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Shape of the Heart and the Mystery of Meaning

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Abstract

The human heart is infinitely more than just a blood-pumping organ. It is the source of all life's vitality and the institute of feeling, thought, and memory. The iconological symbol of the heart that we use today is necessary for generating rationality for this institution of sentiment. Heart ideograms have been especially vital to religions that use both the imagery and the existence of the physical heart to represent emotional and spiritual qualities. After its origination and development in the late Middle Ages, the "heart shape" was widely used by Renaissance artists, while the intertwining of religious virtuosities and romantic love developed "heart metaphors". The significant connotation of the heart is to serve as an empty vessel to be filled with love: romantic and spiritual. Through the symbolic nature of the heart, the audience becomes fascinated with a feeling that transcends life and, when depicted properly, it can leave an impression of vicarious grandeur. The artist explores these spiritual and metaphorical qualities by manipulating wood, metal, fiber, and various other materials in order to make unique sculptural pieces. Through the processes of carving and casting, the artist portrays the assorted conditions of the heart with allegories such as the romantic, wounded, broken, inflamed, and winged hearts.

1. Evolution and Oddities

Although we now have a more improved understanding of cardiac anatomy and physiology, the scalloped shape has persisted, despite not being an accurate depiction of the heart's physical characteristics. This shape endures as a symbol through the intricate collaboration of Western society's art, religion, and cultural rituals.[1] The heart-shaped symbol that exists today is known as a Valentine's heart. St. Valentine had actually very little to do with this shape developing as a symbol; rather the heart-shape developed over hundreds of years and was inevitably established by Christian artists to express devotion to Christ. It became a prominent symbol that has continued its reputation in Western culture to this day. This is largely due to the fact that romantic love became a mainstream cultural practice.

Most religions (for example, ancient Egyptians, Aztecs, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and more) use both the imagery and the existence of the physical heart to represent emotional and spiritual qualities.[2] The spiritual connotation of the heart is to serve as an empty vessel to be filled with love: romantic and spiritual. The heart shows that there is a duality that lives inside all of us and coincidently, it serves as a safe haven for faith to dwell. Logic resides in the mind while faith resides in the heart.[3] The Islamic heart is the essence of self, control, perception, and interpretation. The heart is material and nonmaterial, and it leads an individual toward God and truth. In Islam, the heart is where the spirit lives in the body; it is the final refuge of the soul and the channel of communication between human beings and God; it is where God lives in humanity.[4] Many Sufis consider Sufism, a Muslim sect, to be the religion of the heart. Sufi ideograms depict the heart symbol adorned with a set of wings or sometimes a singular eye.

Doctors and physicians during the Middle Ages commonly believed that the most vital spirit resided in the heart. These beliefs had been held by the early Egyptians as well. The heart was one of the most important organs to the Egyptian culture and they had two words for the heart.[5] The hieroglyph *haty* represented the physical heart, while

ib represented the spiritual, emotional heart and soul. They believed that *haty* was the vessel for the spirit. The heart was one's center of willpower. When the dead arrived at the Hall of Judgment to be arbitrated by Osiris, the heart would be weighed against the feather of truth. Whether their hearts were good or bad determined where they went in the afterlife.

During Europe's Dark Ages, hearts were typically described but not drawn. When they were drawn, they were done so from description: pine-cone shaped.[6] In the Middle Ages, the pine-cone shaped heart was represented with a rounded base. In many medieval paintings, the heart also came to be represented through images of fruit. The two-dimensional shape that we think of on Valentine's Day was in existence before it came to represent the heart because it was originally the shape of an ivy leaf. The ivy leaf was common in Roman, Byzantine, and Celtic ornamentation and was usually accompanied by tendrils and a stalk.[7] Allegorically in Christianity, because it is endlessly green, it is a symbol of fidelity and eternal life.[8] The ivy, a *clingy* plant, is also a metaphor for attachment and undying affection. The ivy leaf when painted red looks exactly like the heart icon.

It was only during the first years of the fourteenth century that the scalloped shape of the St. Valentine heart, with a fold or dent at the top, appeared in northern Italy. Pierre Vinken, a Dutch cardiologist, suggests that the first scalloped hearts appear on a necklace around the neck of Love's horse in Francesco da Barberino's *Document of Love* from the early 1300s and in an anatomical book by de Vigevano published in 1347.[9] Ever since the earliest Greek observers such as Aristotle, the heart had always been considered to have two sides.[10] The symbolic role of the heart wanted and needed to be visibly dual, thus it can be split into two. The dent achieved this.

