The Consecration and Profanation of "Madonna and Child": Seeing Religious Art in the Age of Cinematic Mobility[1]

Peng Hai, *Harvard University*

This paper will examine and analyze the experience of viewing "religious art" in non-religious spaces (specifically museums),[2] and problematize the fact that, within such secular spaces, religious art is framed in a way that reduces it to its materiality, thereby obscuring the fact that such art can evoke a mood which religious scholars have identified as a fundamental component of human religiosity: the subjunctive mood. I argue that the possibility of religious art to effect this evocation is related to what I refer to below as the "cinematic mobility" viewers have when engaging with such works of art.

This paper will begin by critically reflecting on the fact that, since the Enlightenment, there has been a predominant tendency to view religious traditions and their material culture through a rationalist and secular lens. This framing has given rise to the

1. I would like to extend a special thanks to the reviewers and editors of *Arc* for helping bring this paper to its current and polished form.

2. While there are some religious spaces – such as certain parts of the Vatican – which present curations of the institution's own lineage and history and are branded as "museums," this article specifically discusses the modern art museum as defined by the disciplinary precepts of Art History, where museums are understood to be secular spaces.

conceptualization of "religious art," a rationalist nomenclature which secularizes and commodifies formerly sacred objects. However, it is my argument that, despite this secular framing, the "sacred" nature of religious art can never be fully erased – religious artwork contains the social and somatic memories associated with their ritualistic use,[3] and these memories can be evoked even when the art is presented in a setting that encourages a secular perceptual framing. In other words, borrowing from Walter Benjamin's discussion of the *mémoire involontaire* (involuntary memory),[4] I argue that religious art can recall and reproduce the social or somatic memory of its religious/ritualistic use, and that this recalling and reproducing is arguably what constitutes the "sacred" aura of such art. While modern secular education emphasizes the materiality of art in a way that discourages this type of evocative experience, part of what makes religious objects "religious" is their ability to invoke these types of evocative experiences, which, in turn, generates meaning that transcends the art's secular, materialist framing. The meaning that religious objects are able to evoke is rooted in what ritual theorists such as Jonathan Z. Smith, Michael Puett, Adam Seligman and Victor Turner refer to as "the subjunctive mode of being."[5] In Turner's words, the subjunctive

3. The phrases "somatic memory" and "social memory" are inspired by David Morgan's differentiation between the "somatic body" and the "social body." For a nuanced discussion of Morgan's phraseology, see *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 55–60.

4. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Selected Writings 1938–40*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 337–38.

5. See Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Adam Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Simon Bennett, *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008); Victor

mode of being refers to "the mood of maybe, might-be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire" – it is a mode of being that turns our attention towards the human capacity to carve out a better future for the world.[6] By containing the possibility of invoking a subjunctive mood, religious art facilitates what Robert Bellah refers to as the human capacity for "beyonding" – a "symbolic transcendence" that allows us to see "the realm of daily life *in terms of* a realm beyond it."[7]

Accordingly, I argue that the secular rationalist move to encourage non-religious perceptual framings of art will never fully succeed, as the sacred aura of art – i.e., the potential it contains to evoke the subjunctive mode of being – cannot be stifled by the fact that most people view religious art in secular institutional settings, such as public or private museums. This will be accomplished via an examination of the Madonna and Child iconography found in the Stefano Bardini Museum, where I will demonstrate that the changing perceptual frames facilitated by cinematic mobility allows viewers to perceive religious artworks, not in purely material terms, but rather as expressions of the subjunctive mode of human existence, expressions which, in turn, can invoke a subjunctive mood in the viewer as well.

Framing "Religious Art"

Daniel Miller, in developing a thesis made by art historian Ernst H. Gombrich, puts forth a rather radical view on the

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Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987).

6. Victor Turner and Edward M. Bruner, *The Anthropology of Experience* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 42.

7. Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution: from the Paleolithic to the Axial Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 9.

relationship between framing and the "existence" of art:

> Art exists only insomuch as frames such as art galleries or the category of 'art' itself ensure that we pay particular respect, or pay particular money, for that which is contained within such frames. It is the frame, rather than any quality independently manifested by the artwork, that elicits the special response we give it as art.[8]

In other words, it is Miller's argument that "art" is "art" by nature of its framing as such, rather than by nature of some inherent property it contains. Miller thus adds a third dimension to the traditional binary understanding of what constitutes art – it is not just a matter of materiality and representation, but also of framing. On a micro level, the monetary buying power of an art collector and the acquired knowledge of an art historian are part of the framing or the "naturalization process" that transforms an image or an object into art. On a macro level, there are also epistemological framings which take form over time.

According to the argument put forward by Hans Belting in *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Age of Art* (1994), religious art fits this category of epistemological framing, because, until the Renaissance, religious imagery was produced, not for aesthetic purposes, but rather to enable the viewer to enter into the sacred presence of whatever was depicted, be it Christ, the Saints, Mary, etc. He refers to this period as "the era of the image." After the Renaissance, however, the modern sense of art began to take shape, and art increasingly came to be understood as something to be appreciated in purely aesthetic terms.[9] In other words, it is

8. See Daniel Miller, *Materiality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 5.

9. Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Age of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). As W.J.T. Mitchell puts

Belting's thesis that the secular epistemology of modernity made the secular epistemological framing of religious art dominant – so dominant, in fact, that he believes the era of art "replaces" the era of the image.[10]

Belting's account of the "era of the image" has found wide support and has generated several recent studies by Glenn Peers, Chris M. Woolgar and Patricia Cox Miller,[11] who generally concur that that the church's absolute control over the consecration, custody, meaning, (co-)mission, display and discharge of sacred images in late antiquity and medieval Christendom was such that to "see" a sacred image was to partake in the synesthetic experience of worship.[12] As Woolgar demonstrates, the notion of "religious art" was foreign in the middle ages.[13] However, Belting's assertion that the era of art supplants the era of the image – transforming the latter into "a memory from olden times"[14] – has been contested. For

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it in his discussion of Belting's thesis in *What Do Pictures Want?*, in the era of art, "any 'power' in the image is now a delicately adjusted 'aesthetic response' that does not overwhelm the beholder in the way that traditional religious and magical icons did." See Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 95.

10. Belting, *Likeness and Presence,* 490.

11. Glenn Peers, *Sacred Shock: Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Chris Woolgar, "What Makes Things Holy? The Senses and Material Culture in the Later Middle Ages," in *Sensing the Sacred in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. R. Macdonald, E. Murphy, and E. Swann (London: Routledge, 2018).

12. See: Peers, *Sacred Shock*; Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination*; Woolgar, "What Makes Things Holy?" I use the term "synesthetic" because, during this time, seeing a sacred image invoked the synesthetic experience of seeing-as-feeling – that is to say, of seeing (religious art)-as-feeling (a religious sentiment).

13. See Woolgar, "What Makes Things Holy," 70.

14. Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 490.

example, Megan Holmes has noted that the Renaissance was an age when the production of miraculous images in Italy was at an all-time high.[15] Likewise, Adrian Randolph demonstrates that, while fifteenth century works of art were indeed increasingly "defined by their eliciting visual rather than haptic responses," this did not stop congregants throughout Europe from engaging in the intimate act of kissing the *instrumentum pacis* (the Kiss of Peace)[16] – an act which I argue is best understood as a response provoked by what I've referred to above as the "sacred aura" of the art. Accordingly, the era of art should not be understood as supplanting the era of the image, but rather as inaugurating a dynamic period where the sacred and secular auras of religious artwork co-exist. This article argues that we are still living in this dynamic period, and, moreover, that even in the secular space of the art museum, sacred images can continue to inspire a subjunctive mood in those who behold them.

