Title: Deconstructing Religion through Art?: Wim Botha's images of Christ.

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Abstract

South African artist, Wim Botha, is known for his post-modern reinterpretations of religious iconography, yet Botha states that he is not interested in religion *per se* but is motivated by a concern for historical systems of representation and visual communication, with the intangibility of *religion as a concept* as his starting point. Through his work he investigates both the past and the present understanding of a religious 'truth' and the way that 'truth' has been presented in visual terms to convey a message that far outweighs the physical fact of the elements involved (a man on a cross, or a woman with a baby, for example).

Religious iconography is a perfect vehicle for parody and/or 'quotation' in a post-modern sense as it has a long historical presence and conveys certain messages that are understood by many people. This allows for complex layers of meaning that result sometimes in extreme responses, ranging from outright condemnation for some works, and others which function as devotional aids, despite Botha's non-religious intent. This paper investigates selected sculptural images of the crucified Christ by Botha, and the implications they raise for contemporary viewers, both Christian and agnostic.

Key Words: South African art, post-modern, parody, transgressive images of Christ

Wim Botha is a South African artist who employs religious imagery in transgressive ways to comment on the current social and political status of life in South Africa. Botha (2008) states that his work is not 'religious' in any way, and he does not seek to pursue a religious truth nor does he wish to comment in a derogatory way about the relevance of religion in a contemporary world. In fact he purports to be 'neutral' about religion but chooses to employ religious imagery because it has a long art historical presence and the historical and religious implications are therefore automatically understood by western viewers. This makes religious iconography a perfect vehicle for reinterpretation and 'quotation' in a post-modern sense. It also allows for complex layers of meaning that result sometimes in extreme responses, ranging from outright condemnation for some works, and others which function as devotional aids despite his non-religious intent. This paper investigates selected images of the crucified Christ by Botha titled *Commune: Suspension of disbelief* (2001) (figs.1 and 2), *Premonition of War (Scapegoat)* (2005) (figs.5 and 6) and *Scapegoat* (2005) (fig.7) to ascertain the implications they raise for contemporary viewers, both Christian and agnostic.

In his introduction to *The Sacred Gaze* David Morgan[1] interrogates the notion of 'belief' as the foundation of faith and the way belief is mediated through words, actions, and images. Morgan states that belief cannot exist without a body to speak or act and without a means to share that belief. In other words, it is not something that happens in isolation but as part of culture: it must be communicated.[2] Communication as a theme appears in the Gospel of John 1:1 (New International Version) which states: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God". This emphasis on the Word, (or Logos), as an appropriate metaphor for God the supreme creator, as well as for his son, implies the importance of

‘speaking’ a truth into existence. The written word of the Bible, as the next step in such communication, is circumscribed and limited in its application, as explained by Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatololgy*[3] who argues that writing is understood to generate meaning when spoken language is absent. It replaces speech with a graphic substitute for a voice as if voice and writing were comparable and interchangeable. The reality is, however that the voice is alive and present whereas writing is the dead remnant, capable of being misinterpreted or manipulated by the reader/receiver. Interestingly, he notes that in our society the primary bearer of meaning and knowledge is textual rather than phonic. Written discourses (particularly academic discourses) operate as autonomous systems and refer intertextually to each other rather than to primary speech events. A generative and universal Word thus becomes a hermeneutically interpreted text that functions semiotically within a set of predetermined (humanly determined and therefore limited) grammatical rules. It is this slippage between the conceptual and the concrete that is the inspiration for Wim Botha’s *Commune: Suspension of disbelief* (2001) (figs.1 and 2), which consists of a suspended crucified Christ figure carved from Bibles and Bible text, surrounded by surveillance equipment in the form of CCTV cameras creating, as Liese van der Watt[4] remarks “a kind of art-historical tautology where form and content seemingly join.”

Willemien Otten (2007:33) notes “The fact that Christianity was about the Word, or Logos, makes it also understandable that in its next phase it is to be considered a religion of words, of books, or better still: a religion featuring a whole library.” We can understand therefore, “how the Bible came to form the pinnacle of divine revelation”[5] possibly diminishing the role of other media in the process, and termed ‘bibliolatry’ by Otten;[6] who goes on to explain this as a function of Protestantism and explains that early Christian hermeneutic studies led to ‘reining in’

“the evocative potential of allegory, symbolism and metaphor.” Morgan[7] agrees with this and states “The iconicity of printed texts is a category of experience that Protestants relish”.

