

Between Sacred and Profane: Devotional Space, the Picture Gallery, and the Ambiguous Image in Poland-Lithuania

von

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‘Our heretics sold their eyes to the devil. Having expelled the crucified Christ from their bedrooms and chambers, they now hang paintings of Fauns, Cupids, Venuses and Fortunes above their tables to dine with them. [...] The images of Christ and the Saints are expelled even from their churches. [...] The debauched paintings have more luck with this lot: even if removed from one place or another, [these improper images] will still find a home.’¹

Writing in response to Calvinist charges against the Catholic veneration of images (deemed ‘idolatry’ by the Reformed), the Dominican Fabian Birkowski, court preacher to Crown Prince Ladislaus Sigismund Vasa, accuses the Calvinists of succumbing to what he deems a truly idolatrous form of imagery: mythological nude scenes.² Explicating the grounds for his judgement, the author asserts that mythological nudes are illicit images, for they represent fictional beings that never existed. Purged of devotional images, Birkowski continues, the Calvinist domestic space not only lacks decorum, but is also a locus of debauchery and immorality—an alleged opposite to the pious Catholic domestic interior. Regardless of its declamatory perspicacity, Birkowski’s binary rhetoric is more a heresiological topos than a reflection of actual prac-

* Special thanks are due to Angela Vanhaelen, Matthew Hunter, Matt Milner, Torrance Kirby, Joan Boychuk, Danijela Zutić, Heather Muckart, Isabelle Masse, David Mitchell, and Krystal Chehab for their constructive criticism and valuable comments on various drafts of this text. All remaining shortcomings are my own responsibility. Before this essay evolved to its present form, some of its ideas had already featured in TOMASZ GRUSIECKI: *From the Site of Presence to the Medium of Representation, and Beyond. The Fluid Epistemology of Imagery in Post-Reformation Poland-Lithuania*, in: TORRANCE KIRBY, MATTHEW MILNER (eds.): *Mediating Religious Cultures in Early Modern Europe*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2013, pp. 85-118.

¹ FABIAN BIRKOWSKI: *O świętych obrazach* [On Holy Images], in: *Głos krwie B. Iozaphata Kunczewica*, Kraków 1629, p. 76. ‘A nąby heretykowie tak psu oczy przedali, że Chrystusa ukrzyżowanego obraz z łóżnic y z izb wyrzucią, a ną to miejsce Faunów, y málowanych Kupidynkow, Wenerow, y Fortun nád stołem nawieszają, aby z nimi wespoł obiedwali. [...] Nie wysiedzą się dla nich ani po kościołach Chrystusowe y świętych obrazy. [...] Obrązy wszeteczne mają wietśe u nich bężeście, iáko ich z jednego abo z drugiego miejsca wyrzucić, znajdą lepśą gospode.’ All translations are the author’s except where otherwise noted.

² See WŁADYSŁAW TOMKIEWICZ: *Pisarze polskiego Odrodzenia o sztuce* [Writers of the Polish Renaissance on Art], Wrocław 1955, pp. 104-107.

tice. Surviving inventories and correspondence with art agents present an altogether different picture.

In reality, many Catholics—including the royal Vasa family—incorporated a number of mythological scenes and nudes into their collections.³ As a royal chaplain ministering to Prince Ladislaus Sigismund,⁴ Birkowski probably had access to the art collections of the Vasas, where Christian themes co-existed with mythological paintings, portraits and still lifes. Naturally, he could not condemn the Vasas for inconsistency vis-à-vis Catholic doctrine, given his dependence on royal patronage. Nor could he risk weakening the rhetorical appeal of his anti-Protestant sermon about permissible forms of imagery by diluting the differences between Catholic and Protestant forms of art collecting and viewership. Yet Birkowski's reluctance to admit to Catholic collectors' permissiveness regarding nakedness in painting flies in the face of the recurrent admonitions against mythological nudes. The most evocative instance of such scolding—which paradoxically suggests the popularity of the mythological genre in Poland-Lithuania before the era of the Counter-Reformation—came from the pen of the Archbishop of Lwów (L'viv, Lemberg), Jan Dymitr Solikowski:

‘And you, other swindlers, the painters who
Make wanton images—the numerous
Paintings of Jupiter, Mars and Venus;
These pictures should be burnt together with you.
For you deprive decent people;
Mindless are those who pay high prices for your works.’⁵

The message of this reproach is clear: Catholics must not own nudes. Although written in the 1570s, Solikowski's stance was not a one-off intervention. On the contrary, condemnation of nudes reverberated widely in Polish-Lithuanian seventeenth-century literary discourse.⁶ It is not possible to measure the effect of such anxieties on art collecting in quantitative terms, but we

³ Ryszard Szmydki's investigations of Vasa inventories and letters reveal that the collections of Sigismund III and Ladislaus IV were rich in religious paintings. RYSZARD SZMYDKI: *Artystyczno-dyplomatyczne kontakty Zygmunta III Wazy z Niderlandami Południowymi* [Artistic and Diplomatic Contacts of Sigismund III Vasa with the Southern Netherlands], Lublin 2008, pp. 64-66; IDEM: *Kontakty artystyczne królewicza Władysława Zygmunta Wazy z Antwerpią / Prince Ladislaus Sigismund Vasa's Artistic Contacts with Antwerp*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 132-134.

⁴ DARIUSZ KUŹMINA: *Wazowie a Kościół w Rzeczypospolitej* [The Vasas and the Church in Poland-Lithuania], Warszawa 2013, pp. 290-291.

⁵ ‘Y wy drudzy mątáczé, málárze, co takie / Czýnićie niewstydlíwe sztuki, y wbelákie / Márnóści Jowiówowe, Marse z Wenerámi, / Dobrzeby íe záprawde popálić y z wámi. / Co wy dżís lúdzíem wśystkím zgorbénia czýnićie, / Głupi lúdzíe co drogo ích prace pláćiće.’ JAN DYMISTR SOLIKOWSKI: *Lukrecya Rzymska y Chréścijańska* [The Roman and Christian Lucretia], n.p. 1570, Biii^v-Biiii^t.

⁶ See, for example, MAURICJUSZ TRZTYPRZTYCKI: *Co nowego abo dwor* [News from the Court], Kraków 1605, pp. H3^{r-v}, and TOMKIEWICZ, *Pisarze* (as in footnote 2), p. 107.

are fortunate to have one important—and unusually well documented—response to the Catholic prescriptive discourse on the limits of representation. Grand Marshal of the Crown Mikołaj Wolski—one of the foremost connoisseurs at the court of Sigismund III—took the aforementioned admonitions to heart and ordered that all the ‘offending’ paintings in his collection be destroyed.⁷ This act of repentance took place on Wolski’s deathbed, three days before his passing on 9 March 1630. The marshal clearly states his reasons for shattering his once splendid art collection in the last-minute attachment to his will:

‘Therefore I demand that all the libidinal paintings that lead to sin—of which there are plenty in Krzepice Castle—be burnt. For the nudes in my old bed-chamber, I ask that an able painter clothe them in garments covering the private parts. The ceiling paintings may remain as they are.’⁸

Did Wolski’s decision to purify the space of his art gallery of ‘libidinal’ impulses stem from an attempt to re-create and re-establish reverence for the Christian image? Such an inference stipulates that, on his deathbed, the marshal drew a line between Christian paintings and mythological subject matter—a distinction he had not deemed necessary prior to his moral conversion. An act of destruction was essential in this context in order to purge the Krzepice gallery of its unsuitable elements. The result of Wolski’s ordinance was thus a gallery space deprived of many of its old secular paintings, in which religious images could be contemplated without eliciting impious thoughts.