The term "subjunctive mood" comes from ritual theory,[17] which argues that humans perceive the world in two modes simultaneously: the indicative mode which perceives the world as it is, and the subjunctive mode which envisions the world as it ought to be.[18] As Seligman puts it, ritual represents a continuous subjun-

15. Holmes defines miraculous images as those distinguished by their extraordinary efficacy as sites of votive petition, sacred intersession, and miraculous manifestations. Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 3, 13.

16. See Adrian Randolph, *Touching Objects: Intimate Experiences of Italian Fifteenth-Century Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 214–217.

17. Following Jonathan Z. Smith, this article defines ritual as an embodied and communal practice of cultural orientation through the repeated observance of prescribed and proscribed behavior, thoughts, wishes and desires. See Smith, *Toward Theory in Ritual*, 103.

18. See Smith, *To Take Place*; Seligman, Weller, Puett, and Bennett, *Ritual and its Consequences*; Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance*.

ive enactment of the world's "better" potentialities and possibilities.[19] Similarly, Seligman, Weller, Puett and Simon argue that the subjunctive mode constitutes a "could be," a mutual illusion which rituals create and sustain.[20] While these theorists are largely focused on the subjunctive mood as it relates to ritual, they also note that it can be inspired by "the antistructural liminality provided in […] aesthetic forms,"[21] and, accordingly, I argue that this explains why religious art resists the purely material and aesthetic viewing experience encouraged by secular perceptual framings: religious works of art are expressions of the subjunctive mood, which, in turn, invite the viewer to participate in the subjunctive mood as well.

Aura and the Involuntary Memory of Religious Ritual

Religious icons have been objects of ritualistic devotion for much of human civilization, as the wealth of extant iconography attests to. Hence, an analysis of religious art in the form of iconography presents an excellent means of demonstrating my overarching argument. Take, for example, a fifteenth century Madonna and Child sculpture from the Domenico Gaggini (1425–1492).[22] The tiny cracks on the polychromed alabaster immediately

19. Adam Seligman, "Ritual and Sincerity: Certitude and the Other," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36, no.1 (2010): 10. I put "better" in quotes because there is no objective criterion to assess any culture's definition of a better model of life.

20. Seligman, Weller, Puett, and Bennett, *Ritual and its Consequences*, 23.

21. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), vii.

22. A series of the Domenico Gaggini Madonna and Child (alternately titled Madonna di Trapani) are preserved at the Berenson Art Collection at Vila I Tatti, Florence, attributed to Edvige Lugaro, "Una Madonna Gaginesca ai Tatti," Paragone, XXXV, 411 (1984): 74–80.

calls for the viewer's reverence for its survival over the centuries, while the astonishingly well-preserved metal crown (presumably gold or gold gilded) demonstrates its recalcitrance to being pilfered (see fig. 1). From certain perceptual framings, this recalcitrance can be interpreted as being rooted in the sacred power of the icon; its ability to protect itself from profanation. Beyond what is signaled by its pristine preservation, the crown also adds sacred value to the idol via the symbolism associated with gold. As Woolgar explains, adorning icons with jewels and other precious metals "was significant, serving not as superficial decoration, but as a contribution to the force of the object" – in other words, such ornamentation was meant to "enhance the power of the holy [object]."[23] Using the terminology introduced above, we can thus say that there is a sacred aura emanating from this well-aged Madonna sculpture, an aura which, as I will argue below, is rooted in a specific type of experiential response.

23. Woolgar, "What Makes Things Holy," 69.

Figure 1: "Workshop of Gaggini, and Copy after Pisano, Madonna and Child," late fifteenth - early seventeenth century. Alabaster, partly polychromed and gilded with metal crown. Berenson Art Collection, I Tatti - The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/ids:419309699.