The creation story also indicates a material world that has been ‘spoken’ into existence both physically and conceptually, an example being found in Genesis 1:3 (New International Version): “And God said: ’Let there be light’ and there was light.” The statement “God said” is repeated for each day of creation, in the first chapter of Genesis, and is followed by the manifestation of his spoken word. Otten[8] observes that “the natural business of words is to generate meaning and signification.” This function is formalised firstly by the written Word (Bible) and is then concretised by the incarnation of Jesus Christ as explained in the Gospel of John 1:14 (New International Version) “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” So the visual, physical manifestation of the Word “opens up the interplay of the verbal and the material”[9] and Christ becomes a physical icon of the anthropological link between the Word and the world.

The complexity of this link is raised by Alain Besançon who questions the devolution of power between the Logos, the man Christ, and his status as the incarnate ‘image of God’. Besançon[10] notes that in early historical church discourse it was stated that “[t]he Logos did not inhabit a man, it became a man”. Through this incarnation the static, semiotically constrained written word could be visually demonstrated, perhaps become alive again and generate new meanings or clarify old interpretations in a new way and thus overcome the limitations of ‘dead’ text as pointed out by Derrida.[11] While this is an anachronistic argument in terms of church history, it is relevant in the interpretation of Botha’s work as he is motivated by a concern for historical

systems of representation and visual communication with the intangibility of *religion as a concept* as his starting point. Botha is interested in both the past and the present understanding of a religious 'truth', albeit an intangible or irrational one, and the different modes (visual and verbal) of its continuing effect on society and the means to promote that effect.

A concept, such as religion, can only functionally impact on physical existence if it is given durable concrete form as language in order for it to be communicated. Language is capable of change with each retelling so to ensure the permanence and continuity of religious dictates they must be written down in an immutable form as text. Text in itself, as mentioned, is merely abstract graphic symbols but through the agency of semiotic systems it becomes information and instruction, which can ultimately be manipulated by the prevailing hegemony to result in intellectual, social and political control. The written text (Bible), formulating a belief system and its rules, is then carved by Botha into yet another mode of representation that serves to encapsulate the central message of the text: the sacrifice of Christ. He appears in a sculptured physical form that conforms to traditionally expected imagery ratified by centuries of art history.[12] He thus displays a 'reality' that is based on myth but is nevertheless strong enough to have upheld entire societies and driven national courses of action over centuries. Botha has also utilised several versions of the Bible, which have been translated into all eleven official languages of South Africa.[13] Through the South African context this version of Christ closely pertains to the introduction of Christianity to the indigenous population, raising issues such as the imposition of a belief structure that serves the colonialist imperative and embodies control over the local populace.[14] Botha's Christ is therefore a figure whose physical 'reality' embodies more than one method of communication leading to control.

CCTV cameras are placed at different points surrounding the image with display monitors. Cameras create cultural spectacle, they refer to the predominance of photography, cinema and television, which can operate as mechanisms to disseminate cultural 'truths' in today's society. Simultaneously they embody a sense of voyeurism and the control of state institutions - one thinks of George Orwell's statement "Big Brother is watching you" from his novel *Nineteen Eighty Four*[15] which has had ever increasing validity in our era of cameras on highways, in shopping centres, in lifts, and even satellite cameras above the earth that can watch anyone, anywhere. Botha's camera images, while alluding both to spectacle and control, are deliberately obfuscatory rather than informative, with black and white hazy images shown on the monitors that switch between an upright view and a sideways view (fig.3). Three of the cameras zoom in on fragments of the Christ figure, which progressively become high contrast images and are eventually completely out of focus, showing just fragments of His body. When looking at the sculpture it is still possible to identify the section being depicted, but when looking only at the images they degenerate into abstraction. The work as a whole takes the viewer literally from an abstract imbued with religious meaning through various physical and visual manifestations to concrete form, and back to a black and white abstract with no meaning whatsoever. Could this be described as the deconstruction of religion through art?

