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AS ART FORM

(TITLE)

BY

Karen Karabasz

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1974 YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

5.3.74 DATE

5-3-74 DATE

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I want to thank my graduate committee: Carl Wilen, Dick Moldroski, and Jerry McRoberts, for all their encouragement, confidence and assistance; for giving me the freedom to develop as an artist, and expecially for their friendship.

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There are things that are known. There are things that are unknown. In between are the doors.

--Author Unknown

Sixteen years of parochial education, emphasizing sin, suffering, and sacrifice have resulted in a continual use of accepted and respected imagery in my work. Catholic philosophy of punishment and restraint has denied my natural emotionalism, resulting in a strong sense of order and austerity in the formal aspects of my creative work. Constant negativism and allusions to sin affected my entire outlook and approach to life, which resulted in a chronic guilt syndrome. Although I have always wanted to be an artist, my interpretation of the Catholic way of life did not allow for this: the inevitability of being subjected to nude models might be the stimulus for an "impure" thought, thus damning my soul to the fires of hell forever! So, I sublimated my goals and desires and forced myself into a discipline of nursing, a decision that was actually an extreme sacrifice for me. But it was, in essence, another life style that perpetuated the rigidity and regimentation of my religion at that time. I was angered by my warped morality and sense of values, by my constant guilt and fear of sin, and by unrealistic demands of the Catholic religion. I felt compelled to speak out against the indoctrination to which I was exposed. But instead of feeding my hostility, I used the negative influences and transformed them into symbolic forms for my creative statements. Instead of a blatant emotional or expressionistic attack, I have chosen to express my hostility in

subtle satire, an highly formalized and intellectualized manner. The content and message, however, are so escteric that most people will not be able to relate to the iconography.

A spectrum, a fence, and nine feet of plastic ribbon were three assigned elements to "work with" in a graduate materials course. Initial ideas involved the literal construction of a fence surrounding a prism reflecting a spectrum of color. But the problem solving process and the creation of a work of art for me involves reduction of both form and concept, as opposed to an additive completion. The three given elements were reduced to conceptual tools and the problem solved in metaphysical terms. Zeroing in on the concept, "spectrum of parochial education", employed the spectrum element. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, one definition of spectrum is "a broad sequence or range of related qualitios, ideas, or activities". A series of nine balsa wood constructions of empty reliquaries were chosen to portray this concept. The constructions themselves and the entire concept of visually depicting the birth, growth, and development of a movement, isolates or symbolically fences off parochial education, if that were indeed, a possibility. And the stark whiteness of the forms, and emptiness of each construction were an intentional satire relating directly to the theme of the statement.

The reliquary is a container for keeping or exhibiting a relic or relics. George Ferguson, <u>Signs and Symbols in Christian Art</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 168.

A relic then, may be a body, or part of a body of a saint, or anything, such as clothing, associated with the saint which the Church venerates because of the sanctity of the person while on earth. The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism, explained by Rev. Bennet Kelley, (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1969), p. 249.

Nine, symbolic of the "nine months" of human life development in "utero", seemed an appropriate number of reliquaries to house the sequence of ideas and developments related to parochial education.

All were physically "blind niches" except for the ninth which contained a small baroque-type frame inside of which was present only the number nine, "9". The physical form in turn was reminiscent of a question mark, or a quasi-embryonic shape--which ironically is placed in the last construction.

I felt at this point that the viewer needed a bit more imagery in order to relate or to become involved with this statement. So the following poem was written in order to compliment the sculptural constructions.

small niche from time departed filled with faded memories of faithful teachings

dogma and philosophy reflected in patent leather 1

calendars of discipline² governing activity and desire

Patent leather shoes were discouraged and even forbidden in several parochial schools. Some of the nuns felt that the sheen of the patent leather might reflect a girl's underpants, thereby encouraging "impure" thoughts. These negative allusions to sexuality permeated the parochial educational system.

²The only birth control measure permitted by the Church is the rhythm method (jokingly referred to as "Vatican Roulette"), which involves sexual abstinance during a woman's fertile period.

habits of purity and collars of infallibility filling young minds with unquestionable truths

segregated followers
"lilies of the valley"
- - plucked and dead
before maturity

magical beads⁴ - - - an ikon of highest order

Habits of purity and collars of infallibility are reflective of the garb worn by the religious priests, brothers, and sisters. Taking the vows of religious life (voluntary poverty, perpetual chastity, and perfect obedience) is considered the best way to walk in the footsteps of Christ and Mary. The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism. p. 101.

[&]quot;The doctrine of the excellence of virginity and of celibacy, and of their superiority over the married state, was . . . revealed by our Divine Redeemer . . .; so too, it was solemnly defined as a dogma of divine faith by the holy Council of Trent." Pope Pius XII, Encyclical on Sacred Virginity, cited by Rev. Bennet Kelley (see above, p. 103).

