



*La valse, Camille Claudel*

## **Le Genre à l'Oeuvre**

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## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to combine modern women's art with feminine mysticism of the Middle Ages and "minor" artistic artefacts done by nuns living in convents during the first three centuries of the first millennium.

Reflection on women's artistic expression is a long-time interest of mine that found its moment of grace at "Les Papesses" exhibition in the Avignon Palace of the Popes in 2013. The real blossoming of this interest was expressed at the Art and Psyche conference in Sicily where I presented some of the material in this paper.

## Avignon

In 2013 an exhibition in Avignon at the Palace of the Popes, "Les Papesses", put forth the question of discrimination in the art world towards women artists. The newspaper Le Monde, where I first read about the exhibition, titled the article "*L'art est un bastion sexiste*" – Art is a sexist stronghold. The title of the exhibition, compared with the historical meaning of the Avignon palace, seemed to me a declaration of war against the power exerted on women for many centuries by the dominant patriarchal culture.

Women's art had always been considered inferior. Since the Middle Ages the artistic production of women, mainly nuns and upper-class women, was overlooked. Women's artistic works couldn't be exhibited in general and the works produced by nuns--tapestries, paintings or other works--had to be kept in an enclosure where only the nuns could see them. However, the best poetry of the period was composed by women. Moreover, in recent years the richness of nuns'

medieval artistic production has been recognized<sup>1</sup> by scholars studying medieval art.



**Figure 1** *Avignon Palace of the Popes*

The location of the exhibition, the palace of Avignon, is in itself a demonstration of masculine power with no concession to roundness or greenery (Fig. 1). Built in stone, with tiny dark corridors, narrow and steep staircases, hidden passages that even today are difficult to detect, hint at treacherous conspiracies, cold spaces, indescribable tortures and the ostentatious show of power. The struggle for domination is written on every stone.

The exhibition of the women artists and their visions there suggested that the palace had been conquered by the suffering bodies of the “inferior beings”. One of the places where the patriarchal dominant power had projected on women all the wrongs and all the infamies that could be imagined, was now conquered.

The other hint to a change in perspective from patriarchal power to the recognition of the diversity of the feminine power is in the title “Les Papesses”, the women Popes; the reference is from the legend of Pope Joan who was very

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<sup>1</sup> Hamburger J. F., Marti S. (2008) - *the Crown & Veil: Female monasticism from the fifth to the fifteen Centuries*. Columbia University Press.

popular at the end of first millennium<sup>2</sup>. One of the early chronicles of this legend tells that Pope Joan disguised her feminine identity and reigned for a few years between 850 and 900. The years of her reign were peaceful and just.

At the 2013 exhibition, *Maman*, Louise Bourgeois' spider and Jana Sterbak's spheres (Fig. 2) were awaiting the visitors.



**Figure 2** *Maman* by Louise Bourgeois and *Spheres* by Jana Sterbak

Bourgeois' spider is the archetypal summa of all the prejudice against women. At the same time, *Maman* powerfully reminds us of the unconscious fear of feminine power as well as the capacity to repair the broken threads of relationships by the patient weaving of the canvas. The roundness of Sterbak's spheres is perfection that asks to be explored. The five contemporary artists,

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<sup>2</sup> The years from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> century were harbingers of meaningful changes in the fabric of the religious status quo and the legend of the Pope Joan was an expression of the discomfort towards the men of the church.



Louise Bourgeois, Berlinde De Bruyckere, Camille Claudel, Kiki Smith and Jana Sterbak, developed their artistic visions around archetypal themes coming from fairy tales, from the juxtaposition of religious art work of the past, from descriptions of the distress, fear and suffering that have accompanied and are always present in the lives of women.

### **On the many prohibitions imposed on women since medieval time<sup>3</sup>**

In the Middle Ages, so many things were prohibited to women that artistic expression wasn't even considered. The Medieval world was misogynist! Men of church and men of arms imposed total control over society and over women. In clear contradiction to the Gospel preaching of equality between all human beings, the men of church considered women as inferior beings; they had to submit to the men of church, to the power of kings and nobles, to their fathers, their husbands, to men in general.

The church of the first centuries, however, couldn't ignore that women became Christian before their husbands and thus assured that children would be baptised and educated in the Catholic religion. Married women were a further problem to the church, though it assigned to them important functions: wives contained the libidinal temptations of their husbands; the institution of marriage had been created for this reason.

