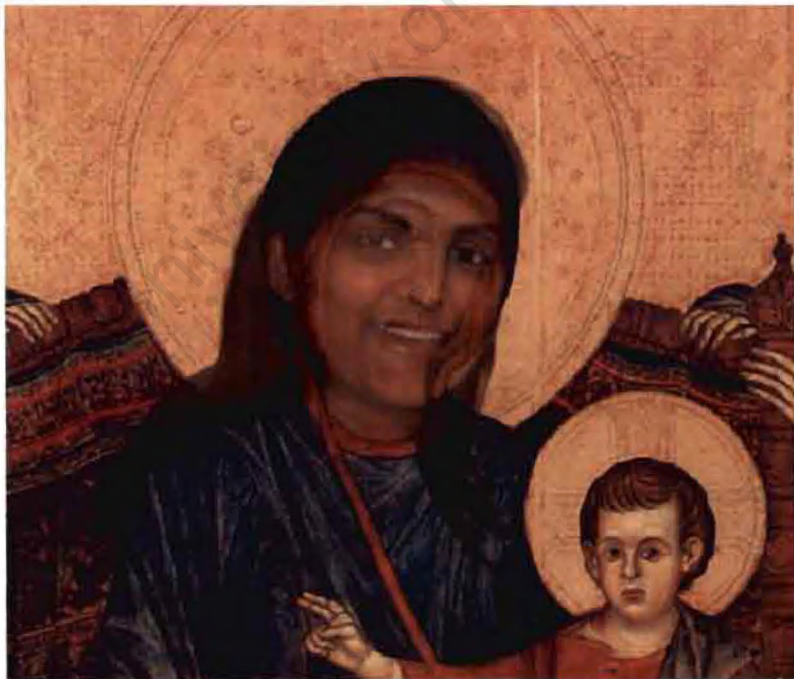
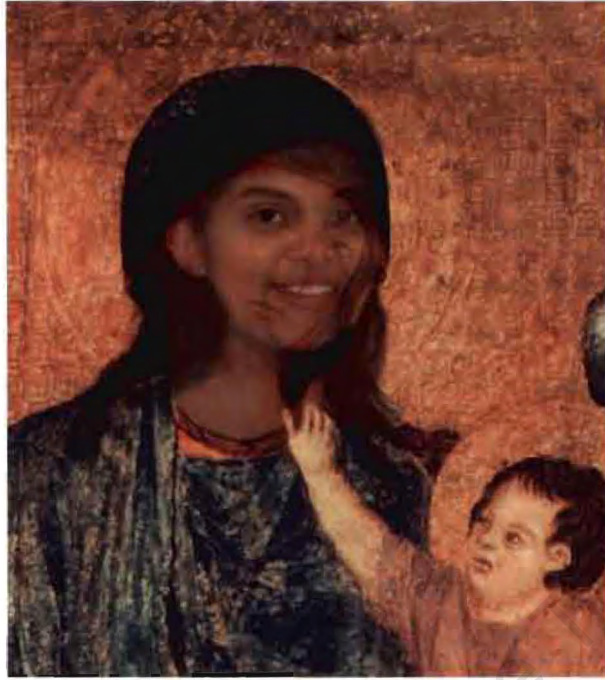


