

## Article

# Representations of the Passion of Christ in Brazil: Devotional Sculpture as Open Artwork

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**Abstract:** Sculpted representations of the Passion of Christ became widely used for popular religious devotion in Portuguese America. They comprise a variety of forms, since the Passion had so many episodes, and thus necessitated various bodily positions for Christ. In investigating the manufacture and trade of Latin American Baroque sculpture, it is possible to identify a market of whole-body carvings, items of dress, and loose body parts, such as heads, hands, feet, etc. This parts-based approach to sculpture, in effect, transformed them from “finished” works into “open” ones. The idea of an open artwork applies to objects that are not usually classified as art. This openness can be found in lifelike images that encourage the viewer to connect with them emotionally. In the case of images that show suffering, viewers respond with empathetic horror before the realistically proportioned and colored representations. The present study analyzes the idea of an open artwork by focusing on sculptural series of the Passion, especially scenes of the Agony in the Garden, that belong to Carmelite lay brotherhoods in São Paulo, Mogi das Cruzes, Itu, and Santos, cities in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. Images of the Passion existed in a constant process of transformation and, thus, openness, from their manner of construction to their uses in Holy Week rituals. By allowing viewers to interact with them on their own terms, we argue that devotional sculptures had far-reaching potential.

**Keywords:** Passion of Christ; Agony in the Garden; devotional sculpture; Brazil



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## 1. Introduction

Sculpted representations of the Passion of Christ became widely used for popular religious devotion in eighteenth-century Portuguese America. The representations comprised a variety of forms, due to the fact that the Passion had so many episodes and thus necessitated various bodily positions for Christ. This kind of artistic representation helped the faithful to mentally and physically experience the suffering of Jesus. The image of worship offered the devotee a presence of the divine, which religious rites helped make palpable (Belting 1994). In addition to reflecting broader Catholic currents of the early modern period that emphasized close identification with Christ, devotion to the Passion in the Americas<sup>1</sup> was a matter of local concern for religious communities.

Since sculptures are three-dimensional, they are more tactile, and thus more “friendly” and emotionally accessible to the beholder than paintings (Jung 2010). Especially when sculptures are moveable and changeable, they offer a tangible presence. These kinds of sculptures have become a testimony to the impact that works of art have on the emotions of the faithful, to the extent that it is not possible to understand religious life and the ways in which faith was experienced without considering the role played by these images in the rites of the Church (Kopania 2010).

In investigating the manufacture and trade of Latin American Baroque sculpture, Gutiérrez (1995) identifies a market of whole-body carvings, items of dress, and loose body parts, such as heads, hands, feet, etc. In considering the creation of devotional sculptures

as more of a process than a single event fixed in time, a process with multiple sources and actors, he applies the notion of “open” artwork. According to Didi-Huberman (2007) open artwork is difficult to classify within what is usually called art. This openness is usually found in lifelike images that encourage the viewer to connect with them emotionally. In the case of images that show suffering, viewers respond with empathetic horror before the realistically proportioned and colored representations. Both Gutiérrez and Didi-Huberman were inspired by Umberto Eco’s framing of the “open work”, which claims that an open work’s meaning is not fixed, but rather, established, by the user/holder when engaging with it.

The present study applies the idea of the open artwork to sculptural series of the Passion of Christ that have belonged, since the eighteenth century, to Carmelite lay brotherhoods in São Paulo, Mogi das Cruzes, Itu, and Santos, all cities in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. We analyze sculptures of the Agony in the Garden in their historical, iconographic, and material aspects. In contrast to Gutiérrez’s framing of the field of possibilities under which hypothetical artworks could come into being, we consider these specific sculptures’ existence in churches over the years, and the ways in which they could be mobilized as “open works”. Through these examples, we show that images of the Passion, even when “complete”, existed in a constant process of transformation and, thus, openness, from their manner of construction to their uses in Holy Week rituals. In addition, while less well documented, we contend that as open images, spectators could respond to them in different ways. In line with Eco’s reasoning, these sculptures are modern in that they allow people to go beyond their strictly biblical meanings and the societally expected responses to them, and interact with them on their own terms. In the context of colonial Brazil and in light of recent work showing how religious images had specific meanings for their communities (Senos 2010; Valerio 2021), we signal the far-reaching potential of devotional sculpture.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The Cycle of the Passion is one of the most widely represented Christological themes in Latin American churches. It begins with the messianic entry of Christ into Jerusalem and culminates with his Crucifixion. In Brazil, the Cycle of the Passion of Christ is communally called “Passos da Paixão”. In Latin Portuguese vocabulary, the word *passo*, literally “path” or “step”, refers to the “path of the passion or an oratory [chapel], in which some of the Redeemer’s torments are represented; or any of the torments, in which one meditates, or speaks<sup>2</sup>” (Bluteau 1789, pp. 167–68). *Passo* is, thus, synonymous with the suffering of Jesus Christ during his Passion in the city of Jerusalem, and a *passo* can be a sculptural representation of the Passion: “The word ‘step,’ in the artistic meaning that we indicate here, surely comes from the Latin ‘passus,’ which means suffering, that is, step equivalent to a lacerating scene of the Lord’s Passion<sup>3</sup>” (González 1959, p. 106).

