

Fordham Center on Religion and Culture

Fordham University, McNalley Amphitheatre
New York, New York
January 26, 2007 — 6:00-7:30 p.m.

**WRESTLING WITH THE ANGEL:
ART AND RELIGION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY****KEYNOTE ADDRESS: “Violence, the Sacred, and the Hidden
God”**

David Freedberg

*Professor, Department of Art History and Archaeology,
Columbia University*

MARGARET STEINFELS: Hello. I am Margaret Steinfels, the other Co-Director of The Fordham Center on Religion and Culture. It is my great pleasure to introduce Ena Heller, who is the Director of MOBIA—which you heard so much about during the panel—the Museum of Biblical Art and our partner in planning this two-day symposium.

There are many things to say about this amazing woman, but perhaps the most amazing is that she actually opened a new museum in Manhattan. Now, who of us would have the chutzpah to do that? It is right down here, at 61st Street and Broadway, where we will gather tomorrow morning for the second half of this symposium.

She is responsible for the vision and strategy that led to the creation of the Museum and its grand opening in May 2005. Since then, she and her staff have mounted several wonderful exhibits, including one on the French artist Georges Rouault, and this past fall “Gilded Legacies: The Saint John’s Bible in Context,” which exhibited pages from the first modern illuminated manuscript bible that is now being done — and who knows when it will be finished? — and, of course, the current exhibit, which you also heard about and which I hope you will all have a chance to see tomorrow or soon.

Dr. Heller’s own field is art history with a specialty in Medieval art. She has a Ph.D. from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. She has written and lectured on everything from fourteenth-century chapels in Florence to the relationship between religion and modernism in today’s museum.

I am delighted to welcome her to Fordham. She will introduce our speaker

and moderate the discussion. Dr. Heller.

DR. ENA HELLER: Thank you for this wonderfully kind introduction. I feel like now I need to give a lecture to make it worthwhile. But I have a much more pleasurable task, and that is to introduce our keynote speaker.

Before I do that, let me just say two things. One, how enormously pleased we are at MOBIA to be collaborating with The Fordham Center on Religion and Culture. I do hope this is one of many such collaborations. Secondly, I was very pleased to hear that our exhibition came so much into play in the earlier panel discussion.

I did want to mention that Tricia Pongracz, who is the moderator of our session tomorrow morning, is also the curator of the exhibition. So bring your questions tomorrow and I am sure she will be able to provide some of the answers.

Our keynote speaker tonight is Professor David Freedberg, who is a Professor of Art History at Columbia University and the Director of the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America, which is also housed at Columbia.

He is one of the most esteemed art historians today, a scholar whose breadth and diversity of expertise is really quite unparalleled in our field. Most of us consider ourselves lucky if we master one little field, one specialty, while Professor Freedberg moves with ease and remarkable knowledge between at least four of them, and I think still counting.

He started out with a specialty in Dutch and Flemish painting, art more generally. His Ph.D. from Oxford was earned with a dissertation entitled *Iconoclasm and Painting in the Revolt of the Netherlands 1566–1609*, which was published as a book in 1988. His other books in that field include *Rubens: The Life of Christ After the Passion*, from 1984; and *Art and History/History and Art: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Culture*, from 1992.

From there, Professor Freedberg moved to seventeenth-century Roman art and the art of Nicolas Poussin; has been involved with a number of contemporary art exhibitions, as attested to by the book *Joseph Kosuth: The Play of the Unmentionable*, from 1992; and more recently turned to the history of science and the importance of new cognitive neurosciences for the study of art history. Most of us don't even know what that means. One of the books, very tellingly, that resulted from that area of research is his 2002 *The Eye of the Lynx: Art, Science, and Nature in the Age of Galileo*, which won the R.R. Hawkins Prize of the American Association of

Publishers for the Most Distinguished Scholarly Book of 2002.

To many of us, however, Professor Freedberg is best known for his work on psychological responses to art, *On Iconoclasm and Censorship*. His books, *Iconoclasts and Their Motives*, from 1985, and, particularly, *The Power of Images*, from 1989, have become such classics in the field. *The Power of Images* has been translated into French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, parts of it in Hungarian, and chapters of it reprinted in numerous other books and editions. Personally, I have to confess that *The Power of Images* had a tremendous impact on my professional training. It helped shape to a very large extent the thinking that went behind the creation of the Museum of Biblical art. For that I thank you, Professor Freedberg, although you didn't know this.

I am not going to mention any of the very numerous lectures, articles, interviews, prizes that he has given and won because otherwise you would be listening to me for the rest of the evening, which I am sure you don't want to do.

But I will mention one interview he gave, back in 1998, to Rosemary Crumlin, an interview which was published in the exhibition catalog *Beyond Belief: Modern Art and the Religious Imagination*, which ran at the National Gallery of Victoria that year. In that interview, Professor Freedberg said: "A great taboo of the twentieth century has been precisely the association of religion and art. We have tended to say that art is something separate from religion. Yet, art and religion interpenetrate, they are mutually fructifying, and religious imagination is present in all areas of life."

This led us, the organizers of tonight's Symposium, to the conclusion that we had to have Professor Freedberg give the Keynote. To our delight, he accepted. So will you please help me welcome Professor David Freedberg?

PROFESSOR DAVID FREEDBERG: Thank you so much for that most generous introduction. I am honored to be here this evening. I am not a little daunted, first of all, because the topic is so large, vast, and complex; and secondly, because either everything has already been said by the panel or everything I have to say will be disagreed with by the panel and, no doubt, by all of you.

I am afraid this lecture is slightly longer than I would have liked, but I hope you will be interested in the illustrations that eventually accompany my exposition.

The history of sacred art is fraught with violence. Even the most

numinous of works, those works in which the divine seems most perfectly and radiantly to reside, elicit the human desire to know the unknowable, to grasp what is not of this world in a form that indeed belongs to it. But unless the art before us is such that it overcomes the desire to grasp the ungraspable, to see what can't be seen, to reach out, to touch, to enfold, or even simply to describe what cannot in its essence be described or contained—then it leaves us dissatisfied.

Let me begin by saying that although my examples today will be taken almost entirely from the history of Western art, and of Judeo-Christian art in particular, I hope that the application and relevance of what I have to say will be clear for other areas of art and religion as well.

I should also say that, despite Professor O'Brien's hope, I am going to talk about art. I am not going to discuss what art is or is not, but I'm not going to talk about other images for the most part. That is in keeping with my brief to speak about art and religion in the twentieth century.