One of the cameras records people entering the space, often standing at the foot of the crucifix like supplicants or mourners in countless historical renditions of crucifixion scenes (fig. 4). The monitored scene of supplication also evokes notions of control, with the cameras as instruments of state regulation over the populace. As Foucault[16] points out, regulation and control requires

rules and their enforcement.[17] Development from faith as an abstract spiritual notion to the formulation of rules and codes of conduct, as organised religion takes over from spirituality, is visually expressed in the raw materials of *Commune: Suspension of disbelief*. The physical manifestation of those rules is embodied literally in a 'figurehead' suspended above the heads of his 'supplicants' with CCTV cameras as his all-seeing eye, revealing a status quo that is underpinned by a conflation of state and religious control. This alludes to the appropriation and adaptation of specific religious precepts that underpinned the Afrikaner Nationalist regime in South Africa where the Nationalist party used their interpretation of Christianity and the Bible to legitimise their discriminatory reign and their belief in apartheid. Charles Bloomberg[18] notes that from the first Calvinist settlers in 1652, Afrikaner nationalists fervently believed in their God given duty as custodians of the new nation allowed them to enforce their views of biblical truth on the social structure of South Africa, that is "its continued fidelity to Christian norms, the illumination of God's word over everything, and the Bible as the source of truth for all political life."

The rigid certainty of these beliefs is no longer evident, however, in the fuzzy, increasingly abstracted images that appear to be in a state of disintegration and are now open to interpretation rather than immutably fixed. Botha's installation has exposed an assurance built up over centuries that certain rules and actions are inherently right and therefore enforceable yet, simultaneously, he erodes the necessary confidence that should underpin their enforcement and replaces it with doubt and uncertainty. Doubt is a necessary ingredient promoting the reflection and self-awareness required for creating a more tolerable future regime. Ironically, therefore, Botha's exposé of past dogmas instituted by the conflation of state and ecumenical regulations

has an end result not too different from the initial motivation of religious faith - in its function as a catalyst for change and self-enlightenment.

Surprisingly, despite Botha's often reiterated lack of interest in religion and his diverse and contradictory motivations in appropriating religious icons, the inherent strength of historical meaning imbued in such images still renders them able to function as devotional aids in support of religious faith for some people.[19] This may result from his representation of Christ in a conventionally acceptable way, despite the unconventional material used. Conversely works such as *Premonition of War (Scapegoat)* (2005) (fig.5), which is a political work commenting on the age old principal of shifting blame to an innocent party, has caused controversy merely because it has been understood as a representation conflating Christ and the Devil.[20] Some people overlooked its primary preoccupation and concentrated only on what was perceived to be blasphemous because of the strength of the religious implications, so there was what Botha[21] (2008) referred to, in an interview, as "a massive knee jerk reaction" based on the reverence with which Christians consider representations of their crucified saviour.

Originally a crucifixion was a shameful death reserved, as Nigel Spivey[22] explains, for only the most unworthy criminals: "it was death with grim humiliation, ignominy and abasement." Moreover Colleen Conway[23] points out that a crucified body was violated, penetrated and therefore emasculated, prompting Cicero, in his Verrine orations, to describe crucifixion as "the most savage, most disgraceful punishment."[24] The cross was therefore seldom utilised in early Christian imagery because of the stigma attached to it. As Spivey[25] so rightly asks "who on earth would want its souvenir or remembrance?" Neil MacGregor[26] notes that on the very few

occasions when the early church depicted Christ on the cross, the emphasis was on his victory over death rather than his suffering, and the motif was thus intended to reinforce the message that the end result outweighed the shame. When realism and graphic suffering was introduced later, as in Grunewald's crucified Christ from the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, for example, the intention was to induce feelings of love and gratitude that would evoke repentance in the viewer. The cross thus gradually became a symbol of sacrifice leading to redemption and, as such, a symbol of life rather than death. The wood of the cross was seen as a 'tree of life' in contrast to the 'tree of death' from the Garden of Eden, and Christ was the 'second Adam' who came to undo the deeds of the first Adam.[27] The cross in current religious understanding therefore has come to denote spiritual life and victory and is a succinct symbol of the core of Christian faith. Benson[28] notes, therefore, that: "The Christian world today no longer thinks of the Cross as an instrument of execution, but always as a glorious symbol of Christ's sacrifice for all mankind." He furthermore states: "The meaning of the Christian Cross is clear and significant. It is the symbol of life eternal, of redemption and resurrection through faith."[29]