²Baptism into the Catholic faith enables one to enter "heaven" after death. Infant Baptism is encouraged, and according to Rev. Bennet, "Catholic parents who delay or entirely neglect the Baptism of their children, commit a mortal sin. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 154. And, well known to Catholic education, if a person dies with mortal sin on his soul, his soul is doomed to hell forever.

The lily is a symbol of purity. Originally, in Christian symbolism, the lily was employed as an attribute of the virgin saints. Ferguson, Signs and Symbols in Christian Art. p. 33.

The rosary is a form of devotion to the Virgin Mary which consists of a series of meditations and prayers centering around events in the life of Christ and the Virgin. The prayers are counted on a string of beads consisting of five sets each of ten small beads separated by one single bead, with the addition of a crucifix and five more beads. Ibid., p. 168.

collections of sacrificial gifts spontaneous and sincere? 1 rendering essentials 2 to a void

Pandora's box?³
perhaps too large
but similar in content
and perhaps another ikon

changes and improvements?
means to an end?
a measure of growth
to the birth of comprehension
- - spectrum of catholicism

After writing the poem, a change of form affecting the entire statement came about. With need for more direct viewer involvement, the first "event" was conceived. Each verse of the poem was written on a small card, placed in an envelope and sealed with wax. One verse was placed in each of the nine reliquaries.

The "event" itself took place at 9:00 p.m. on the third floor of the art building at Eastern Illinois University. The nine reliquaries were arranged on the wall in the hallway. Beneath the

Catholics have a responsibility of contributing to the support of the Church. The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism, p. 139. Tithing is the suggested and preferred method whereby one-tenth of one's yearly income is given to the Church. In some parishes, yearly financial statements are printed and distributed, listing each parishoner and the amount of his "contribution". By this practice, "keeping up with the Joneses" seems to be encouraged.

²The "essentials" refer to the treasures of the Vatican and ultimately the Church, which include property, priceless art, etc..

³Pandora's Box refers to the confessional, which is an enclosure or box where a priest hears confessions. Catholics are required to confess their "sins" to a priest at least once a year. Ibid., p. 138.

An "experience" or "event" is a multi media art form designed for a small number of participants, predicated on intimacy and controlled through the environment.

constructions was the nine feet of red plastic ribbon, which served as an ironic contrast to the purity of the boxes.

Three people were invited to this "event", representing the instructor for the materials class, an art historian, and a female art instructor. Each viewer, or participant, carried a candle through the darkened hallway, pausing at each reliquary long enough for the envelope to be removed from the niche, the seal broken, and the verse read aloud. After the last reliquary was viewed and the verse read, the viewers were led into a room where bread was broken, and the bread and wine were shared.

There was an appeal to many senses in order to evoke responses from the viewer-participant. It almost seems that the final portion of the "event" was the end product of the entire statement. Perhaps, in determination to reach and involve the viewer, this is true. In theory, many of the ideas in this art form are related to the Baroque principles of the seventeenth century.

The Baroque was an age of applied elaborate decor, which involved total integration of painting, sculpture and architecture. It assaults the senses through extreme physical size, illusionary effects, controlled viewpoint, and technical virtuesity, thereby encouraging one to become emotionally involved. It was an age, it seems, that ruling monarchs sought to compensate for the minuteness of their domains by the vastness of their royal works and the splender of their

According to Ferguson (p. 152), red is the color of blood, which is associated with the emotions, and is therefore, symbolic of both love and hate. Red, the color of soverign power among the Romans, has a similar meaning in the dress of cardinals, princes of the Church.

²Julius S. Held, and Donald Posner, <u>17th and 18th Century Art</u> (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, and New York: Prentice-Hall and Harry Abrams, 1972), p. 16.

courts. It has been said that Baroque art is the "product of a Catholic and monarchical society, whose highly complex elements were united spiritually around God, and in the temporal sphere around the prince".

brations, opera, concerts, ballets, comedies, tragedies, funerals, secular and religious ceremonies; everything was a pretext for festivity. What better era could offer a more apt historical reference for a satirical statement which is representative of the religious descendants of philosophy from the seventeenth century? And so by assaulting the viewer visually and psychologically by the nine quasiarchitectural constructions, mentally and audibly by the reading of the poem, and actively by the drama of the ceremony, the viewer was forced into involvement through the imagery and environment. The "event" culminated with the bread and wine ceremony, which is symbolically linked to the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation.

While the Baroque flourished in ornate architecture and design of undulating curves, outward thrusts, restriction and expansion of space, all nine of the reliquaries were stark and simple in design. Each was the same size, 8" x 12", consisting basically of two pilasters supporting a frieze, cornice and pediment(Fig. 1).

lGermain Bazin, The Baroque, translated by Pat Wardroper (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1968), p. 38.