The ecclesiastic power entered into all aspects of the sexual life of the couple and chastity in the marriage was considered a virtue equivalent to virginity before the marriage. The good wife had to take care of the husband, of

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<sup>3</sup> Vezzoli C., (2016) – Queens, Saints, Heretics, Prostitutes. Women in Italy. In: Europe's Many Souls. Exploring Cultural Complexes and Identities- Eds: Rasche J., Singer T. – Spring Journal Books.

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the father and mother of the husband, had to maintain her husband's love for god, take care of the children, the servants and so on<sup>4</sup>. What was demanded of a wife was an impossible task. Conjugal fidelity, even in theory, was imposed on the couple but was strict only for women. There were many other prohibitions and restrictions that regarded the way in which women had to dress or to speak-- or better yet--women shouldn't speak.

The prescription against women can be traced back to Merovingian times and codified by Carolingian and feudal traditions. Just to be irreverent and to introduce historical facts that are not always mentioned: the Emperor Charlemagne had nine wives in a time when divorce was not admitted and not all of them died by a natural death. Men of power had always been able to repudiate legitimate wives. The marriage law could be circumvented in many ways. This was a big problem for women who were at the mercy of men's decisions and changing alliances. Women preferred life in the convents as it was more secure. Death from complications during child birth was very common at the time.

## **Mary Magdalene**

Pope Gregory the Great had already understood the importance of women for the church and in 591, in the Church of Saint Clement in Rome, had proclaimed that Mary Magdalene, who was called a sinner in Luke's gospel, and whom John called Mary, was the same Mary of whom Mark said that seven demons were cast out. Gregory had several reasons to combine the identity of the women mentioned by Luke, John and Mark in their gospels. The Magdalene hagiography, created by Pope Gregory, was aimed at giving women the possibility

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<sup>4</sup> Duby G., Perrot M.,(1991) - *Storia delle donne in occidente. Il Medioevo*. Vol. 2 – Editore Laterza  
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to be in the grace of God. Between Eve and Mary, the figure of the Magdalene came to be the penitent Saint, the woman preferred by Jesus, and to whom he first appeared on the day of his resurrection.

The cult of the Magdalene widely developed due to the preaching of the poverty and simplicity that was lived by the nuns and monks of the mendicant orders. She was the saint that repented, was forgiven and was preferred by Jesus. The Magdalene was called “*apostolorum apostolam*”<sup>5</sup> to define her priority among the apostles. In the following centuries, the Magdalene, the repentant saint, came to represent the possibility for women to be part of the Body of Christ: the Church.



**Figure 3** *The Magdalene* – Kiki Smith

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5 Apostle of apostles.

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Ten centuries later, in the Avignon palace, the enchained Magdalene of Kiki Smith (Fig.3) covered with fur-like hair like a bear, tells us a lot about the condition and suffering of women. The feminine narrative continues and this statue tells of women's suffering, their chained creativity as well as their strength. The chain had been broken but it is still sealed to the woman's leg. The chain will rattle on the ground, reminding her that she can walk but not so freely as she could. The powerful image of an ancestral body with its memory of having been chained might remind us of the pain of imprisonment and the strength required to get rid of the many chains that anchor women to the pervasive devaluation perpetrated by the dominant culture.



**Figure 4** *The Magdalene by Donatello*

The other Magdalene that came to my mind is Donatello's the *Penitent Magdalene* represented in Figure 4. Donatello's Magdalene is an old emaciated woman without teeth, worn-out after a life spent in penitence. She is the hermit covered by her hair that has expiated all her sins. Nothing was left of her original



beauty but the austerity of her expression, her long skinny hands joined in prayer, her long curly hair falling to cover her body suggesting that she is beyond human frailty and that her beauty is in the transcendence of her spirit. Donatello sculpted the wooden statue when he was already old, and it probably represented the approach of the other life that was waiting for him quite soon. However, the dignity expressed by the statue is so strong and in a way so similar to that of Kiki Smith's Magdalene that it moves me deeply. The expression of profound humanity is transmitted through the posture. The beauty of the flesh was transformed into the beauty of transcendent spirituality.