The disruption of such a symbol by placing a 'satanic' image rather than a Christ on the cross led to almost hysterical public outrage and accusations of blasphemy. The Moriel Ministries website,[30] for example, entitled their article on the exhibition, including this work "Premonition of War – Blasphemy in Art" and the reviewer stated that he was "shocked and disgusted" by the works on view. He went on to identify Botha's attitude to religion as the result of a weak personality. The Artthrob website[31] also states that this exhibition generated controversy in Bloemfontien, and Botha[32] himself has stated that many gallery visitors expressed shock at the content of this and other works on the show. The strength of reaction, to the degree that

responses sometimes lack logic, could indicate the residue of a belief in the inherent sacredness of images of the crucified Christ.

When analysing *(Scapegoat)* Botha's reason for his choice of imagery becomes apparent and defuses the inference of blasphemy. It consists of a sculpture made of fragmented and burnt indigenous African hardwood,[33] in the shape of a crucified satyr-like figure with horns and goat legs. The wood is carved in sections and appears unfinished at the back as if it has been pieced together like a puzzle (fig. 6), which creates a link between this central figure and the panels of six dramatic views of clouds and sky on either side which are actually framed jigsaw puzzles. The 'pieced together' nature of a puzzle that slowly accumulates into a coherent image, alludes to the construct that has been assembled over millenia of heaven as 'somewhere up there in the sky'. By association the fragmented figure in between is also revealed as a construct who floats ambiguously conflating the identity of a religious 'saviour' and a comic book saviour such as superman speeding through the sky to 'save' humanity. Botha[34] explains that he wanted to create an emotional impact so this figure is physically contorted with a broken demeanour, and is undeniably a victim rather than a strong and invincible superhero. The wood is burnt as if the figure has already been sacrificed by fire, in other words, doubly victimised. He looks helpless with a hanging head and large pieces missing from the middle, the antithesis of a satanic devil but also the antithesis of a hero or a saviour, he becomes a subversion of both symbols and the powers they represent.

A Scapegoat is inherently a victim; the term originated in the Old Testament ritual of Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:8-10) where a goat was symbolically burdened with the transgressions of

the Jewish nation and then beaten and sent into exile in the desert, carrying away past iniquities to ensure a clean slate for the new year.[35] The principal of shifting blame or sin onto a goat exists in many religions (hence the word scapegoat) and can be found in China, East Asia and Middle Eastern traditions.[36] By extension, the word has come to mean any innocent group or individual that carries the blame of others or is the subject of irrational hostility.[37] Perhaps it is this conflation of goat and sinfulness that resulted in the popular western image of the devil as a creature half goat, half man with cloven hooves, a tail and horns.

The roots of such an image lie in the Greek God Dionysus who, according to James Frazer,[38] sometimes appears in goat form, and in the God's followers, half men, half goats, called satyrs. Surprisingly the religious myth relating to the God Dionysus was associated with suffering, sacrifice, death and rebirth/resurrection and included the promise of life after death for devoted followers who displayed "clean hands and a pure heart"[39]. This does not sound too distant from Christian religious beliefs and perhaps points to the incorporation of suitable aspects of 'old' religions during the introduction of Christianity. On the other hand, however, Dionysus was also known as the God of wine and his worship included "wild dances, thrilling music and tipsy excess"[40] as well as frenzied rituals performed by the satyrs and his female followers known as Maenads.[41] Because satyrs are half animal they are associated with untrammelled animal urges resulting in lechery, debauchery and immorality.[42] There are, of course, far worse evils than these, but such are the traits that the church wanted to subdue, so that the goat-like satyr became the visual manifestation of ultimate evil – the devil.

