UNDER THE VEIL OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN: COLOR, SYMBOL, AND REVERENCE IN THE PRACTICE OF MARIAN ART

by

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This thesis is a documentation of the artistic process and research methods of one young Catholic artist trying to understand the implications of the ritual context of veils and veiling through making veils in the tradition of Catholic veiling. Through this work, she researches art depicting the Blessed Virgin Mary, historical accounts of Mary and the cult of Mary in Christianity, art historical accounts of the veil in specific, Catholic art and art theory, and Catholic post-capitalist political and economic thought. She accounts for the complexity of synthesizing these ideas into a single set of six hand woven chapel veils made based on the Catholic liturgical calendar.

Her work with these veils indicates the broader confluence of influences that an artist encounters and synthesizes and seeks to make that complexity more explicit. The artistic process is a process of reasoning that is unpredictable and fluid, even when it is constrained to a prompt or a material. This work shows that process laid bare for one artist as she works through the theoretical and practical aspects of her work.

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Table of Contents

Introduction 5
Chapter 1: Art History 8
Chapter 2: The Artistic Research Process 19
Chapter 3: Materials and Methods 26
Bibliography 38

Introduction

Veiling. To think of putting a covering over my head as I step into a church strikes a certain fear into my heart. Am I imitating some horribly outmoded and subordinating social order that actively seeks my subjugation for no reason other than my gender, my femininity? Am I delusional to think that because women have covered their heads in sacred spaces, in Catholic churches, for much of recorded history, that I might find something here? Surely it is in some sense a lust for pious expression, an extraordinary scrupulousness, a blind need for rules and order to tell me the right way to live my life. Catholic women have not veiled since the middle of the last century. My mother barely remembers veiling as a young girl. What use could I have for this redundant cloth that covers my brown curls? And yet, the cloth calls to me. The flowing robes of the Virgin Mary, swirling and enveloping me in my own imagination.

I was not taught to cover my hair in church. As a young girl at Catholic school, I was told, along with all the other children, to remove hats and hoods when walking into church as a sign of respect. I knelt in my red plaid skirt and white polo shirt and repeated the responses in English. I received communion in the palm of my left hand. I thought about power and clericalism and the parts of the Catechism I did not agree with. My friends debated the merits of Satanism and the backwardness of the Catholic church. I am, in many ways, a thoroughly modern young Catholic woman.

And yet, when I prayed in high school and into college, I liked to put my hood up, to cover myself with a blanket or wrap myself in a coat. I cannot account for this impulse. I never liked the feeling I got from women who veiled in churches I went to. I certainly didn't want to take vows as a religious sister, either. I never wanted the radical

traditionalist lifestyle that seemed to come with the veil. I didn't want five children or a husband who wore an immaculate suit to Mass, didn't want to spend my life as a caricature of a 1950s housewife. I didn't even like the way those veils looked with their synthetic lace in complex floral patterns, ghostly and floating in stiff undulations on perfectly ordered hair.

Catholic veiling has a unique origin among the Abrahamic religions. The only Biblical instruction about veiling comes from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in which he details the instructions for public worship and reads as follows:

> "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man is independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God" (1 Corinthians 11:2-16).

In many ways, this passage is vague and tangential, seeming to twist and turn on itself in explanation of the manifold relationships between men, women, and God. Man comes from woman and woman comes from man; the angels are invoked with no

apparent context. We are asked to “judge for yourselves.” As with most Biblical interpretation, there are many ways to read these words. The Church as an institution does not require women to cover their heads in Church, though she does not condemn the practice. I wanted to understand the realities of this practice in mind, body, and spirit.

And so, I decided to make it a project to veil. I wanted to see this practice in its context and feel it in my body. I was drawn to veiling in my prayer, especially through my devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, so I started with her, my namesake and queen.

Chapter 1: Art History

Christian tradition has a long history of imaging Mary in visual arts that spans centuries and continents. I decided to gather for myself a timeline of touchstone paintings and other images from which to draw inspiration and instruction. This is not a comprehensive list, nor does it encompass the many diverse styles and representations of Mary that have been made, even within the tradition of painting or oil painting in particular. When I started this process, I was interested in the historical styles of figurative depiction and the significance of color, but as I delved into the pieces, themes of historical dress and the archetypal feminine in Christian cosmology began to take precedence in my research.