The other important conviction common for the medieval believers was that to become a hermit, to live in poverty was inconceivable for women. The Magdalene and her retirement in the desert was therefore a demonstration of the strength and spiritual Eros the saint had achieved. The creation of the Magdalene changed the destiny of women. In the XI century, with the development of the mendicant orders and their acceptance of repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of god's almighty love, the Magdalene became the saint to be imitated. Women were allowed to be spiritual beings. With the preaching of life in poverty and at the service of the poor, and the monastic life as a way of expiation of the sins of the world, the convents became the privileged houses where women had the right to choose for themselves a spiritual life away from the struggle for power.

All of this had two effects: one was the birth of mysticism, something unknown until the advent of women mystics; and the other was Female Monasticism and its effects on art.

## Women Mystics

In *La fable Mystique*, Michel de Certeau emphasises that mysticism was created by the “inferiors,” Christians that for reasons of poverty or lack of power formed a great mass of people that easily died by famine or were not more than serfs. These were the peasants, let us say the majority of people in the position of having no voice. For their position in society, women were prominent among the disinherited; even if they came from prominent aristocratic families, they were subjected to the decisions of men in power, including the clerics.

The mystic is torn by the longing for a god that is not there anymore, by melancholy for the figure of the loved being, or nostalgia for the loved one. The separation is ancient and profound and the mystic writes about the longing in her prayer, about her desire to not be separated from God and his love. The longing is the expression of the desire of being united to the One, the Unique, in his form of a monotheistic god. This longing can be defined as the illness for the absence of the other: The Unique<sup>6</sup>. The mystic believed that love coming from the heart was the greatest enrichment, the one that overcomes all the limits of the world as well as that of the enclosure.

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<sup>6</sup> De Certeau M. - *La Fable Mystique* – Gallimard 1982

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**Figure 5** *Mystical marriage (connubium spirituale) Christ descending to the bed of his bride miniature in the Rothschild Canticles.*

The mystical marriage with Christ represented the superior union of souls as we see in the image (Fig. 5) where the angel dives into the bed of his bride; it is a miniature in the Rothschild Canticles. The mystical marriage was the regression to perfection that allowed women to explore their souls, the longing for the Other. The sexual or erotic energy is evident. These lower artistic expressions show in their naivete the power of interior feeling that fights to reach consciousness. What I like in this *arte minore* is the pure expression of the awakening of consciousness.

