WINDOWS TO THE SOUL

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the degree Master of Fine Arts
School of the Ohio State University

by

Janet L. Marsano, B.F.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
1985

Master's Examination Committee:
Carlyle Johnson
Richard Harned

Approved by

[Signature]
Adviser
College of the Arts
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I warmly thank the members of my thesis committee, Carlyle Johnson and Richard Harned, for their humor, enthusiasm and support. A special thanks goes to my advisor, Don Duncan, who made this degree possible.
DEDICATION

To Dennis
who was always there
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . ii
DEDICATION . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . iii
LIST OF PLATES . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . v
THESIS TEXT . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 1
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 9
# LIST OF PLATES

1. Holy Card .......................................................... 10
2. Holy Card .......................................................... 10
3. Body Icon II ......................................................... 11
4. Body Icon II, Detail .................................................. 12
5. Window 2 ............................................................... 13
6. Window 2, Detail ....................................................... 14
7. 'Til Death Do Us Part Icon, Detail .............................. 15
8. 'Til Death Do Us Part Icon ........................................ 16
9. 'Til Death Do Us Part Icon, Back View ...................... 17
10. Under the Rose, Detail ............................................. 18
11. Under the Rose ....................................................... 19
12. Under the Rose, Back View ....................................... 20
13. Window 3 .............................................................. 21
14. Body Icon III, Brooch ............................................ 22
15. Body Icon III, Brooch Back View ............................. 23
16. Body Icon III ......................................................... 24
17. Window 5 .............................................................. 25
18. Window 4 .............................................................. 26
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Window 4, Detail</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Window 5, Detail</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Window 1, Detail</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>The Golden Rule Icon or Do Unto Others</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>The Golden Rule Icon or Do Unto Others, Detail</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>The Golden Rule Icon or Do Unto Others, Back View</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>'Til Death Do Us Part Icon, Back Detail</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Order, ritual and discipline were an important part of the first eight years of my elementary education at Saint Joseph's Parochial School. We marched in pairs to mass everyday, sang in Latin, fasted before communion, recited prayers and the rosary, confessed our sins, memorized our catechism (questions and answers) and for eight years we sat in alphabetical order. There was a lot of repetition in the learning, but not always as much understanding of what was taught. I remember clearly the story told to me of the man who missed Sunday Mass, was in a car accident during the week and died without the benefit of the last rites to cleanse his soul so that he may go to heaven. Fear of this happening to me kept me going to mass... for awhile. We were told what to think and what to believe and I accepted it... for awhile.

"God is, was, and always will be," "remember, man, that thou art dust," "the eyes are the windows to the soul," and "the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit"—my head was full of these phrases as well as pictures of religious images. The Assumption of the Virgin, the Ascension of Jesus Christ, and the Virgin standing triumphant on the serpent are some of those images. I saw these figures many times in the form of statues, Byzantine-like icon paintings and stained glass windows. They were placed high and out of reach in some niche within the architecture of the interior of the church. They were physically distant, which gave
me the sense that they were someone whom we should aspire to emulate. We carried these images around with us in the form of the holy card, small pieces of stiff paper, sometimes encased in protective plastic, that were stylized representations of Jesus, Mary, Joseph and other holy persons. Some were extremely ornate with lots of gold paint in the illustration, or crowded with angels, clouds and halos. My recollection of the image is that of a central figure floating - not earth-bound - hidden amongst the embellishment of clouds, angels, halos and gold (Plates 1 and 2). We hoarded and traded the cards to acquire our favorites. It was as though possession alone of a real, material object would give some understanding of our faith's mysterious spirituality, as represented by the figure.

My thesis project is an attempt to synthesize these recollections, current experiences and the idea of the "icon" through the use of enamel, metal, acrylic and paper. Traditionally, an icon was a representation or picture of a sacred, Christian personage, itself regarded as sacred. It was a real object that embodied the spiritual and was to be venerated, but "icon" simply means "image". In my work, I am not trying to reproduce icons or holy cards, but am using my own image to convey feelings similar to those associated with traditional church icons: reverence, order, ritual, mystery, history and artifact. The work has taken the form of cloisonne, enameled brooches and handmade paper.

