Touching the Surface: Painting and Violence in Jusepe de Ribera's *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*

Leighton Fenske

Department of Art History and Communication Studies
McGill University, Montreal

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Table of Contents

Abstract

The violence for which Jusepe de Ribera is celebrated is arguably most palpable in his 1644 painting, the *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*. The scene of Bartholomew being flayed alive accrues an additional level of violence through the artist's hyper realistic use of paint, which looks like flesh. Although art historians have considered this unique effect as well as explored the consequences of the close relationship between materiality and subject matter, this thesis turns its attention to the role of touch and tactility, an issue that has largely been overlooked. I argue that the material idiosyncrasies of the artist's painting technique incite a mode of looking that is both tactile and engaged as opposed to ocular and passive. Employing Laura Marks' conception of haptic aesthetics, this thesis takes up the question of the role of violence in Ribera's artistic practice and asks how we as viewers not only engage with but also participate in this scene of martyrdom.

Résumé

La violence pour laquelle Jusepe de Ribera est connue est sans doute la plus palpable dans son tableau de 1644, le *Martyre de Saint-Barthélemy*. Cette scène, dans laquelle Barthélemy est écorché vif, acquiert un niveau de violence additionnel grâce à l'utilisation hyperréaliste de la peinture qui ressemble à de la chair. Bien que les historiens de l'art aient examiné cet effet unique et exploré les conséquences de la relation étroite entre la matérialité et le sujet, cette thèse porte son attention sur le rôle du toucher et de la tactilité, une question qui a grandement été négligée jusqu'à présent. Je soutiens que les particularités matérielles du traitement stylistique de l'artiste incitent à un regard à la fois tactile et engagé, plutôt qu'oculaire et passif. En reprenant la conception de

l’esthétique haptique de Laura Marks, cette thèse aborde le rôle de la violence dans la pratique artistique de Ribera et explore comment nous, en tant que spectateurs, non seulement assistons mais participons également à cette scène de martyre.

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List of Figures

Introduction

The violent subject matter that distinguishes the works of Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652) is palpable in his 1644 painting, the *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* (fig. 1).[1] Depicted as a man of considerable age, Bartholomew's emaciated body and sagging wrinkled flesh connote the lengthy and physically demanding task of spreading the gospel message. Both hands and feet are lined with grime, and his skin is noticeably soiled. Sprawled across the picture plane and bound to a tree, he is portrayed in the midst of his martyrdom.[2] According to Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century *Golden Legend*, Bartholomew was killed for converting King Polemius to Christianity. As a punishment for refusing to recant his faith, the apostle was beaten and skinned alive.[3] Ribera's painting focuses on the saint's almost unimaginable suffering, portraying the lengthy and excruciating process of stripping the flesh from a living person. To the right, an executioner peels away a layer of bloodied skin from the disciple's forearm. And beneath the apostle's writhing body is a skin-like, or pseudo-dermic layering completely detached from his body, which foreshadows his imminent death. Staring out from the canvas, Bartholomew's unbroken gaze relays his steadfast belief in Christ's promise of

[1] The painting was acquired by the Museu Nacional in 1903. Museu Nacional d'Arte de Catalunya, https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/martyrdom-saint-bartholomew/josep-de-ribera-o-jusepe-de-ribera-dit-lo-spagnoletto/024162-000 (accessed December 10, 2020).

[2] Andrew M. Beresford, *Sacred Skin: The Legend of St. Bartholomew in Spanish Art and Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), vii-x.

[3] Jacobus de Voragine, "Saint Bartholomew," in *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 496-502. Ribera would have been familiar with Voragine's text and relied on it for other works including his paintings and drawings of Saint Jerome. See Edward Payne, "Naples in Flesh and Bone: Ribera's Drunken Silenus and Saint Jerome," *Open Arts Journal*, 6 (Winter 2017-18): 109.

salvation. As the evangelist Matthew relates, he will be rewarded for enduring until the end.[4]

Through thick, impasto strokes of paint, the crevices of aging human flesh are layered onto Bartholomew's body, transmuting the three-dimensional folds of pigment into skin. The artist not only represents but restages flesh on the canvas surface by blurring the boundaries separating medium from representation. Unsettling this distinction, Ribera animates the epidermis and amplifies the scene's violence.[5] This unique effect has been subject to a considerable amount of scholarship. Art historians such as Bogdan Cornea, Joris van Gastel, Edward Payne, and Itay Sapir, among others, have considered the interplay of paint and skin in Ribera's oeuvre.[6] My thesis adds to this literature by focusing on how the idiosyncratic material qualities of the painting relate to tactility and touch. I examine the ways in which oily and impasto pigments draw

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[4] See Matt. 10:22. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Version of the Bible.

[5] Joris van Gastel provides an important overview of this dimensionality in his "Slow Violence: Jusepe de Ribera and the Limits of Naturalism," *Oxford Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (2018): 7-8. See also Bogdan Cornea, ""Why Tear Me from Myself?": The Depiction of Flaying in the Art of Jusepe de Ribera" (PhD diss., University of York, 2015), esp.16-17.

[6] On the scholarly literature that links paint and skin in Ribera's oeuvre, see van Gastel, "Slow Violence;" Bogdan Cornea, "Flaying the Image: Skin and Flesh in Jusepe de Ribera's Martyrdoms of Saint Bartholomew," *Open Arts Journal* 6 (Winter 2017-18), esp. 118-122; and Cornea, ""Why Tear Me from Myself?"" On the relationship between the making and unmaking of body and artwork, see Payne, "Naples in Flesh and Bone," esp. 102-103, 105-108; and Payne "Skinning the Surface: Ribera's Executions of Bartholomew, Silenus and Marsyas," *Bild-Riss: Textile Öffnungen im äesthetischen Diskurs* 7 (2015): 85-100. On the senses in Ribera's oeuvre, see Itay Sapir, "Pain and Paint: Titian, Ribera, and the Flaying of Marsyas," in *Visualizing Sensuous Suffering and Affective Pain in Early Modern Europe and the Spanish Americas*, ed. Heather Graham and Lauren Kilroy-Ewbank (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 33-52; and Sapir, "Blind Suffering: Ribera's Non-Visual Epistemology of Martyrdom," *Open Arts Journal* 4 (Winter 2014-15): 29-39.

attention to the canvas surface, thereby forcing the viewer to sensorially interact with the material wounds on the apostle's body. I shall argue that through this distinctive mode of engagement, the viewer participates in a complex relationship of torture, touch, and devotion.

This thesis will focus on the role of tactility in relation to violence. The first part will assess accounts of Bartholomew's life and death, concentrating on his close relationship to skin. To this end, the thesis will argue Ribera employs the subject matter of the apostle's martyrdom to emphasize the materiality of the canvas surface. The artist draws attention to the dermic layer of the saint inasmuch as the woven fibres he paints to stress that truth is not found in the mortal body or in earthly material things. Emerging in the context of a post-Tridentine church that was cautious of the potential for image worship, Ribera reminds that the art object is inanimate. In the second chapter, the thesis draws on Laura Marks' conception of haptic aesthetics to argue that the idiosyncratic textures on the canvas force the viewer to fixate on and subsequently "touch" Bartholomew's body.[7] In this unique physical encounter, the apostle functions within a devotional framework that drew upon the senses to enkindle faith in the viewer. The final section positions this mode of engagement within early-modern society, namely the Inquisition, which depended upon bodily interaction to combat heresy and extract truth.

[7] Especially influential to my thinking is Laura Marks, *The Skin of Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). I thank Julia Skelly for introducing me to her work. Also important is Jennifer R. Hammerschmidt, "Beyond Vision: The Impact of Rogier Van Der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross*," in *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Wietse de Boer and Christine Göttler (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 201-18.