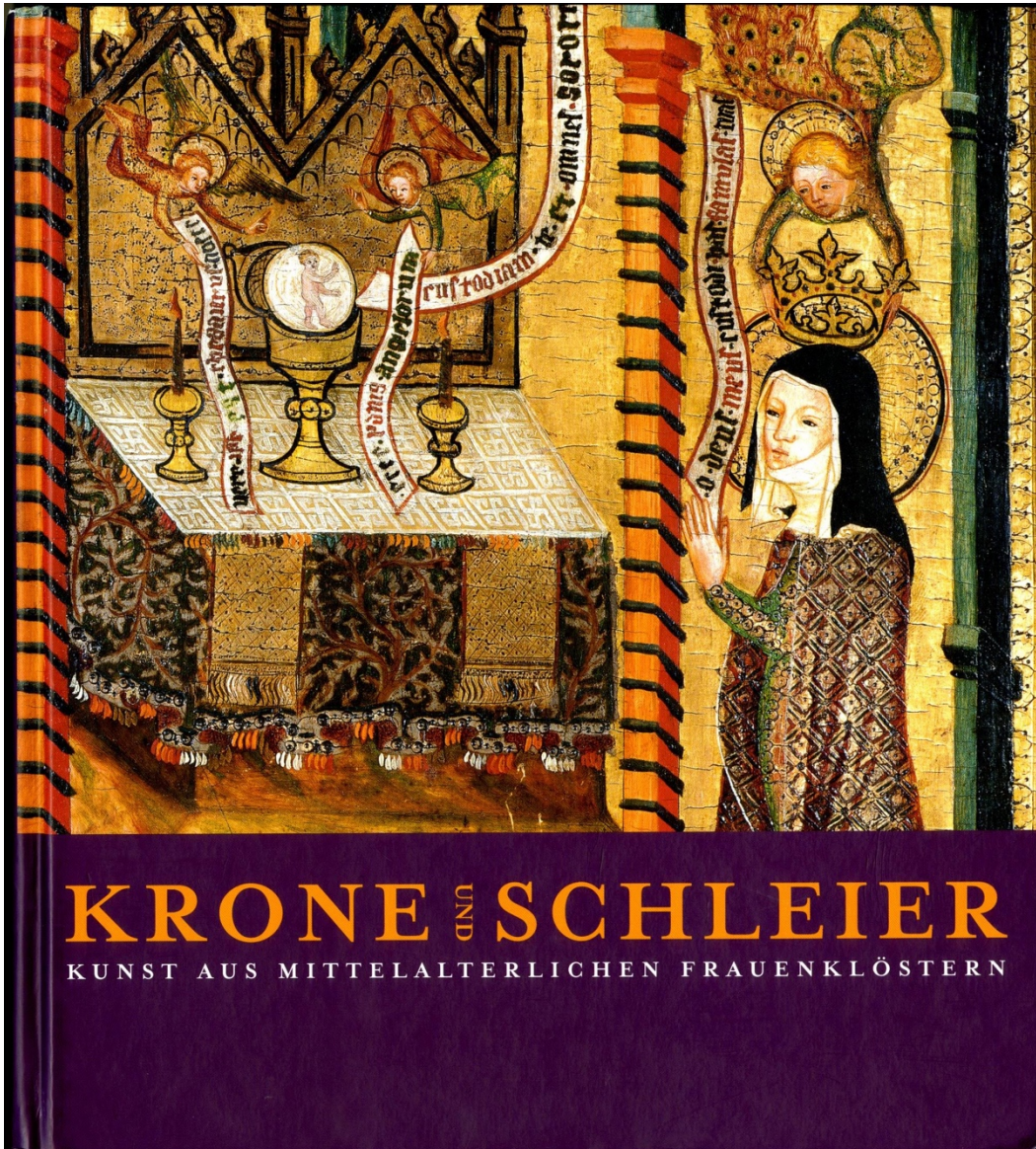
In the language of the prayers, letters and confessions of the women mystics emerged a new perspective that gave love a chance. They were the brides in the mystical marriage and could express their feelings of love and passion in God's love. In the mystical marriage the union of the soul with God creates ecstasy and joy, the greatest fulfilment of life.

They were able to recognize that love was a need in itself and through meditation and the development of spiritual thinking around God they could overcome the limitations enforced on them by a religious vision charged with power and political issues. In spite of the diffused brutality against them, women of the medieval period did convey feelings of pity and understanding that changed the vision of life and created the possibility of a peaceful world. Women's mysticism wasn't enough to change or convert the addiction to war and power of the masculine world, but at least contributed to the establishment of values like peace, respect for others, love for all creatures and nature. In the image that comes from the monastery of the Poor Sisters of Nuremberg<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 6) we see the coronation of St. Clare. The mysticism of St. Clare that professed the most rigorous Franciscan rule of poverty wasn't easily accepted; she had to apply to the pope for a special dispensation for herself and her order of the Poor Sisters. Clare and her order did contribute to modifying the issue on women and from them came a message of spiritualized Eros.

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<sup>7</sup> Hamburger J. F., Marti S. (2008) - *the Crown & Veil: Female monasticism from the fifth to the fifteen Centuries*. Columbia University Press.





**Figure 6** *St. Clare of the Poor Clares of Nuremberg – Cover of the book of Hamburger J. F., Marti S. (2008) - the Crown & Veil: Female monasticism from the fifth to the fifteen Centuries. Columbia University Press.*

Many women of the X or XI century preferred the life in the convents, as they felt protected from the violence of the world and could live a life of work and prayer and be respected for their dedication to prayer and to God. To live in the enclosure was a sacrifice but to live in the world was even worse, not only because of the material dangers but for the total lack of any respect and for the capricious nature of the men who dominated world and imposed their contradictory will of power on their wife, daughters and so on.

In the medieval universe, knowledge and love were strictly separated; it was by exploring the world of the relationship with God, and by extension with the other, that mystic experiences overcame the split. While the clerics and the priests and the majority of churchgoers remained faithful to tradition and to the scholastic logical reflection on religion, the language and the propositions of the mystics re-introduced the body and the supremacy of desire. We could say that the radicalism of the mystics brought into discussion all aspects of the medieval world. Women's spirituality offered or was representative of Eros, the opposite of the Scholastic Logos.