"Our Lady with the Prophet" (Catacombs of Priscilla, Rome)

Marian art started with the start of organized Christianity, in the catacombs. Images of the Mother of Christ were painted by unknown artists throughout the catacombs of southern Europe in the places where Christians would gather for Mass or for community out of sight of the watchful eye of the Roman Empire. Immediately, Marian art was made not just for personal enjoyment or aesthetic pleasure, but to be part of the ritual context of liturgy.

"Our Lady of Vladimir" 1125

In the early Middle Ages, religious art tended to be highly formal and stylized, with many surreal shifts in perspective and proportion. The focus on stylization was particularly strong in the Eastern Church, now know as Orthodox Christianity, and the tradition of iconography continues to have a particularly pronounced influence on Orthodox spirituality. Innovations in symbol and the focus on the symbolic meaning of everything in these paintings—composition, form, color, pattern, placement, etc.—meant that these paintings took on their own kind of grammar and established certain patterns of recognition. Saints often held certain objects or were pictured in certain ways again and again so as to be recognizable to a general audience. Two colors began to be associated with Mary: red, which is present here in "Our Lady of Vladimir," and blue, which would become Mary's color, especially in the west.

"Coronation of the Virgin" El Greco, 1591

In the late Renaissance, a new form emerged from the studied and realistic neo-classicism of the High Renaissance. Mannerism, as it is now called by art historians, broke the careful forms of Michelangelo and Raphael into swirling and surreal depictions of both heaven and earth. El Greco was one of the most famous of these artists, and his distortions and melancholy have long been an inspiration to me. Though El Greco was revolutionary in his composition, he continued with the western tradition of dressing Mary in blue.

“The Young Virgin” Francisco de Zurbarán, 1632-33

Francisco de Zurbarán has two paintings of a young Mary from the seventeenth century that I wanted to include. According to Lesley Hazelton in her biography of Mary, our best dating suggests that Mary was around thirteen years old when she became pregnant with Jesus. Paintings of Mary as a young girl provide a more comprehensive view of Mary as a person.

“The Young Virgin Asleep” Francisco de Zurbarán, 1630-35

"Virgin and Child" Elizabetta Sirani, 1663

Elizabetta Sirani's "Virgin and Child," also from the seventeenth century, heralds a much more modern approach to Marian imagery. Sirani's approach pulls Mary and Jesus into the contemporary era: they are a comfortable family, casual and close. The two figures smile at each other unself-consciously, as if they are at home or another domestic setting. This image pulls the sacred into the domestic, the mundane, the everyday. Far from the highly stylized images like "Our Lady of Vladimir," Sirani's work invites the viewer to recall family, friends, and companions who resemble the figures in the painting. This mother and child are immediate and recognizable rather than archetypically abstracted.

"La Madonnina" Roberto Ferruzzi, 1897

Roberto Ferruzzi's "La Madonnina" or "Our Lady of the Streets," as it is also known, uses informal closeness to focus on the age and station of Mary as he brings her into the streets his contemporary context as a poor girl with an infant. Like Sirani,

Ferruzzi pulls Mary into a relatable scene that might connect with the viewer, to call to mind familiar memories and images. But by adding a perhaps more historically accurate age, Ferruzzi suggests not only an allyship of Mary and Jesus to the poor, but asks the viewer to see Mary in young, struggling mothers.

"Virgin and Child" Natalia Goncharova, 1911

Natalia Goncharova's "Virgin and Child" signals a return to stylization alongside the radical shifts in visual arts coming to the fore at the turn of the twentieth century. Goncharova, in line with the growing abstract art coming out of the avant-garde art circles of Europe, uses flat, bright colors and highly stylized shapes with bold and graphic lines. Goncharova incorporates the hierarchical and symbolic language of iconography fluidly into the new stylings of the modern European art scene, bridging the gap between tradition and innovation, secular and sacred, expression and stricture.