The image of my icons is a truncated, nude torso or a floating window-like object (Plates 3, 4, 5 and 6). The torso is drawn from what I recall from past study of the fragmented torso of the classic Greek and Roman sculpture of athletes, heroes, gods and goddesses. They are
remnants or relics that have survived and call to mind past cultures. I have also been influenced by the exaggerated musculature of Renaissance figures, particularly those by Michelangelo. He depicts figures of God and deity as perfect physical and spiritual beings. I don't think they exist in reality: they exist in paintings, in sculptures, in holy cards. They exist for me in my enamels.

The nudes in the enamels are lean and sensuous. They are ripped and torn in the area of the breast, buttock, abdomen and pelvis. This draws attention to the erotic and vulnerable regions of the body. I have used blue or white for some of the torsos to show their coldness and lack of feeling. They are permanent like marble. The degeneration implied by the openings in the bodies has stopped. Like those classic, fragmented sculptures, they are caught in a particular moment in time.

The torsos do not show the pain and terror that would accompany such violent action. Their lack of feeling is accentuated by the blue and white color of the figures against the hot reds and yellows of the background (Plate 7). There is a paradoxical beauty about these pieces in the material, in the opalescence of the enameled torso, that is contrary to the violence of the image. They are like certain pictures of Christ's crucifixion or the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian wherein the facial expressions are peaceful while the situations are painful: Christ is nailed to the cross and saint Sebastian is full of arrows.

"At that time of Martyrdom, the sufferings are not shown, just as they are not described in liturgical texts. What is shown is not the suffering itself, but the bearing there must be towards it, as the reply." (Lossky, Ouspensky, The Meaning of Icons, p. 27)
Sometimes I think of the torsos as self-portraits. The openings in
the flesh parallel my own confusion about relationships; the detachment
of the torso from the abuse done to it parallels my not feeling or show-
ing the reaction to the pain and hurt that is a part of relationships,
particularly those between men and women. I want to hide my emotions
and vulnerability behind a facade of strength and composure. How often
I have heard the phrases "the patience of a saint" or "turn the other
cheek," as if this made one more perfect, closer to the ideals of
Christianity.

The narrative present in work like 'Til Death Do Us Part and Under
the Rose is about the sacrament of marriage and the phrase "and the two
shall become one" (Plates 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12). Both depict the male and
female in symbolic sexual intercourse. The bodies blend into each other
to become one and are penetrated by a sperm-like object or by a rose
and thorns. Marriage can be a beautiful and difficult commitment, many
times a mystery to all even, to the two who are bound, hence the rose
and thorns, a symbol of secrecy, beauty and danger.

I think of the phrase "the eyes are the windows to the soul" in
regard to the floating image of the handmade paper. Like stained glass
windows, they don't allow you to see through them to the real world,
they control what is seen. The enamels have a closer structural rela-
tionship to windows. The cloisonne wire is used to make lines or cells
that hold baked glass as lead came makes lines to hold flat glass. The
enamels are framed by metal, they reflect light and have a translucency
similar to stained glass windows. The window's in Saint Joseph's Church
were of a narrative nature as are the enamels. The window images in the
handmade paper don't have the actual transparency of glass, but one has the illusion of being able to see through them. The image which is viewed is more ethereal than that in the enamels. The window frame becomes like the body, framing or containing the soul, the spirit (Plate 13).

Suspension of the image is another way that I try to show the spiritual nature of the icon. This comes from my recollections of church windows high on the walls of the church interior, the large, wooden crucifix that hung over the main altar, and most importantly from the Assumption of the Virgin, a frequent picture on holy cards. The Virgin was the central figure surrounded by clouds and air.

As jewelry, in the form or brooches, I didn't think the enamels were successful icons. They lacked what I desired for them in importance. I liked the smallness of the brooches. They capture the viewer's attention through intimacy rather than monumentality; the viewer is forced to get close to the work in order to see all that occurs within it. However, I believed that for them to evoke the reverence that an icon deserved, they should be presented in such a way as to make them more than just an ornament. I experimented with masonite and wood to make a framework into which I could place the brooch, but the finished piece lacked perfection. The crudeness was incompatible with the preciousness of the enamel and silver. I had considered making glass frames, but chose acrylic which could be easily drilled, sawed, filed and polished. The plastic could be colored and had the transparency and smooth, slick surface of glass. I used layers of acrylic and cut an opening into the plastic deep enough to contain the brooch. I fastened the brooch
securely in the niche (Plates 14, 15 and 16). They were now like the chalice safe in the tabernacle or the relic contained in the cornerstone of the altar. I sprayed paint onto the acrylic in the same way that I airbrushed the handmade paper, with color in gradations from dark at the bottom to light at the top, making a reference to air, atmosphere, a nimbus, which was in keeping with the floating quality of the holy cards as well as the compositional order of them.