The thesis concludes that through tactility, Ribera puts the viewer in a position of uncovering, witnessing, and experiencing Bartholomew's martyrial wounds.

Bartholomew the Surface

The *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* represents the apostle as he is excoriated for his faith, an artistic choice that recalls the traditionally close link between the saint and skin. Bartholomew is named in the Bible as one of the twelve disciples, those who were called to share in Christ's life and mission. These hand-picked followers witnessed Jesus perform miracles and participated in his public ministry. As Sean McDowell points out, they also "ate with him [and] travelled with him," equally partaking in his most intimate moments.[8] The apostles were tasked with spreading the message of salvation. In effect, they were to disseminate the gospel and instruct the faithful so as to continue their saviour's ministerial work.[9] The Gospel of Mark describes those who were given this apostolic custody and recounts how Christ was walking along the Sea of Galilee when he came upon Simon, named Peter, and his brother Andrew in the midst of fishing. Calling out to these two, he reveals they will cast their nets for the souls of humanity and beckons them to follow. Without hesitation, they return to shore leaving behind their fishing equipment (Mark 1:16-20). Peter and Andrew's decision to abandon their nets was more than just an act of obedience: it was a symbol of renunciation. To be an apostle, they demonstrate, meant forsaking the world in favour of eternal salvation.[10]

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[8] Sean McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles: Examining the Martyrdom Accounts of the Closest Followers of Jesus* (London: Routledge, 2016), 25.
[9] McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, 25.
[10] William Foxwell Albright and C. S. Mann, eds., *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 26, *Matthew* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 40.

Bartholomew appears in each of the three synoptic Gospels and once in the Acts of the Apostles.[11] In the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he is named along with those who are chosen to be Christ's twelve followers. The Evangelists each describe the Great Commission the apostles are given: go make disciples, baptizing and instructing them in the faith (Matt. 28:19-20). At the same time, the Twelve would equally be challenged to follow Jesus even if it led to death. To this end, Matthew's Gospel is unique among the others for its emphasis on the necessity of sacrifice for eternal life. Like Peter and Andrew who abandoned their livelihood to follow their savior, Matthew's account admonishes the apostles to be similarly willing to lose their lives.[12] As the evangelist plainly states, whoever "wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life . . . will find it" (Matt. 16:25). The Bartholomew who confronts us in Ribera's painting heeded Matthew's call.

Unlike the synoptics, the book of Acts introduces Bartholomew in the early stages of his ministry, shortly before Pentecost when tongues of fire rested on the disciples' heads as they received the Holy Spirit. He is listed seventh among those who came together to pray after Christ's Ascension into Heaven.[13] Once divinely inspired following the descent of the Spirit, Bartholomew alongside the others would depart with little more than the message of Christian salvation. And except for John the Evangelist, all would be killed for their missionary work.[14] McDowell has convincingly proposed that Nathanael,

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[11] See Matt. 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, and Acts 1:12-13
[12] F. W. Beare, "The Mission of the Disciples and the Mission Charge: Matthew 10 and Parallels," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89, no. 1 (1970): 3-4, https://doi.org/10.2307/3263634.
[13] See Acts 1:13, 2:1-5.
[14] McDowell provides an important examination of the likelihood of each apostle's martyrdom in *The Fate of the Apostles*.

an individual mentioned in the book of John, may also be Bartholomew.[15] According to this Gospel account, Christ remarks he saw Nathanael under a fig tree prompting the apostle to exclaim, "You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel" and in turn enter into his ministerial role (John 1:43-47).

Synonymous or not, names do little to illuminate the obscure biblical life of the apostle. Only the apocryphal texts and hagiographic sources provide any additional information about Bartholomew's early life, where his ministry took him, where he died and whether he was martyred. Four prominent traditions stand out within these Gnostic writings, each of which testifies to the apostle's martyrdom.[16] Firstly, in the *Acts of Philip*, a fourth- or fifth-century text that recounts the miracles of the disciple by the same name, Bartholomew traveled to Hierapolis where he and Philip are imprisoned for ministering and then to Lyconia where he is crucified for his faith.[17] Secondly, according to the Coptic Synaxery, the apostle ministered in Parthia where he was thrown into the sea "in a sack full of sand."[18] A third, more prominent account describes Bartholomew in Armenia where, according to tradition, he was martyred in Albanus. In his fifth-century

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[15] Alongside the ordering of names in the synoptic Gospels, McDowell further suggests that Bartholomew and Nathanael are synonymous given the former is a "family name." He also points out that neither Bartholomew or Nathanael is mentioned in the same book. See McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, 27, 211. Dwight Moody Smith rejects this claim, however, suggesting it is a "groundless" assertion that depends solely on the ordering of names with little evidence beyond a categorical genus. See Smith, *John* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 75.

[16] McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, 211.

[17] McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, 211-15. For a description of Bartholomew's martyrdom as found in this source, see Francois Bovon and Christopher R. Matthews, eds., *The Acts of Philip: A New Translation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 99-105.

[18] McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, 212, 216. For a thorough overview of this source, see Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, trans. R.M. Wilson (Cambridge: J. Clarke & Co, 1991), vol. 2, 451-52.

History, scholar and "Father of Armenian History," Movsēs Xorenac'I remarks: "There came into Armenia the Apostle Bartholomew, who suffered martyrdom among us in the town of Arepan."[19] While Xorenac'I remains silent about how this disciple was killed, numerous liturgical sources uphold that he was flayed alive for his faith.[20] A final tradition found within the fifth- or sixth-century text, *The Passion of Bartholomew*, details how the disciple travelled to India where he was beaten, beheaded, and thrown into the sea. This narrative, however, would later incorporate the description of flaying that originated in Armenia.[21]

Bartholomew's martyrdom by excoriation is mentioned in both the *Breviarium apostolorum* (c. 600), which recounts how the disciple "was skinned alive by the barbarians in Albanopolis, Great-Armenia, and at the command of . . . Astargis [Astyages], beheaded and buried on 24 August."[22] The flaying of the saint is also discussed in St. Isidore of Seville's seventh- or eighth-century work, *De ortu et obitu patrum*. This text pays special attention to Bartholomew's missionary efforts, praising the apostle's translation of Matthew and describing his martyrdom. For "preaching," recounts

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[19] McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, 217. Also Movsēs Xorenac'I, "History of Armenia," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, vol. 8, *The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, the Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 706.

[20] Els Rose, *Ritual Memory: The Apocryphal Acts and Liturgical Ocmmemoration in the Early Medieval West (c. 500-1251)* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 86. See also McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, 216-18.

[21] J. K. Elliot notes *The Passion of Bartholomew* was preserved in Greek, Latin, and Armenian. See Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 518. Also, McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, 218.

[22] Cited in Rose, *Ritual Memory*, 86-7.

Isidore, "he was skinned alive by the Barbarians in . . . Great-Armenia and buried."[23] Likewise, in the fourth century St. Ambrose, one of the Four Doctors of the Western Church, confirmed that Bartholomew was flayed in his Preface for the apostle, stressing that he remained "steadfast as always in the faith."[24] As Ambrose makes clear, Bartholomew was willing to lose his skin and his life in order to remain obedient to the gospel mission.[25]

In the Medieval period, separate traditions like Isadore's and Ambrose's would come together as cohesive narratives. However different they may be, these sources unanimously affirm he was martyred.[26] Jacobus de Voragine's significant thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* stands as a chief example of this narrative hybridity. This text, as Andrew M. Beresford remarks, was one of the "most widely circulated of the great medieval hagiographic compendia."[27] It reconciled many of these other prominent traditions in its retelling of how Bartholomew was martyred.