“Mary” and “Joseph” Evie Hone, Co. Tipperary, Ireland

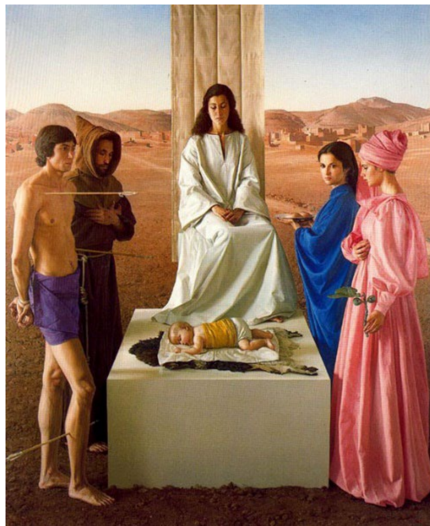
In the early twentieth century, reaction to increasing industrialization and urbanization consolidated in artistic movements focused on handmade, traditional production and the relationship between production, artistry, scale, and speed. Evie Hone, in this milieu, combined her cubist training with her faith as she became a stained-glass artist in the 1930s in Ireland. Her work can be seen today in churches and other buildings across Ireland and the United Kingdom. Like Goncharova, Hone incorporates ancient sensibilities of hierarchy, simplicity, and abstraction in her stained glass portrait of Mary. Her work is reminiscent of both medieval illuminated manuscripts and cubist painting. Her shapes are rounded and soft despite the rigid material she works with, and her colors are muted and earth-toned.

“Mary In a Cloak” Lily Yeats, 1930-49

Like Evie Hone, Lily Yeats was part of the Arts and Crafts reaction to industrialization. Yeats became particularly interested in traditional Irish craft—mainly embroidery—at a time when Ireland was fighting for independence from the British crown. Yeats’ work pulls reference from traditional imagery of Mary and new sensibilities of color into the slow, traditional medium of embroidery. Her blue becomes the central focus of her piece and covers the figure of Mary in a protective, warm embrace. Mary is mysterious, comforting, and traditional at the same time.

“Let it be done according to thy word and the word was made flesh” and “Stabat Mater” Adë Bethune, 1935

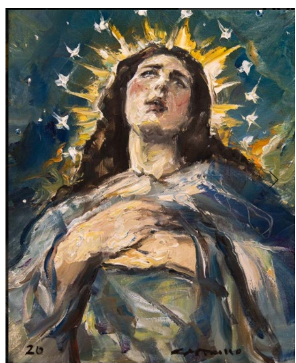
Adë Bethune, like the other modern artists I mentioned in this timeline, was responding to a world of industrialization and the new problems of industrialized labor and urbanization. Bethune was the illustrator for Dorothy Day's radical Catholic newspaper, *The Catholic Worker*, for which these illustrations were produced. Bethune's work is largely in black and white, made for cheap paper and printing methods. She works in an abstract, modern, graphic style, bringing Marian imagery and modern simplified forms together in an image of Mary.

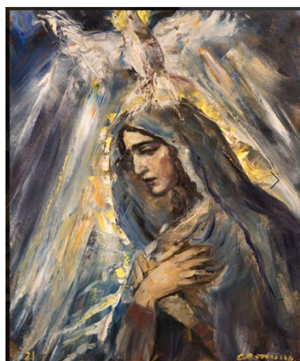

"Madonna" Claudio Bravo, 1979

Claudio Bravo's "Madonna" has been part of my life for a long time. His hyperrealist style brings a near-photographic level of detail to his figures and landscapes. The odd landscape transports the viewer to an uncertain place where saints from different times (left to right: St. Sebastian, St. Francis, St. Agatha, St. Lucy) meet the Mother of God and the Child Jesus. Mary presides over the scene in the white of purity, looking calmly down on her sleeping Son. Bravo uses recognizable iconography to indicate the identity of his saints, in keeping with Christian image tradition.

