

“THE UNMENTIONABLE ACT”

This is not a work *against* the pope. This is not a work *against* the Church. This is not a work *against* the Vatican.

This is not a work *in favour* of the pope. This is not a work *in favour* of the Church. This is not a work *in favour* of the Vatican.

Anyone reading this work of art through the distorting lens of political partisanship, which does not belong to it, would distort the vision even before understanding it.

This is a work of art *about* the Pope, *about* the Church, *about* the Vatican. We as artists felt stimulated by the cultural/media/sociological phenomenon in its iconographic sense, and our attempt has been to condense a period, a structure of power and spirituality, into an image. We fell in the role of reporters who record the facts, of storytellers who narrate them, and finally as artists we gave all this visual form. *One* form, of course, among the countless possibilities. *Ours*, of course.

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It was essential for us to read the texts of HANS KUNG (especially “Can the Church Still be Saved?”) and the writings of Cardinal CARLO MARIA MARTINI.

The intellectual debt to these authors is such as to enter the very iconographic body of the work.

Of the numerous historical essays by Vatican experts, we believe Marco Politi and his “Joseph Ratzinger – Crisis of a Papacy” worthy of a mention.

(The list of intellectual, cultural and iconographic sources we turned to in studying the conceptual and creative development of this work would be too long.)

THE ACT

The Supreme Roman Pontiff is caught in the most human act possible, yet absolutely unimaginable, unthinkable, *inenarrabilis* when associated with the successor of Peter: covering his face in shame. Or in despair. “*I am ashamed*” and feel “*Shame and remorse*”, the Pope has said on several occasions in relation to the paedophilia scandals. But he claims to be “*Distressed and hurt*” by the Vatileaks scandal. And finally, he expresses his weariness in governing the Church, in light of the “*ingravescentem aetatem*”.

THE FACE

When the unexpected news of the pope’s resignation reached us, we focused on the expression on his face, but understood immediately we could not use it. The pope was no longer there and then his words: “*...I will be hidden from the view of the world*” paved the way for us to “dare” to attempt something never-before-seen in centuries of official papal portraits: the hidden face.

Francis Bacon, after all, had already desecrated, deformed and distorted it.

THE BEJEWELLED HANDS

The wealth, treasures and precious stones that popes flaunt and Ratzinger loves in particular are even more absurdly in contrast with the poverty of Christ. Saint Francis *non docet* obviously.

THE ROBES

Both Kung and Cardinal Martini use similar expressions to describe the pontifical robes, “*examples of Baroque pomp...*” for the first, “*our robes and our rituals are pompous*” for the second.

What an irreconcilable contrast with the bare, bony figure of Christ on the cross. The ostentatious obscuring the true message.

But the weight and abundance of the robes are the superstructures, the incrustations of temporal and curial power that almost suffocate and constrain anyone who has to wear them.

THE GOSPEL ON HIS KNEES

The horrified gesture is perhaps due to a fresh reading of a passage from the Gospel: “*...Let the children come to me*”.

THE CONFESSIONAL

The ultimate home of secrets. And too many scandals, too many crimes were covered up by secrecy, and for too many years. Even child abuse took place in the confessionals!

We used this original late nineteenth century confessional to provide a visual representation of what Cardinal Martini clearly states: “*...The church is 200 years behind the times*”. The firmness and immobility of traditionalism risk forming a very narrow prison.

The opposite of the openness to the world proposed by the Second Vatican Council.

Finally, the simple, poor and humble style refers to the idea of the Church at its origins.

MICKY MOUSE

In our artistic language, Mickey Mouse is always an incongruous iconographic element but performs the task of playing down the scene. He lightens the visual impact of the work and reminds us that it is only ever a work of art, an artificial work of art. Theatre at the end of the day. And like the slippers in the work about Silvio Berlusconi, he is a little bit like our signature.

Conceptually, the stuffed toy is the most natural reference to childhood. And only the instinctive, playful, innocent act of a curious child could uncover that unmentionable act that is consumed in the silence, the darkness, the drama. Pulling that faded purple curtain towards him, he then reveals it to the world.

THE TRIPLE CROWN

On the ground, on large red drapery, the Triple Crown, symbol of the temporal power of the popes, a worldly power still today too unnaturally dear to the Pope, more “*absolute monarch*” than simple pastor. But the precious tiara features a card, an unofficial communication, symbol of the Vatileaks scandal. Any further comment is superfluous.

THE CAPPA MAGNA

The cappa magna symbolises the return to traditional pre-conciliar rituals, customs and mentalities, the conservatism it loves to portray with clarity. It is the ancient symbol of the imperial Roman rank inherited from the pontiffs. The colour red is symbolic of martyrdom. And it is for this reason that we have embroidered the names of all the people silenced by Vatican dogmatism: *“In the twenty-five years in which Ratzinger has headed the Holy Office, there is a long list of people who have been interrogated, rebuked, condemned...”* (Kung, Schillebeeckx, Boff, Fox, Romero, Byrne, Gramick, de Mello... but for a comprehensive list, see Matthew Fox’s “The Pope’s War”).

THE CARDINAL AND THE COUNCIL

On the right-hand side, invisible to the viewer, we have placed the book by Cardinal Franz König, great protagonist of the Second Vatican Council. If the pope had listened to him, many things might have turned out differently...

THE LOCATION, THE SOUND

To present this work, we have chosen the stage of Palazzo Santa Chiara: the presence of the Chapel of the Transit, the place where St. Catherine of Siena, co-patron of Europe died; the special indulgence left by Pope Clement XIV and finally a small ancient cross carved into the marble, all elements so profoundly impregnated with history, religiousness and symbolism.

The exhibition is completed by the sound of piped background voices that allude to the “*chatter*” with which Cardinal Sodano dismissed rumours from around the world about the scandals rocking the Church; overlapping with the speech in Latin with which Benedict XVI announced his resignation.