In this study, we consider representations of the Cycle of the Passion that are found in churches of the Brazilian Third Orders of Mount Carmel, which include the following scenes: The Agony in the Garden, Arrest, Flagellation, Crowning with Thorns, *Ecce Homo*, Carrying of the Cross, and Crucifixion<sup>4</sup>. The third orders were religious associations formed by lay people. Exclusive in nature, the brotherhoods admitted only men and women considered to be of good reputation, family, and economic status. Esteemed professionals also entered these communities.

Lay brotherhoods emerged in Europe with the encouragement of the mendicant orders, including that of the Carmelites, in the renewal of spiritual attitudes that began in the twelfth century. Religious orders aimed to follow, as faithfully as possible, the lives of Jesus’ first disciples, guided by his acts and sufferings. This was intensified in the Counter-Reformation, in an attempt to win back the masses attracted by the Protestant Reformation, and missionaries allowed the laity to become more involved in the domain of the sacred. Being part of a lay community gave the Christian faithful the chance to remit their sins and experience an edified, supported life and a good death. This led to the multiplication of devotional exercises and pious practices, among which works of mutual support and

devotion to the Passion of Christ stand out (Brusadin 2021). That is why representations of the Passion are commonly represented in the iconography of the churches of third brothers, including those in Brazil that were established after Portuguese colonization.

The Third Orders of Mount Carmel in the state of São Paulo commissioned and maintained various sculptures depicting scenes from the Passion of Jesus in the eighteenth century. The orders chose the sculptures based on their iconographic, technical, and stylistic aspects. The devotional works could fulfill different purposes and uses inside and outside the religious space. They were exhibited on altarpieces of the orders' churches or chapels, used in processions and other Catholic rituals in the open air, made to participate in theatrical sets (especially the Stations of the Cross and Nativity scenes), and included in home oratories for domestic worship (Oliveira 2000).

In order to analyze a work, it is important to holistically consider its form, structure, uses, and functions. In the relationship between the form and function of an image, we find the intention of the artist, his/her patron, and the social group involved in its realization (Schmitt 2007). We should consider not only the aesthetic value of a sculpture, but also the place for which it was destined, in addition to its eventual mobility, in order to access its meaning. Since the Middle Ages in Europe, images of Christ Crucified were made with joints in the shoulders, allowing for representations of the Crucifixion, the Descent from the Cross, and the Dead Christ<sup>5</sup>.

Herein, we focus on the Agony in the Garden, an episode in the Passion Cycle that became popular in Iberia and its American colonies during the Counter-Reformation. Works such as Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* (1548) encouraged closer engagement with the suffering of Jesus, and lay brotherhoods helped to spread this devotion widely. Furthermore, in the sixteenth century, church authorities began to ban the use of live actors for Passion plays, so in the following century, such plays were replaced by sculptural scenes (Webster 1998).

The Agony in the Garden appears in all four gospels, but relies especially on the Gospel of Luke. As stated there, after the Last Supper, Jesus prayed alone at the Mount of Olives: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine". An angel from heaven appeared to comfort him. In anguish, Jesus prayed more insistently. His sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood (Luke 22: 39–44)<sup>6</sup>. Sculptural versions of this scene attempt to convey the drama of Jesus' anguish, and the presence of the angel adds to the potential dynamism of the scene. In Brazil, this messenger of God was popularly called the Angel of Bitterness, as it presents the Chalice of Bitterness, the "cup" which is the eventual symbol of the Passion referred to by Jesus.

In the eighteenth century, sculptural ensembles of the Agony in the Garden in Lay Carmelite churches of the state of São Paulo fulfilled a double function in religious rituals: throughout the year, they served as altarpiece sculptures, thus being the main theme of side altars, and during Holy Week festivities, they served as one of several sculptures carried in procession on litters. The corteges went through the main streets of cities, then returned to their churches, ending with a sermon (Bayón 2001).

The particular procession, called the Triumph of the Holy Cross (or simply the Triumphal Procession), was carried out by Lay Carmelites both in the Iberian kingdoms and in Spain's and Portugal's overseas colonies<sup>7</sup>. In the Christian tradition, the Triumph is the first episode of the Passion, the moment when Jesus jubilantly enters the city of Jerusalem<sup>8</sup>. The idea of Triumph also relates to the Triumph of the Eucharist, that is, to the sacrament of the Eucharist. In the subsequent episode of the Passion, the Last Supper, Jesus considers himself the Paschal Lamb and offers himself in sacrifice for the liberation of the Christian people (Réau 1996).