As you all know, the problem lies deep within the tradition, in Exodus 20: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth." Now, either one takes this passage as the beginning of the second commandment, in which case the prohibition against images is absolute ("Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image"); or one takes it together with the immediately preceding line, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," and you continue "Thou shalt make unto thee no graven image," in which case the prohibition against images is still to be seen as part of the first commandment, as was often argued in the sixteenth century, and is to be understood as forbidding the making of images of other gods, of idols in other words.

The history of sacred art is haunted by the specter of idolatry. It is a history that is punctuated by allegations that figuration and idolatry go hand in hand, and that representation is somehow fundamentally illusory and fraudulent.

Mimesis, imitation, has long been suspect, and not only when art attempts to imitate the inimitable. The first steps in violence are taken when the attempt is made to show that the god in the picture is a false god, that it has no power to resist destruction, that the divine is limited when it appears as representation, and therefore can be done away with. This is the first achievement of the iconoclast: to make plain human superiority over what is supposed to contain the divine.

From this problem proceeds another. Significantly, this second issue

receives its most generous theological treatments in the prelude to the great Byzantine iconoclasm of the eighth and early ninth centuries and then during the Reformation, that other great period when religious art was found to be wanting. This is the notion that since the Divine is surely unmaterial and uncircumscribable, how can it ever be represented in material and circumscribed form? It is a question that goes to the heart, not just of religious art, but of the very nature of art itself. How can concept be expressed in material form; how can it ever be figured? This question lies at the core of the great revolution in the way we think about art that was brought about by conceptual art.

[Slide] Now, I show you two of Joseph Kosuth's installations, entitled *Signification*, intended for a group show called "God" — "*Significado*." Does this work count as religious art, or is it predicated on expression by word alone? You will remember that the very basis for Martin Luther and his fellow Protestants' rejection of religious art was that words were the true images of God, not the material forms of representation that filled the churches of the time.

The question of the possibility of figuring the true God, as opposed to the all too easily represented idols — "heathen idols," as they are always described by the hegemonic cults — torments all religions. In the Islamic Hadith, for example, when the artist reaches heaven, God, the true creator, presents the artist with one of his creations and then challenges him to breathe life into it. When the artist fails, as he inevitably will, he is cast down into hell. His powers are precisely not divine. [Slide] Or take the case of the great Buddhas of Bamiyan, where the blasting away in 2001 of the faces of the Buddhas, indeed their whole bodies, was not only a political statement, but also testimony to the fear that these forms might indeed contain the divine — or, worse still, attract believers — by their form, their beauty. All that is now left of their form is pure emptiness.

The suspect beauty of great works of religious art — suspect because it appealed to the senses, to draw the beholder to God — was often also called divine by those who admired it, at no time more than at the height of the Italian Renaissance. [Slide] Michelangelo was called *divino* because of the seemingly superhuman qualities of the art which his genius had created. You are going to get some old art as well as twentieth-century art. Yet, towards the end of the Counter-Reformation, it was precisely what made him divine, *divino*, that was regarded as a kind of un-Christian concentration on style, on the sensual and the aesthetic, distractions from pure concept and concentration. Hence, the efforts to censor, which most of you know about — and even sometimes entirely to cover over, as Pius III did *The Last Judgment*.

For the sensual is grounded in what makes us human — namely, our bodies; our bodies are distracted from spirit by our carnality, and fear of the senses overwhelms belief in spirit.

Such are the fundamental dichotomies that continue to be inherent in religious art even in our own times. But the most intractable problem of all, I think, is the problem of whether to represent the divine in a form we know — that is, in a form we know because it is in and of this world; or whether to indicate its presence by absence, to acknowledge that the presence of the divine is too blinding to be shown in any graspable form. Must it therefore remain transcendent, unsullied by earthliness, free from the danger of concretizing the numinous in ways that detract from its sacrality? The problem begins early in Christian history and is endlessly polemicized. It is both practical and theological.

[Slide] Take the two wonderful little pictures by Cimabue — we are staying in earlier times — in the show recently organized at The Frick by Holly Flora. These are pictures that engage us: first, because they are so small, because their size makes us concentrate on them, as good meditational pictures should, and focus on their subject in quiet meditation; secondly, because of the radiant gold backgrounds; thirdly, because of the angels; fourthly, because of the halos that signify the sacred status of the protagonists; and fifthly, and most importantly of all, because we can empathize with these divine figures because they are so like us, because the Virgin is no regal queen of heaven, but rather a simple woman, a soul like ourselves, or as we would like to be. We empathize with Christ because he suffers so much, because his drawn face, even in this ancient painting, so clearly shows the lineaments and expressions of pain. In other words, we are drawn in because these figures are beings like us, even though we know they are divine, sacred, not in the end of this world at all. We could not empathize with their sadness and joy unless they were human like us. Then, how can the merely human flesh like ours be divine and sacred?

[Slide] The issue arises quite explicitly with Käthe Kollwitz's small sculpture in the exhibition — this is a slightly different version I have here — identified as a Pietà but parenthetically described as “mother with dead son.” Does it move us because it is a mother with a dead son — I think Archie Rand was making a similar point in the discussion earlier — or because it is Christ in the lap of the Virgin? It moves us, if it does at all, precisely because of that conflation. It is the traditional iconography literally brought home.

This was precisely one of the issues that tormented the Byzantine writers on images, and it troubled the whole of the sixteenth-century debate about

images too. On the one hand, the very possibility of holy images was justified by the incarnation of Christ as man, by the fact that that which was essentially divine and un-circumscribable could be represented in human form in the very light of Christ's incarnation. On the other hand, the opponents of divine images taunted their defenders by pointing to the individuality of the human, by pointing out that people did not worship the Virgin in the image; they worshiped that particular Virgin and that particular Saint Anthony because these were the much loved Virgins and Saint Anthony's of such and such a place, because they looked in such and such a way, because they were no Queen of Heaven or son of God, but individuals. [Slide] The great Antonello da Massina in Palermo.

No wonder there was such a debate in the eighth and ninth centuries, and then again in the sixteenth century, and often enough in between and after — well, not so much after — about what Christ really looked like, about his true face. No wonder, too, that at the Council of Trent the Catholic defenders of images should have insisted that it was not the image that people should worship, but rather what the image stood for. The honor paid to the image passed to their prototype, as Saint John Damascene insisted. The image was merely an intermediary, a reminder, a sign of what could not be represented in human form — firstly, because humans were too different; secondly, because to represent a god as human was too close to idolatry; and thirdly, because the divine was not subject to the accidents and bruises of the flesh.