"The Red Magnificat" Br. Emmaus O'Herlihy, OSB, 2018

Br. Emmaus O'Herlihy is a working artist and Benedictine monk whose work with the sacred body has been incredibly meaningful to me. His figures emerge from a nebulous mist, as if the viewer is peering through the veil, catching a glimpse of figures just outside the scope of this world. "The Red Magnificat" in particular also brings a political element into the contemplative setting of the piece. Br. O'Herlihy paints Mary as a young indigenous Canadian, and paints her red, the color used today to raise awareness for missing and murdered indigenous women in the US and Canada. Like "La Madonnina," "The Red Magnificat" invites the viewer to consider the relationship between the Queen of Heaven and a young girl of an especially vulnerable population.


"Immaculatum Mariae Virginis III" José Luis Castrillo, 2020


"Saint Mary Receiving Grace" José Luis Castrillo, 2021

Finally, I will end with another working artist whose prolific hand is quite practiced in the language and movement of the image of Mary: José Luis Castrillo. Castrillo's work is largely gestural, using large, energetic brushstrokes and exaggerated lighting. He uses the color blue liberally in his images of Mary, and often incorporates elements from Revelations typically tied to Mary, such as her crown of stars. Mary is a figure of power and of softness, and this paradox prominently and often appears in Castrillo's work.

The richness and diversity of these images of Mary bring together associations historical and contemporary, all clothed in swirling, draping, flowing veils. Mary embodies the veil, the filter through which the divine (Jesus) entered the corporeal world. Mary is talking to angels, she is a mother holding a new life, she mourns her child's death, and she is crowned Queen of Heaven. The veil indicates her identity and conceals her visage, showing both who she is individually and concealing her individuality to show her ritual role. Many of these paintings even employ an abstracted style that provides another layer of veiling between the viewer and the subject. Even in seeing her, we see her though a very obvious filter.

Chapter 2: The Artistic Research Process

With this foundation in Marian imagery, I began to think more broadly about the artistic process I was using in my inquiry into veiling. I work from a Christian, specifically Catholic Western European and American tradition, and I read theory in this tradition to set out more specifically and consciously the aesthetic sensibilities that flow from that tradition. Catholicism is a diverse religion full of individual, local, and cultural differences in its visual aesthetics. I tend to work most closely from my own heritage, from various European Catholic immigrant populations that settled in America in the mid to late 1800s. I do not exclude influences from outside this tradition, but I want to be transparent about who I am and with what stories I come to this project steeped in. I am a child of these people and ideas, and I always find it important to draw out the story around what I am participating in before I can properly convey what I have to say.

In a similar vein, I would like also to bring in C.S. Lewis's research approach laid out by Rachel Fulton Brown in *Mary and the Art of Prayer*: "For too long, our scholarship has privileged those who would look *at* devotion as something to be explained from the outside, rather than allowing ourselves to look *along* devotion to see what the devout might see" (Brown xxix). In my research as an artist, I find it compelling to look "along" the practices and histories I participate in, attempting to see beauty from the inside as Lewis suggests. This does not preclude my own critical lens, rather increasing the nuances I encounter, thus leading me to more in-depth analyses.

I started with J. R. R. Tolkien, the famous fantasy author of *Lord of the Rings*. I looked to Tolkien in his lecture "On Fairy-Stories," in which he outlines the function of

the fairy-tale in the human psyche and the implications of these functions on the artistic process of building what he calls a "secondary world." Tolkien's idea of world-building, or an artist's creation, flows from his understanding of Creation by an ultimate Artist or Creator, namely the Christian God. The artist, as made in *imago Dei*, (in the image of God,) wishes to create like God does. However, he cannot. He is human, not divine, and his creations are limited to the human realm. But within that human realm, he can build small "secondary worlds" that through his artistry can illuminate the real world with their strangenesses and similarities. The part of the artist is to do his best to illustrate his observation of reality through his media of choice, and in so doing make apprehensible his mode of understanding. This, he seeks to do with his mind, body, and soul, fulfilling his innate desire to imitate his Creator through "secondary" creation. Tolkien's view of the artist is ever with me as I work through artistic problems, reminding me of both my limited creative power and the immensity of possibility available in whatever "secondary world" I might find myself creating.