A telling case of Catholic iconoclasm, the cleansed gallery of Krzepice Castle simultaneously opens up the important question of the agency of early modern display space in defining images’ cultural functions. Wolski’s determination to separate mythological nudes from Christian themes rested on his belief that these were ontologically dissimilar. Yet this essay is not simply concerned with the efficacy of Catholic discourse in constructing mythological paintings as ominous idols. Instead, I focus on how the early modern beholder understood images in relation to the space in which they found themselves. While ontology always plays a role—in that paintings could take on their own lives as autonomous beings with metaphysical potentials—the central aim here is to explore the limits on picture galleries in securing the images’ secular nature. Such an enquiry is epistemological in nature, because it

⁷ WŁADYSŁAW TOMKIEWICZ: Czynniki kształtujące sztukę polską [Factors Contributing to the State of Polish Art], in: *Rocznik Historii Sztuki* 11 (1976), pp. 15-52, here p. 29.

⁸ Mikołaj Wolski’s letter to Jan Witkowski from 06.03.1630, in: *Biblioteka Książąt Czartoryskich* [The Princes Czartoryski Library], Kraków, rkps 1821 IV, fol. 63: ‘Naprzod to waś prośbę y ordinuję wśitkie obrazy ad libidinem y do grzechu pobudzaiace co ich iedno w zamku krzepickim się naidziecie wśitkie spalcie te co na murze w moiey izdebce gdzie sypiał y komnatce nago są namalowane prośbę was niech malarz który to potrafi sukienki iakie kolwiek wymaluie a zszcern [?] ten in honestatis niech pokryye pod stropami malowania już tak jako są niech zostawiają.’

examines the gallery as the lens through which early modern viewers obtained knowledge of a painting's cultural status.

In this context, why was it necessary for an illustrious art collector such as Wolski to draw a distinction between the images representing Christ, Mary and saints on the one hand, and the paintings depicting naked classical deities on the other? If this question is particularly significant, it is because the marshal's consent to iconoclasm goes against the dominant art-historical assumption that the conceptual framework of early modern connoisseurship regarded all visual forms as representation—merely signifying the represented, rather than manifesting it. Such a stipulation stems from the belief of many art historians that the placement of Christian paintings in art galleries towards the end of the sixteenth century virtually neutralised the images' cultic qualities and nature.⁹ The major proponent of this thesis, Victor Stoichita, has famously asserted that such spatial displacement brought about the creation of a modern—that is, secularised and disenchanting—work of art.¹⁰

Stoichita's *Self-Aware Image* is one of the few books that radically influenced the way art historians think about images and the contexts of their reception.¹¹ The author considers the unprecedented spaces of display (such as the picture gallery) and the new artistic genres—which emerged in the late sixteenth century in the aftermath of a series of confessional and intellectual crises—as the inventions that reshaped the perceptions both of the image and of viewing. Stoichita's most genuine contribution to the study of early modern viewership is his notion of the 'self-aware image', that is, the painting which self-reflexively points to its constructed nature as representation: the image that undoes its own mimesis. Nevertheless, one of Stoichita's points—his theorisation of the art gallery as the guarantor of paintings' inherently profane status—appears to conflict with Wolski's decision to purge his gallery of the images perceived as impermissible according to Catholic doctrine. The tensions in this case indicate the need for a more open-ended understanding of the role of display space in shifting the epistemological orientation of early modern imagery. To this end, I argue that the installation of Christian paintings in an art gallery did not necessarily assure their status as secular artefacts. In challenging the unidirectional narrative of the image's transition from cult object to medium of representation, I therefore advocate a reconsideration of the early modern art gallery as a space immune neither to the contingencies of practice nor to epistemological U-turns.

In this regard, I assert that Polish-Lithuanian contexts for the display of paintings can serve as a useful test for the pan-European purview of an early modern epistemology of images. This particular cultural milieu—marked by

⁹ VICTOR STOICHITA: *The Self-Aware Image. An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 79-88, 111-114.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. xiii-xv, 83.

¹¹ A review essay that does justice to Stoichita's book is ROSE MARIE SAN JUAN: *Framing the Early Modern Field of Vision*, in: *Oxford Art Journal* 23 (2000), 2, pp. 171-177.

the often fraught relationships between members of various religious and social groups—generated attitudes to images that lie outside the main interest of English-speaking art historians. Despite its omission from dominant art-historical narratives, Polish-Lithuanian engagement with images can nonetheless elucidate a more nuanced theory of the development of the Western category of art as a whole. This potential follows from the parallel between the confessional fluidity across the country and the impossibility of fixing the status of the image permanently in such a culturally diverse environment. Since so many confessions competed for cultural space in Poland-Lithuania—Roman and Greek Catholics, the Orthodox, Lutherans, Calvinists, Jews, the Polish Brethren, and other Protestant denominations¹²—in this vast state, the epistemology of the image was constantly in flux. By exploring Polish-Lithuanian Catholic prescriptive discourse on religious images and their mode of display at the Vasa court, this essay breaks down the distinction between the picture gallery as the supposed herald of secularisation in art, and the church as the guardian of the image's cultic function. This attention to the spaces of display oscillating between sacred and profane makes it possible to contend with existing theories of the art gallery's status in early modernity.

Disenchanted Space?

I have argued elsewhere that Polish-Lithuanian Lutherans did not invariably treat the images they themselves deemed adiaphorous as disenchanted. Neither did the Vasa monarchs always consider the Christian paintings in their collections in connoisseurial terms.¹³ The focus here, however, shifts from the agency of the viewer to the ambiguous status of the picture gallery as a spatial context for the display of Christian images. My engagement with Stoichita's theorisation of the gallery as a means of disenchantment intends, in this respect, to shift this historiographical model into a more equivocal and indeterminate realm.

For Stoichita, the placement of Christian images in the picture gallery was the foundation of their secular status. This claim follows from the author's attentiveness to the role of sixteenth-century iconoclasm in enabling the development of 'art' as a new conceptual category.¹⁴ As images were removed

¹² For a general introduction to this subject, see: DOROTA FOLGA-JANUSZEWSKA, ANDRZEJ ROTTERMUND (eds.): *Polish Commonwealth Treasures. On the History of Polish Collecting from the 13th Century to the Late 18th*, Olszanica 2008. See also KARIN FRIEDRICH: *Poland-Lithuania*, in: HOWELL A. LLOYD, GLENN BURGESS et al. (eds.): *European Political Thought, 1450-1700. Religion, Law and Philosophy*, New Haven 2008, pp. 229-240; and IDEM: *Die Reformation in Polen-Litauen*, in: HANS-JÜRGEN BÖMELBURG, MICHAEL G. MÜLLER (eds.): *Polen in der europäischen Geschichte. Ein Handbuch in vier Bänden*, vol. 2, part 2, Stuttgart 2011, pp. 125-146.

¹³ GRUSIECKI (as in footnote *).

¹⁴ See DAVID FREEDBERG: *Iconoclasm and Painting in the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1566-1609*, New York 1988, pp. i-xvi.

from churches throughout northern Europe, a number of religious paintings that survived the plundering were sold and became part of incipient art collections. One only has to peruse the pages of Karel van Mander's *Schilder-boeck* to learn how such paintings often constituted the nucleus of newly formed picture galleries.¹⁵ Drawing on these historical events, Stoichita has foregrounded the process of displacement and subsequent relocation of religious images as a means of their secularisation. He emphasises that by raising the issues of function, reception and context, Protestant critics effectively developed the modern notion of art.¹⁶ Once decontextualised from their original religious space, Stoichita maintains, previously devotional images were subjected to a new process of contextualisation as pieces of art displayed in a collection. Accordingly, the art gallery discharged the erstwhile cult images of their old function as receptacles of the holy.