[Slide] Hence, for example, the opposition to Caravaggio's famous *Death of the Virgin*, in which the Virgin was shown as an ordinary plump woman, and probably, as if to make the point about carnality even clearer, modeled on a prostitute. Of course, it is always possible to say that the divine resides in the everyday, in every grain of sand — as the seventeenth-century Calvinists claimed, that God shows himself in the quotidian. But if this is the case, how is one to achieve the aesthetics of the divine rather than the aesthetics of the everyday? Is it only great art that is adequately sacred? This is not a question that is easily resolved, but it is important to pose it at a time when the definition of art itself is furiously contested and has never seemed less capable of resolution.

The issue was never really resolved. The fury of the iconoclast was visited on representations of the divine. God in human form was canceled out. In the sixteenth century, it was painted out of Lucas van Leyden's *Last Judgement*; in Byzantium, first the great Pantokrators went, those great figures of Christ in the domes and apses of the churches of Byzantium, then even the lamb, and so one was left with a cross alone. [Slide] The cross, as Andy Warhol, devout Catholic that he was, knew, was a sign of the divine precisely because the figure of the divine in human form was

absent from it. But how are we to get close to God if he isn't figured, if he isn't shown as suffering incarnate, as in the long tradition of grim and sad crucifixions where Christ is shown as man, and often as a man much too like ourselves?

No one would deny the effectiveness of images such as Arnulf Rainer's *Crucifixion*—[Slide], a kind of modern-day equivalent of images such as Fra Angelico's *Bloodied Head of Christ* in Munich. In the light of such images, it is hard to understand the controversy surrounding André Serrano's *Piss Christ* [slide], which fits so perfectly into the Christian tradition of showing Christ mocked in the most degrading of ways, with the basest materials. There is really no problem here, as the panel pointed out. I could show you any number of images from the fourteenth and fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in which Christ is tormented by having bits of blood and urine and rotten eggs and so on and so forth thrown at him and rubbed into his wounds. The problem is awkward and insistent.

Could it be resolved by adopting the Jewish and Islamic solution, by avoiding figurative representation altogether, at least when it comes to the sacred? It is no wonder, perhaps, that some of the greatest religious art of the twentieth century has been abstract art, and art produced very often by Jews. We will look at examples in a moment. But in the meantime, consider very briefly the case of Marc Chagall. Some of my aesthetic prejudices are going to become clear, and I hope that you will allow me them for the sake of the argument. I think most members of this audience will agree that, despite their religious subjects — I am talking about Marc Chagall — many of his works seem meretriciously spiritual — sweet enough certainly, but unable to convey the sacredness of their subjects [Slide]. There is too much anecdote here, too much pictorial discursiveness, too much visual chatter of no great weight. It is difficult to feel that we are in the presence of the sacred in these images.

[Slide] This is *Jacob's Ladder*, just for the sake of the argument which I am about to introduce. It is difficult to feel that we are in the presence of the sacred in these images of the Bible made everyday. Take the subject of Jacob wrestling with the angel. They are too whimsical, too pretty, for their grave subject.

[Slide] Compare this treatment of the subject with the Rembrandt School's painting — I think it is a Rembrandt School painting — but it is a great engraved picture in Berlin of Jacob wrestling with the angel. How different Chagall's works are from those, say, of Rothko and Newman, which seem so mysteriously to break the numinous and to have the aura of the sacred.

We will return to aura in a moment. But first, bearing these particular images in mind, I would like to say something about the title of our Symposium, “Wrestling with the Angel.” It could not be a more fitting one, for in the story of Jacob’s encounter — indeed, in the course of the Jacob story as a whole — we discover some of the fundamental issues in the understanding of religious art in the twentieth century. It is also a story that points to the roots of the relationship between violence and the sacred and the continuing relevance of religious art for the modern world.

So the title of our Symposium is, indeed, an apt one. But it is apt, ironically enough, because it is not correct. For the fact is that Jacob did *not* wrestle with an angel. He wrestled, according to the quite explicit account in Genesis 32:24, with a man: “Jacob was left alone, and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.” It has often been claimed that Jacob’s opponent was actually an angel in the guise of a man, and this is the way in which the subject is usually illustrated. [Slide] I show you Gauguin, one of the great innovators for twentieth-century art. There you see Jacob wrestling with the angel.

Now, I don’t want you to be distracted by images when I am going to be talking about *not*-images. This is going to be the part in between, which deals, if you will allow me, with the analysis of the Biblical story, which seems to me so relevant to the problem we are facing. Let’s see how the episode actually ends. The man with whom Jacob wrestles struggles with him, rather unsuccessfully, and then asks him his name. Jacob tells him. Whereupon his opponent, this man, rather unexpectedly, bestows upon him a further name, that of “Israel,” a prince, according to him, that has power with God. But when Jacob asks the man *his* name, this man simply refuses and blesses him. We have barely a moment to reflect on this willful refusal to disclose a name, when suddenly the Bible announces that “Jacob called the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved.” *Pniel*, of course, means precisely that, “face of God.”

There could be no more explicit statement of the fact that for Jacob to have known that he was seeing God face to face would have destroyed him. He could not know his opponent, he could not even know his name, or he would have been blinded by the brilliance of revelation or destroyed by the knowledge of the visual identity of his opponent.

But what more is this about, this fact that the bible first says that he wrestled with a man and then Jacob says he has seen the face of God? There is no angel in any of this. In fact, explanation comes soon, with further resonance for the understanding of the relationship between religion and visual representation. In the very next chapter, Jacob finally encounters his brother Esau. I had an account here of why Esau was cross

with Jacob, but you will all remember the story perhaps, so I'll skip that. So he finally encounters his brother Esau, of whom he is fearful, but they meet and embrace. Jacob blesses Esau, saying, "For I have seen thy face as though I had seen the face of God, and thou was pleased with me." So what's going on here?

Many commentators have suggested on the basis of this encounter that the man with whom Jacob wrestled was Esau himself, or, more improbably — here is possibly the origin of the story — Esau's angel. But the point is surely — and herein lies the relevance for the representation of the divine — that God can only be seen, if he is to be grasped at all, in the form of a man; and, moreover, a man — or I should say a human being perhaps — whom one knows.

Indeed, this section of Genesis is punctuated by repeated instantiation of just this point. It is in the broader context of Jacob's wrestling with the angel that we begin to realize the full relevance of Jacob's several encounters with the sacred in the form of angels, visions, actual images, or the face of God itself, to an understanding of the continuing relevance of holy images, for in the very unclarity with which these images are described — one minute man, the next minute the face of God, the next minute Esau's face as though it were the face of God — in the very instability of the objects of these encounters, we begin to understand the ways in which the sacred is both hidden and revealed through representation and why responses to them are so fraught with both love and violence. I know that you will perhaps be unsure about how much this has to do with religious art in the twentieth century, but I hope to show you how it does.

