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CHECKLIST

Dana Salvo, American, born 1952
Mendoza Household Shrine—Chiapas
About 1995
Chromogenic print
Gift of Varujan Boghosian; PH.998.47

Audrey Flack, American, born 1931
Macarena of Miracles
1973
Color lithograph
Gift of Dr. Samuel Mandel; PR.983.57.1

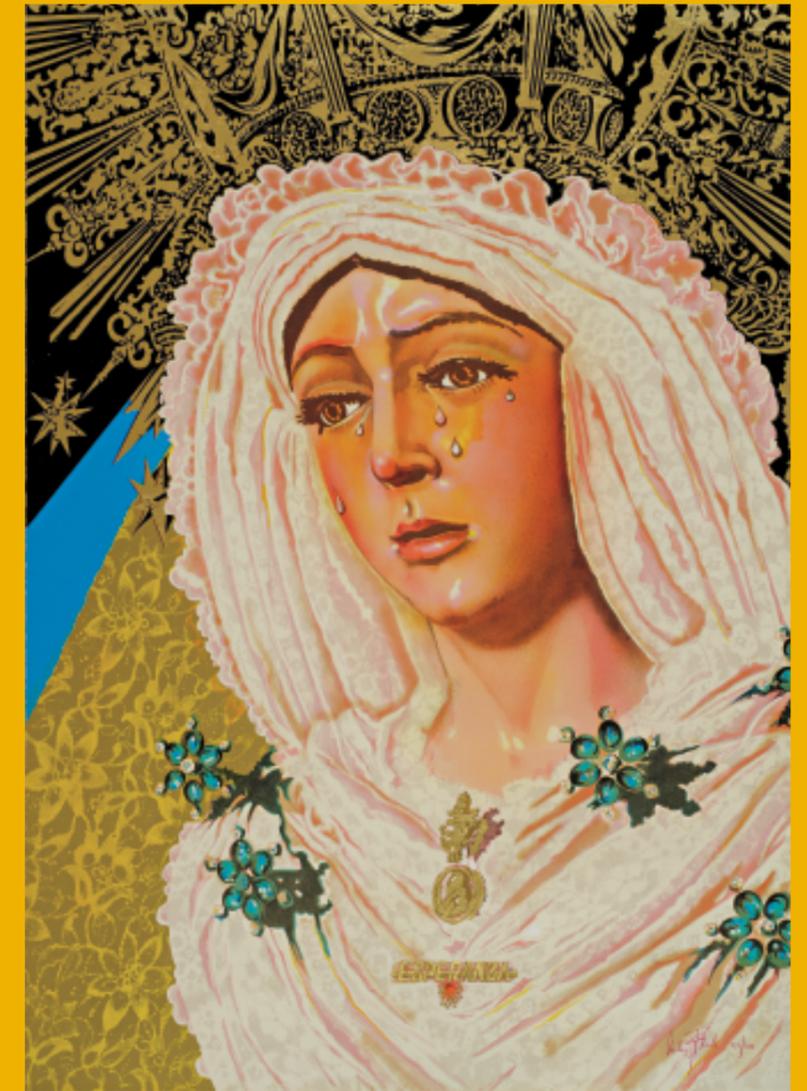
Andre Pierre, Haitian, 1914–2005
Ritual Jar for Ezili Freda
Collected 1966
Oil paint on terracotta
Gift of Micaela and Jack Mendelsohn, Class of 1956; 2005.7.2

Unknown, Mexican
Our Lady of Guadalupe
Early 20th century: Spanish colonial
Paint and steel
The Alice Cox Collection, Class of 1939hW; 177.9.25704

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Audrey Flack, *Macarena of Miracles*, 1973, color lithograph. Gift of Dr. Samuel Mandel; PR.983.57.1

VISIONS OF THE VIRGIN

Manifestations of Mary and Personal Devotion



Dana Salvo, *Mendoza Household Shrine*—Chiapas, about 1995, chromogenic print.
Gift of Varujan Boghosian; PH.998.47

Blessed Virgin. Mother of God. Throne of Wisdom. Queen of Heaven. These are just a few of the honorifics that have been given to Mary throughout the history of Christianity. Over this time, countless artists have also depicted the Virgin, inspired by her roles in both biblical and apocryphal narratives. Mary's numerous iterations make her a remarkably versatile figure and have allowed people around the world to incorporate her into their daily existence. In a way, Mary is the archetypal female, a standard for power and femininity in both religious and secular contexts. This installation investigates the Virgin as a trope and looks at some of the ways in which artists manipulate her to evoke personal piety in both religious and secular contexts that transcend particular cultures. It includes four works—a painting on steel, a photograph, a terracotta jar, and a color lithograph—all created in the twentieth century by artists from the Americas. Produced in different cultures and at different times, these objects present distinctive iterations and interpretations of the Virgin Mary as an object of art and devotion.