In many ways, this argument builds upon Hans Belting's earlier book *Bild und Kult*,¹⁷ in the introduction to the English edition, Belting even names Stoichita's study a companion volume to his own.¹⁸ Belting has famously called the sixteenth-century transition in the epistemology of Christian imagery the 'crisis of the image'.¹⁹ In coining this phrase, he stressed that a new conceptual category, that of 'art', replaced the old idea of the 'image' in early modernity.²⁰ In this shift, the old cult token (the receptacle of the holy) turned into an object of visual appreciation. In other words, the earlier association of religious painting with the spiritual presence of God or saints gave way to a new epistemology of the image as the medium of representation.

Influenced by Belting, Stoichita argues that once Christian images were located in the profane space of a picture gallery, they could signify solely as representation, rather than as cult objects.²¹ With its emphasis on the role of the picture gallery in the secularisation of Christian imagery, Stoichita's narrative clearly develops Max Weber's idea of the 'disenchantment of the

¹⁵ KAREL VAN MANDER: *The Lives of Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters*, from the first edition of the *Schilder-boeck* (1603-1604), vol. 1., ed. by HESSEL MIEDEMA, Doornspijk 1994, pp. 122, 222, 234, 259. FREEDBERG (as in footnote 14), pp. 105, 118, 121, points out that the images saved from destruction were the ones that already possessed an economic or proto-aesthetic value. Consequently it was not iconoclasm that gave these images value, but rather they survived due to an existing value system already discernible to a group of interested individuals, that is, art connoisseurs.

¹⁶ STOICHITA (as in footnote 9), pp. 89-102.

¹⁷ HANS BELTING: *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, München 1990.

¹⁸ IDEM: *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, Chicago 1994, p. xxiii.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, chapter 20: *Religion and Art. The Crisis of the Image at the Beginning of the Modern Age*, pp. 458-490.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 14-16.

²¹ STOICHITA (as in footnote 9), pp. 76-88, 111-114.

world'.²² This affinity is particularly evident in Stoichita's dichotomous model of dislocation and relocation, in which the removal of religious images from sacred space—and their subsequent placement in the profane space of the art gallery—is the means of disenchantment. Noticeably in tandem with the Weberian tenet of cultural rationalisation,²³ Stoichita's assessment marks the gallery as an efficacious means of epistemological conversion.

In flagging a shift in the experience of early modern visual imagery, Stoichita offers a heuristically useful art-historical narrative. The author's model of epistemological transition, however, is presented in broadly teleological terms. Of particular concern here is Stoichita's focus on the disenchanting function of the early modern art gallery. It posits a unidirectional change in the nature of the image—from site of presence to medium of representation—as if the orderliness of such a shift could ever be possible. As a result of this logic centred on the rationalising power of the picture gallery, the theoretical model of disenchantment remains within the realms of spatial one-dimensionality. Accordingly, the gallery is presented as a safeguard against the return of the secularised paintings to their former state as loci of religious presence.

In contrast, I take a pluralistic and open-ended perspective on possible responses to the Christian image as located and viewed in the seemingly disenchanted gallery. Stoichita's disenchantment theory implies the significant agency of space (as a physical container of connoisseurial discourse), granted so that the art gallery could efface the cultic function of a Christian image by virtue of its secular nature. Such a view, however, appears one-sided in its clear differentiation between sacred and profane spaces. Moreover, it takes no account of the demand for a greater correlation between space and its appropriations—as articulated by, among others, the Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who argues that each space is the product of its users' thoughts and actions.²⁴ Space does not pre-exist its occupiers. On the contrary; it is itself created through the social actions of its inhabitants and, in return, it partakes in the continual transformation of these very users.²⁵ Spatial forms and spatial functions do not correspond to each other in a preordained manner; the relation between prescribed purpose and actual use is an ongoing process.²⁶ As follows, an art connoisseur would have seen 'art' even in a church, while a

²² MAX WEBER: *Science as a Vocation*, in: PETER LASSMAN, IRVING VELODY (eds.): *Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation'*, London 1989, pp. 3-31, here pp. 13-14.

²³ One of the best-articulated critiques of Weber's position is JANE BENNETT: *The Enchantment of Modern Life. Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*, Princeton 2001, pp. 3-16, 56-65.

²⁴ HENRI LEFEBVRE: *The Production of Space*, Oxford 2010, chapters 1 and 2.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 33-36.

²⁶ For example, ANGELA VANHAELLEN: *The Wake of Iconoclasm. Painting the Church in the Dutch Republic*, University Park/PA 2012, pp. 70-99, has argued that the desacralisation of religious space in the post-Revolt Dutch Republic was an incomplete process, since Catholic practices persisted in the buildings that had become Calvinist spaces.

Catholic 'idolater' would have venerated images also in an art gallery. With the view that the demarcation between the act of viewing paintings in the gallery and in church has been drawn too sharply, this essay now turns to actual examples of ambiguous space.

Royal Galleries

Our point of entry into the Polish-Lithuanian culture of display is the only surviving image representing a Vasa royal art gallery: the *Art Cabinet of Prince Ladislaus Sigismund Vasa*, 1626, by an unknown Antwerp painter (Fig. 1).²⁷ An idealised representation of the prince's collection, this oil painting depicts a number of artefacts, including paintings, drawings, prints, statues, and decorative objects. So precise is their depiction that Polish art historian Juliusz Chrościcki was able to identify most of the artworks rendered by the painter.²⁸ Thus, among many other notable objects, the viewer can spot Peter Paul Rubens' and Peter Brueghel the Elder's *Madonna and Child in the Garland*, Hans von Aachen's *Mary Magdalene Repentant* and oval bust portraits of Saints Peter and Paul by Rubens. These Christian paintings are nonetheless displayed together with a number of mythological and allegorical images: Rubens' *Drunken Silenus*, a sixteenth-century Venetian bozzetto on panel depicting naked Caritas with three putti, a drawing of Chronos with Venus, Minerva and Fame (possibly by Hans von Aachen), and a bronze copy of Giambologna's sculpture *The Rape of the Sabines*.

Given the purportedly disenchanted and connoisseurial context of the represented gallery space, the coexistence of depictions of the Virgin and saints together with mythological imagery, genre scenes and still lifes seems to confirm the power of the art gallery to neutralise the sacredness of Christian imagery. Indeed, it thus appears that Ladislaus included Christian paintings in such an ensemble because he viewed visual arts as representation rather than believing in the metaphysical efficacy of the Christian image. With this assumption in place, all the paintings depicted in the *Art Cabinet* would act as objects of connoisseurial delectation. At least in theory, an art enthusiast could not perceive the Christian themes in Ladislaus' collection as cult objects. The disenchanted nature of the imagery on view is further affirmed by

²⁷ According to JULIUSZ CHROŚCICKI: *Obraz 'Kolekcja sztuki królewicza Władysława Zygmunta' z r. 1626* [The 'Art Cabinet of Prince Ladislaus Sigismund' of 1626], in: *Kronika Zamkowa* 3 (1988), pp. 3-7, the *Art Cabinet of Prince Ladislaus Vasa* was painted by Etienne de la Hyre. Hanna Małachowicz, the curator of paintings at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, argues that this attribution is inaccurate given that de la Hyre had last visited Warsaw before 1600 and had given up painting by 1625. See: *Land of the Winged Horsemen. Art in Poland, 1572-1764*, Baltimore 1999, p. 109.