It is through the popularity of courtly love and romantic love that the St. Valentine's heart shape still exists. However, St. Valentine has been given too much credit for this shape and it is by odd circumstances that this has occurred. St. Valentine is actually a combination of a few Roman priests with the same name who were beaten and beheaded around the third century. Saint Valentine eventually became the patron of lovers merely because of a coincidence of timing. His feast day coincided with the Roman festival of Lupercalia. Young girls' names were written down and put in a box to be ceremonially drawn by young men during a month-long series of feasts in honor of Pan, god of chaos and wine, and Juno, goddess of marriage. The combination of a celebration of wine and marriage was a powerful one. The early Fathers tried to put an end to such pagan fun. Rather than putting an end to this celebration, they merely adjusted the holiday a little and incarnated a Christian front. Later, young men and women would write their names on pieces of paper that were then drawn by lots, whereupon the person's name that they drew became their "Valentine".[11]

The valentine card first appeared in the sixteenth century, with its imagery reaching the height of sentimentality in Victorian times. Exchanged on Valentine's Day, these cards often depict symbols of love such as hearts, doves, and cupids. February 14th was originally known as the "birds' wedding day" due to an old belief that birds selected their mates on that day.[12] And since the birds were copulating, people thought of this as a suitable day to make declarations of love.

The Sacred Heart of Jesus, feasibly the most recognized religious heart, advanced out of many other ancient cults and ideas. Feelings, sentiments, and certitudes we associate with the Christian heart, such as love, passion, gratitude, and sacrifices, are nothing new when it comes to other religious ideals and faiths. The word "heart" appears 592 times in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. In the Old Testament, the heart's purpose is to love God and to be unfaltering under the persecutions it may face. Above all, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, since he is simultaneously man and God, serves as a temple for the union of the two.

Religious iconography renders an important service, especially at the height of reliquary favors within the church and its followers. The first Christians created images for themselves in order to have aids for memory. For this purpose, they used the pre-Christian iconographic heritage of symbols and inadvertently established some as their own. Pope Gregory the Great viewed symbols as "the Scriptures of the illiterate… and thereby a means of teaching religion and its mysteries."[13] The attribute of a saint was fundamental in order for faithful patrons to be able to recognize particular saints and their special roles. When age and condition make saints seem indistinguishable, the attribute makes it possible to identify saints for whom it is difficult to find any accurate details of their appearance. An attribute will be easy to sum up in a sign that reflects a significant incident in the saint's life.

The heart, when carried by a saint, is symbolic of love and piety. Jesus Christ, his disciples, and saints were often portrayed with a wounded heart or in possession of one that had gone up in flames. The flaming heart suggests the utmost religious zeal, while the heart pierced by an arrow symbolizes penitence, humility, and devotion under conditions of extreme trial.[14]

The flaming heart and occasionally the pierced heart are used as attributes of St. Augustine of Hippo symbolizing God's guidance of zeal. In fact, the spiritual and emotional importance of the Christian heart was defined by St. Augustine of Hippo in the fifteenth century. His famous words: "My heart is restless until it rests in [Christ]", is filled with emotional symbolism. The *unquietus* (or restless) is Augustine's favorite adjective for describing the unstable condition of the human heart and the yearning that drives the individual inevitably towards God. Because fire and

flames in religious artworks are both typically symbolic of martyrdom and religious fervor, Augustine's special attribute is a flaming heart. Sometimes Augustine's heart was pierced by an arrow, thus representing a heart struck with divine adoration.

Figure 1. Philippe de Champaigne, *Saint Augustine*, 1650. Oil on canvas. 31 × 24.5 in

Figure2. Detail image of flaming heart. http://wtfarthistory.com/post/17657560414/i-found-my-heart-at-lacma

Because the heart is a muscle, it cannot physically break. However, the imagery of a broken or wounded heart can be felt spiritually and emotionally. The acts of piercing and being pierced are a superlative example of physical and emotional, erotic, and religious zeal. In romantic love, Cupid shoots his arrow into the heart and people fall in love with each other. In Christian mythology, Longinus the Roman speared Jesus through the heart on the cross, and the love of God poured out over humanity. Jesus' wounded heart was often particularly emphasized for prayer and devotion: *Salve plaga lateris nostri redemptoris* (hail the wound in the side of our redeemer). Interestingly, the lance that caused the wound was also honored in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century prayers. Once the heart of Jesus was pierced, it remained wounded and never healed. This wound serves as the gateway to heaven and the well of everlasting life.