Voragine, however, focuses on the connection between death and faith by relying on the tradition he was flayed. In his lengthy chapter on the disciple's apostolic ministry, he recounts how Bartholomew was performing miracles when word came to Polemius, referred to as "the king of that region," who sought someone to cure his daughter's demonic fits. Polemius and his subjects converted to Christianity upon her healing and destroyed the statues of their previous gods once they had been baptized. At the same

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[23] Cited in Rose, *Ritual Memory*, 87.
[24] Cited in Voragine, "Saint Bartholomew," 501.
[25] Voragine, "Saint Bartholomew," 500-1.
[26] Rose, *Ritual Memory*, 87. Also McDowell, *The Fate of the Apostles*, 220. Ronald Brownrigg argues these disparate traditions could easily coexist. See Brownrigg, *The Twelve Apostles* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 136.
[27] Beresford, *Sacred Skin*, 12.

time, the king's brother, a devout pagan named Astyages, learned of this event and summoned Bartholomew to answer for converting Polemius to Christianity. Astyages demands that Bartholomew bow down and worship his god Baldach. He exclaims "abandon your God and sacrifice to my god" and states that noncompliance would be punished with death. Refusing to participate in this act of image worship, the apostle rebukes this request, which subsequently shatters the statue of the god. Tearing his robes in response, Astyages orders Bartholomew to be beaten and flayed alive.[28]

In Voragine's influential description, Bartholomew's status as a martyr is clearly linked to flaying and skin. This is affirmed by his saintly role as the patron of dermatology and of those suffering from skin diseases. He is also the patron saint of tanners,[29] which likely derives from the *Acts of Philip* and its description of Bartholomew who was "pinned" to a wall and "stretched out" like the hide of an animal during torture.[30] Ribera investigates this clear link between skin and saint. Not only does the life-like quality of paint draw attention to the apostle's flesh, an issue which I will return to in chapter two, but other references to the dermis also proliferate in the work. For instance, the limp shroud that rests underneath Bartholomew is a material that evokes both the texture and substance of skin inasmuch as that of the canvas. This visual motif resonates

[28] Voragine, "Saint Bartholomew," 496-98.
[29] Kachiu C. Lee and Barry Ladizinski, "Bartholomew the Apostle: The Saint of Dermatology," *JAMA Dermatology* 149, no. 10 (2013): 1194, https://doi.org/10.1001/jamadermatol.2013.6135. See also, C. Rogalski and U. Paasch, "Haut Und Messer: Attribute Des Heiligen Bartholomäus," *Der Hautarzt* 54, no. 5 (2003): 458, https://doi.org/10.1007/s00105-003-0523-4; and David Hugh Farmer, "Bartholomew," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
[30] Bovon and Matthews, *The Acts of Philip*, 99.

with the writings of St. Theodore who noted that Bartholomew's epidermis "was pulled off as if to make a bag."[31]

Another dermic detail in the composition is highlighted in a later work attributed to eighteenth-century engraver Hamlet Winstanley (fig. 2) based on Ribera's painting. Here, Bartholomew is shown bound to a tree; his left arm is tied to a broken stump and his right leg to the large trunk of another. In this engraving, the peeling bark is like the painted shroud; it also parallels the stripping of skin from Bartholomew's body. In his *Sermo IV de sancto Bartholomeo*, Voragine compares the apostle's flesh to the trunk of a tree. As he explains, the disciple's dermic bark gave way to the "white" and virtuous layer of sainthood beneath as it was peeled away through martyrdom.[32] Winstanley underscores this connection by using similar line work to connote the skin of the disciple and the exterior of the tree, drawing parallels between the two textures and surfaces. Furthermore, a knife, one of Bartholomew's primary attributes, has been stabbed into the trunk in the upper left corner penetrating its external, skin-like layer.

Ribera's imagery of Bartholomew, which so insistently draws attention to surfaces and skin can be interpreted in terms of recent scholarship that theorizes the importance of flesh in defining human identity. A key idea is that skin is the location where a person's sense of self is constructed and presented.[33] Claudia Benthien, for instance, argues that it is a vital "interface" or "boundary between body and culture."[34] The intact dermic layer both joins and separates the interiority of the body from the

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[31] Cited in Voragine, "Saint Bartholomew," 501.
[32] Beresford, *Sacred Skin*, 13-14.
[33] Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 26-28.
[34] Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), viii.

external world. In a similar vein, Steven Connor suggests that flesh is an "integument and screen," the "guarantee of the wholeness of the body."[35] Skin is understood as a vital demarcator of an individual's bodily integrity and thus of identity. Yet, when these theoretical insights are put in dialogue with Ribera's painting, the question arises: what happens when this layering is violated or when wholeness is substituted with fragmentation?

Bartholomew's desecrated form equally communicates positive implications. While flaying, according to Benthien, "deprives the victims of their identity along with their lives" it is also a process of "transformative regeneration."[36] Ribera's depiction of excoriation captures this moment of change to sainthood; when the apostle is scraped of both his dermic and human layers.[37] As Edward Payne aptly put it, Bartholomew is thus "made" anew through the "unmaking" of his body.[38] In sum, as he loses his mortal flesh, Bartholomew gains his true identity as a saint.

This positive view of excoriation is evident in Michelangelo's painting of the apostle on one of the walls of the Sistine Chapel in Rome (fig. 3). Michelangelo portrays the disciple as a glorified saint in heaven with his body wholly intact. Clutching the limp epidermis of his former, tortured self, Bartholomew proudly brandishes the crown of his martyrdom alongside the instrument of his torture. The apostle who confronts us in Michelangelo's fresco has been reimbursed for his faithful endurance. As Daniela Bohde has suggested, the artist reminds that "exaltation and humiliation, self sacrifice and

[35] Connor, *The Book of Skin*, 26.
[36] Benthien, *Skin*, 72, 79.
[37] Benthien, *Skin*, 79, 84. See also Cornea, ""Why Tear Me from Myself?,"" 185.
[38] See Payne, "Skinning the Surface," 86, 89, 97-98.

redemption" lead to eternal life.[39] Through bodily violence and transformation, Michelangelo emphasizes suffering as a means to salvation.[40] In the apt words of St. John Chrysostom, an early Church Father and Bishop of Constantinople, martyrdom is the "root and source and mother of all good things."[41] For Chrysostom, to die for one's faith is to receive everlasting life when the mortal body becomes immortal through faithful endurance.[42] In a like manner, Michelangelo's portrayal relays this positive conception through Bartholomew's martyrdom.[43]

Excoriation is also referential of the artistic process—both image and saint are created through change. According to Benthien, the flayed victim is both "material" and "object;" a medium for the flayer to sculpt with his knife and a bodily spectacle once the skin has been removed.[44] There are certain parallels here between Ribera and this canvas. The artist who scrapes layers of painted flesh onto the art object calls to mind the flayer who strips skin from the saint's body. Moreover, the instrument of torture employed by the executioner parallels Ribera's artist practice. The sliding of paint across the surface

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[39] Daniela Bohde, "Skin and the Search for the Interior: The Representations of Flaying in the Art and Anatomy of the Cinquecento," in *Bodily Extremities: Preoccupations with the Human Body in Early Modern European Culture*, ed. Florike Egmond and Robert Zwijnenberg (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 23-24.