### **Female monasticism**

Female monasticism had always been suspicious to the men of the church, even if veiled women were regarded with respect and as sacred to God since the early centuries of Christianity. In the engraved bas-relief (Fig. 7) we see Saint Marceline surrounded by other women with the veil. She was sister to Saint Ambrose and lived to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. She was protected by the high reputation of her brother and the status of her family and could live with other women in a convent and dedicate her life to prayer and holy works. In fact she was made a nun by Pope Liberio in 353 on Christmas day in Rome. Many centuries later in the baroque bas-relief, we see Marceline surrounded by other women with the veil to demonstrate their dedication to the spirit. The veil was a requisite to show modesty and devotion. In the Catholic Church women were required to wear the veil when entering the church. Even though the tradition of the veiled women dated back many centuries, the clerics and the men of church



were very suspicious towards the community of women<sup>8</sup>. The notorious weakness of women and their propensity to sin were the main reasons of the contempt. The clerics projected their unchecked lustful desires on women and accused them of the sins that were their own.



Figure 7 Saint Marcellina

We had to wait until the year 1115 for the preacher Robert d'Abrissel to find a community of women and men that, according to his indication, went under the direction of an Abbess that ordered men and women. The historian Michelet in 1975 in his *Histoire de France* recognized that the movement of d'Abrissel was the expression of a religious revolution that pervaded all the temples and altars and in Michelet's words "**God changed sex, so to say**"<sup>9</sup>. D'Abrissel was among the mystics that gave dignity to the body of women.

<sup>8</sup> Hamburger J. F., Marti S. (2008) - *the Crown & Veil: Female monasticism from the fifth to the fifteen Centuries*. Columbia University Press.

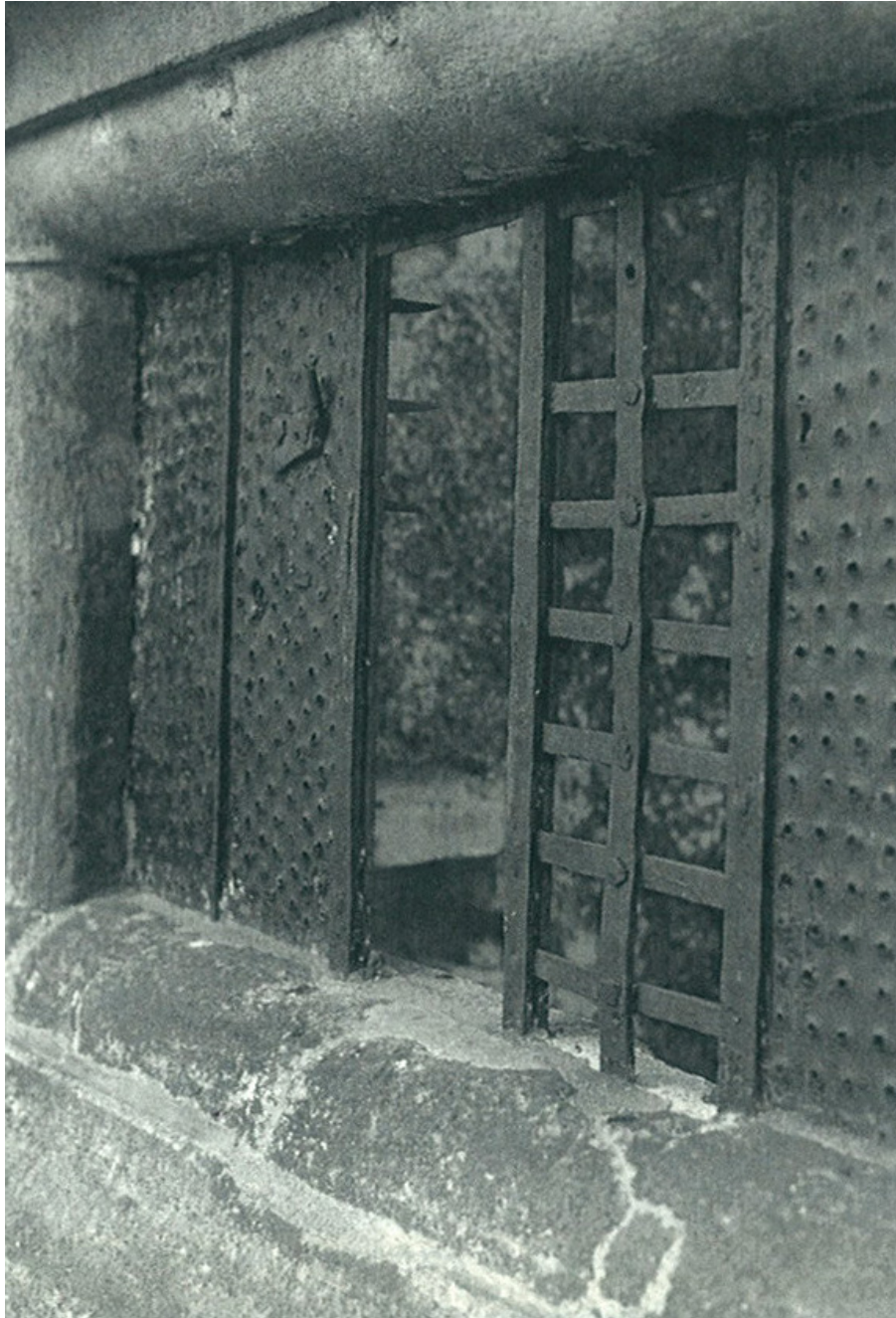
<sup>9</sup> Dalamur J. (2008) "Dieu Changea de sexe, pour ainsi dire": la religion faite femme XIe-XVe siècle. – Fayard.