The scenes were represented by way of polychrome sculptures, three-dimensional works of art covered by layers of color. Polychrome consists of layers of color, with or without a preparation base, applied with different pictorial and decorative techniques, that totally or partially cover sculptures (Gómez-González and Gómez 2001). Polychrome sculptures in the

round can be further classified into fully carved, articulated (with joints in the limbs), and dressed images (completed with actual fabric clothing) (Coelho and Quites 2014).

The works we analyze here are dressed sculptures, and a purple cloth tunic was used in correspondence with other Agony in the Garden iconography. Devotees paid for and changed the costly garments, donated valuable accessories such as jewelry, and took care of the wigs and other adornments of such sculptures (Quites 2006). Their donations allowed for ever-changing images of the sculptures: their positions, gestures, and even iconography could be changed. Such changes were ritual moments that allowed devotees to participate in the lives of the sculptures.

Dressed statues generally have a wooden structure, carved in a simplified way in the areas meant to be covered by the natural fabric clothing, and are more detailed and polychromed in the areas that will be exposed, such as the face, hands, and feet. They have joints to facilitate dressing and may have glass eyes and hair. These elements allow for a near-lifelike level of realism, which was typical of Baroque culture.

Heinrich Wölfflin proposed in the early twentieth century that there are artistic styles with closed and open forms (Wölfflin 1984). The “open” Baroque, in its devaluation of line and valorization of the pictorial, allowed painting, sculpture, and architecture to be experienced in multiple ways. Various scholars have suggested ways in which the Baroque in the Americas, by breaking with the Renaissance aesthetic and removing its rigid dependence on Greco-Roman cultural precedents, enabled Indigenous, African, and mixed-race artists to re-signify the work of art (Theodoro 1992; Lezama Lima 2010; Bailey 2010). We propose, in a more technical/stylistic Wölfflinian vein than that employed by these recent scholars, that the openness of Brazilian Passion sculptures also allowed for a range of responses and meanings.

Devotees engaged with them by expressing veneration, moving them around, changing their clothes, donating hair to make wigs, and even fearing them due to their very naturalistic traits. The use of creative techniques and technologies to provide a high degree of humanization to this type of work lies in a human need to identify with them. For Didi-Huberman (2007), the images are creators of our image in us, not only our appearances, but our actions and responses to crises.

In the following section we highlight the material, technical, and iconographic characteristics and functions of the sculptures of the Agony in the Garden of the Third Orders of Mount Carmel in São Paulo, especially those that allowed the sculptures to serve as open images. Following this, we further discuss the concept of open artwork in order to link our practical and theoretical research.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. The Agony in the Garden in the City of São Paulo (State of São Paulo)

All of the Passion sculptures in the lay Carmelite church of the city of São Paulo have glass eyes, wigs of real hair, and metal halos. The Agony in the Garden sculpture is found in the first altarpiece on the right hand (Epistle) side, and is characterized as a dressed and articulated image (Figure 1). As fitting a sculpture meant to always be dressed (the type known as *roca* in Portuguese and *candelero* in Spanish) the body consists of a simple structure of horizontal and vertical slats, which is covered by clothing. It can be conceived in different positions, according to the iconography that it represents. The sculpture’s arms are jointed at the elbows to enable movement.

The sculpture is equipped with calves and feet that are carved, yet found loose on the base and “stored” inside the slats (Figure 2). It is common for parts to come loose from this type of sculpture, such as hands, legs, and feet. Many are attached in an improvised way or kept next to the sculptures within the altarpieces. Even though this is not ideal for conservation, since pieces can be lost, it is a way of maintaining the visibility of the whole and the devotional aspects of the work (Brusadin 2020). This sort of display also serves as a sign of the openness of artwork because, in addition to enabling the movement and exchange of its constituent parts, it allows devotees to do what they believe to be the



most appropriate with their pieces, as the work is always presented as open and never “complete” or “finished”.



**Figure 1.** *Agony in the Garden*, in the Church of the Third Order of Mount Carmel in São Paulo. Poly-chrome wood sculpture (136 × 78 × 67 cm), eighteenth century. Photo by Lia Brusadin, 28 December 2016.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 2.** (a) Detail of the loose block of the right leg inside the slats. (b) Block of the left leg. Photos by Lia Brusadin, 28 December 2016.

The face of the sculpture presents a realistic expression of anguish and suffering. It has a pronounced upward gaze to indicate Jesus’ looking at the Angel of Bitterness and/or speaking to God in heaven. However, with the exception of the scene of the Agony in the Garden in Itu, we did not find any sculpture of the angel in other cities in the state of São Paulo. Jesus’ mouth is slightly open, and within it survives a note placed by a believer asking for heavenly favors (Figure 3). This indicates a relationship of approximation between the image of devotion and the spectator, in which the latter deposits his/her specific requests *inside* the work, the mouth thus being a literal feature of openness.