[40] Sharon Gregory notes while this self-portrait depicts the artist at judgement it also conveys his "profound belief in God's Grace" and salvation. See Gregory, "Michelangelo, St. Bartholomew, and Northern Italy," *Renaissance Studies* 32, no. 5 (2018): 786, 805, https://doi.org/10.1111/rest.12380.

[41] Cited in Michail Galenianos, "The Value of Martyrdom in Times of Persecution According to St. John Chrysostom," *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 6, no. 1 (2015): 52.

[42] Galenianos, "The Value of Martyrdom," 55-56.

[43] Bohde, "Skin and the Search for the Interior," 45.

[44] See Benthien, *Skin*, viii, 78-79. On the connection between art making and violence, and the artistic paradigm of flaying more broadly, see Payne, "Skinning the Surface," esp. 90-93, 95-98.

calls to mind the blade slipping through Bartholomew's arm, and the spreading of pigment likewise the scraping of flesh. The limp, skin-like shroud resting beneath Bartholomew's torso recalls his own bodily transformation inasmuch as that of the canvas; both are, in the words of Connor, "reborn through change."[45]

Elevated through materialistic gesture, these two disparate "skins" of flesh and fabric collapse into one.[46] Bartholomew and the cloth coalesce into a single pictorial unit that emphasizes the materiality of the saint as well as the material qualities of the canvas itself. This visual alignment equates the saint with a surface; the work and the apostle become consubstantial. Visually idiosyncratic, the woven canvas fibres thus become synonymous with the apostle's painted skin.[47]

Taken to an extreme, Bartholomew becomes a canvas. Viewed this way, the transformation enacted by Ribera takes place on the body of the apostle.[48] A drawing of a similar martyrdom scene (fig. 4) completed by the artist in 1649 emphasizes this deeper relationship between pictorial and corporeal skin. The bound saint has his arms forced apart while his feet are pulled downwards. One executioner is shown in the midst of binding Bartholomew to a tree while the other has already begun to peel away layers of his flesh. The body pulled across the picture plane metaphorically alludes to the stretched canvas that would have been fastened upon a wooden frame. Here, we might also consider the ways in which Ribera's own artistic process parallels this image as in preparation for painting, his canvas was stretched over a wooden frame, pulled, tightened,

[45] Connor, *Book of Skin*, 32. Also Payne, "Skinning the Surface," 97.
[46] Cornea, ""Why Tear Me from Myself?,"" 164-65.
[47] Cornea, ""Why Tear Me from Myself?,"" 164.
[48] Cornea, ""Why Tear Me from Myself?,"" 163-64.

and finally bound. Similar to the artistic medium, the flayer could only begin his execution once his own "surface" had been prepared and properly tied down.[49] Ribera's focus is on the external—this violence occurs on the woven fibres of the canvas where he explores this issue of superficiality, a stage where everything is presented and yet contained, unable to be penetrated. In effect, the artist demonstrates that the mortal body of Bartholomew is just a surface. The true identity of the saint is both immortal and immaterial.[50]

Cautious of the potential dangers of visual imagery, especially in the post-Reformation period, Ribera suspends visuality on the materiality of the canvas. As Cornea has suggested, by emphasizing the superficiality of the painting, the artist denies "corporeal and pictorial depth."[51] In other words, Ribera emphatically reminds the viewer that truth is found in neither body nor image.[52] While image veneration has played an important role in Christian devotion, sacred art also was often the subject of controversy. Iconoclasm—the destruction of religious art—has a long history in Christianity. As early as 722, the Byzantine emperor, Leo III, issued a series of edicts aimed at prohibiting the usage of icons in Christian worship and practice. This program subsequently led to the destruction of many of Byzantium's artistic objects.[53] Indeed, sacred art is haunted by

[49] Payne, "Skinning the Surface," 97.
[50] Benthien, *Skin*, 79.
[51] Cornea, ""Why Tear Me from Myself?,"" 164.
[52] My thanks to Angela Vanhaelen for pointing this out to me.
[53] Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils, 325-1870* (Garden City: Hanover House, 1961), 145-46, 148-49. See also Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 348-53.

the fear of idolatry; the veneration directed towards images could be perceived, notes Philip Hughes, as "superstitious and sinful."[54]

In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation ushered in another wave of iconoclasm. Distrust of religious imagery was expressed most forcefully by reformed theologian, John Calvin. In challenging sacred art, he noted "nothing should be painted and engraved but objects visible to our eyes: the Divine Majesty, which is far above the reach of human sight, ought not to be corrupted by unseemly figures."[55] Calvin viewed Roman Catholic art as a violation of the second commandment, which prohibited the making and usage of images. His admonition for the rejection of sacred art, as Angela Vanhaelen has pointed out, was rooted in a fear of misplaced worship, and he proposed a focus on the Bible that would "replace the image with the Word."[56] In doing so, he aimed to rectify what he viewed as the idolatrous wrongs of Catholicism.[57]

Contrary to the admonitions of the reformers, however, sacred art was deemed an integral part of Christian worship. The twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent (1545-63), the Catholic Church's response to the Protestant Reformation, succinctly reaffirmed:

> Images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints are to be had and to be retained particularly in [churches], and that due honor and veneration are to be given them; not that any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them on account of which they are to be worshipped . . . as was of old done by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols.[58]

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[54] Hughes, *The Church in Crisis*, 149.
[55] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin*, 7th American edition, translated by John Allen, 2 volumes (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1900), 1:126.
[56] Angela Vanhaelen, *The Wake of Iconoclasm: Painting the Church in the Dutch Republic* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 33.
[57] Vanhaelen, *The Wake of Iconoclasm*, 33.
[58] *Dogmatic Canons and Decrees: Authorized Translations of the Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent, the Decree on the Immaculate Conception, the Syllabus of Pope*

As Trent made clear, the veneration of imagery was a beneficial practice that directed the viewer's attention to the spiritual and drew the faithful closer to God. Yet, the council insistently clarified that the art object possessed no power in and of itself; it was not inherently divine. What is more, Trent went on to differentiate between the reverence shown God and attitudes towards sacred art more generally:

> The honor which is shown [images] is referred to the prototypes, which those images represent; in such [ways] that by the images which we kiss, and before which we uncover the head, and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ; and we venerate the saints whose similitude they bear.[59]

This was not a new idea. Thomas Aquinas had differentiated between forms of worship and adoration centuries earlier. In his thirteenth-century *Summa Theologiae*, he presented a tri-fold distinction between the adoration (*Latriae*) reserved for God alone, the *Hyperdulia* shown towards Mary, and the *Dulia* offered the other saints. The same logic that distinguished between the worship of God and the reverence of saints differentiated the image from an idol. The veneration of the sacred object was emphatically defined as distinct from the adoration of God.[60]

Aware of the potential danger of image worship, Ribera appears to uphold the doctrines of Trent in this religious painting. He ensures that the surface of the canvas is emphasized to prohibit the potential pitfalls of a work that transgresses too deeply into realism and encourages one to become entranced by its pictorial depth. Horst Bredekamp describes this dangerous terrain using the example of the Vera Icon or Mandylion that

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Pius IX, and the Decrees of the Vatican Council with *imprimatur* of Archbishop John Cardinal Farley (New York: Devin-Adair, 1912), 167-169.

[59] *Dogmatic Canons and Decrees*, 169.