One of the miracles recorded in “La Vie de Robert D’Abrissel” tells that he dared, against the will of the inhabitants and priests of a village where he was preaching, to introduce women into the church to demystify the lies that proclaimed women to be sinners and impure. As the people resisted, d’Abrissel addressed them by saying that sainthood wasn’t the enemy of the spouses of Christ and that the blessed sinner that kissed the feet of the Redeemer and with her tears cleaned his hair and with ointment cleaned his body was dear to Christ. The reasoning around the body of women is particularly interesting. We have the Magdalene that as a prostitute did not use her body as the temple of the Spirit but for sinful purposes; at the same time, she uses her body, her tears, her hair, her hands to touch the body of Christ that is the temple of the spirit. Women should be allowed to enter the sanctuary by repeating that their body was blessed and is a sacred body, temple of the Spirit. The women following Robert d’Abrissel were nuns and members of the community that he had formed around his preaching in Fontevraud. He was defending them by demonstrating the dignity and equality of women in the face of God and in society.

### **The enclosure**

To a modern mind the enclosure is a prison. Not so for many of the women that entered the convents in medieval times. For many it was the best, safest place to be. They had some protection from the masculine power and they were especially protected by the contempt that attributed to them the worst of sins, that of alluring men to sin.





**Figure 8** *The door of the enclosure*

The iron door represented in Figure 8 could be seen as the door of a prison as well as a bulwark against the invasion of outside powers.

Convents were the place where women were confined but at the same time where they did take refuge from the secular life. For early medieval women the path of spiritual life defied the impositions of the masculine world and assured them a better life.

Life in the convent as represented in the image (Fig. 9) portrays the nuns living in the convent of Hohenburg in the Garden of Delights. It was painted by the Abbess Herrars of Hohenburg (XII century).



**Figure 9** Portrait of the nuns living in the convent of Hohenburg in the Garden of Delights , by the Abbess Herrars of Hohenburg (XII century)

I like this image very much because, in a way, it is accurate. Looking carefully at the images of the sisters, it can be see that not only are they portrayed with their names, but their expressions differ and it's possible to read or imagine from their faces some of their individual characteristics. You can even tell who of

them was younger and who was older. The abbess on the side seems proud of presenting her sisters in God.

### **Art in the convents**

The major religious art was produced by and for churches and convents and was shown as a form of warning against sin, as well as an invitation to prayer and works of charity. The works of art were commissioned from men artists and were for the public. There was another art considered “*minore*” that was practiced by the nuns and, at the time, wasn’t considered an expression of art. The discrimination towards women’s art was strong. To put it simply, women were not allowed to practice the arts and especially not if they were nuns. In convents women could only produce objects for everyday life, such as tapestries, embroideries for the holy services, written records of their religious visions, paintings of religious episodes and visions, miniatures in the books of prayer, sacred books, books containing the hagiographies of the Saints venerated in the convents, representations of the founders of the convents that had become Saints. Nuns’ artistic works were not visible to the public and were kept in the enclosure.

