



Guido Dettoni della Grazia since his youth has researched the representation of Jesus Christ through painting and sculpture. As time passed, he came to believe that Christ could only be imagined by each individual.

He saw the image of the "son of man" as something personal and non-transferable, the fruit of individual lives and experiences, and because of this he stopped representing it both on canvas and in material form. However, years later he realised that the representation of Christ was necessary to evoke Him and awaken His presence. It was then that he created this Face of Christ.



FACE OF CHRIST



In front of the cross, we place our hands under the screen and touch the Face of Christ. As we touch it from behind we embrace the cross. The screen gently reflects the image of the woman or man who is touching it.

Guido Dettoni della Grazia modelled this work in wax, blindfolded, on Easter Sunday, the day of Resurrection, in the year 2000. He has reproduced this shape in wood, incorporating it into the cross.

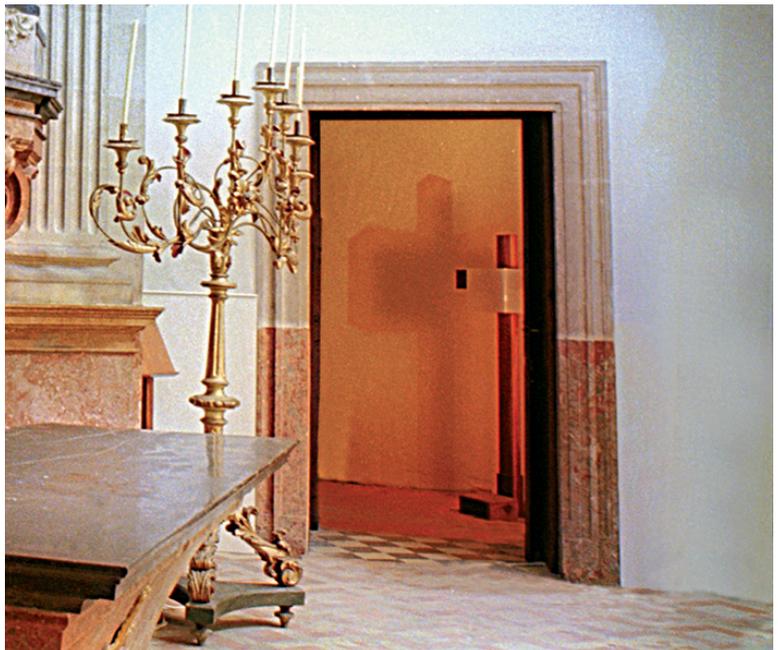
The artist proposes an individual experience, "seeing" with our hands alone that which the screen prevents us from beholding. Touching it, with no visual aid or influence, we imagine and feel it.

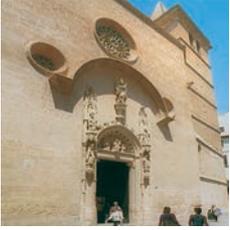


SANTA MARIA
IN MONTESANTO
Roma 2000



ESGLÉSIA DE SANT ANTONIET
Palma de Mallorca
2000 / 2001





ESGLÉSIA DE SANT MIQUEL
Palma de Mallorca
Permanente



The Face of Christ
by Guido Dettoni Della Grazia

Article by Fr. Miquel Ambròs
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On July fifth of this year Guido Dettoni della Grazia presented the Face of Christ in Santa Maria di Montesanto in Rome, the artists' church, under the patronage of the organisation NESHAR and the international cultural Association for Christian Art, ANÁSTASIS. The event is significant enough to give it a special mention, because the Face goes beyond art, entering fully into the religious experience and lends itself, as did other artistic manifestations of the past, to theological comment, if I may use this expression.

Before going further into the subject I should like to say a few words about Guido Dettoni and his work. This Italian artist was born in Milan in the year 1945 and, although he has travelled all over the world, he came to live in Barcelona whilst still very young. Here he made contact with Catalan culture and learned the language. His work does not move in the contemporary art circuits. His artistic search gave rise to a series of works that he called Yada in 1989. This Hebrew verb formed by the words YAD – hand – and AYIN – eye – means "know", know in a specific sense, the knowledge that comes from the experience of the senses: what the eyes see, the hands touch. This was the origin of a process which allowed the terms to be inverted, that is, the hands see, and the eyes touch. The works that emerge from the hands of the author are conceived, from their very birth, to reach the hands of everybody. Thus the sculptures of Mary and the Face are Yada sculptures, or sculptures to be perceived with the hands.

Some years back I had the satisfaction of presenting to my Majorcan countrymen the image Mary, captured definitively by Guido on 8th January of 1998 in Palma. Mary is a unique image, made in hand-size and reproduced in thirty-three different types of wood, comprising an installation in accordance with the design the author prepares for each church or space where it is exhibited. The success of the tiny image is so huge that it has been visited and admired in all the towns it has been to: Barcelona, Vic, Tarragona, Rome (twice: in the Gregorian University and in the Basilica of Saint Clement), Tortosa, Gerona, Assisi and Verona. Very soon it will be shown in Saragossa (October-November) and in Palma (November-January). So the force of Guido Dettoni's work is evident, unimaginable not only for those of us who have experienced his work, but also for himself, and quite unstoppable.