As an image, the wounded heart of Jesus, Mary, and the saints appeared as elongated diamond-shapes, conch shells, frilly edged, or spitting blood. It is difficult to look at this imagery without getting some vaginal reference. When pictured with phallic-shaped nails, swords, and arrows, the sexual imagery becomes undeniable. The similarity to male and female genitalia imitates the physical yearning for a more intense, spiritual, and divine love. This sexually charged imagery was meant to channel basic human instincts toward a higher purpose. A valid relationship with Christ meant harnessing earthly passions and channeling them into a divine love for God.

Indeed, the juiciest bit of flesh is not the genitalia but the heart because it is the link between flesh and soul. Sexually, the heart exudes male and female qualities. It can be vigorously manly like an engorged erection or a spurting orgasm, or penetrable and receptive like a woman. In fact, "Heart" was common Tudor slang for vagina. "My throbbing heart shall rock you day and night"- William Shakespeare. Cupid's arrow serves as the phallus that penetrates the heart; the wound in turn is vaginal, and it is through this wound that love enters in and out. This compelling exchange results in a "petite mort," an expression used to describe the post-orgasmic state of unconsciousness that some people experience after a sexual encounter. If humans can have passionate relationships with others, then they can have a fervent relationship with Christ that would assuredly include its own physical side effects. None would know best about this physical nature with Christ than his brides: nuns.

A prime example of this spiritual ecstasy is artistically expressed through Bernini's sculpture, *The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*. St. Teresa of Avila, Spain described her encounter with Christ as follows:

> "In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love of God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness caused me by this intense pain that one can wish to lose it.".[15]

Bernini's enchantment with the divine orgasm sets off a chain reaction amongst the viewer. In a single moment, pleasure is derived via the touch, the connection, the wound, the love, the ecstasy, and the salvation.

Figure 3. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, 1647-52 (Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome). Marble. https://www.artble.com/artists/gian_lorenzo_bernini/sculpture/the_ecstasy_of_saint_theresa

The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa also serves as a prime example of the dichotomy of eros and agape, two terms created by the Greeks to define two variations of love. The angel piercing Teresa with the shafted arrow represents the Greek mythical god Eros. Eros is the personification of sexual desire. Thus, this imagery is a devout battle between the love of God and the God of love. "The heart sexualizes spirituality and it spiritualizes sex," according to Lisa Young. Spiritual love is not a substitute for human love, and vice versa. They are extensions of each other. Therefore, metaphorically, love can be divided in two. One side, eros, is filled with a romantic love that is affectionate, sexual, selfish, passionate, enticing, and often egocentric. The other is filled with agape, a love that is faithful, gentle, unselfish, unconditional, forbearing, and ultimately theocentric. It was Sappho who first called eros "bittersweet" which seems at once an experience of pleasure and pain. "Eros is often sweeter when he is being difficult" says a Hellenistic poet.[16] The imagery of Eros serves as a reminder of the Hellinistic dogma instilled in Christian ideas of love. Sacrifice and passion are two words usually used to describe the painful side of love. The definitions of the term passion is curiously conflicting. Passion can be a strong emotion, a lusty desire, a zealous spirit, a crazy obsession, or an agonistic suffering like Jesus endured. According to Anders Nygren "Christ is Agape's Archer who adroitly aims at the soul and does not miss his mark; but He is also one who pierces the soul with "Eros's arrow."[17] Nygren was a Lundensian Theologian who wrote two volumes on Eros and Agape at the turn of the twentieth century.

2. Influences

Frida Kahlo was an early twentieth century female Mexican painter best known for her self-portraits. In fact, Kahlo created at least 140 paintings and of these, 55 are self-portraits that often incorporated symbolic depictions of physical and psychological wounds.[18] One of her most exquisite paintings titled *The Two Fridas*, not only serves as a reflection of her outward physical self but also captures her inner essence. She is successful in conveying thought and feeling through color, juxtaposition, representation, and symbolic allegory. By intricately examining all of these features of her painting, the viewer can gain a sense of wonderment as well as an affinity for the brilliant artist.

The Two Fridas is now located in the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City, a city in which she lived her whole life.[19] The oil on canvas painting was originally created in 1939. It is grand in proportion at five feet, eight and a half inches square and shows a balanced double portrait of the artist that dominates almost the entire canvas. When attempting to define her relationship to colors, the artist said that "cobalt blue represented electricity and purity love." In fact, the Frida on the right utterly represents her love and passion, while the Frida on the left represents her sorrow.