Ironically the Christian crucifixion is also a pure example of the scapegoat principle. Christ is the carrier of sins, the innocent one that bears the blame and is unjustly punished for all. Botha's work is merely combining the two visual images that historically express the same principle. The fact that it looks like Christ and the devil is merely a result of the manipulation of religious imagery over centuries. As Botha says "It is not something I did – I just pointed it out". [43] His stated intention was to combine recent popular myths with 'old' Gods and overlap them with religious imagery, as so much of the content and symbolism already overlaps. His disintegrating Scapegoat hanging in front of an expanse of sky as if in the midst of a heroic battle that he is not winning, taps into popular mythology like *The Matrix* or Japanese anime films, as much as it refers to ancient religious traditions.[44] It demonstrates the continuing necessity for mythological constructs to be unravelled and reinvented in order to unpack them and interrogate their significance.

Botha made a second version of the scapegoat carved out of anthracite, epoxy resin and eco-solvent, and entitled simply *Scapegoat* (2005) (fig.7). It is a sharper, more confrontationally menacing image than the wooden version. Like the former, it was originally hung with framed jigsaws which were, however, placed in a less structured more scattered composition, as part of the Durban installation of *A Premonition of War.* Botha has also exhibited this version on its own and explains that although it is a variation on a similar theme the effect is more aggressive, with more presence, and is therefore capable of standing 'alone'.[45] This figure is whole and defined; the facial features are sharper and more precise in their naturalism. The hair is stylised and spiky as if it has a life of its own, and Botha[46] has said that it was directly inspired by hair typically seen in Japanese anime films. This energising effect makes the figure look as if he could lift his

head at any moment and he thus appears more vital and aggressive than the blurred fragmentation and victimisation of the first *(Scapegoat).*

This figure also has a prominent phallus, which created another level of controversy when it was exhibited in Durban in 2005, as it was associated more directly with satyriasis and lewd behaviour than salvation. Through his inversion and conflation of religion and mythology Botha is displaying "hostility towards grand narratives", and van der Watt[47] explains, that he questions the powers and rules which function through binaries such as "good/evil, friend/foe, sacred/profane, sanctioned/rejected, order/chaos, purity/taboo, canon/exclusion". His works thus appear to be deliberately ambiguous, so the anthracite from which this *Scapegoat* is carved could indicate an all-consuming sacrifice, or evoke the material that fuels the fires of hell.

Botha's post-modern quotation of such an icon with its layers of meanings from previous incarnations provides a catalyst for viewers to rethink past beliefs and deconstruct their underpinnings to better understand the present. The gut reaction, or shock factor is a necessary part of this process as his reinterpretation of religious imagery could be said to function, in Brechtian terms, as a method of distanciation that creates a forum for understanding, unshackled by old pedagogies and unhampered by past expectations. Botha's approach allows a viewer, whether Christian or not, to face the culpability of art history and religion as vehicles of state interests and mechanisms of control. His works promote a re-consideration of one's understanding of both the image of a crucified Christ and the message that He may carry in contemporary society.