[60] Ralph McInerny, *Introduction to the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas: The Isagogue of John of St. Thomas* (South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2004), 163.

was touched to Christ's face by St. Veronica. An art object that seems to substitute the body for an image, effectively becomes a "window." And it acquires the potential to easily transfix the beholder who might treat it as though it contained a living presence.[61] To this end, Bartholomew is shown as all surface to overcompensate for the potential pitfalls of an image that appears to perform this "image act."[62] Ribera encourages the viewer to be moved by the realistic depiction, yet to do so from a distance. By emphasizing the surface of the canvas through the unapologetic traces of the artist's hand, Ribera calls attention to the object's surface to show it is emphatically an image made by human hands.

Touching the Surface

The *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*'s overt violence is amplified by the canvas, which seems to ripple not only with paint but also with human flesh. This "capacity," as Hanneke Grootenboer points out, for a material substance to "mimic human skin" invests the painting with a heightened degree of realism.[63] As argued above, Ribera's technique distances the viewer from the object by emphasizing its superficiality. Consequently, this commands the viewer's focus so that they are visually suspended, as if caught on the surface. Here, the focus shifts from the painting's convincing illusionism to its tactile potential. In this way, Ribera creates a viewing experience whereby the spectator comes to not only see but also to feel the scene of Bartholomew's martyrdom.

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[61] Horst Bredekamp, *Image Acts: A Systematic Approach to Visual Agency* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 137-40.
[62] Bredekamp, *Image Acts*, 138.
[63] Hanneke Grootenboer, "Introduction: On the Substance of Wax," *Oxford Art Journal* 36, no. 1 (2013): 9, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/kct001.

The traces of pigment betray the intensity of how paint was applied in impasto strokes that are both thick and thin. Fittingly, when the painter Paolo de Matteis (1662-1728) wrote about Ribera's technique, he described how "forcefully" the artist applied pigment. As he put it, "every turn of the brush equals a turn of the muscle."[64] While de Matteis highlights the semblance between paint and skin, his focus lies with the idiosyncratic dimensionality of Ribera's canvas which he describes as churning with musculature. The visible working of the paintbrush across the canvas surface recalls the flayer who tends to Bartholomew's arm. In sum, the material and textural qualities of pigment caught de Matteis' attention, and his comments demonstrate how Ribera's paint was likened to flesh.[65]

The material qualities of the work thus engage the faculty of touch and involve more than just sight. Through an exploration of "tactility, texture, [and] articulated surfaces," Itay Sapir suggests that Ribera dispenses with visuality as the primary sense choosing instead to "involve" all of the senses.[66] For Sapir, the textures staged on the canvas surface are a means to explore "alternatives to sight's supremacy."[67] And therefore, Ribera's work might be better understood as an investigation of the senses, most especially touch.[68] Building on Sapir's argument, I propose that the tactile materiality enhances the violence of this martyrdom scene, allowing viewers to "touch" the experience of the saint depicted.

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[64] Cited in van Gastel, "Slow Violence," 6.
[65] Van Gastel, "Slow Violence," 6.
[66] Sapir, "Pain and Paint," 45, 49-51.
[67] Sapir, "Blind Suffering," 30.
[68] Sapir, "Blind Suffering," 32.

Ribera's critics and biographers were quick to pick up on his elision between paint and flesh. De Matteis additionally remarks that Ribera's treatment of skin is so "lifelike" that it "tricks the eye . . . [with] inimitable diligence."[69] In a like manner, Italian art historian Bernardo De Dominici captured the unsettling qualities of the artist's technique when he noted in his 1742 *Vite dei Pittori, Scultori, ed Architetti Napolitani* that "no other painter, be it from the past or our own times, has painted more vivacious and true to life heads of old men, giving them all those folds, all that dryness and other signs brought about by old age."[70] For both writers, Ribera's prowess did not lay in his skill at achieving a high degree of realism. Rather, it was his ability to seemingly transubstantiate paint into flesh and mimic the textural quality of the human dermis that distinguished him in the eyes of critics. As van Gastel rightly notes, Ribera not only represents the skin of the apostle in a life-like manner but "*re-presents*" it, transmuting the paint into a viscous, fleshy layer.[71]

To this end, we may follow Michael Camille and turn to the idea of the simulacrum. The simulacrum is a term that Plato employed to label the "false likeness" of something that appears so closely to the original that it becomes mistaken for it.[72] In effect, this illusionistic falsity threatens the distinction between a prototype and its copy, as it plays with the boundary between reality and representation.[73] The simulacrum acts as a substitute for the real; its external appearance convincingly embodies that of the

[69] Cited in van Gastel, "Slow Violence," 6.
[70] Cited in van Gastel, "Slow Violence," 5.
[71] Van Gastel, "Slow Violence," 8.
[72] Cited in Michael Camille, "Simulacrum," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), para. 2.
[73] Camille, "Simulacrum," para. 1-2.

original.[74] Fittingly, such notions resonate with the insights of Ribera's biographers who were unsure of whether he had applied paint to a canvas or actual human skin.

Ribera's life-like work also demonstrates representational violence in how the pigment was applied. As recorded by the artist Giovanni Navarretti in 1646, "the Painter [Salvator] Rosa was here, and he says that *lo spagnoletto* [the little Spaniard, that is, Ribera] applies his colours in a most forceful manner, that he finishes his paintings in just one go [già alla prima], the paint extraordinarily dense."[75] Rosa points out the obviously thick viscosity of paint and underscores his comment about Ribera's aggressive approach with a consideration of the material qualities of the notably gelatinous pigments. In his *Vite*, De Dominici additionally pointed out a connection between painting and violence:

> And so [Ribera] return[ed] to his earlier studies, and began to paint with bold innate power and tremendous (*tremendo*) impasto so dense and full of colour, that can reasonably be said that in this respect he superseded Caravaggio himself.[76]

The term "*tremendo*" is of importance as it implies the artist employs his hands directly in the process of creation, abandoning his tools of art making in favor of direct bodily intervention. The paint therefore becomes shaped and formed through the immediate manual labor of the painter's fingers and hands.[77] This manner was to also accrue a violent association. As Cornea details, the "word *tremendo* . . . can be seen as a reference to the way [in which a] painting is executed;" with violence and "a terrifying intensity that threatens the integrity of the subject."[78] The artist not only paints with copious quantities of pigment but he also forsakes his tools in order to brutally carve the flesh of

[74] Camille, "Simulacrum" Para. 2, 4-5.
[75] Cited in van Gastel, "Slow Violence," 5.
[76] Cited in Cornea, "Flaying the Image," 120.
[77] Cornea, "Flaying the Image," 120-21.
[78] Cornea, "Flaying the Image," 121.

his image with a kind of viscerality that parallels the flayer who disregards his knife to forcefully peel open Bartholomew's arm.[79] Spanish painter Antonio Palomino noted this in 1724 when he aptly suggested that Ribera

> express[ed] horrendous and rough things: which are the bodies of old man, dried, wrinkled and consumed with skinny and haggard face; all done with natural accuracy, as a passionate painter, with force and elegant handling: as it is made visible by the Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew, where he is being flayed and the internal anatomy of his arm exposed.[80]

Here, Ribera is described as passionately expressing the material realism of bodily flesh as he carves, moulds and sculpts the oil pigments. As Palomino's description makes clear, this kind of violence had a strong affective impact. And it is fitting that he sees in Bartholomew's painting a perfect pairing of ferocity and materiality, whereby the act of flaying appears to occur on the surface of the canvas itself.[81]

In viewing the lingering brush strokes and gobs of paint, we might call to mind Walter Benjamin's discussion of the aura; an innate uniqueness or original "authenticity" absent with technological reproductions, most especially photography and film.[82] As Benjamin notes, a faithful copy lacks "its presence in time and space, its unique existence."[83] When the serialized object replaces the original, the artwork's aura vanishes rupturing the temporal connection between creator and created.[84] Laura Marks has offered a compelling take on Benjamin's essay, viewed through the lens of hapticity. She

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[79] Cornea, "Flaying the Image," 120.
[80] Cited in Cornea, "Flaying the Image," 122.
[81] Cornea, "Flaying the Image," 121-22.
[82] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Shocken Books, 1969), 2-3.
[83] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 3.
[84] Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 4.

proposes that when the aura vanishes, the artist's touch along with a shared sensorial experience between viewer and object also dissipate. For her, the aura is:

> The material trace of a prior contact, be it brushworks that attest to the hand of the artist or the patina on a bronze that testifies to centuries of oxidation. Aura enjoins a temporal immediacy, a co-presence, between viewer and object. To be in the presence of an auratic object is more like being in physical contact than like facing a representation.[85]

The visual residue of the artist—a brushstroke for instance—is immediately tactile and fosters a mode of viewing that incorporates the sense of touch through this dimensionality. These haptic qualities create an auratic and sensorial experience.