Continuing our little bit of exegesis, in the first and most famous of his dreams, Jacob lies on a stone and sees a ladder, as we saw in the Chagall, ascending from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending. [Slide] I show you two typically uninspiring traditional representations of the scene, Coptic and Jewish. [Slide] And one much more interesting one, Philip Guston's. And then, at the top of this ladder, he sees: "And, behold, the Lord stood above it and said" — naming himself clearly this time — "I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac," and so on. As soon as he awakens, Jacob declares, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not" [Slide]— to which the writer of the chronicle adds, "and he was afraid." And well he might have been. Once more God was hidden from him. But remember, it was only a dream. Jacob calls the place "Bethel, "Bet-El," literally "the house of God."

Then follow two of the most picaresque chapters in the bible, full of Jacob's habitual trickery, and his father-in-law Laban's demands and

impostures — the substituting of his fiancée Rachel by her veiled sister Leah, for example. Remember how painting itself is always a veiled imposter for the object of representation. Then Jacob has another dream. This time God speaks to him through an angel and says to him, “I have seen all that Laban does unto thee. I am the God of Bethel.” The angel — or, rather, the all-seeing God — then instructs him to return to the land of his kindred. As Jacob sets about leaving under God’s instruction, what does his new wife do? She steals the images that were her father’s and takes them with her. They are Laban’s gods, false images, idols. It is a seemingly inexplicable development in the story which appears to follow from nothing. But it is surely to be understood as a pointed contrast to the single God that appears only in dreams, immaterial, or in the form perhaps of an angel — the God, significantly, to whom Jacob now dedicates an altar, called “The God of Gods of Israel.” He is no image or idol. And he is not plural, like the images Rachel stole — he is one.

Then follows the episode of wrestling with a man at Pniel, which we have discussed. But given that the name refers to “the face of God” (Pniel), not “the house of God” (Bethel), are we not entitled to surmise that the man with whom Jacob wrestled was no angel but rather God incarnate? Only for those who resist the notion of an incarnate God did Jacob wrestle with an angel, as in the title of our symposium and in most accounts of Genesis 32. What motivates the mistake is the fear that Jacob felt upon waking at Bethel, the fear that visits those who think it possible to see God face to face, the fear that often turns, as we shall see, to violence.

Indeed, the next episode in the biblical account is the really grim story of the massacre of the freshly circumcised men of Shechem, where he erected that altar following the rape of his daughter Dinah, whereupon Jacob is once more instructed to go to Bethel (the house of God) and to make there “an altar unto God that appeared unto thee when thou fledest from the face of Esau, thy brother.” In the very next verse, Jacob issues the preemptory command to his household and all those who are with him to throw out the images which Rachel had stolen from her father, to “put away the strange gods among you and be clean.” Then Jacob proceeds to build the altar to God. The contrast between altar and images could not be clearer. The images are gone. Purity and cleanliness prevail. The altar stands for the God who is absent and immaterial, unlike the images which Rachel had earlier put under her chair to hide them. If God does appear, it cannot be in the form of an image; it has to be that of a quotidian man.

So it is an old story, but almost everything in it, paradoxically enough, pertains to the continuing significance of religious art — for to see God, how are we to show him? To grasp the truth of religion, do we need names or images; or will the altar suffice, the altar dedicated to the one God who

only appears in dreams, the empty altar from which the smoke of offerings will arise but on which no images will yet be placed? All this may seem to lead straight to the apparent aniconicity of the First or Second Commandments. But it also raises, I think, questions about arguably the most profound turn in religious art of the twentieth century, a turn heralded in the Middle Ages, occasionally and sometimes in Eastern cultures, but one which, after the horrors of the Holocaust, leads to some of the most profound changes in how we think, not only about art in general, but also about the relationship between art and religion, and more specifically about the presence of the divine in art.

Indeed, as I implied in the interview I gave in the catalog of the excellent exhibition that Ena Heller just mentioned, which Rosemary Crumlin organized in Melbourne in 1998, I said: “Our religious response to images is in a way exemplary for all our responses to images.” I think that in order to understand what is aesthetic about representation, we also need to understand where the numinous lies in figuration — by which, of course, I don’t necessarily mean figured imagery; indeed, I mean largely, but not entirely, abstract imagery.

Consider some of the weaknesses of figured imagery of the kind that are all too apparent in Chagall, say, or Rouault, or so many other modern works based strictly on Biblical and other religious texts. [Slide] I wanted you to think of that as we were thinking about Jacob’s altar at Bethel. [Slide] Here is something else I am not terribly impressed with, Kandinsky’s *All Saints*, for the reasons that I outlined in my criticism of Chagall. [Slide] Of course, I don’t mean to say that all is failure. Look at the Gauguin we saw; or Bacon — here one of his Crucifixion scenes, a truly wrenching representation, although this is arguably on the road to the abstract. I’m showing you contemporary works which could adequately contain the divine.

Look also at, or think about, Bill Viola. [Slide] There is a problem with these images by Bill Viola. They are so clearly derived from early Italian and early Flemish painting. These figures in mourning are taken straight from the Giotto’s *Mourning Angels Over the Lamentation* in the Arena Chapel. Their historicism flaws them. [Slide] Look at this, straight from Dirk Bouts in the National Gallery in London. Their obvious derivativeness makes one all too aware that whatever effectiveness they have depends on their aesthetic quotient — that is, on what it is about their status as art that separates them from the tradition. That, in Bill Viola’s case, is moot, I think. So I am saying that this is too attached to the tradition, that what we need is something that makes the distinction from the tradition clearer.

[Slide] One could argue, for example, that it is precisely the awkward

transformation of religious themes that makes Philip Guston's work so compelling. [Slide] This is *Deluge*. [Slide] Or Joseph Beuys' 1971 reworking and performance of the conversion of that great protagonist of the use of images, Saint Ignatius of Loyola. This is his *Conversion at Manresa*, which Beuys reenacted. You see this engages one in the performance. [Slide] Or perhaps his rethinking of the relationship between blood, the cross, and music in the homogeneous *Infiltration for Piano* of 1966. [Slides] Here is the cloth, hung up like some great piece of drapery of Christ thrown by the side, as it often is, or that protected him on the Via Crucis perhaps. Such works are ones that force on us — sometimes awkwardly, but always powerfully and startlingly, perhaps even violently — a reconsideration of the presence of the holy in our daily lives — indeed, even of the persistence of the numinous in material form.