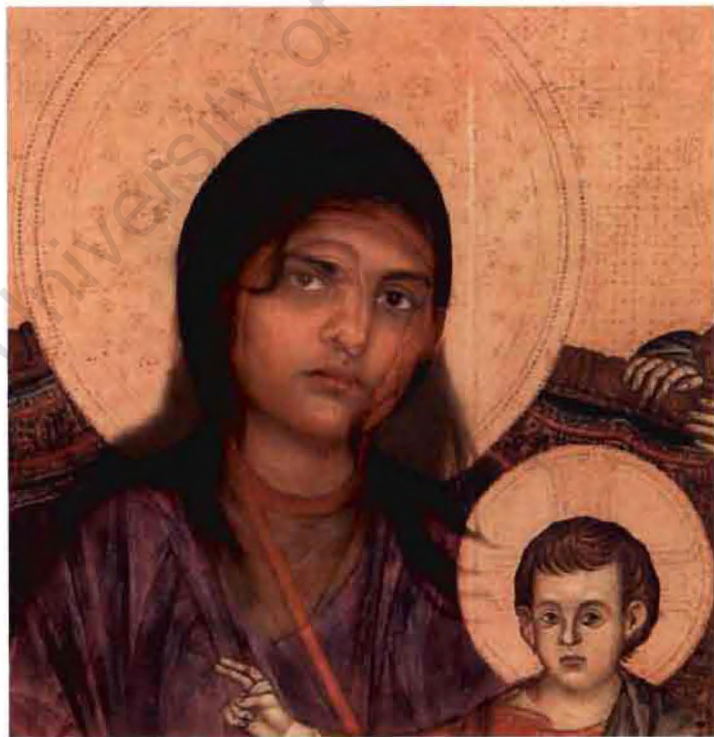
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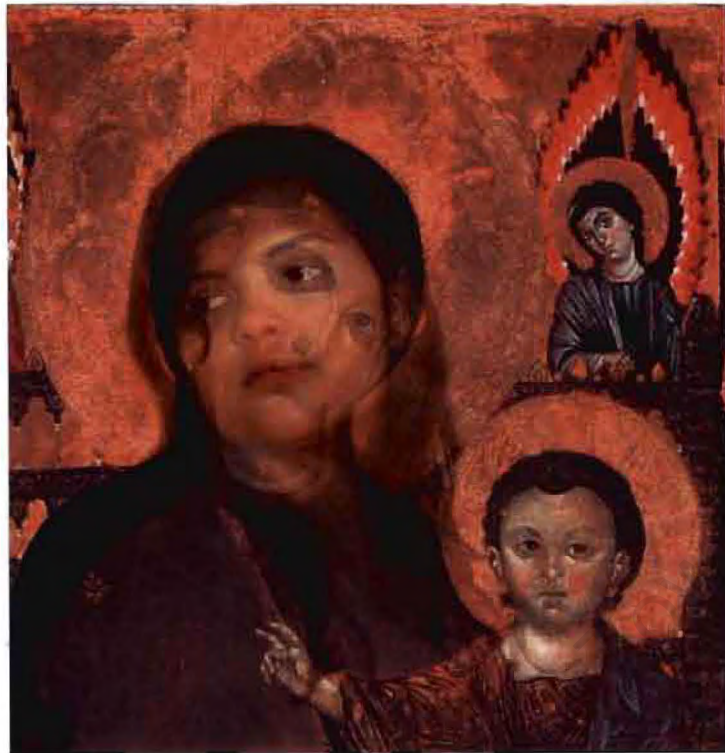