²⁸ JULIUSZ CHROŚCICKI: *De 'kunstkamer' van de Poolse kroonprins van 1626*, in: *De prinselijke pelgrimstocht. De 'Grand Tour' van Prins Ladislas van Polen 1624-1625*, Antwerp 1997, exhibition catalogue, pp. 54-55.



Fig. 1: Antwerp School, *Art Cabinet of Prince Ladislaus Sigismund Vasa*, 1626. Oil on Panel. Warsaw: Royal Castle. Inv. No. ZKW/2123. © The Royal Castle in Warsaw. Photo: A. Ring & B. Tropiło

the self-reflexive nature of the *Art Cabinet*, effectively revealing the mimetic function of the depicted scene. It is possible to recognise this through indexical correlation of the embedded paintings with what they represent and typify.²⁹ Moreover, acknowledging the referential nature of painting creates a distinction between the material form of a piece of art (the medium) and what it seeks to present to viewers (representation). The mimetic status of the *Art Cabinet of Prince Ladislaus Vasa* is especially emphasised by the open album of drawings in the bottom left corner. The painter even included a quill pen at the centre front of the table, inviting the viewer to add to the album's content.

Regardless of the prescriptive rhetoric of the *Art Cabinet*, the connoisseurial context in which Christian paintings were displayed did not inevitably make a devotional response impossible. The desacralisation of devotional imagery by the space of a princely picture gallery did not necessarily negate the spiritual potential of Christian paintings. Although the Vasa kings were avid art collectors,³⁰ they also readily engaged in Catholic practices. Sigismund III

²⁹ See the theory of signs by CHARLES SANDERS PEIRCE: *Collected Papers*. Vol. 2: *Elements of Logic*, Cambridge/MA 1931, pp. 156-173.

³⁰ Ladislaus' father—King Sigismund III—was the first Polish-Lithuanian ruler to have a *Kunstammer* in his official royal residence. See SZMYDKI, *Kontakty Zygmunta III* (as

was a staunch believer. He prayed regularly, attended two services daily, and participated in various church activities.³¹ Ladislaus IV, although not as pious as his father, was a devoted Catholic who heard a private Mass each day once he became king.³² John Casimir (Ladislaus' stepbrother and the last Vasa monarch of Poland and Lithuania) joined the Society of Jesus in 1643 (without taking holy orders). He was made a cardinal in 1645, before returning to Warsaw the following year.³³ Although John Casimir abandoned the diaconate in 1647, he lived out the last days of his life as a commendatory abbot of Saint-Germain-des-Prés on the outskirts of Paris after his abdication in 1668.³⁴ Even more notably, all the Vasas participated in the veneration of holy images by publicly paying homage to the picture of Our Lady of Częstochowa, thus reverting to the ancient tradition of *palladium regalis*—a miraculous image sanctioned by the state and its *de jure* rulers.³⁵

The religious atmosphere at the Vasa court found its expression in the design of Warsaw Castle. Rebuilt by Sigismund III in the years 1598 to 1619, the castle's upper floor (Fig. 2) housed two rooms for displaying the most precious paintings of the Vasa collection. These were the long gallery in the northern wing of Warsaw Castle (room 25 on the floor plan), and the royal chapel (room 23)—situated at the eastern end of the gallery.³⁶ In his discussion of this space, the French diplomat, Jean Le Laboureur, who accompanied the future queen Marie Louise Gonzaga de Nevers to Warsaw in 1646, asserted that the royal chapel was 'enriched with many paintings by the most celebrated painters'.³⁷ The French traveller may have been referring to such

in footnote 3), pp. 59-78. Ladislaus followed in his father's footsteps. See SZMYDKI, Prince Ladislaus (as in footnote 3), pp. 113-134.

³¹ CZESŁAW LECHICKI: *Mecenat Zygmunta III i życie umysłowe na jego dworze* [The Patronage of Sigismund III and the Intellectual Life of His Court], Warszawa 1932, pp. 42-44; HENRYK WISNER, *Zygmunt III Waza* [Sigismund III Vasa], Warszawa 1984, p. 89; STEFANIA OCHMAN-STANISZEWSKA: *Dynastia Wazów w Polsce* [The Vasa Dynasty in Poland], Warszawa 2007, p. 117; JERZY LILEYKO: *Zamek Królewski w Warszawie* [The Royal Castle in Warsaw], Warszawa 1986, p. 65; KUŹMINA (as in footnote 4), p. 26.

³² OCHMAN-STANISZEWSKA (as in footnote 31), p. 134; HENRYK WISNER: *Władysław IV Waza* [Ladislaus IV Vasa], Wrocław 2009, pp. 139-140; LILEYKO, *Zamek Królewski* (as in footnote 31), p. 88.

³³ OCHMAN-STANISZEWSKA (as in footnote 31), p. 153; KUŹMINA (as in footnote 4), pp. 304-309.

³⁴ RYSZARD SZMYDKI: *Vente du mobilier de Jean-Casimir en 1673*, Warszawa 1995, p. 9.

³⁵ ZOFIA ROZANOW, EWA SMULIKOWSKA: *The Cultural Heritage of Jasna Góra*, Warszawa 1979, p. 145.

³⁶ SZMYDKI, *Kontakty Zygmunta III* (as in footnote 3), pp. 182-183, 190; IDEM, *Prince Ladislaus* (as in footnote 3), p. 130.

³⁷ JEAN LE LABOUREUR: *Histoire du voyage de la reine de Pologne*, part 3, Paris 1648, p. 6: 'dans la Chappelle; qui est enrichie de plusieurs tableaux des plus celebres

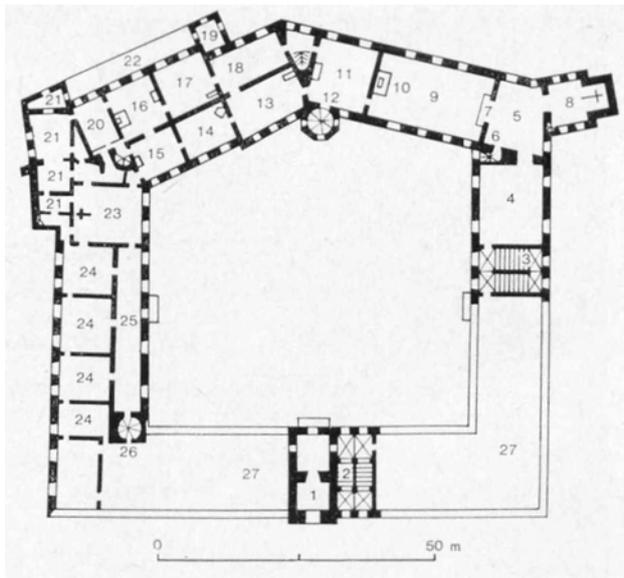


Fig. 2: The upper floor of Warsaw Castle after the rebuilding under Sigismund III between 1598 and 1619. 23: Chapel, 25: Long gallery. In: LILEYKO, *Zamek Królewski* (as in footnote 31), p. 67. © Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe

pictures as Jacob Jordaens' *Birth of Christ*, Jan Brueghel's and Peter Paul Rubens' *Madonna in a Flower Garland* and Rubens' *Descent from the Cross*.³⁸ The fact that Laboureur noticed the high quality and the 'celebrated' authorship of the paintings in the chapel implies the ambiguous nature of these images. On display in a consecrated space,³⁹ they were also shown to visitors as examples of the finest art in the royal collection. The direct access from the chapel to the long gallery (through a door in the west wall) only added to the nebulous status of these paintings.

