

Distillation: Art, Spirituality, and My Catholic Imagination

As an avid collector of objects, images, and words, I have long intertwined these treasures into artwork. An intuitive sensibility and a continual use of problem-solving are my basic approaches. Conceptually, my art is an extension of my spirituality—a complex distillation of sources led by an indelible Catholic imagination.

The roots of my Catholic imagination are many and varied. First and foremost are my life experiences as a Catholic. I was a very devout child. When I would get back from receiving “Holy Communion,” which I believed was the transubstantiated body of Christ, I would kneel and push my fists into my eyes to pray fervently. I thought the sparkling I saw was God. I grew up when Catholic ritual was alive and well, when belief in the invisible and miracles were real, and when the human body in ecstasy and suffering was commonplace. Like the inspiration of fairytales for most of us, those memories inspire me and support my Catholic imagination. As a good Catholic girl, now gone astray, I find solace in referring back to the memories of the “faith” that I had as a child.

Over many years, my spirituality has been distilled by exploring the religious practices of non-Western and indigenous peoples (especially Native American and Mexican), as well as those of spiritualist and occult practitioners. It is also influenced by objects, places, and events that inform my art practice. These corporeal and otherworldly fascinations include my cemetery obsession, love of relics and their intricate holders, and the collection of religious objects. On one of my many trips to Europe, I brought wax body parts from Fatima, Portugal, the site of a purported 19th century visitation by the Virgin Mary. There are also exhibitions that have excited and enlightened me. Some are bizarre collections like the wax cadavers in the Specola Museum of Natural History in Florence, Italy. Others are more traditional such as *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*, the popular exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Through the lens of my Catholic imagination, distilled by my spiritual quests, my peculiar fascinations, and eclectic collections, I make art. Religious iconography and human anatomy are vehicles that I often use for visually connecting the human and the sacred.