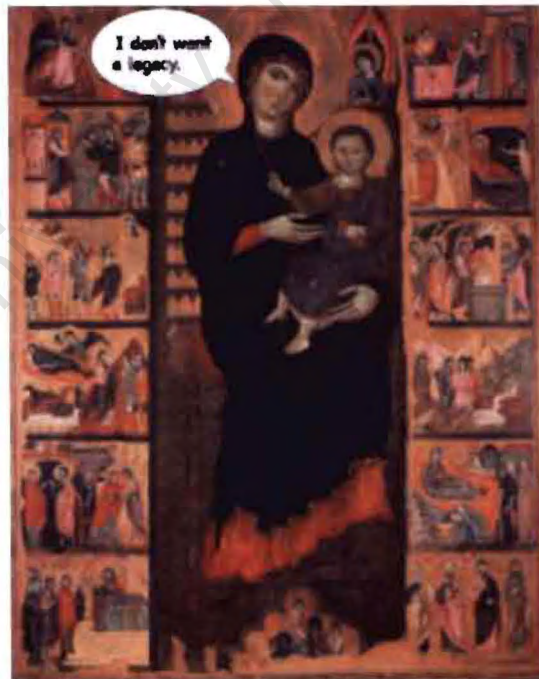


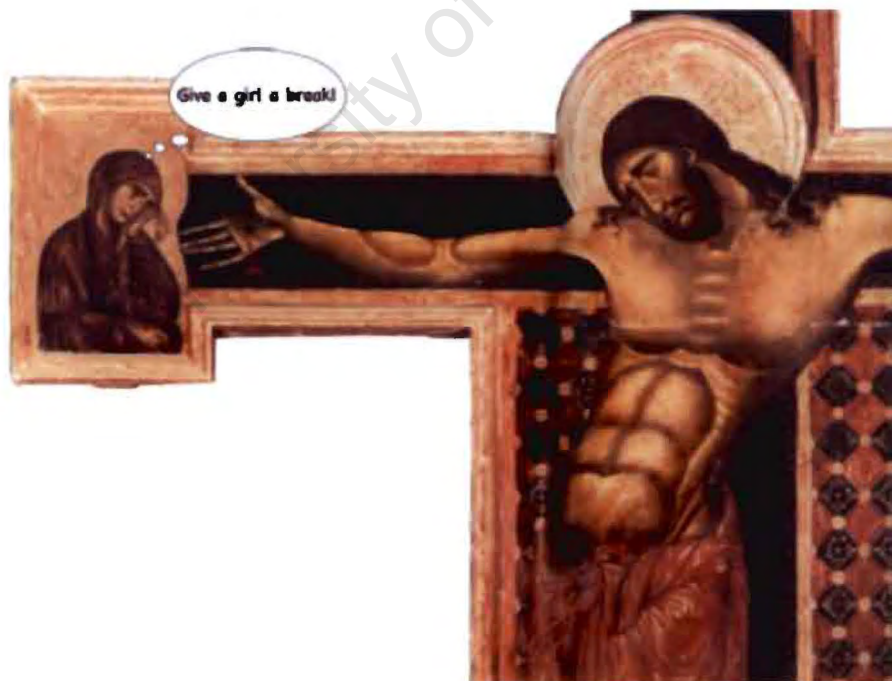
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Comic Images

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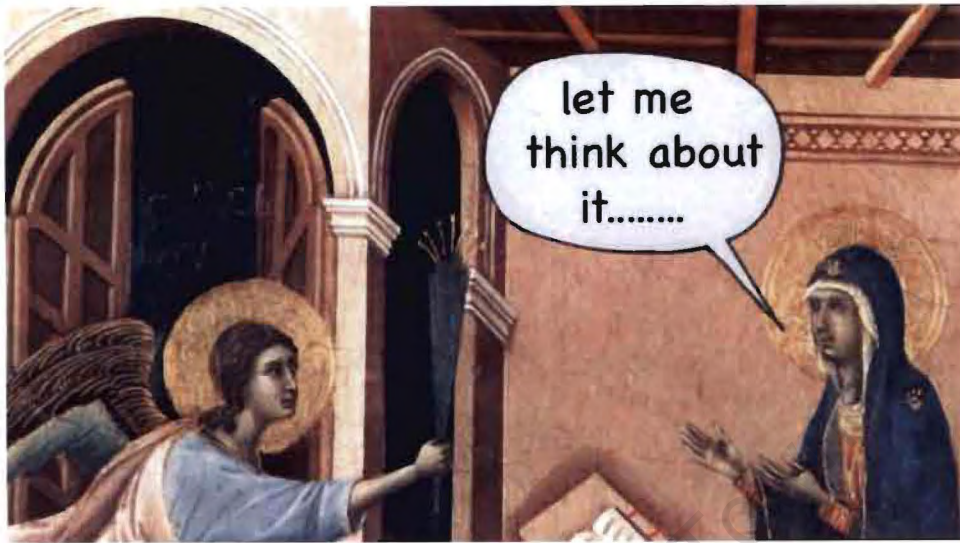