The concept of "aura" is first taken up by Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological

Reproducibility" (1939);[24] however, I am primarily interested in utilizing his discussion presented in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939). In the latter essay, Benjamin asserts that an object's aura is rooted in its "prehistory." As he explains, the prehistory of an object gives rise to certain associations that "cluster" around it, and these associations are what "we call […] the aura of an object."[25] Accordingly, when speaking of an object's aura we are not referring to some innate property that it has, but rather to something which is located in our experience of it. Benjamin links the experience of an object's aura to Proust's notion of the involuntary memory (*mémoire involontaire*): "where there is experience [*Erfahrung*] in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine in the memory [*Gedächtnis*] with material from the collective past."[26] In the specific case of religious iconography, I suggest that this involuntary memory is comprised of a combination of the somatic memory of physically partaking in ritualistic behaviors associated with the iconography – if the icon is of Mary, the somatic memory of saying the rosary, for example – and the social memory of seeing or being aware of people participating in such ritualistic behavior.[27] Where the somatic

24. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *Selected Writings 1938–40*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 251–283.

25. Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 337–338.

26. Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 316.

27. The linking of ritual to the phenomenon of involuntary memory/an object's aura is also in line with Benjamin's assertion that "the earliest artworks originated in the service of rituals – first magical, then religious, and it is highly significant that the artwork's auratic mode of existence is never entirely severed from its ritual function" (Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 256) – and, accordingly, that, "rituals, with their ceremonies and festivals […] kept producing the amalgamation of these two elements of memory over and over again" ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 317).

memory differs from the social memory is that the first is mediated by and originates from one's own corporeality, while the latter is mediated by the mental association of other social bodies practicing such corporeal rituals, now or in the past. Regardless of the level of mediation, the evocation of such memories speaks to the human predisposition towards the subjunctive mode of being. In other words, the auratic shock – the sensation of feeling under the power of the icon – is really the mental process of partaking in the subjunctive mode of being. This partaking, however, isn't necessarily related to holding a religious identification. As the "social" element of the involuntary memory indicates, the aura of religious art – that is to say, its specific prehistory and the associations that accompany it – can invoke memories rooted in our shared social and cultural imaginary, opening up a subjunctive mood that might be unrelated to one's personal/corporeal experiences.

Other scholars have come up with alternative explanations to capture what is described here as the auratic shock. David Morgan, in *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment* (2018), prefers the term "enchantment" over aura, because enchantment for him signifies the way in which "things made by human beings return to them as something *not* humanly produced, something that is as real as they themselves." [28] Elsewhere, Wingfield invokes the South Asian religious practice of *darsan*, which refers to the viewing of a sacred image as a reciprocal experience. In other words, the viewer is also seen by the religious image, and, as a result, is "touched and affected by this contact."[29]

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28. David Morgan, *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 21.
29. Christopher Wingfield, "Touching the Buddha: Encounters with a Charismatic Object" in *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, ed. Sandra H. Dudley (London: Routledge, 2010), 65.

While I am drawn to Morgan's metaphoric conceptualization of enchantment and sympathetic to Wingfield's notion of humanistic charisma, I believe aura, understood as the involuntary invocation of the somatic and/or social memory of ritual, represents the best theoretical description.

This is because their terminology seems to assert, contra Benjamin, that the aura of religious art is both fixed and innate – that is to say, their terminology seems to locate the aura of religious artwork *in the work of art itself* (i.e., in its "charisma" or some "enchanting" property it has), rather than in the viewer's distinct and variegated *experience of it*. To clarify, while I do not think they are asserting that religious art is animated by some type of sacred essence, I do think that the language of "charisma" and "enchantment" reifies the perception that it is the object itself that causes this intersubjective effect, rather than the idea that it is the frame we bring that effects this type of experience. This, then, is why I believe the terminology of aura-as-involuntary-memory to be superior – it highlights how the cinematic mobility of the viewer represents a crucial component of an artwork's aura. In other words, by locating an object's aura in the viewer's experience of it, it becomes clear how the cinematic mobility of the viewer (as explicated below) creates different perceptual framings which invoke different types of involuntary memories and thus different types of subjunctive moods. I argue that this language is especially preferable when referring to the experience of viewing religious art in the context of the secular museum. Here, religious art exists in assemblages and communities[30] where a collection of sacred imag-