Due to the hegemony of the Spanish conquistadors, Catholicism—brought to the Americas during the late fifteenth century—spread quickly throughout the indigenous populations of Latin America. According to legend, the Virgin of Guadalupe, a Marian apparition, appeared to Mexican native Juan Diego in 1531 and called for his conversion to Catholicism. Since the seventeenth century, Guadalupe has been revered in Mexico, affirming not only Mexican religiosity but also national and racial identity.

Traditionally, the Virgin of Guadalupe is depicted as dark-skinned and surrounded by an aureole, an almond-shaped cloud of light. The Hood Museum of Art's early-twentieth-century work titled *Our Lady of Guadalupe* is portrayed in this conventional manner, emphasizing her popularity in and relevance to Mexican Catholicism. Painted on a small piece of steel, this rendering was likely created as a portable private devotional object.

Dana Salvo's photograph *Mendoza Household Shrine* (1995) provides an example of how the faithful use portable images of the Virgin as part of a personal domestic altar. Domestic altars remain an integral part of worship for followers of a number of religions. At home, worshippers can tailor their space and practice to fit their specific spiritual needs. Domestic religious objects tend to reflect this personalization and enable more efficient and individualized devotion. In Mexico, the number of home altars increased during the nineteenth century, due to a renunciation of the Church during the Enlightenment.

The continued usage of Mexican home altars today underscores a focus on individualized religious experience and allows worshippers to customize their commemoration of specific events, saints, or ancestors. Salvo, in *Mendoza Household Shrine*, illustrates how Consuelo and Ricardo Rincón Mendoza have arranged their *nacimiento*, an altar dedicated to the celebration of Christ's birth, with offerings of food and drink, statuettes, lithographs of saints, photographs of deceased family members, and lavish ornamentation. Various portable representations of Mary, including the Virgin of Guadalupe, are placed on the altar, indicating her significance to the Mendozas.

The Virgin is also used outside of the Christian context. Haiti's Vodou pantheon is comprised of a number of *lwa* (deities) with distinct personalities. In colonial Haiti (1492–1804), the European invaders pressured Vodou practitioners to convert to Catholicism. To ensure the survival of their particular religious traditions, the subjugated practitioners adapted Catholicism to their needs. As they were syncretized with Catholic saints with similar personalities, attributes, and experiences, the *lwa* acquired white faces. Ezili Freda, the *lwa* of love and beauty, was matched with the Mater Dolorosa, a representation of the Virgin Mary sometimes shown surrounded by gold with seven swords through her heart.

Haitian artist Andre Pierre created this *govi* (collected 1966), a small jar in which the soul of a deceased ancestor resides during Vodou rituals. It is highly ornate, in line with the iconographic expectations for both Dolorosa and Freda. Additionally, Pierre includes a sword derived from the stories of the Dolorosa, and pink and light blue, colors that traditionally refer to Freda. His incorporation of symbols alluding to this apparition of Mary illustrates her utility even in a new religious and cultural context.

While visiting a church in Seville, Spain, American artist Audrey Flack took a photograph of a wooden statue placed near the altar. This opulent sculpture, created in the seventeenth century by Baroque artist Luisa Roldán, is a public devotional work known as *La Macarena Esperanza* (Our Lady of Hope). On Good Friday in Seville even today, *La Macarena* is paraded through the streets to inspire contemplation of the crucifixion and sacrifice of Christ.

As a photorealist, Flack is inspired by objects she encounters every day and creates hyperreal paintings and lithographs based on her photographs of them. Photorealists, who are mostly men, generally focus on objects from the urban American landscape, such as cars and empty streets, presented in an unexpressive manner. Conversely, Flack produces sentimental works with symbols referring to feminine experiences. In *Macarena of Miracles* (1973), Flack creates a lithograph of this sculpture's head and torso, removing the Virgin from her original religious context to more directly address her feminine power and strength. Flack gives the feminine agency in her interpretation of a female subject by a female sculptor. Indeed, Flack connected with this Madonna so intensely that she created her own self-portrait in 1974 with lustrous, polychrome skin like that of the *Macarena*. As a work of art, the *Macarena of Miracles* highlights the changing secular and societal expectations for women in 1970s America.

While the Virgin Mary is a fundamentally Christian protagonist, a host of cultures and individuals around the world have used her to serve their specific needs. As such, Mary continues to accumulate religious, cultural, and personal meanings. In the works featured in this installation, one thing is clear: around the world today, Mary does not simply exist as the Mother of God; rather, she is the Versatile Virgin.

Jessica Womack '14
Levinson Intern

Andre Pierre, *Ritual Jar for Ezili Freda*, collected 1966, oil paint on terracotta.
Gift of Micaela and Jack Mendelsohn, Class of 1956; 2005.7.2