The architectural order of the church comes to mind when I think about the arrangement of elements in the work. The church has a central aisle or nave that is intersected by the transept. A view from above would reveal a cross form. Some of the paper is actually laid in a cross form or the form is created through the activity of line or color (Plate 17). Sometimes the church has a central or main altar flanked by two smaller side altars. In my work, the image of the nude torso or floating window is always central, like the main altar. In Window #4, the representation looks like a mosque flanked by two columns (Plate 18).

Ritual is a part of the function of the church. It occurs as repetition in the celebration of the Mass and in the recitation of prayer. The work is ritually created in a layering of materials that invites the viewer to try to unravel the mystery of what is actually and symbolically hidden within. The window series is created from layers of paper into which pearls, sticks, flowers and glittery fibers are embedded (Plates 19, 20 and 21). The paper is ripped to allow a peek through the surface.

The enamels are constructed in layers. Sheets of fine silver are soldered together to make an opening to receive the enamel. The torso and its background are mottled by building up strata of the colored
enamel. The transparent enamel allows one to look through the surface to the fine silver below.

The acrylic, that frames the enamel, is stacked in sheets with shading film and frosted mylar sandwiched in between to create patterns of line and color. The sheets of acrylic are bolted together into a framework of brass (Plates 22 and 23). The brass backing plate is decorated by piercing and/or riveting small, metal shapes to the exposed acrylic (Plates 24 and 25). This was consistent with the embellishment on the back layer of the brooches. Backlighting revealed the translucency and the many layers of the acrylic. In some of the pieces, the light created a halo effect around the enamel, reinforcing the idea of atmosphere and spirituality.

Gold, silver and enamels have been traditional materials used to create articles for the church. I use them for their beauty. I respond to the brilliancy and reflections of metal and enamels, their durability and preciousness. They are luxurious, sumptuous and sensuous. Certain characteristics of the church's accoutrements appeal to me: the color and texture of the priest's vestments, the gold and ornament of the chalice and tabernacle, the transparency and richness of stained glass windows, the polished marble of the altar. I am aware of the reverence with which these objects are made and cared for.

I didn't try to reproduce traditional church objects or icons, but attempted to get the feeling of them into my work by the choice of materials, the order of composition, the ritual of their creation and the attention to detail in an attempt at perfection.
My windows are not of common, transparent glass that show me the real world outside. They reflect back to me and reveal what is inside. I don't see through them but into them to my soul, my spirit, which exists beyond the real and the tangible. The soul is that mysterious and ethereal part of me which will outlive my physical self. My spirit is not a part of me that I expect to be able to fully understand. As the stained glass windows in Saint Joseph's give existence to God, the saints and their spirituality, I have tried to make my work give existence to my soul. I feel my spirit's essence and have faith in its reality and its eternity.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PLATE 1

PLATE 2

HOLY CARDS
PLATE 6

WINDOW 2, DETAIL
'TIL DEATH DO US PART ICON, DETAIL
'TIL DEATH DO US PART ICON
PLATE 9

'TIL DEATH DO US PART ICON, BACK VIEW
PLATE 10

UNDER THE ROSE, DETAIL
PLATE 11

UNDER THE ROSE
PLATE 12

UNDER THE ROSE, BACK VIEW
PLATE 14

BODY ICON III, BROOCH
BODY ICON III, BROOCH BACK VIEW
PLATE 16

BODY ICON III
PLATE 22

THE GOLDEN RULE ICON OR DO UNTO OTHERS
PLATE 23

THE GOLDEN RULE ICON OR DO UNTO OTHERS, DETAIL
PLATE 24

THE GOLDEN RULE ICON OR DO UNTO OTHERS, BACK VIEW