30. See Nile Green, *Bombay Islam: The Religious Economy of the West Indian Ocean, 1840–1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), where he discusses a "religious economy" where religious art and holy sites often must compete with their peers for following and attention.

es and objects compete for the visitor's attention. In such a context it is not some enchanting or charismatic property of the art that invokes the subjunctive mood, but rather the frame applied by the visitor's cinematic mobility.[31]

Cinematic Mobility in the Modern Art Museum

Filmmakers relay the intended narrative of a film through its *mise-en-scène* – the design and composition of the set (including props, actors, costumes, and lighting) – cinematography, and editing. Cinematography is a crucial component, as "how the camera takes in the [mise-en-]scene is how the audience will perceive it."[32] Likewise, Museums relay intended narratives about certain pieces/collections/artists/movements through the curation of exhibits. In other words, by choosing rooms with certain fixtures, moldings, wall coverings, lighting, etc., and by manipulating these features as needed, museum curators create "frames" which encourage visitors to perceive the intended narrative.[33]

In the analogy currently being explicated, the director corresponds to the museum curator, the *mise-en-scène* to the curated exhibit, and the cinematographer to the visitor. While the

31. It must be made clear that the visitors I am referring to are members of the general public who are viewing these works of art in the contemporary context of the secular museum. In different periods, the art currently on display in these museums would have only been accessible to a small elite group. As this elite group was mainly comprised of art historians and wealthy art collectors/connoisseurs whose viewing experience would have taken place in a much more intimate setting, their viewing experience would be quite different from what I describe below. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the present work to discuss earlier eras.

32. Alain Brown, *Cinematography: Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 10.

33. Philip Fisher, *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museums* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991), 10.

mise-en-scène of a film suggests a certain narrative frame, the cinematographer adds another level of framing, which is why, depending on how the cinematographer decides to shoot, the same *mise-en-scène* can tell different stories. Likewise, although a museum exhibit suggests a certain narrative frame, the cinematic mobility of the viewer – their ability to walk through at their own speed, dwell on certain pieces while ignoring others, focus in on a certain aspect of a piece while letting the rest fall into soft focus, view the same piece from different angles, etc. – adds another level of framing, which is why the same curated exhibit can invoke different perceptions from different visitors. In both instances, the movement of the camera/visitor frames the scene.

There is, however, a problem with this analogy: while in the case of a film the cinematographer is establishing a frame to assist an unknown viewer in coming to see the director's vision, in the case of the museum, the visitor-as-cinematographer is establishing a frame for themselves. However, this doesn't mean that the museum visitor is somehow closer to the "reality" of the spectacle than the viewer of a film. In both museum installations and films there is distance between the spectator and spectacle. While in previous eras patrons were able to have a more intimate experience with the art they encountered by touching it,[34] modern day museum goers are not afforded this luxury for obvious reasons related to preservation. The materiality/representation of artwork thus becomes something to be engaged with on a strictly visual level, calling for the viewer to actively exert their gaze and imagination to reach a more organic "grasp" of its materiality/representation through constant mental associations (which can trigger involuntary

34. As suggested above, the modern-day museum goer's experience is much more mediated than in earlier eras. For a subtle discussion of the term intimacy, see Randolph, *Touching Objects*, 8–14.

memories, both somatic and social). While films have soundtracks and dialogue between characters to stimulate our mental associations and memories, in a museum an on-site curator and ambient noise function in a similar manner to achieve this same goal.

In sum, the cinematic mobility of each visitor is unique, and by engaging with exhibits/individual pieces in different ways – i.e., through different perceptual frames – each visitor can narrativize the same exhibit/piece in different ways. Using the terminology of aura, we can say that different people will experience different auras when encountering the same work of art.[35] This brings us to our next discussion. We will now examine a Renaissance-era work depicting the Madonna and Child as a case study to analyze the effects of cinematic mobility in the production of changing auras.