The material features of a work of art can incite a haptic mode of engagement that extends beyond merely sight.[86] As Marks has argued:

> If one understands . . . viewing as an exchange between two bodies—that of the viewer and that of the [object]—then the characterization of the . . . viewer as passive, vicarious, or projective must be replaced with a model of a viewer who participates in the production of the [viewing] experience. Rather than witnessing [it] as through a frame, window, or mirror, the viewer shares and performs [artistic] space dialogically.[87]

While optical viewing enforces the distinction between viewer and object, the haptic dimensions involved in experiencing a work of art replace a detached mode of engagement with one that works to sensorially affect the beholder. In this way, the viewer becomes actively involved with the material qualities of the artwork.[88]

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[85] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 140.
[86] See also Marks, *Hanan Al-Cinema: Affections of the Moving Image* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015); and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
[87] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 149-50.
[88] Marks, *Hanan Al-Cinema*, 275-76.

There are various techniques that create such a sensorial experience. Hapticity can be fostered through materiality that draws attention to the surface.[89] In *memento-mori* like fashion, these fleeting qualities allow us to empathize with an object that is both "damaged and mortal."[90] Decay and traces of deterioration elicit an empathetic response that affects the beholder. Encouraging a discourse or a dialogue, they provoke an interaction. Auratic qualities like cracking and peeling paint prevent beholders from visually entering an image. Confronted with the mortal presence of the artwork, sight is forced to remain on the surface and the encounter rests with the image of decay itself. Such a focus on mortality highlights the viewer's shared experience with the object as unique, fleeting, and temporally irreplaceable.[91]

Through this kind of visuality in which the surface of the object is emphasized, passivity is replaced by active touching and engaged looking. As Marks argues, both viewer and object become sensorially entangled when the ocular sensation of touching creates a "bodily relationship between the viewer and the image."[92] Ribera does this most notably through paint—the three-dimensional pigments that protrude from the canvas and flake away, peeling with age.[93] Inherently haptic, art objects become increasingly tactile as they deteriorate with time. And with each viewing experience, with each piece of peeling paint separating from the canvas surface, we feel the mortality of the object.[94] In the case of Bartholomew, the craquelure of aging paint conflates with the wrinkling of

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[89] Laura Marks, "Haptic Aesthetics," in *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. Michael Kelly (Oxford University Press, 2014).
[90] Laura Marks, "Haptic Aesthetics."
[91] Laura Marks, "Haptic Aesthetics." Also Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 162-63.
[92] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 164.
[93] Cornea, "Flaying the Image," 125.
[94] Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 172.

aging flesh. Like the old men whose skin full of "dryness and other signs brought about by old age" captivated De Dominici, Bartholomew's martyrdom causes one to be struck by the physical qualities of its ephemerality.[95]

Here, I return to Ribera and argue that he employed haptic aesthetics in his portrayal of Bartholomew to incite an empathetic response from the viewer and move them to greater piety. Textures call attention to the materiality of the canvas itself. The viewer's eyes touch and feel the curves of Bartholomew's skin. They become suspended on the qualities of his fractured flesh; what Palomino referred to as a body defined by "rough . . . dried [and] wrinkled" skin built up through paint.[96] The viewer is forced to caress the cracking layer of pigment and the jarring corners of deteriorating paint that stick out from the canvas body along with the dense, viscous pigments that define his sagging dermis. And in this way, the violence is not only made affective in its embodiment and portrayal, but in its sensorial tactility. Our sight plunges in and out of Bartholomew's aberrations and we peel back layers of his flesh as we gloss over the canvas not only seeing but also feeling his wounds. This kind of sensory experience had the potential to heighten the devotional impact of an object to those who beheld such an image, inspiring religious piety and fervor. In short, viewers were inspired to witness inasmuch as experience the apostle's martyrdom.[97]

At the same time, there is something uneasy about Bartholomew's tactile body. As Maria Loh notes, visceral images like the apostle's martyrdom force the viewer to

[95] Cited in van Gastel, "Slow Violence," 5.
[96] Cited in Cornea, "Flaying the Image," 122.
[97] Hammerschmidt, "Beyond Vision," 213-14.

remain fixated upon the material surface, "to look with critical eyes wide open."[98] Unflinching, the exposed musculature of the apostle who confronts us with his body stripped of flesh is both shocking and intensified by the materiality which behaves like an actual dermis. Through such a profound encounter—what Loh describes as an "embodied" and "visceral response"—we experience and come to engage with the work "as if it were real."[99] Confronted with a tangible image of shocking violence, the viewing experience affects not just our intellect but also our senses.[100]

The devotional potential of this painting of Bartholomew would have worked well within the confines of a church. Likely positioned as an altarpiece, the proximity of Bartholomew to the altar would have drastically heightened the power of the scene of martyrdom and of the liturgy taking place in front of it. The senses were viewed as an important means of enkindling faith and many Counter Reformation devotions encouraged believers to engage all of the senses in practices of religious piety. As Erin Benay notes, by bringing "the sense of touch to the act of painting," artists allowed viewers to "experience firsthand" the mysteries of Christian salvation.[101] Relics, sacraments, and paintings allowed the faithful to become partakers of the transformative realities of their faith and enter into physical proximity to the saints depicted, and thus to Christ.[102] Indeed, this experience was referential of the transformational power and nearness of the Eucharist that would have taken place beneath on the altar, allowing

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[98] Maria Loh, "Early Modern Horror," *Oxford Art Journal* 34, no. 3 (2011): 326.
[99] Loh, "Early Modern Horror," 329.
[100] Loh, "Early Modern Horror," 331-32.
[101] Erin Benay, "Touching is Believing: Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas* in Counter-Reformation Rome," in *Caravaggio: Reflections and Refractions*, ed. Lorenzo Pericolo and David M. Stone (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 73.
[102] Hammerschmidt, "Beyond Vision," 213.

believers to likewise come into contact with Christ through the sacrament. As Benay rightly adds, like paintings of saints who demonstrated their belief in Jesus, the liturgy likewise played a "crucial part in confirming the Resurrection, and thereby the layperson's faith."[103] The worshiper who engages with the painting, as they would other sensorial practices of the Catholic faith, comes into contact with the divine.[104] Fostered through Ribera's concern with the surface and its tactile potential, the viewer thus participates in this scene of martyrdom and ultimately salvation by their very viewing of it.[105]

Touch and Truth

In *The Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew*, touch is the means through which truth is uncovered: torture is a method to extract it. This process is the central theme in an ink drawing dating after 1635 (fig. 5). Ribera depicts two inquisitors who look towards a central figure hung by the wrists on a device known as the *garuccha*.[106] The arms are twisted behind the individual's torso and pulled above their head as they are hoisted into the air. Here, the artist captures the procedure of extracting confessions—one inquisitor is engaged in dialogue with the accused, scribbling notes as the suspect writhes in torment. While executed with minimal line work, Ribera's documentary-like sketch meticulously delineates the subject's agony. As L. C. Álvaro explains, details like the dislocated

[103] Benay, "Touching is Believing," 68.
[104] Benay, "Touching is Believing," 73.
[105] Hammerschmidt, "Beyond Vision," 213. See also the important chapter by Benay, "Touching is Believing," 59-82.
[106] Henry Kamen outlines how this device was used. See Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 175.

shoulders and "the loss of sphincter control and consequent involuntary defecation" demonstrate intense physical suffering.[107] Here, the horrifically painful process of deterring heterodoxy and forcing confession is front and center.