[Slide] Now, for a long time the pinnacle of religious art and architecture in the twentieth century was regarded as the Chapel at Vence and the churches at Assy and Audincourt. But I find the decoration of all these churches slightly embarrassing, rather too literal, occasionally derivative, often vulgar in their obvious recourse to superficial pictorial charm. [Slide] There is the Léger. [Slide] There is the Lipchitz. The works by Léger, Bazaine, Lipchitz — [Slide] — even Rouault — in this sense remained vulgar and schematic. [Slide] Whatever power lies in them surely comes from the light, from the essentially and fundamentally uncorporeal, the successful conveying of the divine light — of the *lux mundi*, as Christ would have been described in the Middle Ages — and is often symbolically represented as well. [Slide] You can't help thinking of that trinity of candles in Richter's great painting. [Slide] Here is another painting by him, for which there are many precedents as well in the early Renaissance.

So perhaps the time has come to turn to the great achievements, talking of light, of Newman and Rothko. But this, of course, is not all by any means.

[Slide] *Onement I* was the altogether significant title of Newman's first zip painting. He painted it on his birthday, January 29, 1948. Or “[*inaudible*] *des choses il y a un*” (“at the height of things there is the one”), wrote Father Couturier, founder of the journal *L'Art sacré*, the spirituous rector of Vence, Assy, and Audincourt, and the inspirer of Dominique de Menil's Rothko Chapel of 1971. “From the one derives numbers, lines, surfaces, volumes, which make of the entire universe a harmonious architecture,” so the Dominican Father Couturier said.

Almost everyone who writes about *Onement I* recalls a couple of years earlier Newman's statement that “the artist is a true creator, delving into chaos,” and this is what makes him an artist; just as, to quote Newman, “the creator himself in creating the world began with the same material,

for the artist tried to wrest truth from the void.” It is an important parallel, as we have seen. The work is wrested from chaos, to offer instead a sublime void that is yet a truth. Over and over again, the zip in Newman’s pictures — he called it “the zip;” it’s an unhappy phrase, but that is the term which has stuck in the literature — approximates to structure and is surrounded by a kind of halo.

But there is more. Newman’s statement offers a response to the passage in the Hadith, which I cited earlier, that when the artist reaches heaven he will be asked to breathe life into his creations. But here, while the artist approximates the creator, as Newman himself declared, there is no possibility of blasphemy, precisely because there are no figures into which to breathe life; he must breathe life into the void itself. And so this picture respire with the life of the blood-red void, animated by the wound that is the zip, by the roughness of the paint, by the aura that seems to emanate from it. It is aniconic, and yet its aura is such that it carries the conviction of an icon. It seems to contain something of the divine, just as the best figured images once did.

It is hard to put this into words, but surely in the very sense it conveys of a purely aesthetic life, a life predicated on the animacy of the paint itself, of a kind of constant hovering over the surface, as waters ruffled by wind, it suggests a presence that is beyond the human. Of course, it is no surprise that this form of representation should be so explicitly associated with monotheism, *Onement*, and that in the next few years Newman would repeatedly return to subjects taken above all from the book of Genesis.

Indeed, the first critical painting of 1949 was called *Abraham*. [Slide] It is black and white, purified of color, mostly black, and with all of the seductiveness that color implies. Not surprisingly, it was made in the same year in which Newman visited the Indian burial grounds in southwest Ohio, where — I am quoting his own words — he “was moved by a sense of presence within the dramatically open spaces.” “Suddenly one realizes,” he wrote, “that the sensation is not one of space or an object in space. It is the sensation of time and all other feelings vanish like the outside landscape.”

[Slide] *Abraham* was the first work by Newman to which he gave a proper name as a title. It was, as he insisted, against the claims of Ad Reinhardt in particular, the first (and still) the only black painting in history. Newman knew from the Bible and his study of Kabala that Abraham was the destroyer of idols, the figured images of alien gods which his father had made. He was the patriarch, the father of Isaac and grandfather of Jacob, who responded to the presence of God by affirming, as his grandson later did, “Here I am.” This is a statement that denounces the relationship of

the spectator to the painting's presence.

It is not insignificant, I think, that the vision of the divine here occurs in a black painting, amidst the blackness of which Newman was so proud and worked so hard to ensure remained unsullied. It recalls the nocturnal visions and dreams of Jacob. The painting is a quintessential statement of monotheism, of a God who expresses himself as "the light that emanates from that single numinous column" — the zip, as he and art historians continue to call it.

Every critic has noted the aura that emanates from it. It is indeed a halo. "One has to be patient to perceive it," wrote Yve-Alain Bois. "In a sense, one has to have faith; one must be expectant. It requires one sustained presence, and this presence is based on faith, like that of Abraham answering God's call by declaring 'here I am.'"

No wonder that this fragile halo needed to be protected, as the slightest alteration in its conditions of visibility — alteration of the picture's surface, harsh light, and so on — would annul its possibility. It is for this reason that Newman was extraordinarily wary of any interference in the conditions of viewing or he was very concerned when he shipped his paintings that they be properly packed, anything that might disturb the delicate interaction between the two blacks that you see here of *Abraham*. So he would continue to ship his pictures with very specific instructions about the special care they required.

And yet, within a few years this very work was vandalized. Its beautiful black surface had six fingerprints of bright-green paint pressed onto it in September 1957. It was as if someone was so disturbed by the divinity that seemed to inhere in the painting that she or he had to make plain that it was merely a creation of man, and thus subject to soiling and destruction. It may have been that its purity was too strong. Immediately after the rhapsody which I just read to you about "the one," Father Couturier wrote: "*Au sommet des chose il y a le Pur. E nul n'approche le Pur qui est impur*" — "At the height of things there is the pure, and nothing approaches the pure that is impure." But, more likely, the act against the Newman was simply, as it always has been, to show that the image was no more than paint on canvas, to show that one was not afraid of whatever superhuman power it might have, might inexplicably contain, and that after all it too was simply an idol, a false god, a mere object, as the Reformation critics would have all said of wood or stone. To damage it was to impugn its divinity.

[Slide] This was only the beginning. In November, one of Newman's greatest works, the one that most clearly approaches the status of the

sublime, the *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, was similarly attacked. No wonder that Newman had a major heart attack a few weeks later. And so it would continue for years afterwards.

[Slide] *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?* in Berlin and Amsterdam

[Slide] Here's the Berlin one. The paintings were both violently slashed, as if once again it was necessary to demonstrate, as the title implied, that one was not afraid of them, that there was nothing inexplicably present within them to inspire fear, that whatever resided within these images could be shown to be no more than the sum of their material substance, and that there was no residue of the spiritual, of what was not made by human hands, as the Byzantines called holy images that were once supposed to have descended directly from heaven within them.