The smooth physical transition from the chapel into the long gallery—and *vice versa*—suggests that the spaces in which sacred images and secular art were viewed were much less antonymous than Stoichita's model implies. It is reasonable to assume that the Vasas, their courtiers and guests, treated all paintings on display as works of art, including those images located in the castle chapel. Nevertheless, the latter were likely to be objects of devotion during the celebration of Mass. Likewise, the king might have venerated these images when using the chapel for prayer and meditation. The double status of the chapel paintings as devotional aids and secular artefacts—depending on

Peintres'. See also JERZY LILEYKO: *A Companion Guide to the Royal Castle in Warsaw*, Warsaw 1980, p. 140.

³⁸ SZMYDKI, *Kontakty Zygmunta III* (as in footnote 3), p. 202.

³⁹ The castle chapel was used to celebrate private Masses. See LILEYKO, *Zamek Królewski* (as in footnote 31), p. 88.

the use of this room—translated into the multivalent epistemologies of the images on display. It was not the chapel alone that secured a certain reading of a work, but rather the appropriation of this space by the user. In a similar vein, the viewer who had just attended a private Mass at the castle might have transferred their reverence for the paintings in the chapel to the artefacts in the long gallery.⁴⁰ In either case, all these artworks retained the potential to instigate very real religious responses in the period of the alleged ‘crisis of the image’.

The fluid boundary between the castle chapel and the picture gallery is of crucial importance to my argument. Stoichita’s rationalist mechanism of disenchantment situates the epistemological shift of early modern religious imagery within the broader discursive framework of the disenchantment of the world. In contrast, the malleable context in which the paintings were displayed at Warsaw Castle solicits contradictory responses—both connoisseurial and devotional. Since the engagement with paintings in both the gallery and the chapel were contingent on the beholders’ appropriations of these spaces, the array of reactions which the images could solicit was not limited to the room’s official purpose. Instead, the function of the castle chapel and the gallery as either the locus of image veneration or the site of visual delectation could change as circumstances dictated. The malleable status of both these rooms casts some doubt on the idealism and implicit teleology of the disenchantment model.

Voidable Presence in Catholic Imagery

The fluid architectural transition between the gallery and the chapel at Warsaw Castle was no rare anomaly, but rather a consequence of the more widespread status of Christian images within Polish-Lithuanian Catholicism. The display of ‘celebrated’ paintings in the consecrated space of the castle chapel owed much of its rationale to the post-Tridentine view of Christian images. In Poland-Lithuania, as elsewhere in Europe, Catholic luminaries did not perceive images as the site of presence. Instead, they understood Christian paintings as referential signs of the holy, which lacked their own inherent sanctity.⁴¹ Such an interpretation dovetailed with the efforts of the Catholic

⁴⁰ In a similar vein, DAVID FREEDBERG: *The Hidden God. Image and Interdiction in the Netherlands in the Sixteenth Century*, in: *Art History* 5 (1982), 2, pp. 133-153, here p. 141, asserts—whilst discussing Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s *Adoration of the Magi*—that even though this painting was ‘hung in a secular context, and had no ostensible ritual function, it is still probable that the individual beholder would have responded to it in terms of the associations which this particular religious subject was capable of arousing, irrespective of its context’.

⁴¹ PIOTR KRASNY: *Visibilia signa ad pietatem excitantem. Teoria sztuki sakralnej w pismach Roberta Bellarmina, Cezarego Baroniusza, Rudolfa Hospiniana, Fryderyka Bormeusza i innych pisarzy kościelnych epoki nowożytnej* [*Visibilia Signa ad Pietatem Excitantem. The Theory of Devotional Art in the Writings of Roberto Bellarmino, Ce-*

hierarchy to refute the Protestant criticisms of the supposedly idolatrous nature of devotional paintings.⁴² Catholic doctrine particularly required defending in areas with a large Protestant population.

One painting that communicates the Catholic response to the Protestant accusations of idolatry is Bartholomäus Strobel's *Coronation of Mary*, 1643 (Fig. 3), painted for a Catholic parish church in Rehden (Radzyń) in Royal Prussia. Although the province had a strong Catholic population outside the major urban centres⁴³, the Catholic congregations in Royal Prussia were surrounded by powerful Lutheran towns, including Danzig, Elbing, and Thorn.⁴⁴ Suspicious of the Catholic veneration of images, these Lutheran communities treated Christian paintings as *adiaphora*—morally neutral and having no impact on the salvation of the soul.⁴⁵ Regarded as permissible yet non-essential to faith, *adiaphora* were allowed in church, provided they were not the subject of worship. Given this relatively permissive attitude towards the religious image—compared to the much more restrictive Reformed Church—the Lutheran burghers felt under constant pressure from Calvinists to prove their opposition to Catholics.⁴⁶ Yet the Polish-Lithuanian Calvinists' real target was the Catholic veneration of images, which they explicitly labelled 'idolatry'.⁴⁷

sare Baronio, Rudolf Hospinian, Federico Borromeo and Other Church Writers of the Early Modern Period], Kraków 2010, pp. 185-189.

⁴² The Reformation reached the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania not long after the first conversions to Protestantism in Germany, and spread rapidly throughout the land. Lutheranism found support chiefly among the German-speaking urban communities in Royal Prussia—particularly in Elbing (Elbląg), Danzig (Gdańsk) and Thorn (Toruń)—and in Greater Poland. The nobility of Greater Poland, Little Poland, Ruthenia and Lithuania, on the other hand, preferred Calvinism. The confessional vicissitudes of Poland-Lithuania were, as in the rest of Europe, echoed in shifting attitudes towards religious paintings. See ULINKA RUBBLACK: *Reformation in Europe*, Cambridge 2005, p. 99.

⁴³ SŁAWOMIR KOŚCIELAK: *Katolicy w protestanckim Gdańsku od drugiej połowy XVI do końca XVIII wieku* [Catholics in Protestant Danzig from the Second Half of the 16th to the End of the 18th Centuries], Gdańsk 2012, pp. 118-121, 130-132.

⁴⁴ See, for example, FRIEDRICH, *Die Reformation in Polen-Litauen* (as in footnote 12), pp. 135-137.

⁴⁵ Although Luther never articulated an unequivocal stance towards religious imagery, he nonetheless asserted that owning a religiously themed image was a matter of free choice. See JOSEPH KOERNER: *The Reformation of the Image*, Chicago 2008, p. 157.

⁴⁶ KATARZYNA CIEŚLAK: *Między Rzymem, Wittenbergą a Genewą. Sztuka Gdańska jako miasta podzielonego wyznaniowo* [Between Rome, Wittenberg and Geneva. The Art of Danzig as a Confessionally Divided City], Wrocław 2000, pp. 38-39, 69, 145, 333, 433.

⁴⁷ See, for example, GRZEGORZ Z ŻARNOWCA: *Kazanie ... o obrazach i bałwaniach* [Sermon ... on Paintings and Idols], in: *Postylla albo wykłady ewangelii niedzielnych*, part 3, Kraków 1582, pp. 606^v-612^v.