**Figure 3.** Detail of note inside the mouth. Photo by Lia Brusadin, 28 December 2016.

The sculpture, as well as the church's other scenes of the Passion, had both altarpiece and processional functions, and was used in the celebration of the Triumph during Holy Week in the eighteenth century. We do not know the name of its creator, nor the date it was installed in the church. No primary source referring to Holy Week processions carried out by the Lay Carmelites of São Paulo has been found either, but [Ortmann \(1951\)](#) reported that the Order had been carrying out the Triumphal Procession using its altarpiece statues since 1727. The sculpture may conceivably date to that time.

### 3.2. *The Agony in the Garden in Mogi das Cruzes (State of São Paulo)*

All the Christs of the Third Order of Mount Carmel in Mogi das Cruzes have painted (as opposed to glass) eyes and wigs. This series of passion sculptures was cited by Auguste de Saint-Hilaire, a French naturalist, who belonged to the first group of European scientists who came to Brazil in the nineteenth century. During his visit to the Carmelite complex in the city of Mogi das Cruzes, he highlighted in his travel reports the processional function of the Passion sculptures, as well as their realism and clothing (Figure 4):



**Figure 4.** *Agony in the Garden*, in the Church of the Third Order of Mount Carmel in Mogi das Cruzes. Polychrome wood sculpture (116 × 40 × 57 cm), eighteenth century. Photo by Lia Brusadin, 1 January 2017.

At the entrance to the city, on the Rio de Janeiro side, there is a small convent belonging to the Carmelite Order. I entered the church and found the chancel tastefully decorated. They arranged in the church a series of large images representing Christ and various saints, destined to be carried in Holy Week processions. Such wooden images are life-sized, painted, and dressed.<sup>9</sup> (Saint-Hilaire 1974, p. 84)

The Agony in the Garden sculpture is a dressed *roca* image with elbow joints. An unusual detail is that this Christ has his hands tied by ropes, which does not correspond to the biblical narrative (Figure 5). Yet, the ropes (secured around the figure's neck) may be there to support the folded hands, as Jesus is often represented in prayer during this Passion episode.



**Figure 5.** Detail of tied and folded hands. Photo by Lia Brusadin, 1 January 2017.

The legs of the sculpture are, again, separate objects, secured to the base with wire (Figure 6). Today, they are correctly positioned to emerge from under the robe, unlike in the previous sculpture.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 6.** (a) Legs secured with wires. (b) Detail of the feet. Photos by Lia Brusadin, 1 January 2017.

The statutes of the Third Order of Carmel in Mogi das Cruzes, which were revised and written in 1862, refer to past practices and prescribe that the association carry out the following processions during Holy Week: “§ 1st From time immemorial, Our Order has arranged the following Processions: those of the Path of the Cross, the Triumph of the Lord, as well as the *Rasoura*<sup>10</sup> for the greater glory of Our Most Holy<sup>11</sup>” (*Estatutos* 1862). The order’s sculpted images of Christ were vital elements of such processions, and each year, they were renovated. Devotees donated clothes and asked for the images to be *reencarnadas*, that is, repainted for the celebrations<sup>12</sup>. This was possible due to the openness in the conception of this type of artwork, and due to the brotherhoods’ continued commitment to them.

### 3.3. *The Agony in the Garden in Itu (State of São Paulo)*

The seven sculptures representing the Passion of Christ of the Third Order of Mount Carmel in Itu were commissioned in 1778 from the Portuguese sculptor Pedro da Cunha, residing in Rio de Janeiro. He received a generous sum of six hundred thousand *réis* for their completion. However, three years later, the commission had not yet been completed, and brothers of the order noticed that Cunha’s sculptures were too large to fit in the existing altarpieces. They then decided to enlarge the altarpieces in order to accommodate the sculptural set (*Oliveira-César* 1927–1928). The images came from Rio de Janeiro and arrived in Itu in 1782. From as early as 1785, they were used in triumphal processions on Palm Sunday (*Nardy-Filho* 2006).

Saint-Hilaire also commented on the sculptures at Itu after his visit to the church around 1839. However, the sculptures of Christ did not please the Frenchman: “no accessory to adorn them, such as large silver halos, etc. was forgotten, but all of this does not make them more beautiful” (*Saint-Hilaire* 1940, pp. 234–35)<sup>13</sup>. Saint-Hilaire’s discontentment was perhaps due to the disproportionate and dramatic forms meant to convey Jesus’ psychological distress. Christ’s brow is furrowed, his nostrils are flared, and he is shown sweating blood in accord with the biblical account (Luke 22: 44; Figure 7). This intense realism was typical of the Baroque style, and Saint-Hilaire was likely under the influence of the more restrained neoclassical style of his time. It is interesting to observe how, in the past and even today, the expressionism of a sculpture can emotionally affect a viewer, who may choose, like Saint-Hilaire, to close him- or herself off to this type of image (*McKim-Smith* 1993).