[1] D. Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice,* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, University of California Press, 2005, pp.6-12.
[2] D. Morgan, *ibid.* p. 9.
[3] J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology.* Transl. G. C. Spivak, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, pp. 6-26.
[4] L. Van der Watt, "The opposite of everyday: Wim Botha's acts of translation", in: *Wim Botha,* Exhibition Catalogue, S.Perryer (ed.), Cape Town, Standard Bank and Michael Stevenson, 2005, p.6 .
[5] W. Otten, "The tension between word and image in Christianity", in: *Iconoclasm and Iconoclash: Struggle for religious Identity,* Second Conference of Church Historians, Utrecht,University of Tilburg, Van Asselt, W. van Geest, P. Muller, D. Salemink, T. (eds.), Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2007, p.34.
[6] *ibid.* p.37.
[7] D. Morgan, *op.cit.,*2005, p. 10.
[8] W. Otten, *op.cit.*, 2007, p. 35.
[9] *Ibid.*, p.36.
[10] A. Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: an Intellectual History of Iconoclasm,,*Transl. J.M. Todd, Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 119.
[11] Interestingly the writings of Calvin counteract the notion of scripture as 'dead' text because he believed and taught that in the scriptures both the word and the Holy Spirit are inseparably bound together and corroborate each other. As Morgan (*op.cit.*, p. 12) explains: "Calvin's hermeneutic conflates the Holy Spirit with the spirit or gist or divine intention of the biblical text. In this shift from speech to writing as the medium of revelation, breath becomes essence or meaning. Charisma is constrained by textuality, and text is animated by deeper meaning as discerned by the eyes of faith." With today's post-modern understanding of the authorial role, however, Calvin's stance is untenable and indefensible.
[12] In recent times a plethora of popular images of Christ show a Eurocentric, patrician face with long wavy hair (often light brown or blonde) usually bearded and with a sorrowful or compassionate expression. Despite the many permutations of this ideal in artistic interpretations, there is enough of a similarity in renditions of Jesus to make him recognisable even without the identifying accoutrements of a crown of thorns, a bleeding heart or a cross. Ena Giurescu Heller, thus notes that while all representations of Christ are not alike "[i]t seems that they all follow – with varying levels of detail and accuracy – a common prototype." E. G. Heller (ed.). 2002. *Icons or Portraits?: Images of Jesus and Mary from the Collection of Michael Hall.* Exhibition Catalogue, July 26-November 16, 2002. New York: The Gallery at the American Bible Society, p. 13. Heller (*ibid.* p. 14) ascribes the enduring influence of this image to its origins as an *acheiropoieton* (an image that is 'not made by hands') in the mythical 'supernatural' transference of Christ's features miraculously onto a cloth that was used to wipe his face, as found in the *Mandylion of Edessa* or the well known myth of the Veil of Veronica.[12] The archetypal status of such imagery, free of human agency or artistic interpretation, ensured its veneration because such a portrait could "prove beyond any doubt the historical existence of Jesus" and "give the faithful an accurate image of what he really looked like." (*ibid.* p.19). This allegedly authentic portrayal of Jesus resulted in subsequent images being closely copied and Heller (*ibid.* p. 21) further extrapolates from this to conclude that the remarkable similarity and various recurring features through which images of Christ become recognisable can be traced back to these prototypes.
[13] Van der Watt (*op.cit.*, 2005, p. 6) explains that Botha used the Bibles that are usually found in hotel rooms, with red edges to the pages, which he positioned so that the red was visible in Christ's side and hands to approximate the wounds of his stigmata.
[14] The Black Consciousness leader, Bantu Steven Biko (199725,26), notes that Christianity was introduced to South Africa by the missionaries as a foreign religion that was inextricably part of the move to 'civilise and educate the savages' and turn them into a docile unquestioning source of labour for the colony. The introduction of Christianity was thus equated with the suppression of cultural identity by the black people of South Africa as they were required to change their mode of dress, their religion, their behaviour and even their language to conform to the colonising power. B.S. Biko," Steve Biko: Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity", in*The Essential Steve Biko.* R.Malan (compiler), Cape Town, David Philip Publishers, 1997, pp.10-35.
[15] G. Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty Four.* London, Secker & Warburg, 1949.
[16] M. Foucault, *Power.* Transl. R. Hurley et al., New York, The New Press, 2000.

[17] Foucault , *ibid.,* pp. 201-202, explains that the classical models of power and social control in Western societies turned on issues of sovereignty and law, and thus required a figurehead (God or a King or ruler) to wield that power and control the masses by identifying and removing oppositional or marginal groups. The inclusion and conformity required for state control is historically demonstrated by Constantine's expedient declaration of Christianity as an official state religion in AD 325. Through this decree he brought the two most powerful, and at the time opposing, regulatory mechanisms of his day into a cohesive patriarchal hegemony which has underpinned social power in the West for centuries.

[18] C. Bloomberg, *Christian Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond, in South Africa, 1918-48,* London, Macmillan, 1990, pp. 10,11.

[19] Botha (2008) explains that he often has young students or scholars who are very religious wanting to research his work: "I like it that despite my ambivalent or different intentions people can still find beautiful meaning in something so banal as carving bibles – that it could actually support their faith. The most amazing thing about that work is how people found a way to make it not monstrous. It seems that the possibility of my intent being to destroy bibles was just too horrible to comprehend so they really stretched their minds around this to find ways of making it OK."