Fig. 3: Bartholomäus Strobel, *Coronation of Mary*, 1643. Oil on canvas. Radzyń Chełmiński: St Anna's Church. © In the public domain: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Koronacja_Madonny.jpg (23.03.2015)

Strobel's *Coronation of Mary* is a Catholic response to both Lutheran and Calvinist charges of excessive admiration of paintings. Commissioned either by the Catholic parson of Rehden, Łukasz Pilczewski, or the Palatine of Kulm (Chełmno), Mikołaj Weiher,⁴⁸ Strobel's representation maintains a devotional character, without serving as a receptacle of the holy. In essence, it depicts the glorification of Mary as Queen of Heaven, witnessed by Luke the Evangelist and St Nicholas—the two observers possibly sharing facial features with their namesake donors.⁴⁹ Luke plays a conventional role in this ensemble: that of the painter of the Virgin. As with many other representations of Luke rendering a portrait of Mary, Strobel's image sanctions the veracity of Mary's likeness by referring the beholder to the supposed prototype of a Marian image. It was believed that, through such a chain of transmission, each new representation of the Virgin maintained a connection with the portrait that had been painted by St Luke, and hence with Mary herself.⁵⁰ This understanding of the indexical status of the Marian image was

⁴⁸ JACEK TYLICKI: Bartłomiej Strobel. Malarz epoki wojny trzydziestoletniej [Bartholomäus Strobel. Painter of the Thirty Years' War], vol. 2, Toruń 2000, pp. 37-38.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, vol. 1, p. 94.

⁵⁰ BELTING (as in footnote 17), pp. 47-59.

sustained by the principle of visual substitution, recently discussed by Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood.⁵¹ Crucially for our purposes here, the interchangeability of one work with another within the substitutional model secured the devotional character of the Virgin's depiction by stressing its indexical connection with Luke's original artistic act. Understood in this way, each 'portrait' of Mary referred the beholder to the miraculous apparition of the Virgin, thus upholding the devotional status of the Marian image.

Strobel's painting complicates its own devotional character, however, through pictorial self-reflexivity. As Luke paints the image of the Virgin, he simultaneously marks the entire painted canvas—on which his embedded image is depicted—as representation. Though Luke's own canvas is still empty, the beholder is simultaneously assured that the final image will resemble what they can see in church. Indeed, Luke is just about to proceed with image-making. Such a circular mode of viewing Strobel's painting follows from its tripartite nature: as a material object located in church; as a depiction of Psalm 44.11-12 in the Vulgate, the *Song of Songs* 4.8, and the verses 12.1-7 from the *Book of Revelation*, together constituting the scriptural basis for the visual representation of the Coronation of the Virgin Mary in Heaven; and, finally, as a self-reflexive painting revealing its direct reference to the artist's hand. The indexicality of Luke's artistic act evokes Strobel's own creative agency, thus foregrounding the status of the Rehden painting as a man-made object. Consequently, the viewer is constantly reminded that the image of Mary before them is premised on the act of art-making, and, as such, it cannot be mistaken for the subject it represents. Mary in Strobel's image is merely a simulacrum of her actual presence in Heaven, not a locus of Marian apparition.

The medium-reflexive message promoted by the *Coronation of Mary* was further corroborated in Polish-Lithuanian interpretations of the Counter-Reformation epistemology of the image. Arguably the most theoretical work to defend the devotional image in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was Jan Augustyn Biesiekierski's *Krótką nauka o czci y poszanowaniu obrazów świętych*, published in 1624.⁵² Based largely on the theological works of Roberto Bellarmino,⁵³ Biesiekierski's treatise justifies the use of images in Catholic churches by indicating their representational nature. To this end, the author asserts that 'an image of God is not another god; nor is the veneration of an image reverence of another god'.⁵⁴ In further support of this claim, Biesiekierski emphasises the mnemonic function of the devotional image: 'a

⁵¹ ALEXANDER NAGEL, CHRISTOPHER S. WOOD: *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York 2010, pp. 11-15.

⁵² JAN AUGUSTYN BIESIEKIERSKI: *Krótką nauka o czci y poszanowaniu obrazów świętych* [Short Discourse on the Veneration and Respect for Holy Images], Kraków 1624.

⁵³ KRASNY (as in footnote 41), pp. 185-189.

⁵⁴ BIESIEKIERSKI (as in footnote 52), p. B2^r: 'bo Obraz Boży nie iest inŃy Bog, ani cześć Obrázá, iest cześć Boga inŃego'.

painting is only an image of Christ; it is not Christ himself—we must understand this relation for all the [devotional] images. [...] [The reason why] paintings must be respected is [...] because they remind us of the holy persons that we should reverence and honour.’⁵⁵ Accordingly, Biesiecki’s attitude to devotional painting in Poland-Lithuania is in line with western European post-Tridentine scholarly reflection on the theology of the image.⁵⁶ By officially promoting the nature of the image as a medium, Biesiecki—like his fellow Catholic luminaries elsewhere—hoped to refute Protestant criticism of the devotional painting’s ‘idolatrous’ nature.

In a similar vein, Dominican Fabian Birkowski—whose views on mythological imagery were surveyed above—also emphasises the character of the Christian image as representation. In the sermon *O świętych obrazach*, published in 1629, he asserts that images of the Christian god and the Trinity are merely visual signs based on metaphors from Scripture and, as such, must not be worshipped.⁵⁷ In line with the Council of Trent, Birkowski argues that religious painting is only an image, rather than the imagined. It is not ontologically the vehicle of the Christian god’s presence, but merely represents the idea of divinity as expressed in Scripture. Devotional pictures, he maintains, do not simply refer us to the original through likeness, but, more accurately, re-mediate narratives, symbols and ideas originating from Scripture.⁵⁸

This Catholic understanding of images was sanctioned by the resolutions of the Synod of Cracow, held in 1621 under the leadership of Bishop Marcin Szyszkowski. Although its decrees were legally binding only in the Diocese of Cracow, other Polish-Lithuanian bishoprics soon followed suit.⁵⁹ Besides banning a number of iconographical motifs deemed inconsistent with the doctrine, the Synod reformers urged parsons to follow the resolutions of the Council of Trent regarding Christian images.⁶⁰ This was the first official im-

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. D1^r: ‘obraz obrazem iest Chrystusowym, Chrystusem nie iest: co też o inbnych wbytkich obrazach rozumieć trzebá. [...] [O]brazy máią być uczczone [...]: bo nam przywodzą ná pamięć te osoby, ktore czcić y bńanowác potrzebá.’

⁵⁶ See JAMES WATERWORTH (ed.): *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, London 1848, twenty-fifth session, second decree, 1563, pp. 233-236.

⁵⁷ BIRKOWSKI (as in footnote 1), pp. 66-67.

⁵⁸ Birkowski’s position on the role of images in Christian doctrine was however incoherent, to say the least. Having denied the metaphysical efficacy of the image (as we have seen earlier), Birkowski paradoxically reasserts that ‘holy images’ sanction and honour God and the saints, as they have the power to inspire the beholder to follow the represented paragons of virtue. More surprisingly, Birkowski goes on to list a number of ‘miracles’ instigated by images. See ibidem, pp. 68-79.

⁵⁹ WŁADYSŁAW TOMKIEWICZ: *Uchwała synodu krakowskiego z 1621 r. o malarstwie sakralnym* [The 1621 Decree of the Synod of Cracow on Sacred Images], in: *Sztuka i Krytyka* 8 (1957), 2, pp. 174-184, here p. 178.

⁶⁰ Caput LI: *De Sacris Imaginibus*, in: *Reformationes Generales ad clerum et populum Diocesis Cracoviensis pertinentes*, Cracoviae 1621, pp. 152-155. Polish version: *Uch-*

plementation of the Tridentine decrees *De sacris imaginibus* in Poland-Lithuania.⁶¹ The admonition against the improper use of Christian paintings concluding the fifty-first resolution is particularly telling:

‘Priests must frequently remind the simple folk in particular that Catholics do not call venerable images gods; nor do they serve them as gods; nor do they entrust their salvation to them; nor do they look for the last judgement in them, but rather, they remember and imitate those whom these images represent. Due veneration and honour is given to God only.’⁶²

This passage clearly repudiates the efficacious nature of the Christian image. An image can only serve as a referential medium and never as an actual cult object.