Fig. 4. Frida Kahlo, *Las Dos Fridas*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 5' 8.5" x 5' 8.5".
www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/art-between-wars/latin-american-modernism1/a/kahlo-the-two-fridas-las-dos-fridas

It was not until the Renaissance that artists could consistently be identified portraying themselves as either the main subject or as characters in their work. Mirrors became a crucial tool for artists that wanted to study their own features. This was especially true for Frida who was in a bus accident when she was 18.[20] She suffered serious spinal column and pelvic injuries that had to be operated on throughout her entire life and was thus left bed-ridden for long periods of time. For Frida not to go stir crazy, a mirror was rigged above her bed and she painted herself for hours on end. As a result, she began an extraordinary series of self-portraits that were both introspective and revealing. She explained, "I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone, because I am the person I know best."

Kahlo's portraits were also influenced by her Mexican culture, which is apparent in her use of bright colors, apparent symbolism, and primitive style. She combined these classic religious Mexican traditions with surrealist elements. Her father was a German Jewish immigrant and her mother was a devout Roman Catholic of mixed Amerindian and Spanish descent; therefore, Christian and Jewish themes, are often depicted in her work.[21] The main focal point of her painting is the two Fridas; they are dressed quite differently, however, reflecting her bipolar European and Mexican heritage. The European Frida on the left is attired in a modest white laced dress with floral appliques. The dress reaches all the way from the top of her neck to her feet, only leaving her face, arms, and surprisingly, her heart exposed. Adjacent to the right is her counterpart, dressed in traditional Tehuana attire. She is darker skinned, more colorfully

dressed, and shows more skin with her neck, upper shoulders and chest exposed. Her skirt still flows to the same length as her other. This earthy peasant persona was eagerly encouraged by her fiery lover and spouse, Diego Rivera, who was also a famous Mexican painter.[22] She too has an exposed heart only hers is unscathed and whole, while the other Frida's heart has been savagely ripped open.

Both Fridas are sitting side by side on a green wicker bench, holding hands, and looking out at the viewer with their heads at a three-quarter view. Their somber facial expression, direction of gaze, and facial direction presents a dynamic personality that lends to the importance of her psychological identity. Both the figures share the space evenly. Not only are they symmetrically balanced, they are also harmoniously balanced through their perspective, posture, and outlook. Their knees bow outward and are highlighted to suggest chiaroscuro realism. Their laps are covered with the other hand. Frida once told a friend that whenever she portrayed her hands over her privates, it meant she was masturbating: another visual stimulus for purveying passion.[23]

Another element that connects both Fridas is a thin red vein that amusingly glides horizontally across the image. This vein does not continue off the artwork, but corresponds intimately between both Fridas. The shared artery has been cut with a surgical clamp that is grasped in European Frida's hand, however, blood still drips from its end onto her white dress into two main puddles. Her heart has been savagely ripped open and an outline of her breast is revealed. At the other end of the vine-like blood vessel is a miniature portrait of Diego as a child in an oval shaped amulet. Frida once told Diego, "My blood is the miracle that travels in the veins of the air from my heart to yours." Perhaps this is why the Hispanic oriented Frida's heart has remained intact.

According to Gerry Souter's book *Frida Kahlo: Beneath the Mirror* this portrait represented the love that she has for Diego and the love she does not. Obviously, the dissociated Frida is the one on the left as this is the Frida who tries to sever all emotional ties with Diego by using surgical pincers. Here she is attempting to stop the imaginary shared blood flow. The bright red blood puddles that form on her prudish white gown also serve a double meaning: the pools of blood represent the countless wounds she has endured physically and emotionally, from her multiple surgeries and miscarriages, to her betrayal and loss of Diego.

Frida Kahlo once said, "There have been two great accidents in my life. One was the trolley, and the other was Diego. Diego was by far the worst," therefore, the Frida on the right represented the romantic and spiritual love Frida had for Diego. In her lap she clutches a miniature portrait of her lover in an egg-shaped frame with a protruding long red vein symbolizing an umbilical cord, like a baby in the womb. This subtle clue suggested that Diego was not only her lover, but her child as well. Kahlo's accident made it impossible for her to have her own children, consequently Diego with all of his immature and infantile behaviors was like the child she never had. "Diego was everything; my child, my lover, my universe."