**Figure 7.** Pedro da Cunha. *Agony in the Garden*, in the Church of the Third Order of Mount Carmel in Itu. Polychrome wood sculpture (126 × 62 × 52 cm), eighteenth century. Photo by Lia Brusadin, 26 December 2016.

In this sculptural ensemble, all of the images have glass eyes, and the hair is carved in such a way as to accommodate a separate metallic halo. The Christ of Agony in the Garden is an anatomized dressed image, the type that was designed to wear fabric clothes



but has good anatomical definition of all parts of the body. It seems that the inclusion of real clothing was always intended, since there is a space between the sculpted hair and the shoulders (Figure 8) so that the image can be properly dressed.



**Figure 8.** Detail of the space between the hair and the back for the fit of the garment. Photo by Lia Brusadin, 26 December 2016.

Despite the records indicating that the altarpieces were enlarged to fit the sculptures, in this case, seemingly, the legs were cut off below the knees in order for the Christ to fit into the altarpiece. As in the examples above, the legs are now kept in a wooden structure under the sculpture. Another intervention was to fix the thigh region to the sculpture's base (Figure 9). Such interventions were most surely subsequent to the conception of the sculpture, and further highlight the ongoing manipulation of such works.



(a)



(b)

**Figure 9.** (a) Blocks of the legs. (b) Detail of the thighs fixed to the base. Photos by Lia Brusadin, 26 December 2016.

This scene is the only one in the state of São Paulo that includes a figure representing the Angel of Bitterness, who holds the chalice of the same name (Figure 10). The chalice represents the cup that Jesus asked the Lord to take from him, and stands more broadly for the Last Supper. The ancient Passover was transformed into the Lord's Supper when Jesus gathered with his apostles to celebrate the Paschal Supper. Thus, the chalice of wine symbolizes Jesus' death, in which he considered himself the Passover lamb, offered in

sacrifice for the liberation of the Christian people. Therefore, it symbolizes the Passion and Christ's death on the cross. On the altarpiece, Jesus appears in profile with his hands folded and facing the angel, which appears as a tiny child dressed in white garments and holding a cross along with the chalice.



**Figure 10.** Detail of the Angel of Bitterness. Photo by Lia Brusadin, 26 December 2016.

### 3.4. *The Agony in the Garden in Santos (State of São Paulo)*

The sculptural ensemble of the Passion Cycle in Santos has images with different construction techniques, possibly commissioned from different sculptors at different times. The first altarpiece, on the right side of the church, holds the Agony in the Garden, the sculpture of Jesus as a dressed *roca*-type image (Figure 11). He has natural hair, wears a red tunic, and is in a profile position as if he were facing the angel, although no angel is now present (Figure 12).



**Figure 11.** *Agony in the Garden*, in the Church of the Third Order of Mount Carmel in Santos. Polychrome wood sculpture (96 × 50 × 40 cm), eighteenth century. Photo by Lia Brusadin, 29 December 2016.

The sculpture's legs are missing, either lost or stored elsewhere. Likewise, no data were found regarding the processions carried out in Holy Week by the brotherhood in the eighteenth century. As in the previous sculptures we have discussed, this work's expressiveness lies in the face and hands, with added realism of the clothing. The ultimate goal was that the pain of Christ could be acutely felt by devotees.



**Figure 12.** Altarpiece of the Agony in the Garden. Photo by Lia Brusadin, 29 December 2016.

The Passion sculptures of the Third Orders of Mount Carmel in São Paulo, Mogi das Cruzes, Itu, and Santos all have realistic and expressive characteristics meant to appeal directly to devotees. In advance of being processed, they were prepared by members of the brotherhoods in semi-private settings for which the churches were vacated, especially of children (Santiago 2009). New, donated clothing was placed on them, wigs of real hair were renewed or replaced, and the sculptures were perfumed. In many ways, they were treated like actual humans, and once they emerged in procession, their articulated limbs arranged anew and set in motion atop decorated litters, they were animated by their users.

#### 4. Discussion

The “open image” is an expansion of Eco’s (2007) “open artwork”, linked to notions of amplitude, probabilities, and ambiguities. Eco applied this concept to the visual arts in general, and especially to Baroque literary works. His notion of “open artwork” is an explanatory category meant to exemplify a tendency of poetics. As a fundamentally modern artwork (or in our case, Baroque and early modern), the open work is capable of translating a new vision of the world, its contents, and communicative structures.