The engraved frontispiece to the resolutions of the later 1643 Synod of Cracow (Fig. 4) is revealing in this respect, as it gives a sense of how the prescriptive discourse on Christian images was meant to reverberate in the church space. The print depicts an idealised assembly deliberating under the leadership of the Bishop of Cracow, Piotr Gembicki. We see a cleric speaking to the ecclesiastical council, three scribes taking minutes from his speech, and the other members of the assembly listening attentively. The represented site of the synod resembles the presbytery of St Mary’s Basilica in Cracow: the clergy sit in the choir stalls, which are still extant. Additional participants engage in the deliberations from the galleries above the stalls (the gallery on the left can still be seen at St Mary’s). Although the clergy have gathered in the part of the choir reserved for the laity, the represented space is not completely divorced from intimations of sanctity. A rood screen separates the conversing clergymen from the high altar where the sacrament of the Eucharist took place. The most sacred site within a Catholic church, this is where the priest made Christ metaphysically present through transubstantiation.⁶³ This emphasis on the sanctity of the altar—marked by the absence of human figures—explains the relative effacement of the triptych depicted in the background of the print. Despite the striking similarity to the celebrated Gothic *Altarpiece of*

wała synodu krakowskiego o malarstwie sakralnym, 1621, in: JAN BIAŁOSTOCKI (ed.): *Teoretycy, pisarze i artyści o sztuce 1500-1600*, Warszawa 1985, pp. 428-431.

⁶¹ TOMKIEWICZ, *Uchwała synodu krakowskiego* (as in footnote 59), p. 175.

⁶² ‘Doceant denique frequenter, praesertim rudiores, quod Catholici, imagines venerabiles non appellant deos, neque serviunt iis ut diis, neque spem salutis ponunt in eis ab eis expectant futurum iudicium, sed ad recordationem & imitationem eorum, quos repraesentant, exhibentur & veneratio et honos, qui eis praestatur, ad Deum refertur’, in: *Reformationes Generales* (as in footnote 60), pp. 154-155. For Polish translation, see BIAŁOSTOCKI (as in footnote 60), p. 431.

⁶³ SARAH HAMILTON, ANDREW SPICER: *Defining the Holy. The Delineation of Sacred Space*, in: IDEM (eds.): *Defining the Holy. Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Aldershot 2005, pp. 1-23, here p. 8. J. G. DAVIES: *Altar*, in: ERWIN FAHLBUSCH, LUKAS VISCHER et al. (eds.): *The Encyclopedia of Christianity. Vol. 1: A-D*, Grand Rapids/MI 1999, pp. 42-43.



Fig. 4: Anonymous, *The Synod of Cracow*, Engraved frontispiece to the *Synodus Dioecesis Cracovien. Cui accessere Constitutiones in diversis Synodis [...]*, Kraków 1643. © University of Warsaw Library, Early Printed Books Department, sygn. Sd.714. 1406 adl.

Veit Stoss at St Mary's in Cracow (with the *Dormition of the Virgin* in the centrepiece and scenes from the life of Christ in the side panels), the artwork is physically removed from the high altar by a large screen. Moreover, the upper panels and the crest of the altarpiece are concealed by a cartouche with Gembicki's arms.

There is a reason why the engraved *Altarpiece of Veit Stoss* is partially obscured, both by an element of the represented space (the screen), and the scrolling frame device present outside of that space (the cartouche). Critically, the frontispiece to the 1643 decrees of the Synod of Cracow depicts an ideal ecclesiastical setting that likely never materialised. The print does not

necessarily render a space as perceived by its users, but rather as it was supposed to be seen. Had a seventeenth-century beholder entered St Mary's, their eyes would have been drawn to the *Altarpiece of Veit Stoss* located at the end of a vista marked by the converging bays of the nave. This directional pull would have particularly increased when the triptych's wings were opened to mark a solemn occasion like the 1643 synod. The engraving plays on this enticing power of Stoss' triptych by making it simultaneously visible to the eye and overshadowed by architectural and ornamental motifs. Thus the medium itself creates a dichotomy between transparency and opacity: a visual dialectic that cannot be resolved, only replicated.

This disclosure and concealment on the frontispiece marks a visual paradox. The altarpiece in the print is open, yet obfuscated from above and below. Whereas viewing an open triptych in a real space would have been a truly interactive experience, the engraving denies the viewer this opportunity. This inaccessibility is particularly jarring given the location of the altarpiece: it lies at the vanishing point where the converging lines of the choir's upper walls meet in the geometric centre of the image. It is impossible not to see the altarpiece, and yet also difficult to fully engage with it. The viewer is taunted by an unreachable object of devotion, hidden by the screen and cartouche. As a result, another point comes to the fore: the high altar. Located at the meeting of the converging lines drawn along the lower stalls and marked by a lit candle placed atop a fantastical rood screen, the high altar is fully visible to the eye. This visual rhetoric confirms the sanctity of the altar.⁶⁴ The special status of the most sacred place in church is further emphasised by diverting the viewer's gaze from the celebrated *Altarpiece of Veit Stoss*, which arguably was Cracow's most famous devotional image. The simultaneous solicitation and disavowal of the viewer's gaze produces an effect of unfulfilled visual promise. It is precisely this broken expectation of visual engagement with a famous triptych which mediates the position of Cracow's ecclesiastical authorities on the role of paintings in church.

As the frontispiece visually ordains the proper use of Christian images by partially concealing the *Altarpiece of Veit Stoss*, the oscillation between veneration and disinterested viewing comes to the fore. Although paintings may be useful in marking the sublimity of ecclesiastical space and acting as the referential signs of the Trinity and Catholic saints, they must not be allowed to become objects of reverence. If the high altar and the Eucharist are the most sacred part of the church, then, by contrast, Christian images are only the simulacra of the holy. Despite its prominent location at the geometric vantage point of the 1643 print, the *Altarpiece of Veit Stoss* is pushed away

⁶⁴ The thirteenth decree of the 1643 synod, on chapels and altars, states that no private altar, even a portable one, shall be erected without consent of the bishop of Cracow ('sine autoritate Nostra Ordinaria, aut Nostri in Spiritualibus Vicarij Generalis'). See: Caput XIII: De Capellis et Altaribus, in: Synodus Dioecessana Cui accessere Constitutiones in diversis Synodis [...], Kraków 1643, p. 8.

and physically disconnected from the sanctity of the altar. This spatial separation of the triptych from the presbytery calls into question—by means of visual rhetoric—its own potential as a cult object.

Ambiguous Space

Notwithstanding the above, the Catholic prescriptive agenda cannot be seen as reflecting contemporaneous viewing practices without further qualification. First, conscious participation in the debate on the role of images required abstract thought, accessible to only highly educated religious figures and the lay aristocracy. Second, it always remains difficult to gauge the exact level of cross-pollination between theory and practice. In this context, the existence of a body of theoretical discourse on proper interaction with Christian images is no guarantee of actual practice along these lines. If anything, the persistent repetition of warnings against the blind veneration of images suggests that these admonitions were often ignored. The *Altarpiece of Veit Stoss* may have been represented as a disenchanted artefact visually detached from the high altar in 1643, yet the faithful probably continued to venerate the Virgin, Christ and the saints carved by Stoss in a manner incongruous with post-Tridentine synodal decrees.