But let's return to that critical year 1949. Having discovered how to indicate the presence of the divine in these plain paintings, the biblical subjects flowed with extraordinary intensity and rapidity from Newman's studio. [Slide] They all have names which make this plain — *Adam*, *Jericho*, and so on. But some of these paintings are more relevant to the critical Abrahamaic theme, to texts that are directly pertinent to the subject of the presence of the divine, of the one God whom he, Abraham, had chosen to worship, and to whom the revelation of divine presence was vouchsafed — not directly, not figuratively, but always hidden formlessly beneath the surface of things. [Slide] *Covenant*, of course, referred to the covenant made by Abraham with God, with the God who cannot be named. [Slide] So does *Promise*. [Slide] While *Cathedra* stages another "Here I am" in reply to God's call, which is repeated in Isaiah 6. It implied the beholder always.

These paintings, like those of the other abstract expressionists I will mention shortly, are not simply allegories of the divine. They embody it, and in them are expressed the mystery of the sacred. God only reveals himself by presence, not in person. [Slide] Even the series of *The Stations of the Cross*, also largely in black and white, as of course befits the black night of the crucifixion — [Slide] — which make one think of the marvelous etching of Rembrandt, *The Three Crosses*, which Newman certainly knew — offers further testimony to this kind of presence. It is predicated on the inner voice of the painting, the voice that cried out from the cross, "Oh, God, why has thou forsaken me?" and that Newman himself somehow felt would emerge from them.

But the figure who most of you will be thinking of here, I'm sure, is Mark Rothko, whose paintings so compel meditation on what may lie beyond the stillness of those serene and beautifully proportioned surfaces. [Slide] Rothko's works, like Newman's, force us to consider why it is that these

plain fields of color — [Slide] — always irradiated by some kind of halo, by a form of aura that suggests the presence of the holy, so insist on our spectatorial involvement in it, so much so that the “Here I am” proceeds easily and automatically from our inward selves. [Slide] “No possible program notes can explain our paintings,” Rothko wrote. “Their explanation must come out of a consummated experience between picture and onlooker. They force us to meditate. They induce serenity, as if the spirit within the painting has satisfactorily filled our own bodies.”

The phenomenology of these paintings is predicated on the power of the color field, of their plain expanses of color or black and white, by the calm they induce, by the engagement so well described by Bois, with the aura that emanates from them. [Slide] These are the murals, curiously enough, painted for the Seagram Building for the Four Seasons, now in the Tate Gallery in London.

This is the aura that has not been lost because it hovers now, not over the altar ritual, but that of art, of pure aesthesis. It is not a surprise that the somber paintings which Rothko prepared for the Four Seasons Restaurant, of all places, in 1958–59 should have had such an effect on its beholders, or that it should have inspired Dominique and John de Menil to commission the Rothko Chapel in Houston. When they saw the Seagram murals, the de Menils were overwhelmed by the power and passion of these great somber murals. “To their astonishment,” says one author, “they realized they were speaking in whispers, as behooved of course works of such presence.” [Slide] How far they seem to have progressed from the churches of Vence, Assy, and Audincourt, which under the guidance of Father Couturier they had so much admired. Their attitude towards American art turned full circle as a result of their engagement with abstract expressionism.

When Father Couturier took the de Menils to visit those French churches, he inserted the following passage in an article Dominique wrote: “If I think about all that is done in the U.S.A. in the name of a better philosophy of Christian art, all of the sickening triumph of imitation modern, of these pseudo-naïve statues of others full of sentimental piety, let’s forget the rest and hope that year by year works that are purer still will take their place.”

What exactly she intended by “purer” here is not entirely clear, but it surely would have applied in her eyes to the great series of Rothkos which the de Menils commissioned for that chapel in Houston. [Slide] This actually is the north apse triptych. [Slide] There is the east end triptych. It is precisely the fact that they are so somber, their form so simple, the fact that there is no figuration to remind us of their earthliness, of their kinship with the mundane, that so invests them with a numinous. [Slide] It is

also, I think, the neutral effects of these broad expanses of color, fraying gently at the edges, as if their power does not dissipate but merges with the all — we'll go back to that one — with some vast universe that can only be suggested, never depicted.

But since we are dealing with this subject in Judeo-Christian terms in the context of an exhibition of biblical art, the obvious needs to be confronted. Many of you will have thought in the course of my exposition of Newman, Rothko, and the others that: of course the Jews are an an-iconic people. They observe the injunction against graven images. Their God cannot be represented in material form, and certainly not figuratively, for that would align the one true God with the idols of the nations, the idols stolen by Rachel from her father before Jacob told her to destroy them, the idols Abraham himself destroyed, the golden calf which Aaron so disastrously put up while Moses was on the mountain receiving — indeed, taking down — the word from a God who could not be seen, who was hidden in that black cloud. The claim would be an entirely fair one. And I am far from suggesting that good religious art can no longer be figurative.

[Slide] I have time for both George Segal and Cindy Sherman, partly because Segal's work has such gestural power, another story altogether for another occasion — [Slide] — while Sherman, like Beuys and Reiner, and even that bloody body artist Hermann Nitsch, exemplify the need for figural art now to challenge the canons of figuration in order to be genuinely effective. This is to me a much more compelling reworking of a work from the tradition — Jean Fouquet's famous *Madonna of Melun* — than the work of, shall we say, Bill Viola. [Slide] This is why even someone like Kiefer often fails, and I dare say Kiki Smith, who you can see in the exhibition as well. But these are but prejudices.

On a number of occasions I have maintained that the ontology of religious images is exemplary for all images. That is, the mode of being of religious images is exemplary for that of other images as well. It is natural enough, as I set out in *The Power of Images*, to conflate image and prototype, to believe that what you see in the picture somehow partakes of what it represents, indeed of the body of what it represents. [Slide Holbein] Think the divine is in that picture of the man and the man is actually there as well. The same for the amazing Holbein in Basel. This conflation of image and prototype — the man is there — is exactly what bothered the early church fathers, the Reformation leaders, and the Catholic defenders of images in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who insisted, with theoretical but not behavioral plausibility, that images were merely signs for what they represented. All such insistences, of course, ignored the widespread evidence that beholders tend to see the prototype in the image, that people believe that Christ is present in this image in particular, as we

said earlier, and not that one, and so too as we saw for his mother — [Slide] — and that Saint Anthony is in this particular image in Padua rather than in that one, and so on.