From Tolkien, I moved to Eugene McCarraher, who is a contemporary historian and writer. His recent book, *The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity,* was helpful for me in putting Tolkien's more spiritual artistic concerns in a political context. *The Enchantments of Mammon* traces the history of capitalist political thought through a sacramental, Romantic lens. McCarraher's work on the Arts and Crafts movement was particularly compelling to me as it speaks directly to the liturgical and ritual aspects of craft and art objects. In fact, some of the artists from the movement viewed "handicraft as a 'religious problem,'" an idea that came from a "belief that the fusion of beauty, pleasure, and character had been ordained by 'a most

kind Providence'" (McCarraher 312-313). Fundamentally, this movement that rebelled against the mechanization of hand craft and sought to revitalize slower, more storied forms of manufacture recognized religious concerns at the heart of its struggle. The movement "depicted industrial work and technology as an evil liturgy, and they feared that the extension of human power over nature led to anomie, animosity, and violence" (McCarraher 312). Not only did this movement see industrialization as a spiritual problem, it saw industrial gestures as particular perversions of good and necessary ritual. The increasingly industrial technology fueled by capitalism became the ritual objects of capitalism, instructing its faithful in the theology of profit as surely as stained-glass windows in cathedrals instruct churchgoers in Bible stories.

Inscribed in these heated and frantic warnings from the Arts and Crafts movement is a fundamental respect for the power of material culture as an opportunity for public reasoning. For as well as expressing the technology and philosophy by which they were produced, textiles from industrial machines express "the eternal desire for material beatitude: the body rescued and transfigured, not only from decay but also from the everyday doom of banality" (McCarraher 309). There are complex stories in every textile that express the basic human needs both for covering and for expression of ideas. This movement recognized the potential for co-optation that increasing industrialization would make traditional forms of folk expression vulnerable to and the power that these new technologies would have over the people who interact with them or their products. In their concern over this power, the Arts and Crafts thinkers maintained an "ancient religious conviction that beauty is a sign of metaphysical enchantment, a countenance of the transcendent" (McCarraher 309). If beauty can be

co-opted to serve industrial aims, artistic beauty can change from organic enchantment to mechanical hypnosis that ultimately works to serve the ecosystem of capitalism rather than to serve human flourishing. McCarraher argues that we are living in the aftermath of this particular co-optation, where the

> "results are, by now, depressingly familiar: the greatest concentration of wealth among the top 1 percent since the early twentieth century; stagnant real wages for the past three decades, resulting in increased reliance on debt for health care, housing, and education; precarious employment, diminishing benefits, and shabbier working conditions; the potential elimination of whole classes of employment by automated production technology; and intensifying pressure for productivity on workers reminded every day of their utter dispensability" (McCarraher 664).

Now, from within this world led by technological machinery rather than human hearts, we must re-organize ourselves to understand beauty in the face of immanent destruction and manufactured scarcity we have achieved through extractive industrial processes driven by the theological doctrines of capitalist profit structures and material culture. In this thesis, I was interested in working with the slow hand-craft of weaving to see how this process could form my work toward the perfectly innocent beauty Mary represents, even in this increasingly mechanized world.

With this political context, I returned to the Catholic tradition of Marian art to try to integrate and understand these ideas into the spiritual and material concerns of my thesis in specific. Returning to Paul's description of the ritual laws for veiling, I remembered the line, "For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels." (1 Corinthians 11:10). The content of this symbol is particularly powerful in the ritual context and brings out what I find most particularly interesting in this passage: the ritual setting of veiling. Katherine Osenga echoes this

same idea in her definitive study of Marian veils in art history: "In Christianity, the veiling of women was required only in prayer, and only custom, not religious practice required women to be veiled in public" (Osenga 45). Paul asks women to veil not for the common reasons we might assume as modern readers, but for ritual, archetypal reasons intrinsic to the ritual spaces the veiling takes place in. Women are not asked to cover their heads because they are inferior or because their bodies might tempt someone to sin. They are asked to cover their heads to indicate their status as feminine, to assert their selfhood through gender in its archetypal, ritual context. The veil is a declaration of femininity as it relates to masculinity, femininity as it relates to femininity, femininity as it relates to angels, to Christ, to God. This statement is only required in the ritual context because it serves a particular instructive function as part of the ritual. Outside the ritual, other concerns prevail and no demand is made to veil.