Although *The Two Fridas* is considered a piece about her breakup with Diego, there is still an even deeper connotation that correlates with the masses across several cultures. Even if one does not know Frida and her tragic past, there is a universal truth that translates through her portrait. This translation can literally be found by looking at the heart of the matter. The heart of the loved Frida remains intact while the rejected Frida exposes a heart that has been ripped open. *The Two Fridas*, above all, epitomizes the concept that duality resides in every heart. "For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning" - Kahlil Gibran.[24]

The mirrored duality in *The Two Fridas* is an oscillating visualization of Frida's personal dilemma. Painting was a way to connect her hand to her heart and thus allowed visualization of her heart's reflection when replicating her likeness. Throughout her lifetime, Frida Kahlo accumulated a series of fully realized self-portraits that were both personal and meditative. Through her self-portraits, she could examine her world from within her broken body to reveal introspection. Through her symbolic nature the audience becomes fascinated with a feeling that transcends life and is left with an impression of vicarious grandeur.

Scholars Corrine Anderson, Lauren Marie Freese, and Janice Helland have all written articles that explore the dichotomy of *Las Dos Fridas* with emphasis on her costume, iconology, and demeanor. All three scholars agree that Kahlo is not only depicting the complexity of her personal identity but is clearly portraying her cultural identity as well. Their interpretations of national identity explore the complexity of Mexican womanhood during a pertinent transitional period of Mexican history. This double self-portrait is simulated through Kahlo's understanding of what it is to be Mexican, female, artistically minded, and human. The differences and interrelations between these scholars is based on their interpretation and signification of her dress, iconography, and physical presence. [25] [26][27]

Symbolism played an important role to the people of central Mexico, which was reflected in their calendars, writing, clothing, and artwork. Some of Frida's heritage was a culmination of Aztec and Spanish Catholic influence. Female Aztec deity Coatlicue, often depicted with a necklace of human hearts, hands, and skulls, was an avert influence in Frida's art.[28]

To the European Catholics who first met the Aztecs, human sacrifice was a fascinating feature of their civilization. This ancient civilization ceremoniously tore the still beating hearts from the chests of their sacrifices as offerings to

their gods and, thus, were labeled by the Spanish as cannibals; however, Spanish religion often emphasized the more bodily aspects of beliefs through bloody depictions of the crucifixion of Christ. Even the imagery of bread and wine to depict Christ's body and blood "also can suggest a cannibalistic practice," according to Shifra Goldman's lecture *The Heart of Mexican Art: Image, Myth and Ideology*.[29] European depictions of blood, sacrifice, and cannibalism; therefore, paralleled the traditions of Mexico's indigenous people.

A nostalgia for indigenous and Mexican themes was apparent throughout the nineteenth century. The integration of these two cultures, led to the sacred heart becoming a common religious folk art motif in Mexico. This Mexican folk art symbol is depicted in various forms; often it was engulfed in flames or stabbed with daggers. Mexican folk art heavily influenced Frida Kahlo's work and so the religious heart symbol was often integrated into her work.[30]

Damien Hirst is a contemporary artist who has used both the anatomical heart and the heart icon repeatedly in his work. In celebration of Valentine's Day 2015, Hirst presented a pop-up exhibition at the Paul Stolper Gallery titled *LOVE*. This exhibition of prints and sculptures focused solely on the theme of love. As Hirst says, "Love is a beautiful thing and I see it as a small antidote to all the horror in the world."[31] The exhibition included *LOVE Gold*, a portfolio of Valentine heart prints each foil blocked with a single butterfly in the center. Hirst limits each heart to only three colors but they are individually unique in their combination. Eight of the hearts are silkscreened, six are in gold leaf, and all are encompassed with a white background within a frame. Also included were two large scale heart pill sculptures *♡YU4EVA*, as well as *Love Struck*, a resin casted pig's heart pierced by a crossbow bolt suspended in mineral oil inside of a glass jar.[32]

Requiem contains many important works by Hirst, made between 1990 to the present and represents the artist's most iconic statements and crucial themes.[33] Hirst's two- and three-dimensional pieces mix a plethora of mediums that eloquently compose themselves into a rhetorically conceptual work of art. Despite his artwork transpiring over twenty years, Hirst's themes constantly interchange between different works and series of works. This development of various ideas allows the works to interplay with each other as well as to refer back to re-engage his earlier themes and motifs of historical iconography. When surveying *Requiem*, the viewer becomes immediately aware of the biblical scale on which the artist is visualizing his work; thus, Hirst can be considered one the greatest current religious artist of our time.