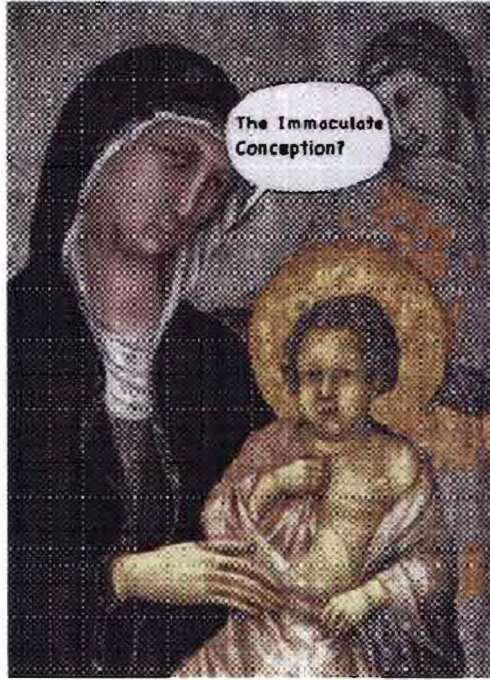


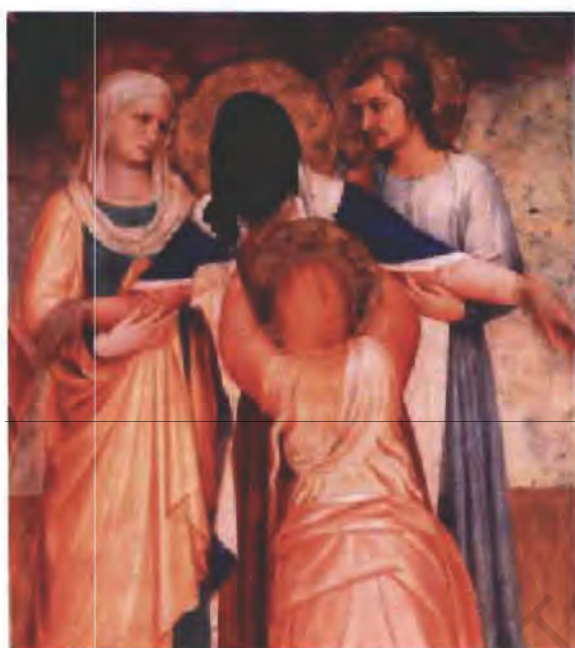


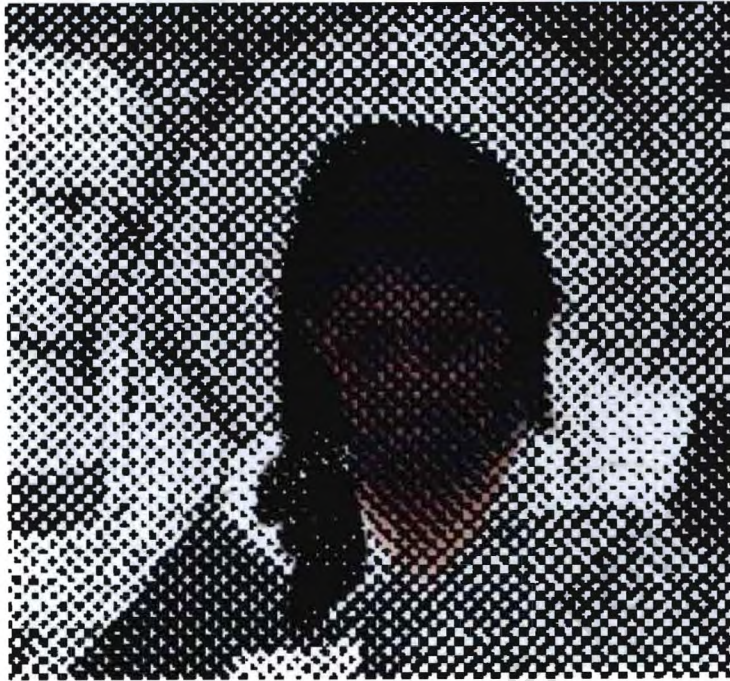
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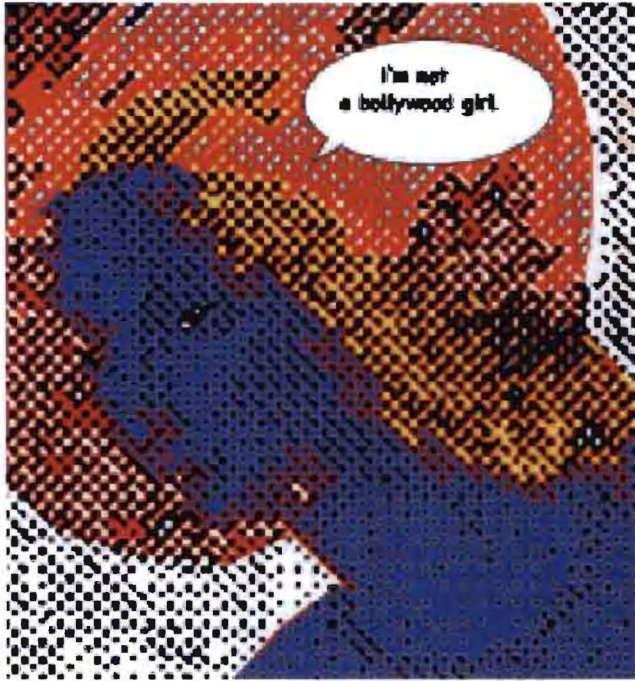
Halftone Images.