Mary, as the most prominent woman in Christian tradition, has a complex and instructive relationship to her veil. *Her Veil: The Story of the Marian Veil in Art History from the Catacombs up until the Reformation* by Katherine Osenga traces this relationship through art history. Osenga remarks on the uniqueness of Christian veiling in comparison to Islamic and Jewish traditions of veiling, which primarily are concerned with material modesty, through Mary's veil in Byzantine art where "the Marian veil expands to become a symbol of her motherhood and her protective power, indeed a power that could defeat the Islamic Empire" (Osenga 46). Mary's veil is a symbol of her various stations, encompassing mother, protectress, and raw power. The veil as a covering is used not to hide, but to show a particular reality about this most

extraordinary woman: that she was the Mother of God, and thus spiritually powerful. Her spiritual power extended into her veil for her devotees of the Middle Ages who first started to venerate relics of her veil in churches. These relics were not venerated for their inherent qualities of cloth, but because of the person who wore the veil (Osenga 65). Relics of this sort (objects handled consistently by a saint, such as clothing) are called second-class relics. They are second only to parts of a saint's actual body and are venerated in devotion to the spirit of God that is expressed through the saint. Relics of Mary are particularly venerated because Mary's position is above that of other saints, she having carried God in her womb. This raw spiritual power of Mary has been tempered by various cultural and political projects over the course of Christian history, leaving many with the idea that Mary is a quiet, meek woman without much of her own agency. Osenga credits the Counter-Reformation with this image in Catholic spaces, saying that really, "Mary was a mixture of two realities: heaven and earth, power and humility. She is not one or the other, but both at the same time, and this is why she was, and is, so popular and so necessary for women" (Osenga 109). Mary and her veil are intrinsically linked, and her exalted position as the Mother of God provides an example in the tradition of the height of the archetypal feminine that the veil represents.

A veil used for prayer, in a Catholic worldview, would be considered a sacramental. Sacramentals are objects used for particular purpose in ritual, both formal and casual, that orient the mind to God. In theory, this could be almost any object, though traditionally objects like rosaries, veils, holy medals, and scapulars have become the most popular and obvious kinds of sacramentals. In its function as a sacramental, a veil becomes not just an object, but part of the world around us that can, to use a crude

analogy, “conduct” grace. Humans are bound by material; our flesh is part of who we are and because of this we need to construct physical things to even begin to understand abstractions and divine movements. So, the veil that I wanted to make would need to have not only beauty to the weaver’s eye in the pattern of warp and weft, in the stiffness or flowing movement of drape, but to have the beauty of functionality as all sacramentals and ritual objects have. Intrinsic to sacramentality is a reflection of the abundance of nature that is opposed to the modern construction of a world of scarcity in which we are all on the brink of extinction through climate change, wage stagnation and the accumulation of un-disposable trash objects. As McCarraher writes, nature “is not a stingy and punitive antagonist, but rather a fruitful, ever-evolving habitat, open to the rational and reactive participation of humanity in its manifold generosity” (675-676). These material concerns are also spiritual and political. They involve the whole of human experience, as does all spiritual ritual. There is, perhaps, an aura to objects touched by ritual. These objects are kept safe, they are treated alternately as utilitarian and precious; they are moved intentionally to reflect meaning. My veils were to become ritual objects rather than art pieces for a gallery and so I wanted to understand how my artistic decisions needed to be made in line with that outcome.

Chapter 3: Materials and Methods

I began my research in the painting studio. I knew I wanted to work in weaving, but I first had to learn a bit more about how to weave, so I started where I had more reference points of technique. I was just getting familiar with oil paints as a medium, and I find painting to be a great space for imagination, especially in color. I was learning that Mary is traditionally depicted in two colors in the European artistic tradition I was looking to: blue and red. In western Europe, she is generally wearing a pink robe and a blue mantle while in eastern Europe her mantle is red. Having western European familial ties, I was a little more unfamiliar with the red color and so decided to explore it in a depiction of Our Lady of Sorrows. Our Lady of Sorrows is a particular devotion to Mary in her grief following her Son's death. I pictured her with the traditional seven swords piercing her heart and the words of the "Salve Regina," a well-known traditional prayer. This painting was an exercise in understanding the image tradition through participation. I started seeing Mary in red, the color of blood, of birth, and of martyrdom. This image was foundational to my continued understanding of this project.