Many of the important themes in Hirst's art, even when they are ambiguously implied, are religious by nature. Death and life, pain and suffering, love and sacrifice, are not only conditions and emotions central to everyone's existence, their pertinence and relativity are shaped by our artistic and religious history. Hirst's manipulation of the anatomical heart and the phrasing of his titles, clearly refer to ecclesiastical and biblical traditions. *The Immaculate Heart* from his 2008 *Sacred* series, for instance, is a prime example of the Christian iconography that he constantly references. Here, a bull's heart has been adorned with dove wings and silver barbed wire, and then stabbed vertically through the center with a stainless-steel knife. *The Sacred Heart of Jesus* is another sculpture that references the wounded heart of Jesus by lacerating a bull's heart with sterling silver pins and needles, barbed wire, and razor blades.

The visual impact of these sculptures is immediate and visceral. The viewer is confronted by a physical representation of the heart of Jesus that is both impeccable and tortured. These are meticulously blunt depictions of beliefs, ideas, and conditions that shape the common basis of human experiences. The awareness of love and sacrifice are themes that run throughout his work, but this concentration on the inflicted heart is matched and framed by an equivalent preoccupation with sublime spectacle, astonishment, and wonder. Hirst's art merges sublime pageantry with not only allegories of love, but also the vulnerability of the heart. The use of such dramatic spectacle as a medium for art making, not only allows Hirst to engage the viewer in a direct, highly provocative way, but also to play with the conceptual relationship between despondency and empathy. Hirst is therefore reviving the Christian narrative while simultaneously critiquing and "kitsching" Christian beliefs.

Fig. 5. Damien Hirst, *The Immaculate Heart* - Sacred 2008-Acrylic, painted stainless steel, stainless steel, resin, silicone, sterling silver barbed wire, monofilament, bull's heart, dove's wings and formaldehyde solution,| 36” x 24” x 11.5”. http://damienhirst.com/the-immaculate-heart-a-sacre

Fig.6. Damien Hirst, *The Sacred Heart of Jesus*, 2005. Acrylic, painted steel, sterling silver, stainless steel, bull's heart and formaldehyde solution, 53.9” x 19.6” x 19.6”. http://damienhirst.com/the-sacred-heart-of-jesus

The modern materials and processes used in the artwork of Damien Hirst combined with a minimalistic pristine aesthetic subconsciously attaches the idea of science as the language of religion and beauty the liaison of death. Hirst’s scrutinizes that, “science is the new religion for many people. It’s as simple and as complicated as that really.”[34] This is one of his most enduring themes, and is most powerfully manifested in his works that incorporate formaldehyde

solutions, medical equipment, and the sterility of surgical environments. Combining the use of technical equipment and resolute realism with an equivalent sense of vulnerability and alienation directly correlates religion to science and the rational to the non-rational within our psyche.

3. Methodology

I was literally born with a broken heart; a condition called Wolff Parkinson White Syndrome. Wolff-Parkinson-White (WPW) syndrome is a heart condition where there is an extra electrical pathway between the heart's upper chambers (atria) and lower chambers (ventricles) causing an irregular heartbeat.[35] The extra electrical pathway is present at birth and quite rare. WPW is detected in about four out of one hundred thousand people. These extra electrical impulses send disorganized messages, causing the atria to beat very quickly and out of step with each other or atrial fibrillation. As a result, the ventricles do not have time to fill with blood and do not pump enough blood to the body. Common symptoms of WPW syndrome include sensation of rapid, fluttering, or pounding heartbeats (palpitations), dizziness, lightheadedness, fainting, and anxiety. My heart condition went unnoticed by doctors for the first twenty years of my life, which is fairly common for most people with this condition. When I was twenty-one years old I had cardiac ablation surgery and was left with three physical scars on my heart. Having three extra passageways is considered to be even rarer and therefore, my ailment left me a walking time bomb. Despite being left with these physical scars on my heart, it seems that the emotional scars on my heart from past experiences are far more painful and enduring. It is for this reason that I am fascinated by heart iconography.

My Associate Arts degree in Professional Crafts Silversmithing and my Western North Carolina heritage has made craft an integral part of my work. Craftsmanship demands the acquiring of important technical knowledge, skill, and methods. For this concept, I have chosen to explore the traditional craft mediums-wood, metal, clay, and fiber. I have found delight in the ability to transform these materials through texture, carving, assembling, painting, and manipulating the form. Through art I am able to connect to the passion and pain that resides in my heart and express it in a manner that tends to be both dark and humorous. By working with my hands, I am making a literal connection from heart to hand through various sculptural methods using wood, metal, mold-making, and found objects. I use a medley of materials and techniques for the freedom to explore and appropriately convey my internal cognizance.