In the *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* (fig. 1), Ribera captures the moment in which the apostle, having been offered a choice—"abandon your God and sacrifice to my god"—is subject to the executioner who attempts through the stripping of flesh to forcibly deter Bartholomew's Christian beliefs.[108] Here the apostle is punished for remaining faithful to his savior. His body suffers for refusing to abandon from the truth, the true God, whereas the inquisitorial subject is punished for departing from it. Both subjected to violence, the physical and confrontational touch inflicted upon these figures reminds of the larger role that bodily fragmentation played in relation to truth.

These two examples call to mind a painting by Ribera's influential predecessor Caravaggio. In his *Doubting Thomas* of c. 1602 (fig. 6), Caravaggio captures the precise moment when Thomas inserts his finger into the Christ's gaping wound. Verifying that the body he touches is in fact that of his resurrected Lord, Thomas' unbelief is transformed into belief as he slides his finger into Jesus' pierced side. The "wounds" that Thomas probes were not only an important site of violence for the apostle's faith but also for a society that depended on physicality as part of its interactions with the human figure.[109] In a similar manner, the bold red on the peeled layer of Bartholomew's right

[107] L. C. Álvaro, "Neurology and Medicine in Baroque Painting," *Neurosciences and History* 1, vol. 5 (2017): 31.
[108] Voragine, "Saint Bartholomew," 498.
[109] Allie Terry-Fritsch refers to physical aberrations on the body as "wounds." See Terry-Fritsch, "Proof in Pierced Flesh: Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas* and the Beholder of Wounds in Early Modern Italy," in *Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern*

forearm and the transgression of bodily boundaries between the executioner's hand and the apostle's exposed interiority likewise enacted an ontological change. As I argue, Bartholomew's wounds similarly offer "proof" functioning as a site of tactile knowledge production. Much like the aberrations Thomas probes, Bartholomew's broken figure can be equally situated within a larger societal concern with the body, and the ways in which it could serve as both visible and tangible evidence. Unlike a body that relates to medicine, criminality, or disease, however, Bartholomew's wounds attest to the larger role torment and torture played in relation to remaining faithful to the truth.[110]

Aberrations on the body had the potential to expose, confirm, and convict.[111] To the inquisitorial mind, bodily wounds served as a site whereby dissident orthodoxy could be purged.[112] At the same time, they were crucial to the Catholic faithful who viewed martyrs' wounds as important sites of truth. Bartholomew's broken form reflects a larger societal concern with bodily fragmentation; what Todd Olson describes as the "torture, mayhem, and dispersal" of the body as a larger symbol that spoke of Catholic endurance.[113] This violence emboldened the faithful to remain steadfast within the tense and volatile climate of the Counter Reformation by finding inspiration in the figures of early Christians who had been persecuted.[114] By conflating martyrdom with

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Europe, ed. Allie Terry-Fritsch and Erin Felicia Labbie (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 16-17.
[110] Terry-Fritsch, "Proof in Pierced Flesh," 16-17.
[111] Terry-Fritsch, "Proof in Pierced Flesh," 17.
[112] Esther Cohen, "The Animated Pain of the Body," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (2000): 50.
[113] Todd Olson, "Pitiful Relics: Caravaggio's Martyrdom of St. Matthew," *Representations* 77, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 116.
[114] Olson, "Pitiful Relics," 126.

representational violence, Ribera encourages viewers to see themselves as martyrs for the Catholic church.[115]

The increasing power of the Inquisition in the Counter-Reformation period is significant for understanding the proliferation of imagery of torture and violence. The Inquisition had been established in the latter half of the twelfth century as a response to perceived heresy. While it sought to combat the religious threat that grew within the Spanish Crown, the Inquisition would later spread throughout Europe, surfacing in Italy and Portugal as well as the colonies of Spain.[116] What had begun as a medieval and exclusively spiritual affair bled into the secular realm when Pope Sixtus IV authorized its establishment in Castille in 1480. The Crown's goal of unifying Roman Catholic Christianity led to the dissolution of the boundaries separating secular from religious authority. Inasmuch as the Inquisition sought to counteract the "destabilizing effects of heresy," the Crown's view that it was a religious as well as public threat thus resulted in a secular approach to sacred matters, and recourse to judicial punishments for religious crimes.[117] For instance, it was understood that heretics alongside those who aided or defended them were to be placed under anathema, cut off from the sacraments and receive no Christian burial.[118] In addition, dissidents were to have their material goods confiscated. Those found guilty of heresy lost their tangible as well as spiritual

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[115] Olson, "Pitiful Relics," 127.
[116] Damian J. Smith, *Crusade, Heresy, and Inquisition in the Lands of the Crown of Aragon (c. 1167-1276)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 171-72. For a detailed account of the various colonial inquisitions, see Hans-Jürgen Prien, *Christianity in Latin America*, trans. Stephen E. Buckwalter (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
[117] Prien, *Christianity in Latin America*, 199-200.
[118] Smith notes they were to be fundamentally separated from the Catholic Church. See Smith, *Crusade, Heresy, and Inquisition*, 172-73.

possessions. Conversely, those who fought against heterodoxy were encouraged and even protected by bishops and secular authorities for participating in what was viewed as a righteous cause. In the goal of maintaining catholicity throughout the Spanish world, the slippage between secular and sacred affairs meant that heresy jeopardized the salvation of the soul as well as the integrity of the state.[119]

Literature on the procedure of inquisitorial trials attests to the methods used in pursuit of and the punishments employed to extract truth. For instance, Nicholas Eymerich's fourteenth-century *Directorium Inquisitorium*, a manual that would be of importance to both the Spanish and Italian inquisitions, was a book that recommended various methods to coerce the truth out of the accused.[120] One strategy involved suggesting there was already a reason for conviction. The inquisitor was advised to confront the accused by saying "it is clear that you are not telling the truth, and the true story is what I say it is. Therefore tell me clearly the truth of the matter."[121] Eymerich's text additionally recommended the inquisitor frighten the suspect into confessing by saying "I wish that you had told me the truth, so that I could have finished your business. Thus you would not have to stay here a prisoner."[122] While this text, like others, was not

[119] Smith, *Crusade, Heresy, and Inquisition*, 172-73. Also Prien, *Christianity in Latin America*, 205.
[120]Edward Peters, *Inquisition* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 109. See also Jonathan Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 198; and James Buchanan Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society: Power, Discipline, and Resistance in Languedoc* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 47-48.
[121] Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 47-48.
[122] Given, *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, 48.

unanimously authoritative, it nevertheless offered methods to extract a confession and enjoyed numerous editions.[123]