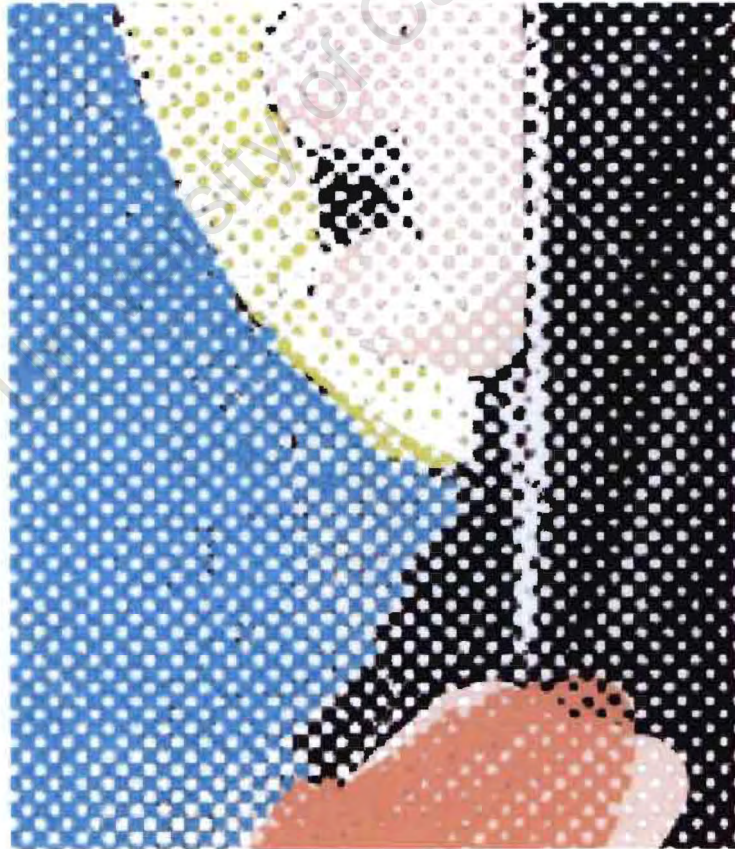
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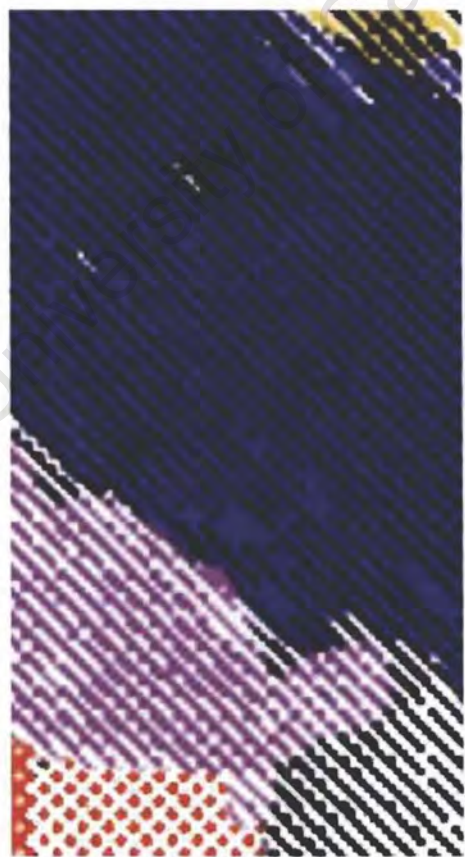