After this painting, I did an ethnographic study of the practice of Eucharistic Adoration, during which time I attended Adoration once a week for a couple of months. Adoration is a traditional prayer practice of silent prayer before the Eucharist that is generally done for approximately an hour. During these sessions, I offered my hands to Jesus and Mary, hoping for divine help in understanding how to move forward with the project. I began to pray before the Marian altar most Sundays after Mass, just basking in

her gaze from the Byzantine-style icon mounted above the altar. I was praying for guidance, unsure of how to proceed.

I learned to weave, throwing the shuttle through treadle sequences for a whole term, just trying to understand the movement of thread in relation to the image of Mary herself spinning and weaving that has hundreds of variations in word and brushstroke throughout history. I had no idea how I could possibly translate these ideas into cloth.

Jovencio de la Paz, my thesis advisor, suggested that I look closely at the color blue, the color traditionally associated with Mary. I made a playlist of songs about blueness. I went for walks and listened to this. I bought blue thread. I bought blue paint. I made an entirely blue and purple painting. I knit blue squares. Finally, I decided to make myself a tapestry loom out of the back of a canvas and a box of nails. I made a small tapestry of Mary on this that I was completely embarrassed to have shown to anyone. I was really stuck.

Then Ash Wednesday began looming in the distance and I started to think about my Lenten discipline. Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the late winter fasting season that precedes Easter. I thought about making a commitment to veil at Mass. I did not want to do this because of the social awkwardness of the gesture, but a friend asked me about what I was doing for Lent and I felt I had to commit. It popped into my mind that veiling used the grammar that I had been learning in my weaving class and showed the image of Mary not in the cloth itself, but in the woman who wears the cloth. That was certainly interesting to me.

My first time walking into Mass with a scarf wrapped over my head was overwhelming. Ash Wednesday Mass was packed and I felt extremely awkward. I

couldn't leave fast enough when Mass ended. The longer I did it, the better it was, especially when I dug up an old bandana that stayed put when I moved my head. I noticed, as I often do, that putting a cloth over my head changes the way that I pray. I think it makes me feel more connected to my interior experience in some way, focusing me on my own connection to the divine, almost honing my perception in that direction. If I veil in prayer, I normally do it alone, so it was weird to have that perceptive change as I prayed with other people.

Halfway through Lent, I went down to Berkely, California to visit my brother, Br. Anselm Dominic, who is a Dominican religious brother in seminary to become a priest. He was very supportive of my Lenten experiment in veiling and together we reasoned through the chapter in Paul's letter to the Corinthians where veiling is mentioned with the help of the biblical glosses he studies. Our conversation gave me a starting point for understanding the unique position of Christian feminine veiling as a practice for ritual rather than daily life and the context of veiling for men, women, and objects in Christian ritual. Around this time, I also re-discovered my devotion to the apparition of Our Lady Untier of Knots and began wearing a holy medal of this apparition of Mary in the studio, hoping that Mary who unties knots of worry and fear might also help me as a weaver with knots of a much more material aspect.

I came back to Eugene with new insights and ready to start my project. Because I now understood veiling as primarily a ritual gesture, I wanted to place my veils specifically in a ritual context. I chose to make six veils that correspond to the major seasons of the Catholic liturgical year. The liturgical year starts in late fall with Advent, moving, in order through the seasons of Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent, Easter and

Ordinary Time. Each of these seasons is assigned a color which is used throughout the season in altar cloths, vestments, and other church decoration. For Ordinary Time the color is green, for Advent and Lent the color is purple, and for Christmas and Easter the colors are white and gold. Green gives Ordinary Time the connotation of growth, and regularity. Purple, the color of wealth, is given to the seasons of fasting, and white and gold, or purity and glory, are given to the seasons of rejoicing and celebration.