For Eco, the Baroque open form is dynamic, through its play of fullness and emptiness, light and shadow, and curves and breaks. It continuously suggests the expansion of space, causing the viewer to move continuously to see the work from various angles. The work seems to be in continuous mutation. From this perspective, Baroque spirituality is seen as the first manifestation of modern culture and sensibilities, because in it, the human person deals with a world in a scientific movement that demands acts of invention from him. According to Eco, it is in sculpture where the openness of art is found in form itself, where it is built to be ambiguous and visible from multiple angles. Jung (2010) notes that medieval sculpture was more tactile and approachable, offering devotees a certain presence. Baroque sculpture, after achieving the increased realism elicited by the Renaissance, went further by striving toward an expressive hyper-realism. As we have seen, this was achieved with the use of joints, textile garments, natural hair, glass eyes, and dramatic face and body positions.

The arts are inseparable from the colonial worlds in which they were generated and received, and it is important to consider the trauma of conquest and invasion intertwined with the history of colonial art in the Americas. European art and its accompanying ideologies “was upheld by a complex infrastructure that retained its legitimacy through territorial occupation and wealth extraction as well as religious and cultural repression” (Cohen-Aponte 2017, p. 72). Biblically-inspired images of the Passion of Christ may seem almost entirely reflective of colonial religious ideology. On their surface, they may also

seem to resist any sort of hybridity. Yet, in highlighting their openness and changeability in terms of usage, we point to potential ways in which the epistemological violence of colonialism could have been challenged. It is also important to consider the multiplicity of actors who participated in the formation of a given work of art. In 1782 the sculptures of the Passion of Christ meant for Itu were transported from Rio de Janeiro to the Harbor of Santos in the state of São Paulo. Their transport, at a cost of fifteen thousand *réis*, was paid for by eight brothers of the order of Lay Carmelites. The actual transporters were African slaves and Indian porters, who carried the sculptures over land in hammocks as if they were royalty (Nardy-Filho 2006). This example highlights the difficulties in reconciling the visual splendor of works of art and colonial architecture with the working conditions that these works generated (Cohen-Aponte 2017).

The images of the Passion of Christ analyzed above had a double function in liturgical ritual: they were altarpiece avocations and processional objects-as-actors. Thus, in order to fulfill this dyad, each aspect in their conception was calculated: the way to carve the hair or add a wig, the polychrome colors in the flesh or clothing, the movement of the joints in the upper and/or lower limbs, the appropriate clothing fit, the gleam of glass eyes, etc. All of this was performed in order to increase their seeming animation and produce mimetic effect, especially during processions, giving them a momentary quality of sharing the same time and space with their spectators (Webster 1998; Kopania 2010).

With the exception of the procession referenced in the statutes from Mogi, there are no primary source reports of how the Triumphal Procession in the state of São Paulo took place. However, we can use data from other third orders of Mount Carmel in Brazil as a reference, since the vast majority had this iconographic program in their churches. They all also followed, with some differences, the same statutes based on the writings of Father-Master Friar Manoel Ferreira da Natividade. For example, the Statutes of the Third Order of Mount Carmel in Rio de Janeiro narrate that during the Triumphal Procession, the brotherhood carried seven litters depicting the Cycle of the Passion, and recommended that the litter of the Agony in the Garden should leave the church with its master in front, followed by the novices (Serzedello 1872).

In order to become a third Carmelite brother, the faithful had to undergo a probationary period of approximately one year, which was called a novitiate, and the novices were instructed by a master. All the novices had to practice the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, which are divided into four weeks. The first is the recognition and contemplation of sins; the second, meditation on the life of Christ up to the episode of Palm Sunday; the third, a focus on the Passion of Christ; the fourth, meditation on Resurrection and Ascension, with different methods of prayer (Loyola 2004). The exercises of remembrance of the drama of the Passion were facilitated for the novices with the visual resource of the sculptures inside the churches (Brusadin 2021). During the procession, the ritual of carrying the litter of the Agony in the Garden represented, for the novices, a further bodily engagement with the sculpture and, thus, an increased approximation to the divine. At the same time, the novices inserted themselves into, and were seen by, the processions' viewers as part of the social hierarchy of the brotherhood.

We can also consult the account of the traveler Jean Baptiste Debret (1768–1848), a French draftsman and painter who arrived in Brazil in 1816, staying in the country for fifteen years. He visited the Church of the Third Order of Mount Carmel in Rio de Janeiro and witnessed its Triumphal Procession. He mentions the multiple functions of the Passion images in the religious ritual, noting especially what occurred after the sculptures were processed: "On the return of the procession, the images are placed on their pedestals, arranged in two rows on each side of the nave. There they are exposed to the faithful, who come throughout the next day to kiss the strings of their belts" (n.d. pp. 378–79)<sup>14</sup>. The description shows how the sculptures were stimuli/openings that provoked emotion in the faithful for a religious purpose.