In order to uphold sublime mystery, I rely heavily on allegorical symbolism, puns, and metaphors. I use implicit allusions to guide my viewer to their own thoughts and reactions to the piece. Because the physical heart is an empty vessel that is meant to be filled with blood, it is easy for the viewer to imagine metaphysical hearts being empty vessels to be filled with spiritual qualities. My art emphasizes the physical and metaphysical by using both the anatomical heart and cordiform shape. These physical and metaphysical conditions of the heart are explored through sculptural art. This process demanded the acquiring of various technical knowledge, creating new technical knowledge, capabilities, and methodology. Working towards new methods, skills, and ideas creates more evocative and thought-provoking pieces. Excellent craftsmanship and an acute eye for detail is necessary to incorporate to generate contemplation in the minds of those who interact with the artworks.

By using the universally recognized heart symbol, my art speaks to all cultures and people. I have combined these Christian themes with other cultural and religious heart connotations to create a more universal language of the heart and the many ways love can be experienced. While my insights into the heart are ancient, my artistic style was inspired more by modern and contemporary artists like Frida Kahlo and Damien Hirst. Allegories such as the romantic, wounded, broken, inflamed, and winged hearts are just a few ideas referenced in my own body of work. The immediate response I can incorporate what many consider to be a tacky mainstream symbol in popular culture makes the heart naturally kitsch. This kitsch is meant to serve as an ironic mask for the superficial method it is conveying a powerful emotion. Kitsch is usually associated with bad art and bad taste since the term “kitsch” was coined in Germany during the 1860s to refer to “cheap artistic stuff.” Yet, kitsch is by no means unappealing since it is an art that appeals to the masses. Indeed, that seems to be part of the problem with kitsch art because it simultaneously appeals to many people while an equal number of people find the art objectionable. Ironically, most people who think kitsch is good do not think of it as kitsch at all. To them it is the ideal art that is usually well crafted and heart-warming.

Despite being considered poor taste, the saving grace of kitsch is its stylistic ingenuity. Kitsch is often calculated to tap into highly predictable responses in the viewer. The immediate need to get a response from viewers through shock and disgust can become an affectionate, perverse sort of kitsch. Kitsch artist can engage the emotional reflexes of the viewer by using archetypal symbols and the like. Those reflexes are very real, much like basic sexual responses. According to Ellen Laan, a psychologist at the University of Amsterdam, “for both men and women, when you show them a sexual cue, the body responds to it [whether or not they are aware of that]. It's an automatic response, it's

probably hardwired, and it's probably a good mechanism." Kitsch and erotic art are there to take advantage of such responses. Some "sophisticated" viewers, aware of this, often guard themselves against the slightest hint of kitsch. Their protective mechanism is an acquired reaction that typically goes against their primal behaviors.

Kitsch can emancipate and examine sentiments that otherwise might atrophy through overprotective negligence. Thus, there is a place for kitsch despite its immaturity. When responding to kitsch, people do tend to open their "hearts" and to some extent make themselves vulnerable, even if the overall impact and involvement is usually slight or superficial just like a romantic fling. When displaying the results of this exploration, a continuum between fine art and craft is visible as well as conceptual similarities between anatomical hearts and the heart icon. Many artists working in wood today view themselves as both craftspeople and artists, not one or the other. I further hope to blur the lines between high and low brow, comedy and tragedy, sacred and profane, art and craft.

To begin my heart research, I decided I needed to make a portal to access the many sentiments of the heart. And what better way to gain spiritual reflection than by making a mirror. In art, the mirror is a symbol of physical and spiritual reflection and sometimes represents the all-seeing eye of God. I drew inspiration for my mirror from the one that is centrally located in Jan Van Eyck's *Arnolfini Portrait*. In this painting, there is a gear-shaped wooden framed convex mirror with the ten Stations of the Cross depicted in the panels around the mirror. The objective of the stations is to help Christians through the contemplation of the Passion of Christ. Through meditating on these images a worshiper can gain understanding of the love of God through the death of his son Jesus.

Fig. 7. Shanna Glawson, "The Gateway of Love", 2016. Cherry, Aqua Resin, acrylic, and mixed Media, 42" x 42" x 3".

Fig. 8. Jan Van Eyck ,"Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and his Wife", 1434. Detail of mirror. Oil on oak, 82.2 x 60 cm. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arnolfini_Portrait

After recreating this frame out of solid cherry, I decided to replace the *Conditions of Chris*t with the *Conditions of the Heart*. Christian themes, were combined with other cultural and religious heart connotations to create a more universal language of love. I also incorporated these conditions into the third dimension by casting various heart shapes in what is called Aqua Resin. Various heart shapes were created and adorned until I had a completed portal with the various heart conditions leading to *The Gateway of Love,* the title of the piece.