The ambiguous status of the *Altarpiece of Veit Stoss* in the idealised engraving of the choir in St Mary's Church raises further questions about the nature of space in containing the epistemology of images. I have argued here that the Catholic elites in Poland-Lithuania were in a position to appropriate devotional sites as disenchanted spaces, but they could also conceive of the art gallery as an ambiguous spatial setting. Thus it was possible for them to experience both a disenchanted church and a sacralised gallery. A space could change status as either the receptacle of the holy or the site of visual delectation, depending on the users' interactions with their surroundings. In actual lived spaces, no perspective was permanently fixed. This conditioning of the space's semiotic status by the user's actions appears to have been central to the early modern epistemology of images.

In this regard, it is worth recalling the smooth transition between the gallery and the chapel at Warsaw Castle. The conflation of these two rooms as either the setting for the display of artefacts or the gateway for experiencing devotional paintings is symptomatic of the receptiveness of early modern space to different uses. The open-ended nature of this part of the royal castle—one susceptible to recurrent epistemological transformations—emphasises the importance of what was actually happening in a space. The gallery and chapel combined were appropriated by users who continued to manoeuvre between two contradictory modes of understanding Christian images, identifying pictures either as works of art or as the site of presence. The threshold between the sacred and the profane was fluid, and impossible to control. The paintings on view were epistemologically ambiguous precisely because users continued to respond to them in different ways. Although the space of display provided the prescriptive groundwork for engagement with

artefacts—connoisseurial in the gallery and devotional in the chapel—the actual reception of these works was not confined to single norms. The viewers experienced these pictures through a number of seemingly incompatible frameworks.

Yet the most convincing evidence for the ambiguity of the space displaying both Christian and secular paintings is our starting point: Mikołaj Wolski's decision to partially dismantle his renowned art collection.⁶⁵ Drawing on this act of purifying the gallery space from its allegedly incongruous elements, I thus return to the question of art's disenchantment. As I have argued, Wolski's ordinance to destroy the mythological nudes at Krzepice Castle was an attempt to restore the dignity of the Christian image. Because such an act implies that Wolski no longer believed that paintings merely signified the represented instead of manifesting it, we must presume that the Grand Marshal of the Crown now viewed mythological nudes as religious anathema. Otherwise, he would have kept them intact, appreciating their value as objects of connoisseurship alone. Since Wolski drew a clear distinction between the images representing Christ, Mary and saints on the one hand, and 'non-devotional' paintings on the other, it is no longer possible to perceive his gallery as the collection of a connoisseur.

Wolski's prior ties to the culture of connoisseurship are well known. His iconoclasm stands out as the most famous example of an epistemological U-turn in the history of Polish-Lithuanian picture collecting precisely because he had previously been one of the most illustrious connoisseurs of the Vasa period.⁶⁶ Yet Wolski redefined his attitude to images by demanding that 'all the libidinal paintings that lead to sin be burnt'. In line with this reconfigured view, not all paintings were equally suitable; some pictures could offend, while others were ascribed particular religious value. As a result of this radical reshuffling, the truncated Krzepice Castle gallery offers a potent counter-argument to Stoichita's theory of disenchantment. Since only 'decent', desensualised pictures could be displayed in the redefined space, the new status of the castle gallery was markedly at odds with early modern connoisseurship. The epistemological conversion of the space formerly dedicated to the appreciation of all paintings (regardless of their alignment with Catholic doctrine) thus suggests that, contrary to the progressivist tenets of the disenchantment model, the status of images in early modernity was contingent upon the prac-

⁶⁵ Wolski's act of iconoclasm must have been one of many, because only very few 16th and 17th century still lifes and nudes have survived in Poland and other indirect successor states of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine).

⁶⁶ LESZEK HAJDUKIEWICZ (ed.): *Historia Nauki Polskiej* [History of Polish Science], vol. 6, Wrocław 1974, p. 760. LEONARD LEPSZY: Review of *Marcin Teofil Polak malarz polski z pierwszej połowy XVIIgo stulecia* by Mathias Bersohn, in: *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 5 (1891), pp. 118-119; LUDWIK ZAREWICZ: *Zakon kamedułów. Jego fundacje i dziejowe wspomnienia w Polsce i Litwie* [The Camaldolese Monks. Their Foundations and Historical Memories in Poland and Lithuania], Kraków 1871, p. 197.

tices and beliefs of the beholder. Furthermore, it was ultimately revocable. No gallery space—no matter how secular and devoted to artistic interests—could fix the meaning and function of the images on display.

Wolski's reversal of the status of paintings in his own collection from objects of connoisseurship to a more ambiguous form of visual engagement points directly to the complex relationship between space, discourse, context and reception in the phenomenology of experiencing artefacts. Only by replacing the progressivist dogma of the disenchantment model with a more flexible conceptual framework for the transformation of the Christian image to an early modern gallery painting will we gain a more accurate picture of this crucial period in the history of art. A new account of this kind would focus equally on the contingencies of practice and the prescriptive dogmas of discourse; it would emphasise viewership as much as physical location in configuring the image's cultural potencies—connoisseurial or otherwise. This objective can only be achieved by acknowledging the gallery's open-ended status and the on-going epistemological fluidity of early modern images.

Zusammenfassung

Zwischen dem Heiligen und dem Profanen: frommer Raum, die Bildergalerie und das zweideutige Bild in Polen-Litauen

Im späten 16. Jahrhundert war das erstmalige Erscheinen eines neuartigen räumlichen Rahmens für die Darstellung von Abbildungen zu verzeichnen: der Gemäldegalerie. Diese kulturelle Innovation vereinte christliche Gemälde sowie mythologische Szenen, Stillleben und Landschaften unter einem Dach. Seit den 1990er Jahren haben Kunsthistoriker die Meinung vertreten, dass dieser neue Ausstellungsraum derart erfolgreich die bis dahin unüberbrückbaren Differenzen zwischen religiösen und profanen Abbildungen eingeebnet habe, dass ein säkularisiertes und entzaubertes Kunstwerk entstanden sei. Dieser Aufsatz argumentiert, dass die Aufhängung christlicher Gemälde in einer Kunstgalerie diesen Bildern nicht notwendigerweise einen unveränderlichen säkularen Status verliehen habe.

Bezogen auf das Gebiet Polen-Litauens unter der Herrschaft zweier Monarchen aus der Wasa-Dynastie, Sigismund III. (reg. 1587-1632) und Ladislaus IV. (reg. 1632-1648), wird in dem Aufsatz die Ansicht vertreten, dass die katholischen Eliten der Wasa-Zeit beim Umgang mit christlichen Gemälden, unabhängig vom Ort der Aufhängung, zwischen künstlerischem Genuss und religiöser Hingabe wechselten. Zwei Örtlichkeiten wird besondere Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet: dem Königsschloss in Warschau und Mikołaj Wolskis Galerie in Schloss Krzepice. Beide Fallstudien offenbaren, dass der Status eines Bildes in der Frühen Neuzeit von den Praktiken und Anschauungen des Besitzers abhing und folglich kein Galerieraum – wie säkular auch immer – die Bedeutung und Funktion der ausgestellten Bilder festlegen konnte.

Der Beitrag untersucht den vorgegebenen katholischen Diskurs in Polen-Litauen über religiöse Bilder und die Art und Weise ihrer Darstellung und stellt so die vermeintlich klare Abgrenzung zwischen der Gemäldegalerie als einem angeblichen Garanten säkularer Kunstwerke und der Kirche als Raumhülle, mit der die kultische Funktion des Bildes garantiert worden sei, infrage. Indem man den Darstellungsräumen, die zwischen dem Heiligen und dem Profanen oszillierten, Aufmerksamkeit schenkt, erschließen sich Anhaltspunkte, um sich kritisch mit den bestehenden Theorien über die Kunstgalerien in der Frühen Neuzeit auseinanderzusetzen.