Because these color groupings have roughly one fall/winter and one spring/summer season, I decided to make two veils for each color, one in wool and one in cotton. Each color would also use the same weave structure in both materials. Built into this consideration was the comparison of material and the weave structures across materials. I wanted the veils to reflect the liturgical season they were made for, to weave the resonance of the season into the structure of the fabric, so I was very careful with my planning for each veil. Generally, I wanted a sense of permeability and delicacy. In conversation with Jovencio, I settled on a gauze spacing to mimic the properties of lace without the direct connotation of wealth or mass-production. The spacing would create textiles with large gaps between threads that also retained enough structure to serve as a functional garment, bringing to the fore the tension between transparency and opacity a veil indicates.

Within this spacing limit, I was able to work with different weave structures to create different surface textures for each pair of seasons that spoke to the ritual character of each. For Ordinary Time, I chose a simple twill structure. The twill I chose was a very basic, progressive twill similar to that often used in the construction of utility fabrics like denim, but through the increase of spacing, still acted as a gauze. Ordinary

Time, in Catholic liturgy, is the time to read the preaching of Jesus during His active ministry as a travelling preacher. Rather than a specific time of preparation or of celebration, Ordinary Time is a time of balance. The twill I chose is a very balanced weave structure, and one with a direction. The sequence of threads creates diagonal lines across the fabric that seem to record the passage of time, just as the recalling of the Gospel in Ordinary Time emphasizes the sequential passage of time in the life of Jesus, and in our lives by implication. Similarly, because this season is a season of balance, I have always found it somewhat utilitarian and simple in its aesthetics. For this reason, I decided to make these veils the smallest of the six, intending that they be worn kerchief-style to tie up the hair as if in work. In a season that emphasizes the radical teachings of an itinerant preacher, I thought that the aesthetics of simplicity and work made the most sense.

For Lent and Advent, the purple seasons of fasting, I chose the simplest weave structure: plain weave. This weave structure is strong and ancient and records a simplicity of thought in the mind of the weaver. Weaving plain weave is a meditative, contemplative kind of weaving that leaves a lot of room for burgeoning understanding in its simplicity. I finished these with a simple macrame tie structure in the tassels, allowing the pattern of knots to bring some ceremony to the simplicity of the form. I allowed these veils to remain long and wide. Advent and Lent are times of fasting and of prayer, and the enveloping cloth allows for a more complete immersion in the physical aid to prayer that veils can provide. It also, along with the color purple, points to a seeming contradiction at the heart of these seasons. In the midst of fasting, the extravagance of long and lavishly dyed textiles dedicated to ritual embody the spirit of

generosity and discipline intrinsic to the season. Advent and Lent are about self-denial for the sake of personal spiritual growth, solidarity with others, and praise of God. These veils envelop the wearer in the midst of that desert.

For Christmas and Easter, the white and gold seasons of high ritual and feasting, I chose a point twill. Point twills are used to make diamond and triangular patterns, or sometimes stars. The structure I chose was a complex movement of doubles and singles with long floating threads that extend over the surface of the fabric. These are mostly in white, with interspersed stripes of six gold threads. These textiles have a lot of movement, almost jumping in their celebratory joy. The intricacy extends to the finishing, which I did in combined techniques of crochet, macrame, and braiding. These last veils are long and intricate, celebrating the complexity and extravagance of the season and inviting the excited movement of feasting time.

As a set, these six veils cover a liturgical year of ritual. The gesture of wearing a veil in a ritual context is extended not only out to the ritual space from the wearer, but into the structure of the cloth itself. So, the ritual space now apparently includes not only the space of the ritual, but the surface area of the textiles on the bodies of the people, as it always has. These enacted stories told in ritual, in gesture and in movement are recorded in thread. Weaving has always been a way of computing information, and in this way the record becomes again part of the ritual itself.

Green cotton veil for the season of Ordinary Time.

Green wool veil for the season of Ordinary Time.

Purple wool veil for seasons of Advent and Lent.

Purple cotton veil for the seasons of Advent and Lent.

White and gold cotton veil for Christmas and Easter season.

White wool and gold cotton veil for Christmas and Easter season.

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