The works had to remain anonymous for reasons of humility, and nuns had no possessions; even their names were changed when they became sisters in God. The image (Fig. 10) is a small detail from a larger tapestry of the Passion. It portrays two Dominican nuns working at a tapestry. This was the only signature admitted for their work. Not names but images were of the main importance for the development of women’s creativity and with it their inner world.





**Figure 10** *This image is a small detail at the bottom of the Passion tapestry and portrays the two Dominican nuns working at the tapestry. This was the only signature permitted for their work.*

What is important to understand is that women were allowed to express themselves only through visions. To women, the church forbade, among many other things, any theological elaboration. They could only express their religious creed through their dreams or visions. What I find amazing is that through their



imagination, women were able to renew religion and the church of the X to the XIII century and to introduce love in a world that was dominated by wars and fights for power. It's true that they were able to express a needed change professed by the mendicant orders, but the flourishing of feminine mysticism typical of these centuries is a document to women's creativity. Obligated to be in the circumscribed space of the enclosure, nuns and abbesses were far from being passive subjects of the dominant powers; they were active subjects in the expression of the spirituality of love. As an example, the emperor Frederick II who was invading Italy for submission of recalcitrant subjects, was presented with his army at the enclosure of Saint Damian. The frail Saint Claire met and spoke humbly to him. Her effect on the emperor was so strong that he left Assisi and the region around it undamaged. This historical fact has probably been embellished by the tradition of the Saint's devotees; however, the spiritual power of women was a sure fact and helped to resist the assaults of the patriarchal powers for many centuries.

Heretical charges of witchcraft were the extermination tools most frequently used against them. More insidious was the widespread mistrust towards women's capacity to be in charge of their own emotions and feelings. The Magdalene as hermit was of the maximum importance because she represented the constancy of repentance and the moral strength to endure physical deprivation while meditating. She was equal to the men Saints that meditated in the desert in the early centuries of Christianity.

### **Asylum of Montdevergues**

Not far from Avignon there's the asylum of Montdevergues where Camille

Claudel (Fig. 11) died after 30 years of internment. Camille's mother and her famous brother, the writer Paul Claudel, had decided that she was a shame because she lived a life of dissipation and she deserved to be buried in an asylum.



**Figure 11** *Camille Claudel*

Camille was a great sculptor, full of Eros and strength far ahead her time. She dared to express her independent choices by loving a man, Auguste Rodin, who was engaged to another woman and had a son. When the scandal came to light, Rodin didn't take sides. She continued her work independently from

Rodin's approval and support, but to be a sculptor in 1890 wasn't easy and she had difficult moments. She was diagnosed with paranoia and schizophrenia. Her father, who believed in her and supported her financially, died in 1913. When she resolved to ask for help from her brother and mother she was lost. Paul, her brother, had become Catholic and to him the life of his sister was disgraceful. In a moment when Camille was without money and in need of support, with the help of their mother, Paul betrayed her confidence and had her confined in the Montdevergues asylum. Their cruelty had no end, not even when the doctor said that Camille was much better and she could leave the hospital, and not even after the death of their mother. Camille died in the asylum as a poor woman, a shadow of the strong sculptor she had been.

Camille the artist was fully convinced of her value; she sculpted nude bodies which was absolutely unacceptable for a woman to do. Even worse, her sculptures were full of Eros, like: *La Valse* (Fig. 12). The two figures were originally naked; Camille added the drapery to obtain a contract from the State.



**Figure 12** *La valse, Camille Claudel*

The beautiful Camille died in 1943, lost to the world of art until 1984 when she was rediscovered and a retrospective of her work was organized. A woman with great creativity and independence of mind, she paid with her life for the audacity of believing in her own powerful creativity. She was destroyed by her love for Rodin's sculpture but mainly by her incapacity to recognize the hatred of her mother and the misogyny of her brother and the world around her. She was a punch in the face to the male-dominated culture of her time that in various ways projected on women its weakness and sins. Going through the art production of the years between 1850 to the early twentieth century we can revisit the same ideological aggression of the medieval time--this time more explicitly eroticised.