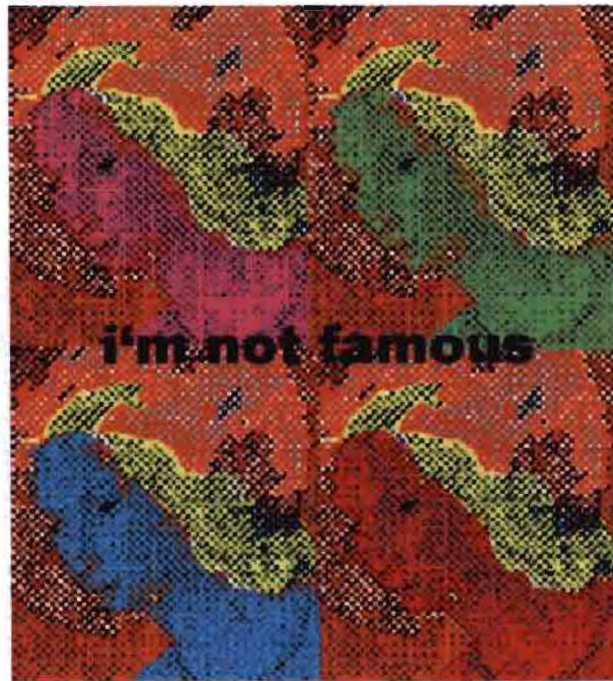






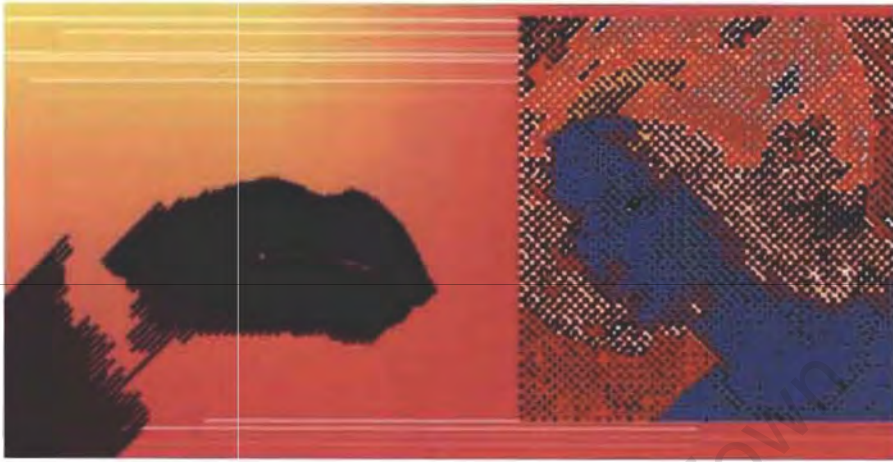


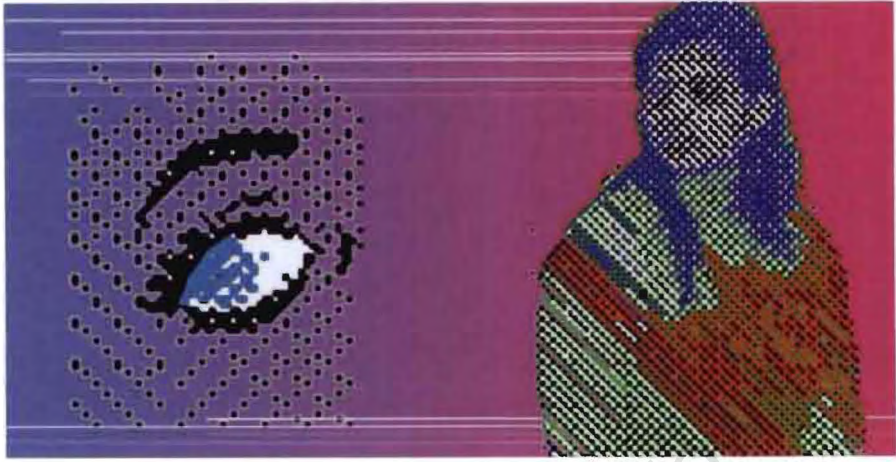




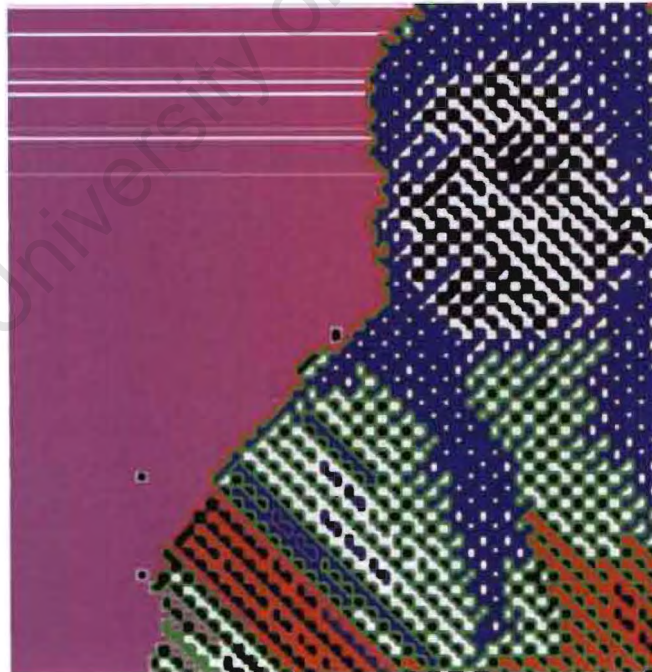


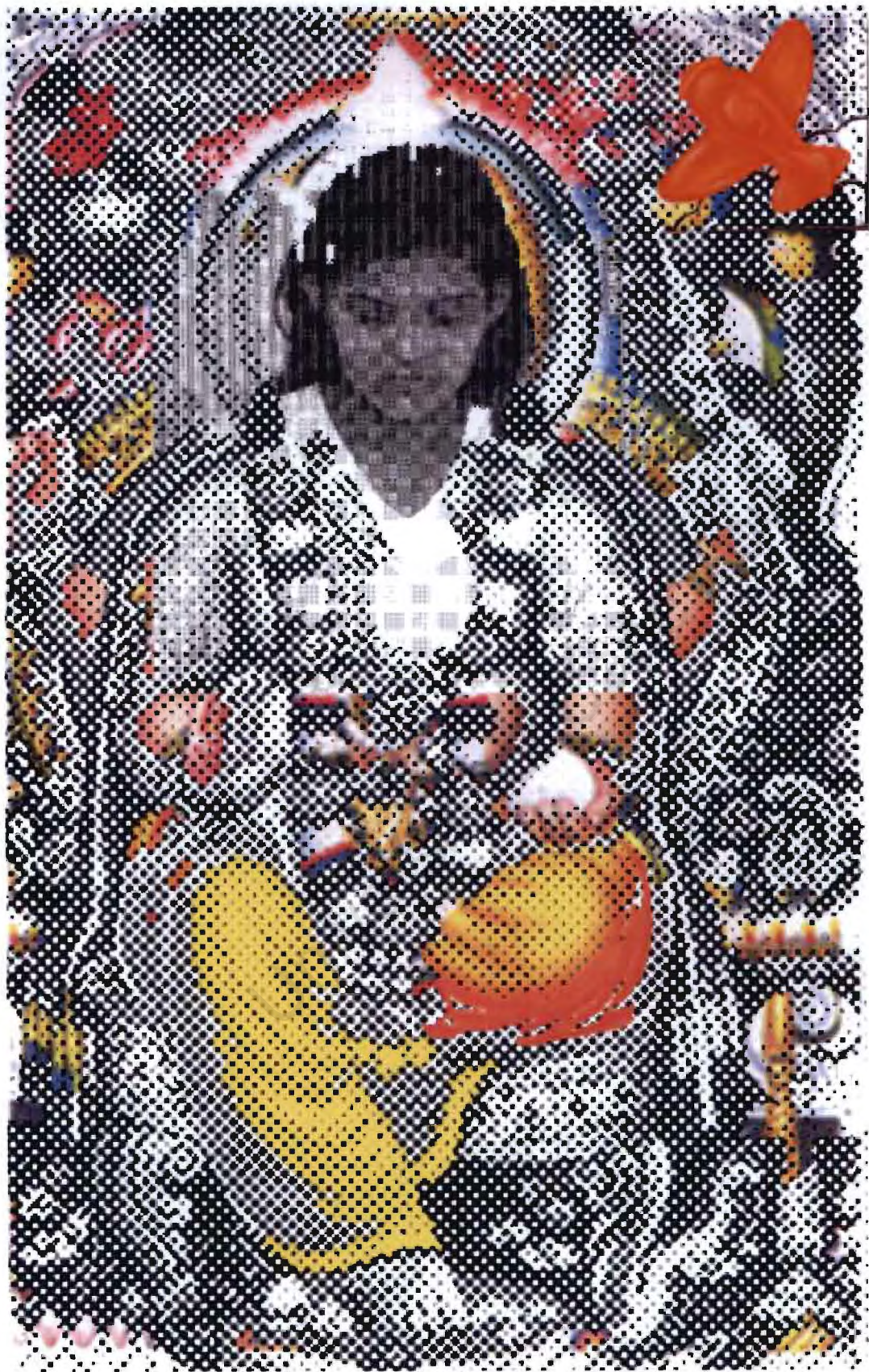


