

A note from an Artery artist

Thursday, June 18, 2009

By Michelle Levy

I am honored that my painting "The Divine Mother" (4' x 8', acrylics) has caused such controversy. The theme of the 2007 Artery exhibit was Icons, and I chose to paint what I believe to be one of the most beautiful and inspirational iconographic themes that transcends the world of art to include the history of mankind -- the simple and beautiful image of a woman breastfeeding her child. The judges at the Pcom Creative Awards, an international competition, also found this to be beautiful and gave me an award for this painting.

Since ancient times, people have been so inspired by the beauty of this image that incredible myths and religious stories and artwork have been created, even worshipped. This includes depictions of the Egyptian Goddess Isis breastfeeding baby Horus, an ancient myth which bears striking similarity to and which many scholars say inspired the Madonna del Latte or Maria Lactans imagery of Europe, which reached the height of its popularity in the middle ages.

'Just' another divine mother

I title my painting "The Divine Mother," though it is not a depiction of the Virgin Mary, as many people erroneously believe. The Virgin Mary is just one divine mother icon of many; my divine mother is one of unity, love, gentleness, compassion -- and so she combines world traditions and religions, transcending time and space, melding pre-Christian religions with Christianity to be an icon we can all identify with and find peace and beauty with. Look closely at her face -- it is half-blue (many Egyptian statues of Isis are blue), and she is wearing Egyptian makeup.

As many people have noticed, I put a new twist on this subject by adding the text "Does this halo make my face look fat?" to the painting. The Madonna Lactans and Isis imagery began as a way to show the compassion of the divine mother and therefore to make her more real, human, and accessible to us. Adding the text was my attempt to refresh and modernize this theme -- to make her accessible, relevant, and real to a modern audience.

The vanity of supermodels

The divine mother, in all her forms, is undeniably the greatest supermodel of the art world since the beginning of mankind -- so I believe that like you, she worries about how she looks in a painting, photograph, or sculpture!

Those who are offended by this image should not restrict themselves to sending letters to their local and national papers; they must also take offense at the hundreds of Madonna Lactans and Isis/Horus imagery by the Great Masters found in museums and churches around the world, and should also direct their complaints to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (to name a few) for their display of the barebreasted Isis (c.330-640 B.C.E.).

They should also complain to the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena, Italy for displaying Lorenzetti Ambrogio's Madonna del Latte/Maria Lactans (1330 CE), The Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, Hungary for Correggio's Madonna del Latte (1523 CE), Andrea Pisano's work in the Museo Nazionale di San Mateo (14th century CE), and ... oh wow, I see Arkansas' very own Arkansas Art Center is exhibiting "World of

Pharaohs: Treasuries of Egypt Revealed" until July 5, 2009!

On the other hand, those who are offended by the female form should skip writing to the papers, churches, and museums entirely, and send their complaints directly to God.

-- **Michelle Levy**

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