This tendency to conflate image and prototype is precisely what permits the high degree of empathic involvement on which so much traditional religious imagery depends. The more one looks, the more one engages with a figured image, the more it dawns on one that the image is but a substitute for the real — that is, it is, in short, a fetish. It is a fetish because as soon as one becomes aware of the powers the image is supposed to have, the harder one looks in order to discover the source of that power. That looking then takes on the form of concentration on the outward appearance of the image, what it looks like — in other words, on its purely formal qualities — as well as its clues to life likeness. In this respect, the image that evokes a religious response is also like an image that evokes sexual response. One outcome of this process may be iconoclasm.

I just wanted to remind you of Bill Viola in the context of conflating images with prototypes. [Slide] But as I have said, once you concentrate on the form itself, one outcome may be iconoclasm. When you try to destroy what is inherent in the prototype by attacking the mere material object itself, either in order to destroy a power that is not explicable, and thereby prove that it is null, powerless after all — here hacking away at the body of the rosy Venus, which destroys her sexual attraction possibly — and that it is in the end reducible to material form rather than immaterial presence, or because the inexplicability of that power rouses feelings of uncontrollable frustration and anger.

These are the roots of the violence that lies at the heart of responses to sacred representation. But the other consequences of the fetishization — or even the concentration on the formal — is to make one aware that it is precisely and paradoxically in the form itself of objects that the true mystery lies, that the sacred does not lie simply in figuration. [Slide] What works such as Rothko and Newman and Ad Reinhardt make clear, which I have not mentioned here, is not the aniconic thrust that allegedly lies at the basis of the Jewish understanding of the divine, but rather that the sacred always remains hidden in the picture, however it may manifest itself in life, until it finally becomes plain through its form. This is the secret of art, and this too is the secret of religious art. It is precisely this, I believe, that has become plain in the twentieth century.

Thank you very much.

DR. HELLER: I think we have about fifteen minutes for questions, after which we will invite all of you for the reception right outside, and I'm sure

we can continue the conversation there.

QUESTION: I would be interested in hearing you speak — it seems that you talked a lot about projection through the filter of the art. I think as we consider art in the twentieth century, where there has been that psychological development that has been expressed so eloquently by so many people, that it might be competing with the mystery of art. So I wonder if you can speak a little to the point of creativity, imagination, soul and spirit, which can be awakened by art that does touch the psychic.

PROF. FREEDBERG: Well, I think we talked earlier in the panel discussion about meditation and you will see that I sort of hovered close to the theme of meditation. I think that one of the aims of religious art is surely, in the first instance, to engage the viewer, then to encourage projection. But in the process of engaging the viewer, it also engages a sense of reflection on what is seen in the image. I think that this is something that was exploited by Ignatius Loyola, and it was exploited also by people like Newman.

I don't think there is necessarily always a case of projection, but it is very important for religious art, the sense of identifying with what one sees in an image, and, in the case of these an-iconic images, the great works of abstract expressionism, to imagine the effects of the divine. It is very difficult to project terribly much onto these images, so you have a sense of the numinous descending upon one.

I think that projection and creativity are always related. This has been the basis of much of my work. I've been interested in responses. To some extent, the real mystery is the mystery of creativity. I don't think we could ever really reproduce in words what goes on in the heads of the creators of works of art. In fact, this has been one of the difficulties I have had with art history in general over the years. How can we know exactly what went on in Rembrandt's head or in Newman's head? How can we reproduce in words these complicated processes of the mind that resulted in actions — in the handling of brushes, in the modeling of clay?

So I prefer to think a bit more about the spectatorial responses rather than the true mystery, which is that of creativity.

QUESTION: Thank you so much for your speaking. I am curious about, when I am looking at religious art, what the artist's journey is who produced it. How do you feel about connecting or keeping together the artist's spiritual journey with the art? I think of, in particular, Stanley Spencer. I know that when I view his paintings — how he took the small town where he lived — he only lived in a small town, he didn't travel very

much — he always sought the Gospel within the people that he lived with everyday. It helped me to see my town differently. It helped me to have a new focus for my artwork, of seeking faith and the life of the spirit within my town. So I respect him for his journey. How much of just looking at the art by itself, versus looking at it through the journey of the artist?

PROF. FREEDBERG: I am very skeptical about the artist's journey. I mean it is very nice that Stanley Spencer made this spiritual journey. I have been reflecting on this a lot for a variety of reasons. When you think of the terrible behavior of T.S. Eliot and you think of those amazing poems — shall we say those spiritual poems — of the “Four Quartets,” you really don't want to speculate on how he behaved or what his spiritual guidelines were.

This relates to my other response. I think the question of the mystery of creation — we just have to relax. We should let the artist talk. And we should also bear in mind — I am firmly of this conviction — that all artists — I am a great believer that one of the mistakes in the humanities in our time is to say there are no universals. I think there are universals. But the one exclusion I would make is the notion of any kind of universal creativity. I want Archie Rand and every other artist to come up and, not make general rules for art, but I want them to tell us about how they make their art, and then we will understand their individual works. But these are subjects which are not capable of generalization, I think.

You had a question?

QUESTION: Yes. I wonder if you would address what Stephen Schloesser was saying earlier about abstraction not being able to carry the faith of religious reality. I was thinking about Guston, who said that [inaudible] that purity that Father Couturier wrote about. But he said, “I can't imagine myself spending my life [inaudible] for faith.”

And then he stood in front of Piero della Francesca's famous painting, *The Legend of the True Cross*, and he wept, because he said, “We have no story. They have a story.” I think there is something there. There is something about the aestheticization of religious experience that is troubling.

PROF. FREEDBERG: You will understand that I in this case in a way was making a plea for the aestheticization of religious experience. I was not making a plea for the vulgarization of religious experience. Let me make that distinction clear.

I think that this brings us close to the word which we didn't mention, and

which Margaret Miles was exasperated with today and that many others have been. I don't know how to define "the beautiful," but the beautiful is something that, however we choose to define it, makes us aware of a presence that is greater than ourselves and greater than human.

So I, myself, don't feel that one needs to depend entirely on the story, as it were. When we have a story, I think what lifts the story above the level of the mundane is precisely that which is aesthetically transforming. This may be to invest too much faith in art, but otherwise we would be content with the art of Saint-Sulpice and we would be content with the works of Marc Chagall, shall we say, which we ought not to be. So I am disagreeing with that position, if I understood it correctly.

QUESTION: Isn't that a sense of the sublime, that really great art gives a sense of the sublime?

PROF. FREEDBERG: "Sublime" is a word that one doesn't want to mess with too much. I think if "sublime" stands for — you know, in a way, I was using a word which I expect to be attacked for, the "numinous." I am trying to deal with something that is beyond the quotidian, the everyday, even though we acknowledge that the divine may reveal itself through the everyday.