Christian (2004) analyzes the religious weeping provoked by the staging of Holy Week in early modern Spain. Christian quotes the well-known devotional guide, *Audi Folia* (1556)



by Juan de Avila, which refers to the dressing of sculptures to provoke tears: “when they want to take out an image, to make people weep, they dress it in mourning and arrange it to provoke sadness” (p. 36). This kind of emotion was provoked by religious dramaturgy, in which images representing saints and Jesus during the Passion played an important part. The more realistic the sculpture—with robes, wigs and joints—the more efficient it was in the collective, as well as the individual, economy of sentiment that was seen as a way to influence God.

In an example from the Americas, [Valverde and Lara \(2018\)](#) discuss a sculpture of Christ carrying the Cross from Zacatecas, Mexico, describing its puppet-like movement used for dramatic effect during Holy Week. They analyze artwork using psychological and social theories of play, and in regard to theater and mimesis. They argue that the movable sculpture, far from being entertainment for children or a means of teaching values, allowed spectators/participants to project feelings such as anguish due to trauma and aspirations through the represented figure. Rituals and works of art “can be precisely therapeutic because they create transcendent meanings, and offer an explanation or a spiritual remedy for the inexplicable” (p. 51)<sup>15</sup>. Public rituals with puppets or lifelike dressed sculptures won the empathy of their viewers and, insofar as they made the sacred become real, were successful in perpetuating Catholicism in the American colonies.

In Brazil, Father Antônio Vieira, a missionary Jesuit and Portuguese preacher of the seventeenth century, described the emotional impact caused by sacred sculptures. He highlights the importance of artworks, which enter through the eyes and are sharper than the words that penetrate ears:

A preacher goes preaching the Passion, arrives at Pilate’s praetorium, tells how Christ was made a king in mockery, and says that they took a purple cloth and put it on his shoulders; the most attentive audience hears that. He says that they wove a crown of thorns and nailed it to his head; they all listen with the same attention. He says also that they tied his hands and put a reed in them for a scepter; the same silence and the same suspension continues in the listeners. A curtain is drawn in this space, the image of *Ecce Homo* appears; behold all of [the listeners] prostrate to the ground, behold all of them beating their breasts, behold the tears, behold the cries, behold the shouts, behold the slaps. What appeared in this church? The preacher had told everything that the curtain covered. He had already spoken about the purple cloth, he had already spoken about the crown and the thorns, he had already spoken about the scepter and the reed. If that did not move hearts at all, how does it now do so much?—Because then it was *Ecce Homo* heard, and now it is *Ecce Homo* seen; the preacher’s account entered through the ears, while the representation of [Jesus] entered through the eyes. Do you know, preaching Fathers, why our sermons do little to stir the souls of our listeners?—Because we do not preach to the eyes, we only preach to the ears<sup>16</sup>. ([Vieira 1972](#), p. 31)

From the models put forth by Vieira and Loyola, we can assume that the lay brothers, and, to a lesser extent, processions’ viewers, responded to processions with a religious emotion especially aroused by the use of lifelike sculptures. This idea has a dialogue with [Didi-Huberman’s \(2007\)](#) psychological conception of open artwork, which states that the images “embrace”—spiritually involve—the spectator; they open or close in upon us, whenever they arouse any kind of inner experience. Thus, this experience touches the emotions, in humanistic terms, and provides contact with the divine, in religious terms.

The open artwork is not generally classified in what is considered “art”, due to its dramatic features in search of the representation of the real. Open images provoke more empathetic reactions in the viewer than painted or printed images of the same: “We respond with empathetic horror to the bleeding wax image or the sculpture polychromed in colors that convey bruising and welting; but when it comes to painted or printed images of bleeding figures, we may like to think that our response is more detached” ([Freedberg 1989](#), p. 245).