²Ibid., p. 66.

Transubstantiation is the change of the entire substance of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism, p. 251.

The "event" of dramatizing parochial education was no sconer over when plans of a follow up experience began. Creative efforts were directed into one statement, relying even more strongly on the Baroque concept of the synthesis of the arts. The seven sacraments were chosen as the primary point of departure, and with that, the form of a whole new "experience" grew.

The sacrament piece was intended to be a personal, individual experience; intentions were to involve the viewer and provoke response. Unlike the Dada quasi-"happenings" of the 1920's where diverse activities, presented at the same time, and simultaneous poetry readings accompanied art exhibits, this "event" was a more controlled environmental activity and experience. As a matter of fact, the environment as well as each individual art object were all part of the same statement.

The floor, walls, ceiling and windows of the artist's studio were painted white, thus creating an environment, or dematerializing atmosphere which in turn heightened the sterility and mystery of the "event". With the environment and the objects both white, they seemed to fuse together, making the objects themselves appear to hover mysteriously in space. Through these effects, their scale, in turn, became questionable. The whiteness was an important element because it emphasized the mood and content of the statement. Color would only distract the viewer, and weaken the impact—a similar thought of

¹Michael Kirby, Happenings (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1966), p. 29.

 $^{^{2}}$ "An environment is usually considered to be a work of art or a creation that surrounds or encloses the viewer on all sides." Ibid., p. 2^{h} .

Rauschenberg when he created the seven paneled white Fainting in 1951.

And like Rauschenberg, who wanted "to make a picture that no two people would see the same thing," the hope of evoking different responses from each participant was prevalent. The seven candles that lighted the room cast shadows, making the participants very much a part of the piece visually, each in a different way.

The sacraments themselves were represented by seven balsa wood constructions consisting of a 9" x 12" cabinet-like box with double doors. The participant was required to open the doors which revealed objects that were in some way significant of each sacrament. In addition to the seven "sacramental" doors, there was a closet door to be opened inside of which was created a church-like environment consisting of a quasi-altar flanked by seven paintings symbolizing or representing relics of the seven participants.

The participants were representatives of both art and non-art backgrounds. They were related in gradated degrees personally, and sociologically to the artist, and by the same token, had similar relationships to each other. Each participant, with the exception of the artist, received the following invitation:

Please join me in experiencing the Seven Sacraments Friday - December 14, 1973 7:00 p.m. 1526 9th Street

I ask that you wear black and bring a personal key that you have used - - to become a permanent part of this creative endeavor.

¹ Andrew Forge, Rauschenberg (New York: Harry Abrams, 1967), p. 14.

of the seven planned participants, the following six were present: J. P. Karabasz, Carl Wilen, Jerry McRoberts, Dick Moldroski, Ken Hadwiger, and Karen Karabasz. Gilbert Fite, President of the University, was unable to attend.

The principle of juxtaposing opposites is woven throughout the iconography and immediacy of this event. Also similarities to Baroque and Dada principles may be noted. According to Rubin, "the ideal Dada act was a paradoxical, spontaneous gesture, aimed at revealing the inconsistency and inanity of conventional beliefs" The core of this statement might be either criticism or veneration, but the response and decision is left to the viewer. The black attire of the participants, a dramatic contrast to the total white imagery, was symbolic of a memento mori, 2 or a metaphor of good versus evil philosophy. But chiefly through external likeness, the similar apparel attempted to unify. The giving of a key is symbolic of sacrifice, and yet it forced the viewer to actively contribute to the creation of an artistic statement. They truly became "participants".

The first box (Fig. 2) depicts the sacrament of Baptism, the sacrament that "gives our souls the new life of sanctifying grace by which we become children of God and heirs of heaven". 4 Closed doors represent those "gates of heaven" and illusionistically as well, by a

William Rubin, <u>Dada</u> and <u>Surrealist Art</u> (New York: Harry Abrams, 1968), p. 11.

 $[\]frac{2_{\text{Memento}}}{\text{of death.}}$ mori is a phrase translated to mean a grim reminder

⁵The proverbial "keys of the kingdom" refers to the attribute of St. Peter who is regarded as the guardian of the Gate of Heaven. Ferguson, <u>Signs and Symbols in Christian Art.</u>, p. 176.

 $^{^{}h}$ The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism. p. 152.

drawing instead of an actual three-dimensional construction. The drawing was enframed within the box, and an actual pitcher¹ (5" in height) containing water² was placed in front of the drawing. The illusionary aspects of the drawing were in direct opposition to the reality of the pitcher. The viewer is then left to speculate as to whether the doors will ever be opened; whether or not the pitcher has any relation to the closed doors; or what side of the doors is desirable.