The sublime is a whole other matter. The sublime gives us a sense, as Kant wrote, of the way in which reason can overcome our fears. So that with the sublime is the great and the big and the awful, but I am not necessarily sure that it is equivalent to the divine.

QUESTION: Simone Weil in her *Letters to a Priest* — I just read this recently — said that when people scoff at her for praying to a statue or an image or things like that, she said, "Why not? Isn't that part of the divine?" I was shocked in reading this. She said, "Isn't that part of the divine and incarnate reality of it?" I wonder if any artists in creating a pietà or whatnot feel they are somehow incarnating God in it. Or is that heresy? I don't quite know. You did a whole book on iconoclasm in the Netherlands.

PROF. FREEDBERG: You know, there is the case of Michelangelo being called *divino* for his creative powers. But I'm not sure that artists — how did you put it?

QUESTIONER: She just felt that if you pray to the statue — what is it, going to fetishize it — she is praying to the statue, that the divine is present in that statue. She feels a spark of the divine in it. I'm just wondering if artists think of themselves as so great these days — well exactly, "a

government grant is my right.” Does an artist have that sense when they do it? Certainly, people like Rubens or Caravaggio had to have priests who influenced them in what they did. But I’m wondering where you draw the line. Today we worship art in this country — not religious art, but art — “I’m an artist; therefore, you get a point blank.”

PROF. FREEDBERG: I’m not entirely sure what part of that question you want me to answer. But I would say this. It is clear that many people respond to images because of what they believe is inherent in them, because of what is shown in them. This is one of the points which I was making. This is a natural enough human response. We may be thinking about our mothers and we may see a particular picture of the Virgin and the conflation of the recollection and the sense that the Virgin is there may move us to tears. But I don’t think this really enters into the question of art. I am trying to get at the question of what is the relationship between religion — and not just religion and figuration, but between religion and the question of art. That is what I have been trying to answer today, this notion that art can somehow give us a quantum more than just a relationship with the everyday.

QUESTION: You mentioned the problem of art, but you didn’t take it into the twenty-first century, you stopped at the twentieth century. I remember reading that Carl Jung said that he saw Western culture as a series of iconoclasms. You talked about presencing and absencing. I’m wondering if the notion of saturation or the guise of a particular *weltanschauung*, or world view, is such that it is almost like the rubber band snaps and then it becomes dead, so within art there is a kind of deadness which then needs to be killed, in which there is a violent act and then it has to be restarted.

PROF. FREEDBERG: Well, the question of repeated iconoclasms is one which we could have a whole further lecture about, because it does happen, and I have given you some indications of why I think it happens. The iconoclast really wants to de-acknowledge, wants to deny, the presence of the divine in what is after all simply material. But I think your question raises a much more interesting point, which is a question raised by Walter Benjamin — and I didn’t mention him in my lecture — the question of Walter Benjamin in that very famous and much-too-much-quoted essay on “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” says: “When we get to know certain images too well, those images lose their aura.” Every fashionable academic has taken this point of view.

What interests me is precisely the fact that very often we see the same image over and over again and it remains invested with that aura. Why is that? I don’t know the answer to that question, but I don’t think that

everydayness and constant reproducibility necessarily diminish the power of those images. It might, but it doesn't necessarily.

Thereby may also lie one of the touchstones of what is great art or not. You will notice that, although I was critical of some works, I was not determining to make a kind of ranking of beauty or aesthetic greatness or whatever.

Many questions. Somebody is waving at the back of the room, the other sweater.

PROF. FREEDBERG: You should speak up so that people can hear.

QUESTIONER: I just wanted to say that I really like Chagall a lot. [Laughter] I am just saying that to have another voice. Chagall does mean a lot to me. I also wanted to say a couple of other things. All the art that you showed were of men artists. The last thing I wanted to say is I feel a little bit confused by your whole presentation, because you started off talking about how significant the figure was in art, and you had a particular track that you were going on [inaudible] philosophy. Then you shifted dramatically into the abstract and tried to then emphasize that the abstract [inaudible] were more connected in terms of the object itself — the physical presence is animating this quality of spirituality, rather than the image with figures, through which it is helping people to act.

PROF. FREEDBERG: I will briefly answer those. Those are good questions.

With regard to Chagall, I think I said at one point I admit these are prejudices. I was giving you my sense of Chagall in order to exemplify the third of the issues, which I will come to in a moment. The second issue, no women artists. I mentioned Cindy Sherman and I mentioned Kiki Smith, and there was probably another person there.

VOICE: Käthe Kollwitz.

PROF. FREEDBERG: And Käthe Kollwitz. Now, I could have mentioned more. I would be the first person to admit that both Rothko and Newman are big, masculine artists. You know, we acknowledge this. I don't think this makes them good or bad in and of itself.

QUESTIONER: [Inaudible]

PROF. FREEDBERG: Käthe Kollwitz and Cindy Sherman. I went to some length on them. But I think there is another problem with that particular observation which I want to say, which is that it is true that if we

were doing art from, shall we say, 1950 through to the end of the century, then I might have improved the representation of female artists. But there is a brutal fact, which has nothing to do with me but that has to do with cruel history, that there were more male artists than female artists. I am not saying this is good or bad; it's just a fact.

But the third issue, which relates to your first issue, is I'd like just to say something about the apparent inconsistency between figuration at the beginning, abstraction in the end, and then a return to figuration at the end. The aim of the paper was to ask a question about "What is it about art in the twentieth century that we regard as divine?" It's not about being close to Biblical texts, although I tried to show you works that illustrated Biblical texts. I think that the case of abstract expressionism makes one aware of the relevance of aesthetics, of thought about art itself, though about form, as a way of understanding the presence of religion in the works.

So, in a way, this was a pedagogical strategy. It was certainly no claim for saying that abstract expressionism is religious and the other art is not. Nor was it a claim for saying abstract expressionism is more religious than figurative art. Absolutely not. I hope I didn't convey that impression.

I happen to like these great paintings which elicit such meditation. But I also think that the work of Cindy Sherman, which is so troubling — with that prosthetic breast, it's a deeply troubling picture — but we could have a whole lecture on that as well, because there is a mystery there and it pertains to the divine very clearly as well.

DR. HELLER: I know that there are many more questions, but I think this is a good point for us to end, because I think it shows us that good scholarship, like good art, raises as many questions as it provides answers. If anything, I think that all of us will be thinking of these issues in probably different lights after we heard this lecture.

Please join me in thanking Professor Freedberg for his very inspiring lecture. Please join us for a reception right outside and join us again tomorrow morning starting at 9:30 across the street at the Museum. Thank you.

[Adjournment: 7:31 p.m.]