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**Figure 13** *The Eternal Idol, August Rodin*

One of Rodin's sculptures will help to show the misogyny of the art world. Auguste Rodin's statue *The Eternal Idol* (Fig. 13) is the explicit opposite of that of Camille Claudel. In *La Valse* we have the union of the two bodies in a movement that is erotic but not pornographic and expresses the rapture of the encounter. In the Rodin we have the perversity of the icy woman on her pedestal who lets the subjugated and handcuffed men adore her. Nobody asked Rodin to put a dress on

the couple! His work was acclaimed and not criticized. *The Eternal Idol* is a summa of the predominant projections on women in 1888.

One of the protagonists of this intellectual scene was Sacher-Masoch and his book *Venus in Furs*<sup>10</sup>. The novel is a fantasy. It starts with a dream and then Severin, the protagonist, wishes to be dominated by a woman like the goddess of love in order to get rid of his obsession with women. Wanda, the counterpart of the stone Venus and human protagonist of the novel, will enslave him. The novel had nothing to do with reality. Once more, the perverse fantasies and fears of men were projected on women. Thirty years earlier, in 1850, the predominant fantasy was that women--wives and daughters-- had to be nuns without sins, had to die young because of their weakness<sup>11</sup>. That was reassuring for men that wanted to maintain the dominant position that the industrial revolution attributed to them. In the novel, Severin, who is in his thirties, speaks of his mother as a saint that died of a long devastating illness. The centuries passed and, instead of the clerics and the inquisitions, we have the culture of the industrial era, but the projections remain pretty much unchanged.

Camille Claudel had nothing to do with the prevailing vision of her time. There is a big difference between the image in the prayer book of the nun visited by the angel in figure 5 and *la Valse*. What they have in common is that there's no perversion. The angel as the emissary of god diving into the sister's bed surprised her and the fact that she is ready to receive him cannot be mistaken. In *la Valse*, the eroticism of the dance and of the bodies is more carnal but there's no aggression. The harmonious movement of the bodies presupposes erotic equality with no submission.

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<sup>10</sup> Sacher-Masoch L. (1888) – *Venus in Furs* -

<sup>11</sup> Dijkstra B. (1986) - *Idols of perversions. Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siecle Culture* – Oxford University Press.





**Figure 14** *Chemise de Nuit*, Jana Sterbak

### **Chemise de nuit**

Jana Sterbak with her *Chemise de Nuit* (Fig. 14) continues the narration of the psychological violence played on women's bodies and the difficult search for personal identities beyond the cages imposed by the dominant culture. The feminine nightdress has in evidence on the breast, hairs typical of male bodies and also the hips and thighs are more that of a man than a woman. The woman's body and the dress are central to Sterbak's research on sexual discrimination and

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gender issues. The fact that the dress was exposed in a niche carved in the wall of stone adds meaning to the artist's vision to free the body/spirit of women from the usurpation that prevented their expression. The white dress reminds us of hospitalized people and the disquieting reality of women imprisoned for their wish to live their sexual and erotic life freely, as it was for Camille Claudel.



**Figure 15** *Into One-another III, to P.P.P* by Berlinde De Bruyckere

### **Suffering bodies**

In Berlinde De Bruyckere's sculpture, shocking bodies represent the suffering of human beings.

In the image (Fig. 15), emaciated bodies with their heads cut are full of scars, suffering but not devoid of lust or shame. Bodies that should be dead stand

in opposition to the ideal of beauty; they are vulnerable and decaying. The De Bruyckere image investigates her affinity with the Italian poet and film director Pier Paolo Pasolini, who used body representations in fighting against the bourgeois society with its falsehood and consumerist ideals. Once more the political stance is played out on the bodies of women and men. De Bruyckere's bodies remind us that the scars inflicted are written in our bodies as well as in our psyche. To become conscious of the trans-generational wounds inflicted to our social bodies is to become aware and conscious of the mutilations inflicted to our psyche by visions dictated by issues that shape our society and by extension shape our perception of ourselves.

## **Conclusion**

The condition of women has known different moments, but negative projections have been a constant throughout the centuries. What I've tried to present in this paper is my enthusiasm for timeless work on the understanding of women's transformative potential and their role in society even when the values of society are played against them. To combine analytical psychology, history and art is a way to rejuvenate my psyche and my understanding of the world of women.

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