Cinematic Mobility and the Shifting Auras of "The Madonna and Child"

In "What Is an Apparatus?" (2009), Giorgio Agamben undertakes a "theological genealogy of apparatuses," and comes to define the concept as "literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings."[36] Later on, in his discussion of the apparatuses of conse-

35. It should be noted that, even in the contemporary context, the perceptual frame of the serious art collector, restoration specialist, curator, etc., is of a different quality than the general visitor, as the former group has not only preexisting knowledge and associations related to the art, but also the luxury of being able to get much closer to the art, perhaps even gaining a tactile sense of its materiality, which adds a layer to the mental associations that can be invoked.

36. See Giorgio Agamben, "What is An Apparatus?," in *What is An Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 14.

cration and profanation, he defines the former as that which "designate[s] the exit of things" from "free use and trade among humans," and the latter as "the counter-apparatus that restores to the common use what sacrifice [consecration] had separated and divided."[37]

In the terms of the present discussion, we can say that during the age of the image the consecration of religious art, as discussed above, imbued it with what I have been referring to as a "sacred aura" – that is to say, works of religious art were viewed as a means of entering into the sacred presence of whatever was being depicted (or, put differently, a means of evoking the subjunctive mood). When religious art became deracinated from its original religious context, it underwent a "profanation" in the sense articulated above. While Belting argues that this process of profanation marked the end of the "era of the image" – and thus the end of the "sacred aura" – I argue that the apparatus of the museum and the apparatus of cinematic mobility combine in a way that allows religious art to be framed as both sacred and profane, simultaneously. In other words, while the secular context of the museum suggests a "profane" framing of religious art, the cinematic mobility of the viewer allows for a "sacred" framing.[38]

Take, for example, the Madonna and Child exhibit that can be found at the Stefano Bardini Museum in Florence, Italy (fig. 2). Here, multiple portraits and figures of the Madonna and Child – all of a similar visual prominence – are found juxtaposed on one wall. The objects on display are multiple and diffuse, and, accordingly, compete for the visitor's attention. With each piece coming from a

37. Agamben, "What is An Apparatus?," 18.
38. I am not, of course, suggesting that every viewer will perceive a sacred aura, but merely that cinematic mobility creates the conditions of possibility for this response in the general viewing public.

different time and place, their assemblage in the secular space of the museum speaks to their deracinated state, and, accordingly, encourages a secular framing: these are valuable pieces of art (i.e., commodities) that have been collected and displayed for their aesthetic and historical value. The fact that they have been deracinated, commodified, collected, and displayed for the enjoyment of the masses makes them prime examples of profanation in the sense articulated above. This framing can be confirmed or denied by the perceptual frame of the viewer, depending on the type of cinematic mobility they employ.

Figure 2: A montage display of various depictions of the Madonna and Child, late fifteenth to early seventeenth century. Sculpted images on wooden plaques. Stefano Bardini Museum, Metropolitan Museum of Florence, Italy. Photo taken by the author on March 7, 2018.

If the visitor walks by without ever fully stopping, the effect is something of a "montage" – what's appreciated is the decorative effect brought about by the juxtaposition of different objects, and