There is a traditional idea within Catholic and Orthodox tradition expressed by the words "Ad Iesum per Mariam: to Jesus through Mary". This is the path Guido Dettoni has followed. Even though he has experienced the representation of Jesus in his painting and sculpturing since he was a young man, the Face of Christ emerged after the "Mary" experience. It is the same everywhere: the mother provides access to the child.

As I mentioned, the author, right from his youth, felt attracted to the figure of Christ, and as he is an artist, he has used his hands to model His Face, the fruit of a process of reflection that has lasted ten years and which has made

him understand that the face did not have to be represented visually. Some may think, "How can this be? Is this not a contradiction of his purpose? Indeed it is not. With this work the author proposes an interior vision of the Face of Christ. Or to put it another way, after touching it, or even better, seeing it with one's hands, one must evoke and awaken the presence of Christ until seeing it in his or her interior, blindly. Thus, renouncing any kind of visual aid or conditioning, the believer or anyone who feels drawn to the person of Jesus, after feeling Him inside, comes to see Him. And at this point the vision is no longer that of an artist, but a personal one. On approaching the work the onlooker does not collect yet another image of Christ in his or her memory; through the sense of touch and a direct relationship with the sculpted face the observer projects what Jesus of Nazareth, Christ, the Lord, actually is for him or her. The tactile experience becomes a spiritual experience. Vision through the hands becomes mystical contemplation.

The artist gave expression to the face blindly using wax and later reproduced it in amaranth wood and incorporated it into the cross made from the same kind of wood which forms the body. Bent sheets of iron at the bottom of the cross suggest the worshipping attitude, the physical expression of which is the kneeling position. The Face of Christ is touched when the observer, positioned in front of the cross, places his or her hands under the veil. The action of touching it on the back of the cross insinuates the evangelical concept of following Christ. Some may ask, "Why a veil?" "When I touch the Face, I see my face reflected in the veil", is my reply. Guido Dettoni expresses plastically the concept of imitation of Christ and of the continuity of His work as saviour through the faith of His followers. In other words the Lord, who dwells in the light which no man can approach unto, (1 Tim 6:16), takes on the features of his followers to reach the far corners of the earth, and be present in history. Also, the veil, frequent in oriental iconography, is always a symbol we find in things sacred and on the edge of transcendence.

Guido Dettoni's Face of Christ meets the paschal perspective of the Christian mystery head on, not only because the work was finished on Easter day of this very year, but also because it evokes and contains it. Touching the Face, I recalled two phrases of Jesus, revived in the way John transmits them in his Gospel: Touch me not or leave me, the words of Jesus to Mary Magdalene on Easter morning in the garden where they meet (Jo 20,17). Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side (Jo 20, 27), the words of Jesus to Thomas when the disciples are assembled within the great room with the doors shut.

The touch me not of Mary Magdalene expresses the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" which lends dynamism to the life of any believer who already has Jesus and who at the same time does not have Him fully. A new reality is already present (the touching hands), tensed towards a future of fulfilment, when the process of internalisation and personal discovery of the features that form a face turns the believer into an "alter Christus".

It is the itinerary of everyone who starts from a specific point: the "already" of touch, to reach the level of Man par excellence and Model, or – if you prefer – mould, according to which every man and woman is projected in the divine mind (the Word that was with God, as John writes at the beginning of his Gospel), that is the "not yet".

The reach hither thy finger of Thomas is the sensorial experience of a reality which is out of our reach: the resurrection. It is also the continuity of the past and present of Jesus, expressed through his tangible, human reality. When Thomas touched and felt the hands and side of Jesus, he entered into communion with his flesh and death, which communicates Life. On touching the Face, exploring the corners of its mouth and following the line of all the features, we commune with the Christ hidden inside, which evidently communicates Life. Curiously enough Thomas, when he demanded to touch the body of Jesus in order to believe – place himself at His disposal, to use more profane language – was seeking contact like that of the past, before the crucifixion and death. He did not accept the novelty of the present. Jesus demanded he overcome the past in order to accept the present. Once he had accepted he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God." I see a parallel with Guido Dettoni's Face of Christ. Often believers and the devout are slaves of the past and simply want to see. This Face demands they have the courage to break off with the past and centre on the present: discover the Jesus that is revealed from within, through touch, like Thomas. And what is the reward? Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed (Jo 20:29). The intuition of the author comes to the fore once again: "The Face of Christ did not have to be represented visually".

Guido Dettoni presents the Face to us with closed eyes and sealed lips. There is no sense of hearing or smell, only that of touch, as he himself says. I would add the following: the task of anyone who touches it is to open eyes and lips with their personal testimony of the experience of Christ. If closed eyes and sealed lips are the symbols of the dead Jesus, the action of opening them must be a symbol of resurrection.



BASILIQUE DE NOTRE DAME DU FOLGOËT
Bretagne (France) 2006 / 2007





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