[20] This work is part of Wim Botha's Standard Bank Young Artist 2005 exhibition, titled *A Premonition of War*. The exhibition opened at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown on 30 June 2005 and travelled to the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum in Port Elizabeth (2 August - 18 September 2005); the Tatham Art Gallery in Pietermaritzburg (6 October - 6 November 2005); Durban Art Gallery (23 November 2005 - 22 January 2006); the Oliewenhuis Art Gallery, Bloemfontein (14 February - 19 March 2006); the South African National Gallery in Cape Town (8 April - 28 May 2006); and the Standard Bank Gallery in Johannesburg (13 June - 15 July 2006).

[21] W. Botha, Interview between Wim Botha and Karen von Veh at Botha's studio in Johannesburg on 5 March 2008.

[22] N. Spivey, "Christ and the Art of Agony", *History Today*, vol. 49, issue 8, 1999, p.19.

[23] C. M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity,* Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 67.

[24] *Verr.* 2.5.64 quoted in C. M. Conway, *ibid.*

[25] N. Spivey, *op.cit.,* p.19.

[26] N. MacGregor, and E. Langmuir, *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art,*London, BBC Worldwide Ltd., 2000, p.122.

[27] Jeffrey Carter explains that many theorists believe sacrifice can be seen as both the "origin of religion" and the "essence of religion" and must be understood as something that is inherent to all religions. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is therefore not only at the core of Christian beliefs but is fundamental to an understanding of religious impact on society in general and therefore fundamental to the whole purpose of Biblical teaching. J. Carter, (ed.), 2003. *Understanding Religious Sacrifice: a Reader,* New York and London, Continuum. 2003, p. 8.

[28] G. W. Benson, *The Cross: Its History and Symbolism,* New York, Hacker Art Books, 1976, p.25.

[29] *Ibid.*, p.23.

[30] Moriel Ministries Notice Board, "A Premonition of War – Blasphemy in Art", 2008, http://www.moriel.org/articles/notice_board/premonition_of_war.htm (accessed 24 March 2010).

[31] Artthrob. 2006. "Wim Botha at the SANG", http://www.artthrob.co.za/06may/listings_cape.html (accessed 31 March 2010).

[32] W. Botha, *op.cit.*2008.

[33] Botha, *op.cit.*, 2008, notes that he chose specific African hardwoods to create a direct link with the African context of his work, using similar reasoning for his choice of mieliepap to create his *Pietà*.

[34] W. Botha, *op.cit.*2008.

[35] The word comes from the Hebrew *Sa'ir La-'aza'zel* (goat for Azazel). Some scholars believe that the animal was chosen by lot to placate Azazel, a wilderness demon, then killed (sacrificed) by being thrown over a precipice outside Jerusalem, to ensure the sins of the past year were removed. Scapegoat, Encyclopedia Brittanica Online, http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/526601/scapegoat , (accessed 30. March2010). According to the *Lion Handbook to the Bible* Azazel is "a place in the wilderness to which the scapegoat was sent…The meaning is uncertain but it cannot refer to an offering to a demon, as some suggest,

for this was strictly forbidden." D. Alexander and P. Alexander, *The Lion Handbook to the Bible,* Berkhamstead, Lion Publishing. 1973, p. 177.

[36] Even in Africa cows are sacrificed as a positive symbol for festivities whereas goats are sacrificed to appease the ancestors.

[37] Definition from Merriam-Webster online Dictionary, 2010, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary (accessed 30 and 31 March 2010).

[38]J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A study in magic and religion,* (Abridged Edition), London, Macmillan, 1959, p.464.

[39] A. R. Burn. *The Pelican History of Greece,* Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1984, p. 134.

[40] J. G. Frazer, *op.cit.*, 1959, p.386.

[41] Burn, *op.cit.*, 1984, p. 135, explains that the Maenads were reputed to have gone into the mountains in their frenzy and torn animals (or people) to pieces. This myth is possibly part of the inspiration for another of Botha's works in this series, *Premonition of War (Bacchus and satyr)* 2005. The satyr, presumably infused with Maenadic frenzy, has ripped off Bacchus' arm and is beating him with it (Bacchus is the Roman name for the Greek god Dionysus).

[42] The connection between excessive sexuality and satyrs is indicated in the use of the word satyriasis to denote a medical condition resulting in "excessive or abnormal sexual craving in a male." Merriam-Webster *op.cit.*, 2010.