The inquisitorial process initially began in one of two ways. As Frans Ciappara highlights, there was an "*accusatory*" method in which a subject was tried on the basis of the testimony of an accuser.[124] While this depended heavily on the witness, it sided with the accused if they were found innocent or if the accuser's testimony failed. Conversely, there was the "*Inquisitorial* procedure" whereby the authorities collected the information and persecuted the accused themselves. In either case, a denunciation brought up by witnesses was treated as valuable proof serving as vital importance to the trial procedure.[125]

Once a denunciation had taken place or there was enough public notice of an offence, an inquisitor began an examination into the claims, opening an investigation through an initial stage called the "*processo informativo*" or "preliminary investigation."[126] This period determined if the resources, materials, and evidence collected formed a compelling case that merited further inquiry or a fallacious claim that was dismissed. While the goal of this initial step, Thomas F. Mayer highlights, was to "punish the guilty and absolve the innocent," its primary concern was arriving at the truth.[127]

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[123] Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition*, 198-99.
[124] Frans Ciappara, "The Roman Inquisition Revisited: The Maltese Tribunal in the Eighteenth Century." *The Catholic Historical Review* 103, no. 3 (2017): 442, https://doi.org/10.1353/cat.2017.0109
[125] Ciappara, "The Roman Inquisition Revisited," 442-43.
[126] Thomas F. Mayer, *The Roman Inquisition: A Papal Bureaucracy and Its Laws in the Age of Galileo* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 171.
[127] Mayer, *The Roman Inquisition*, 174.

Should the evidence be sufficient, the accused would be subject to punishment. Typically, this would come from the Church in the form of penitential reparation, but if individuals failed to justify themselves or accept responsibility, a more severe punishment was used.[128] The inquisitors maintained that a subject could only be tortured once, forbidding its use repeatedly. However, this restriction was circumnavigated by inquisitors who merely treated each torture session as a "suspension," picking up from where they had left off.[129]

Among the devices used during torture, Henry Kamen draws attention to three that stood as the most reliable:

> The *garrucha*, the *tocca*, and the *potro*. The *garrucha* or pulley involved being hung by the wrists from a pulley on the ceiling, with heavy weights attached to the feet. The victim was raised slowly and then suddenly allowed to fall with a jerk. The effect was to stretch and perhaps dislocate the arms and legs.[130]

Ribera's drawing (fig.5) depicting the *garrucha* captures the bodily harm this device was capable of inflicting. And while the goal of torture was not to greatly injure the person, the helpless victim in Ribera's drawing who convulses in agony represents one instance where this "goal" was neither followed nor achieved.[131]

The methods of torture enacted by the Inquisition represented an intensive knowledge and physical engagement with the body.[132] As Terry-Fritsch notes, pain and the human figure were viewed as reliable ways to "test the purity, or truthfulness" of

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[128] Ciappara, "The Roman Inquisition Revisited," 452.
[129] Ciappara, "The Roman Inquisition Revisited," 452-455. Also Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 174.
[130] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 175.
[131] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 175.
[132] Terry-Fritsch, "Proof in Pierced Flesh," 20.

someone.[133] This relationship was key; it meant physicality was understood as a means of determining the verisimilitude of something.[134] Furthermore, it also meant that the body was understood as *the* way to examine the interior value of someone and to judge their truthfulness. In an inquisitorial setting, this emphasis on touch and verisimilitude was the very means through which heresy was revealed and cured. As Esther Cohen expands, "pain was a diagnostic tool in justice."[135] The agony of the body held the potential to both convict and absolve, and thus served as a tactile avenue to the truth.[136]

Wounds inflicted upon an individual were related to larger truths upheld by the Church. Bodily punishment and physical pain were viewed as forms of penance. "Torture," one inquisitorial jurist argued, "can be called agony of soul and body for the extraction of truth."[137] Aberrations were not only capable of convicting but equally reconciling. To this end, bodily violence acted as an immediate and temporal punishment for sin. "Torture replaced the judgment of God," notes Frans Ciappara, and thus those who withstood such treatment were deemed innocent, including those who were in fact guilty.[138] If we place Ribera's St. Bartholomew within this larger understanding of torture, we see how the saint's forbearance of horrific pain displays his inner strength and unwavering faith.

Indeed, in Olson's examination of the relationship between pictorial violence and issues of iconoclasm, he describes martyrial wounds as the "forensic traces" of a

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[133] Terry-Fritsch, "Proof in Pierced Flesh," 20.
[134] Page DuBois, *Torture and Truth* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 11.
[135] Cohen, "The Animated Pain of the Body," 50.
[136] Cohen, "The Animated Pain of the Body," 50.
[137] Cited in Cohen, "The Animated Pain of the Body," 50.
[138] Ciappara, "The Roman Inquisition Revisited," 456.

believer's righteous death.[139] Tactile and immediate, artists like Ribera and Caravaggio, who restage martyrdom scenes by exploring the pictorial potential of painting, link the material with the representational and in doing so remind of the necessity of forbearance for one's salvation. Through imagery that emboldened its viewers, the martyrial wounds located on Bartholomew's body served as more than just the evidence of a saint who had died for his faith: they were tactile symbols that had contemporary importance for the believer. Painted aberrations as well as larger scenes that portrayed the violent deaths of the saints emerged in a Post-Trent Church that saw itself as a militant entity maintaining the truth and combatting the imposing threat that heterodoxy posed to that truth.[140] And thus paintings like the *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* relayed the importance of remaining steadfast regardless of the physical cost.

Catholicism was combative in its approach to the Reformation. This Catholic "militancy," Olson points out, blossomed into a "generation of devotees who willingly sought to imitate the early martyrs."[141] The countless Italian scenes of martyrdoms that featured gratuitous scenes of violence in the years following Trent not only bolstered the faithful but also contributed to the Church's identity; it reimagined itself as a martyr. While Catholics were subjected to the violent and iconoclastic practices of Protestant Reformers, images nevertheless presented a tangible form of reassurance that they were suffering for their correct faith. Scenes of saintly deaths replayed the material violence of martyrdom. And by doing so, viewers were encouraged by those who had already suffered and died for their belief. Ribera relays the temporal consequences as well as

[139] Olson, "Pitiful Relics,"115.
[140] Olson, "Pitiful Relics," 117-19, 123-28.
[141] Olson, "Pitiful Relics," 123.

eternal fruits of remaining steadfast to truth. And the figure of Bartholomew offers a tangible model for the Church that, like the fragmented bodies of saints, encouraged viewers to persevere in their right-believing cause. The *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* thus served as a tactile reminder for viewers that endurance for the sake of truth was rewarded with salvation.[142]

Conclusion

Ribera's *Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* stages a complex relationship between tactility and materiality. Collapsing the boundaries between paint and skin, and subsequently between the pictorial figure of Bartholomew and the corporeal body of the canvas, Ribera presents an image that asks viewers to reflect upon what they see, touch, and subsequently feel. While some scholars have paid careful attention to the relationship between materiality and subject matter and how this works to heighten the violence of the scene, this thesis has argued that the extreme violence of martyrdom is made especially poignant through hapticity, which generates an intensely sensorial confrontation that moves the viewer to piety. As the viewer is forced to fixate on the wounded surface, they engage in the dynamics of touch shared by the flayer and Bartholomew. Such a tactile engagement with representational aberrations is a forceful reminder of the value and importance of material wounds on the bodies of martyrs. The commemoration of the saints provided tangible symbols of those who witnessed to, defended, and died for remaining loyal to the true God. In the context of the Counter Reformation,

[142] Olson, "Pitiful Relics," 117-28.

Bartholomew's broken body served as a clear reminder to the faithful that the reward for remaining steadfast to truth, to their faith, and to God was indeed worth suffering for.

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