Through my research of heart imagery and comparing the heart of Jesus, to that of Frida Kahlo's and Damien Hirst's, I have discovered that the heart is most dramatic when wounded. Therefore, my first step in exploring the emotional pains of the heart was to create a piece that was striking and provocative. I tried to provide "To make heart from guts'". We make heart from guts when we face our fears and conquer them. Since we need to confront the situation, we try to do it by leaving our feelings and emotions aside (that is the heart), and acting with our guts. That is what I was ultimately trying to accomplish with this piece.

Fig. 9. Shanna Glawson. "Hacer de Tripas Corazon", 2015. Mixed media.

Sometimes I face personal fears through creating interactive and community engaging art. My intentions for this piece was to engage the school and community through an art piece of which the symbolic message represents love, thought, and feeling. Through this event we, as members of a school and community, came together and connected via an anatomical heart shaped piñata. The outer construction of the piñata was composed primarily of cardboard, paint, and tissue paper. It measured approximately three feet high and weighed roughly fifty pounds. It was then installed and ready to be destroyed.

Drawing inspiration from how piñatas are prepared and how the human heart functions, I stuffed my heart with an appropriately whimsical filling: blood and guts. Obviously not real blood and guts, but a safer, nontoxic, and clean imitation. The inside of the cardboard piece was lined with spray foam to create texture and more padding. The guts were made by using sausage casing and stuffing them with red dyed spaghetti noodles, which were then contained inside a bag inside of the piñata. After extensive research, I discovered that a kid's water-downed red washable, non-toxic paint would make the best blood solution for safety and cleanliness purposes. Hence, the material would not be harmful to its audience or the facilities. Participants were equipped with a blindfold, a protective jacket, and a stick with a sharp end. They then took turns swinging at the piñata in an attempt to destroy it and reveal the contents. According to William S. Burroughs, "There is no intensity of love or feeling that does not involve the risk of crippling hurt. It is a duty to take this risk, to love and feel without defense or reserve."[36] Through this interaction the audience was able to relate to this abuse of the heart through their own experience of personal pain and elations. These stirred up sentiments should inspire the viewer to listen to what their own heart is telling them.

4. Conclusion

Through the process of learning many sculptural methods, I have explored a range of materials and meanings within my heart manifestations. When the agape-inspired hearts are viewed alongside the erotic hearts, their related figurative associations are revealed. The sacred and profane pieces are visually connected though comparable forms, a consistent color palette, and similar surface treatments. The range of emotions conveyed are not strictly meant to be funny nor tragic; but perhaps, upon further inspection behind these analogies we might find a deeper meaning. I create sculptures that lie in an ambiguous borderland between sacred and profane not because I believe love is a joke, but because I wish to celebrate it, in all of its many forms and disguises.

The process of exploring narrative through a series of sculptures rather than two dimensionally has developed an interest in the relationship between craft and art. The desire to evoke a certain mood, feeling, or response from the viewer led me to research Frida Kahlo and Damien Hirst in order to gain a deeper understanding of establishing a scene for that purpose, with the focus on creating sacred and profane analogies. Just like Bernini, I too, intentionally and boldly display eroticism to excite and arouse the viewer. Just like Frida Kahlo, I too, enjoy delving into myself to portray my subconscious. And, just like Damien Hirst, I too, enjoy using Christian iconography in a stark sculptural

manner. Because of their influences, my work has a genuine complexity of irony. My art is intended to leave a question mark above the spectator's head. As someone who wants to promote curiosity, I want the viewer to consider the "why" and ponder on whether the piece is sad, funny, or both. Maybe they are already in on the joke or maybe they will chuckle despite not knowing the punch line.

My challenge has been to create an exceptional visual investigation of the metaphysical properties of the heart through unique sculptural pieces that integrate wood, clay, and mixed media. Through this research on the heart, I have learned that the heart is a vessel meant to be filled with spiritual qualities, is the most dramatic when wounded, and is naturally dualistic. These ideas subtly manifest themselves in the artwork through the allegorical alterations of the heart imagery. Through my research, I have learned to see love at its most triumphant and pitiful state. I successfully attempted to capture this within the context of a multitude of heart connotations. The research into the history of the heart shape and iconography has led me to this point and the themes are persistent in my work. The interactive components of my sculpture act as the primary method for invoking particular moods and responses from the viewer. In the future, I plan to use my knowledge of all the uses of the heart to continue to pursue my passions in art while focusing on the interactive properties of the work to involve the viewer.

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