[43] W. Botha, *op.cit.*2008.

[44] Botha, *op.cit.*, 2008, mentioned the 1999 science fiction film *The Matrix* in particular, which is riddled with Christian symbolism such as the use of Zion as the resistance headquarters and the last remaining human settlement, for example, or the sacrificial role of the main character Neo (whose name is an anagram of one as in 'The One'), or his girlfriend who is called Trinity (referring to the Holy Trinity). The Wachowski brothers, authors of the film script, stated in a web conversation that most of the religious symbolism is "intentional" (S. Armstrong, "The Gospel according to Keanu." *The Sunday Times.,* 13 February, section 9, Culture, 2000, p.22.). Ela Nutu, in her essay on *The Matrix*, analyses the points of similarity and concludes that Neo corresponds with Christ, Morpheus with God the Father, and Trinity with the Holy Spirit who unites the three. Nutu goes on to explain that the film is also riddled with an eclectic mix of mythological references such as Morpheus and the Oracle for example (E. Nutu, "Red Herrings in Bullet Time: *The Matrix*, the Bible, and the Postcommunist I" in: *The Recycled Bible: Autobiography, Culture, and the Space Between.* F. C. Black, (ed.), Atlanta, Society of Biblical Literature, 2006, pp. 69-85). Such mythological intertextuality corresponds with the various classical characters of myth, such as satyrs and Bacchus or Dionysus, that appear alongside biblical 'heroes' in Botha's *Premonition of War* exhibition.

[45] W. Botha, *op.cit.,* 2008.

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] L. van der Watt, *op.cit.*, 2005, p. 5.

List of Illustrations

All illustrations reproduced with kind permission from the artist.

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Fig. 3. Wim Botha. *Commune: suspension of disbelief* (detail, CCTV monitor feed). 2001. Carved Bibles and Bible text, surveillance equipment, installation dimensions variable, figure life-sized.

Fig. 4. Wim Botha. *Commune: suspension of disbelief* (installation view with 'supplicant'). 2001. Carved Bibles and Bible text, surveillance equipment, installation dimensions variable, figure life-sized.

Fig. 5. Wim Botha. *Premonition of War (Scapegoat).* 2005. Burnt African hardwood, resin, eco solvent inks on satin paper, gilt. Sculpture 188 x 152 x 64 cm; Installation 202 x 653 x 64 cm.

Fig. 6. Wim Botha. *Premonition of War (Scapegoat).* 2005. Burnt African hardwood, resin, eco solvent inks on satin paper, gilt. Sculpture 188 x 152 x 64 cm; Installation 202 x 653 x 64 cm. Detail.

Fig. 7. Wim Botha. *Scapegoat.* (2005). 2005. Anthracite, epoxy resin, wood, cable, metal brackets. Sculpture 188 x 152 x 64 cm. Installation view, Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg

Small images to identify each work:

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

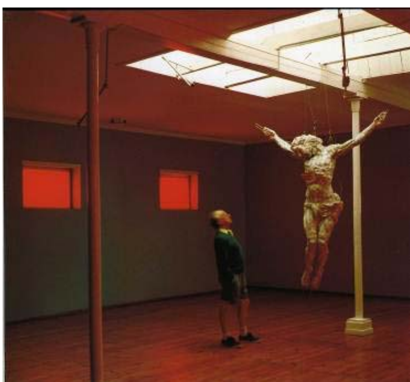


Fig. 5

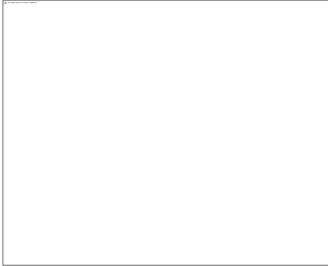
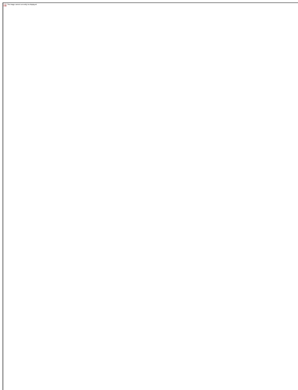


Fig. 6

Fig.7



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