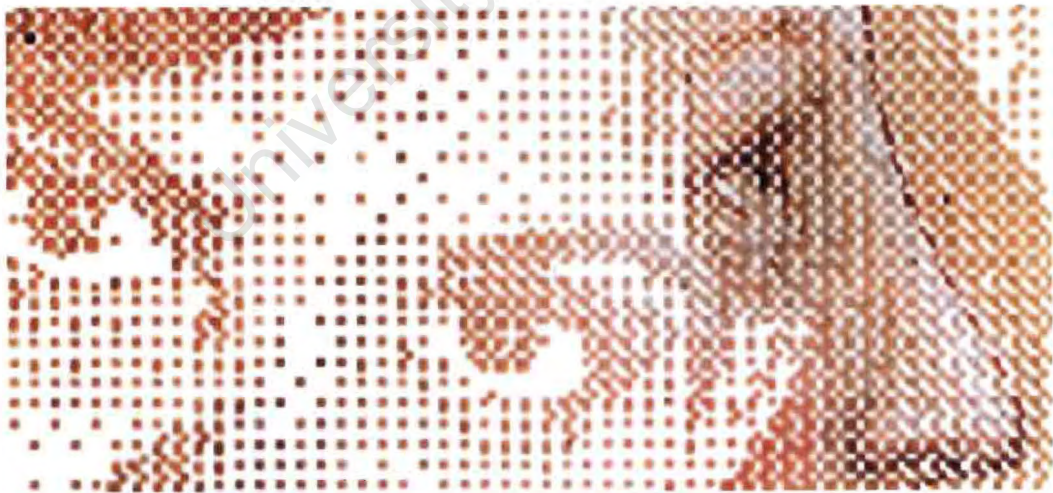
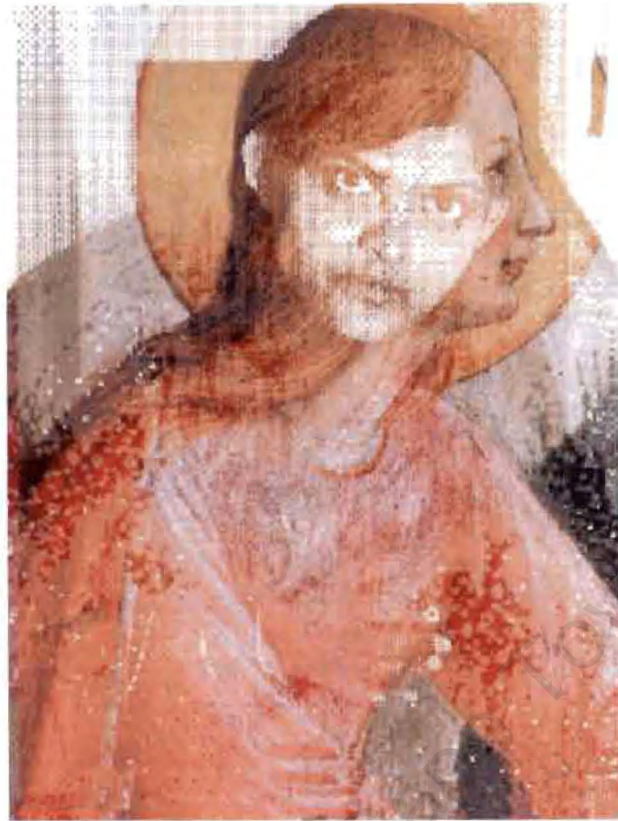




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Neon Signs

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I'm not a Bollywood girl.

I'm not a Bollywood girl.

I'm not a bollywood girl.

I'm not a bollywood girl.

I'm not a bollywood girl.

Our Mother.

Our Mother.

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Abuse Images

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