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Albrecht Durer, *The Sudarium Held by Two Angels*, 1513, engraving on wove paper. Gift of Catherine C. Lastavica, M.D.; PR.2000.46

cover: Albert Bouts, *Christ with the Crown of Thorns*, about 1500, oil and gold leaf on panel. Purchase made possible by gifts from Olivia H. and John O. Parker, Class of 1958; the Mrs. Harvey P. Hood W'18 Fund; Mr. and Mrs. A. Brooks Parker, III, Class of 1955; and the Friends of the Museum; P.986.67

CHECKLIST

Albert Bouts, Dutch, 1460–1549
Christ with the Crown of Thorns
About 1500

Oil and gold leaf on panel

Purchase made possible by gifts from Olivia H. and John O. Parker, Class of 1958; the Mrs. Harvey P. Hood W'18 Fund; Mr. and Mrs. A. Brooks Parker, III, Class of 1955; and the Friends of the Museum; P.986.67

Albrecht Dürer, German, 1471–1528
The Sudarium Held by Two Angels
1513

Engraving on wove paper

Gift of Catherine C. Lastavica, M.D.; PR.2000.46

Leonard Gaultier, French, 1561–1641, after Michelangelo Buonarroti,
Italian, 1475–1564
The Last Judgement
About 1600

Engraving on laid paper

Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisition Fund; 2005.4

Jan Saenredam, Dutch, 1565–1607, after Paolo Veronese, Italian,
1528–1588
Feast in the House of Levi
About 1600

Engraving on three joined sheets

Purchased through the Class of 1935 Memorial Fund; PR.2001.40

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HOOD MUSEUM OF ART

Designed by Christina Nadeau, DPMS



SACRILEGE AND IDOLATRY Religious Images in 16th-Century Europe



Jan Saenredam, after Paolo Veronese, *Feast in the House of Levi*, about 1600, engraving on three joined sheets. Purchased through the Class of 1935 Memorial Fund; PR.2001.40

When artists depict religious images, they confront a range of issues concerning how divine figures might look, what types of images are suitable to include, and what the consequences of their art will be. Often, artists follow established conventions in order to avoid conflicts surrounding those issues. With religious art, however, very fine lines exist between what is acceptable and what is not. Where is the boundary between art and idol? When does creative expression become sacrilegious? Christians asked these questions when they compared the supposedly miraculous image created on the Veronica cloth when Jesus wiped the sweat and blood from his face—as shown in Albrecht Dürer's *Sudarium Held by Two Angels* (1513)—with depictions of Christ created by artists. They wondered if an image created by a human could have the same power and meaning as one apparently created by the divine, and if so, should it? Sixteenth-century European artists and institutions grappled with these questions about the power and purpose of religious art, resulting in conflicts, iconoclasm, and censorship.

Albert Bouts's *Christ with the Crown of Thorns* (about 1500) served as a devotional image of the Catholic faith. Such images reminded the viewer to venerate and honor the figures they portrayed and imitate their deeds or holiness. Often devotional images were also associated with certain powers and miracles. Lutheran and Calvinist reformers called into question the use of these images for mediating prayer. They concluded that an image created by a human could not capture the divinity of God, and

that praying to one amounted to worshipping an idol. A view of Bouts's painting in raking light reveals the repairs of destruction done to the eye and mouth of the figure, likely the result of the iconoclasm (anti-idol sentiment) that occurred in the Netherlands in the autumn of 1566. In less than two weeks, fewer than one hundred Calvinist iconoclasts destroyed the interiors of Catholic churches throughout the Netherlands. While there was little violence done to people, the iconoclasts did not merely ruin but actually “tortured” devotional images, mutilating the eyes and faces of paintings and cutting off the heads of sculptures. The eye and mouth on *Christ with the Crown of Thorns* were probably scratched out in a hurried attack that effectively destroyed the image's ability to communicate with the viewer. Through iconoclasm, the Calvinists believed they could force society back to what they saw as the path of the Lord.

Around the same time that Calvinists were questioning the place of art in religion, Catholics became embroiled in controversy over the nude figures in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* (1536–1541). Prominent religious and literary critics published their objections to the work based on moral arguments and the theory of decorum. They objected to images in the painting such as a man being pulled into hell by his testicles and Saint Blaise hovering over a nude Saint Catherine in a position that suggests sodomy. The critics condemned Michelangelo for highlighting his own artistic ability by painting nudes in contorted and complex poses rather than glorifying God by treating the subject matter more delicately. They complained that the painting would not inspire “common” viewers to piety but would rather lead them to lust and laughter. In addition, due to the proliferation of printmaking during this time, access to the *Last Judgement* was expanded beyond a small circle of ecclesiastical and cultural figures in Rome to a wider public that could obtain prints such as the one by Leonard Gaultier (dating from around 1600). In response to the private and public criticisms, Pope Paul IV decided after the Council of Trent (1563) to hire a friend and disciple of Michelangelo, Daniele da Volterra, to paint over some of the objectionable areas in the work. Printmakers profited from making engravings of the painting in its uncensored state, and thus the Vatican could not completely suppress the questionable imagery.

Jan Saenredam's *Feast in the House of Levi* (about 1600) is a reproduction in reverse of Paolo Veronese's painting (1573) that was originally intended as a Last Supper for the refectory at S.S. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice. Veronese's painting has become an emblem of the conflict between artistic freedom—the right to choose imagery—and institutional restrictions on that freedom. Just three months after the completion of the painting, the Venetian Tribunal of the Inquisition brought Veronese in for questioning for including sacrilegious and secular elements in his painting. He had painted in his Last Supper scene a startling sixty-one extra figures (in addition to the thirteen canonical figures), including black men, Muslims,

a dwarf, two dogs, two birds, and a cat. When asked about the reasons for including several of these figures, Veronese responded to the inquisitors, “We painters take the same license the poets and the jesters take.” He even referred to Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, implying that it was a far graver breach of decorum than anything he had painted. The trial ended with an order for Veronese to make appropriate changes to the painting within three months. The only change the artist made was in the title of the painting, now inscribed on the print “FECIT D.COVI. MAGNU.LEVI” and “LUCAE CAP.V,” changing it from *Last Supper* to *Feast in the House of Levi*.

Although these examples of censorship and restrictions on artistic license are limited to sixteenth-century Europe, they are not unique. One can find a series of historical reasons and social conditions for the censorship and iconoclasm of these works of art, but these incidents could have occurred in any time period, under any social conditions. Artists and audiences will always find conflicts over what can and cannot be shown, because everyone has a different answer to questions about the power and purpose of religious art.

Brittany M. Beth
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Leonard Gaultier, after Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Last Judgement*, about 1600, engraving on laid paper. Purchased through the Hood Museum of Art Acquisition Fund; 2005.4