## 5. Conclusions

Open images of the Passion of Christ were sculptures with realistic and dramatic qualities that could be changed and manipulated. They occupied viewers' space and were put into motion when processed. Devotees, especially the members of Carmelite brotherhoods, engaged closely with the works as they prepared them for annual processions and bore them along processional routes. For these reasons, the works had the power to elicit strong sensations and provoke emotion. Brotherhoods dialogued and lived with their sculptures over the years, and their preservation until today is a testament to their centrality for these social groups. We recognize that in this sociability, asymmetrical power relations were made: between the third order brother and the simple faithful, between masters and novices, and between colonized and colonizer. Yet, the openness of the sculptures allowed for porous boundaries, and for religious experience to progress well beyond standard biblical narratives. Ultimately, this study highlights the epistemological value of sculptural works within the colonial and early modern religious context.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> These kinds of sculptures derive from Spanish/Portuguese precedents in Europe. They are not unique to the Americas. For example, we refer to exhibition catalog: *The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600–1700* (Bray 2009).
- <sup>2</sup> “passos da paixão, oratório, em que se representa algum dos tormentos do Redentor; ou algum dos tormentos, em que se medita, ou fala” (Bluteau 1789, pp. 167–68).
- <sup>3</sup> “La palabra ‘paso’, en la acepción artística que aquí indicamos, seguramente viene del latín ‘passus’, que significa sufrimiento, esto es, paso equivalente a escena lacerante de la Pasión del Señor” (González 1959, p. 106).
- <sup>4</sup> These moments of the Cycle of the Passion are found in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
- <sup>5</sup> Taubert (2015) was one of the first scholars to highlight this feature when investigating (during the 1950s and 1970s) sculptures of Christ Crucified from medieval Germany.
- <sup>6</sup> See Matthew 26: 36–42; Marc 14: 32–36; John 18.
- <sup>7</sup> According to Chaves (2018, p. 33): “With the exception of Brazil, there is still a certain lack of knowledge regarding the role played by the tertiary movement in the execution of penitence processions in most territories that were part of the Portuguese Colonial Empire (our translation)”. The author analyzes the participation of Franciscan Third Brothers in the phenomenon of using dressed images in penitential processions from the end of the seventeenth century to the mid nineteenth century and, also, today, on the islands of São Miguel and the Azores in Portugal. For him, an artwork such as a sculpture has a double function in religious rituals as an artistic element and a link of communication between the faithful and the sacred.
- <sup>8</sup> Matthew 21: 1–11.
- <sup>9</sup> “À entrada da cidade, do lado do Rio de Janeiro, existe pequeno convento pertencente à Ordem do Carmo. Entrei na igreja e achei-lhe a capela-mor decorada com muito gosto. Arranjaram na igreja uma série de grandes imagens representando Cristo e vários santos, destinados a serem carregados nas procissões da Semana Santa. Tais imagens de madeira têm tamanho natural e estão pintadas e vestidas (Saint-Hilaire 1974, p. 84)”.
- <sup>10</sup> The *Rasoura* was a brief procession around the church with a limited route.
- <sup>11</sup> “§ 1º De tempo Immemorial faz a Nossa Ordem as seguintes Procissões: as dos Passos, do Triunfo do Senhor, assim como a da Rasoura para maior glória de Nossa Mai Santíssima” (Estatutos 1862).
- <sup>12</sup> A record of the costs involved in the work of renovation is found in the proceedings of the lay Carmelite brotherhood in Rio de Janeiro. In 1846 fees were levied to cover the expense of 310\$000 réis (three hundred and ten thousand réis) in order to have all of the church's statues of Christ repainted (Serzedello 1872).
- <sup>13</sup> “Não foi esquecido nenhum acessório para orná-las tais como grandes nimbos de prata etc., mas tudo isso não as tornou mais belas” (Saint-Hilaire 1940, pp. 234–35).

- 14 “No regresso do cortejo, colocam-se as imagens nos seus pedestais, arrançados em duas filas de cada lado da nave. Aí ficam elas expostas aos fiéis, que vêm durante todo o dia seguinte beijar-lhes os cordões da cinta” (Debret n.d., pp. 378–79).
- 15 “Los rituales y las obras de arte pueden ser terapeuticos precisamente porque crean significados transcendentales, y ofrecen una explicación o un remedio espiritual para lo inexplicable” (Valverde and Lara 2018, p. 51).
- 16 “Vai um pregador pregando a Paixão, chega ao pretório de Pilatos, conta como Cristo o fizeram rei de zombaria, diz que tomaram uma púrpura e lhe puseram aos ombros; ouve aquilo o auditório mais atento. Diz que teceram uma coroa de espinhos e lhe pregaram na cabeça; ouvem todos com a mesma atenção. Diz mais que lhe ataram as mãos e lhe meteram nelas uma cana por cetro; continua o mesmo silêncio e a mesma suspensão nos ouvintes. Corre-se neste espaço uma cortina, aparece a imagem do *Ecce Homo*; eis todos prostrados por terra, eis todos a bater no peito, eis as lágrimas, eis os gritos, eis os alaridos, eis as bofetadas. Que apareceu de novo nesta igreja? Tudo o que descobriu aquela cortina tinha dito o pregador. Já tinha dito daquela púrpura, já tinha dito daquela coroa e daqueles espinhos, já tinha dito daquele cetro e daquela cana. Pois se isto então não fez abalo nenhum, como faz agora tanto?—Porque então era *Ecce Homo* ouvido, e agora é *Ecce Homo* visto; a relação do pregador entrava pelos ouvidos, a representação daquela figura entre pelos olhos. Sabem, Padres pregadores, por que fazem pouco abalo os nossos sermões?—Porque não pregamos aos olhos, pregamos só aos ouvidos” (Vieira 1972, p. 31).

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