no opportunity is given for the "mute idol to speak."[39] A similar effect is achieved if the visitor does not approach the images closely, but rather views from a distance, something like a "long shot." Long shots "emphasize the space over the character," or the "connection between the character and the space around them."[40] In the secular space of the museum, the long shot thus emphasizes the deracinated state of the objects, and, accordingly, their profanation in the sense articulated above. However, if the viewer stops to dwell on a specific piece, focusing all their attention on it so the rest of the objects fade into a soft focus, the effect is something of a "close-up." As Gustavo Mercado notes in *The Filmmaker's Eye* (2013), "the most important feature of a close-up is that it lets the audience see nuances of a character's behaviour and emotion (especially those that play across the face) that cannot be seen in wider shots […] the closeness and intimacy of a close-up lets audiences connect with a character (and a story) on an emotional level." [41] Likewise, by employing the "close-up," the visitor's experience of a certain piece becomes more intimate: they can focus on the aspects of its materiality/representation which speak to its consecrated prehistory, which can bring up memories and associations (both somatic and social) that make it seem as though the paining "is not mute but capable of speech."[42] The perceptual frame engendered by the "close-up" thus makes it possible to experience the painting as having a sacred aura.

However, as suggested above, the link between cinematic mobility and the triggering of a subjunctive mood extends beyond religious artwork. In other words, non-religious art can also trigger

39. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?*, 156–157.
40. Gustavo Mercado, *The Filmmaker's Eye* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 59.
41. Mercado, *The Filmmaker's Eye*, 35.
42. Belting, *Likeness and Presence,* 261.

the subjunctive mood, depending on the cinematic frame being employed. This assertion will require a bit of unpacking. As David Morgan argues, the cult of the secular icon[43] – a phenomenon widely seen in contemporary fan culture, advertising, political campaigns and eroticism – functions similarly to the cult of the religious icon, in that in each instance, the icon is viewed as a way to "reconnect to the source" – i.e., to the figure being depicted – and "offer renewed access to it."[44] In the terms of the present work, what Morgan seems to be noting is that the human mind seems to be predisposed towards the subjunctive mood when engaging in devotional behavior. However, as I have argued, one doesn't need to be consciously engaging in devotional behavior for the subjunctive mood to be triggered. In other words, the type of cinematic mobility we employ can, to re-quote Turner, help us experience "the antistructural liminality provided in […] aesthetic forms"[45] of all types, an experience which facilities the subjunctive mood. In the terms of aura, we can say that the type of cinematic mobility we employ dictates the type of aura we experience, which can range from the sacred to the profane.

Conclusion

According to the curators at the Stefano Bardini Museum, most of the Renaissance-era Madonna and Child pieces in their collection were collected from destroyed churches or bought from rich families in Tuscany and other parts of Italy. Accordingly, the prehistory of these objects can be framed in either sacred or profane

43. Morgan lists Marilyn Monroe, Che Guevara, John Lennon and Greta Garbo as examples. See Morgan, *Images at Work*, 135.
44. Morgan, *Images at Work*, 135.
45. Turner, *The Ritual Process,* vii.

terms, depending on whether one is focused on their life as consecrated objects or on their life as recovered or pilfered commodities. As argued above, it is the cinematic mobility of the viewer that brings one or the other into focus. In the case of the montage or long shot, what seems to come into focus is the profane life stage of the pieces, as what is emphasized is their deracination and aesthetic value. In the case of the close-up, space is made for the sacred life stage of the pieces – or, put differently, their sacred aura – to come into focus. When this occurs, the portraits appear as the devotional objects they were initially intended to be, and social and somatic memories associated with their devotional use can be triggered. Put differently, the objects come to appear as expressions of the subjunctive mood, which, in turn, may trigger the subjunctive mood in the viewer as well.

Madonna portraits will thus continue producing different auras ranging from the sacred to the profane, depending on the various frames we apply. In all those myriad framings, the minimum requirement from the viewer is respect, a respect that we owe both to the materiality of the portrait and the somatic and social memories it conjuries up in its viewers. The presence and absence of such memories and the fluidity of the two remind us of what Charles Taylor describes as the post-secular human condition of our present era, where belief in God becomes "one human possibility among others."[46] Building on Taylor's insight, if there is any justification for a secularist triumphalism, it is not that God has ceased to exist, but rather that we have broken the totalizing control of the church over the subjunctive vision of one civilization and made it possible for a multitude of subjunctive visions to co-exist and flourish.

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46. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.