The second box (Fig. 3) reveals a pair of boxing gloves hanging from a treelike structure. Because the sacrament of Confirmation is said to make one "strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ", images of strength were chosen and united. The tree has been an important image in Christian symbolism. Biblical references in Genesis 2:9 to the Tree of Knowledge, indicate the power of the tree, since Genesis relates that the fall of man resulted from Adam partaking of the fruit from that tree. The boxing gloves, on the other hand, are symbols today of agressive strength. And so, past is combined with present and inert strength of the tree is juxtaposed with the agressive or defensive strength of the boxing gloves. In their greatly reduced size, however, the images no longer appear to command strength, but seem to evoke a fragile appearance.

The pitcher may be called a "readymade", a term introduced by Marcel Duchamp in the Dada movement and defined by André Breton in 1934 as "manufactured objects promoted to the dignity of objects of art through the choice of the artist."

²Only Baptism of water actually makes a person a member of the Church. The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism, p. 153.

^{3&}lt;u>Ibid.</u>, p. 157.

milk bottles. One totally white bottle is isolated from the rest, and is elevated. The other three bottles, in various states of impurity, are placed in a milk carrier, as if waiting to be taken away and cleansed. The imagery and iconography for this sacrament of Penance relates specifically to an old copy of the <u>Baltimore Catechism</u>, whereby the soul is compared to a milk bottle. According to the catechism, a pure white bottle is significant of a soul free from any sin, and containing sanctifying grace. The other three bottles represent the soul in the state of sin. The small black spots in the milk bottle represent venial sin, whereas the totally black bottle is a soul without grace, or stained by mortal sin. Since Penance is the sacrament by which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven, the bottles allude to the state of the soul.

The Holy Eucharist is a "sacrament and a sacrifice. In the Holy Eucharist, under the appearances of bread and wine, Christ is contained, offered, and received". A piece of bread displayed atop

Rev. Michael McGuire, The New Baltimore Catechism No. 1 (Chicago: Benzinger Brothers, 1942), p. 25.

Sanctifying grace is that grace (life) which confers on our souls a new life, that is, sharing in the life of God Himself. The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism, p. 60.

Mortal sin is a grievous offense against the law of God, and examples have included; eating meat on Friday, missing Mass on Sunday, practicing birth control by methods other than rhythm, etc. Venial sin is a less serious offense against the law of God. These offenses include lying, disobedience, anger, unkindness, etc. Ibid., p. 26. (see also footnote 2, p. 4). Although previously enforced, today, neither eating meat on Friday, nor missing Mass on Sunday is considered a mortal sin. It's interesting to speculate as to what has happened to those souls who were condemned to hell for those earlier "offenses".

⁴<u>Ibid</u>., p. 162.

a banner illustrates this sacrament (Fig. 5). An interesting feature of this box is the significance and quality of light present. The candlelight placed each participant in the boxes through the shadows. And in this box, the combination of the white bread and banner placed in the white box interior, almost negated the object represented through the lighting and shadowing effects.

The fifth box (Fig. 6), containing a piece of fur partially zipped, is indicative of female genitalia. And yet the fur is an unearthly or heavenly white--epitomizing the virginal female. This box is symbolic of Holy Orders and specifically the concept of celibacy. 1

Marriage, on the other hand, (Fig. 7) is represented by an empty box enclosed by bars. According to the Catechism, "Matrimony is the sacrament by which a baptized man and a baptized woman bind themselves for life in a lawful marriage and receive the grace to discharge their duties." Their duties are to God, each other and their children. Help to fulfill these duties² comes from God.

Married people must learn, according to the Catechism, to love unselfishly, to forget themselves so that they can spend themselves for each other. They surrender themselves to God's plans for marriage to bring children into the world and to care for them. "5 Birth control (other than rhythm), and divorce is therefore forbidden. Further-

Holy Crders is the sacrament through which men receive the power and grace to perform the sacred duties of bishops, priests, and other ministers of the Church. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 212 (see also footnote 1, p. 4)

²"The chief duties of the husband and wife in the married state are to be faithful to each other and to provide in every way for the welfare of the children God may give them." Ibid., p. 216.

³Ibid., p. 217.

more, the <u>Catechism</u> states: "If a couple gets a divorce in a court, God refuses to remove the marriage bond. They might walk out of the court and think they are no longer married and can each go to look for a new partner. But God keeps the marriage bond on them and if either of them attempts a new marriage, it will not be a real marriage but adultery." This box reflects the Church's refusal to acknowledge divorce.

The last box (Fig. 8), containing a ladder is indicative of what has been known as the "last sacrament". Extreme Unction (last annointing) is the sacrament which "gives health and strength to the soul and sometimes to the body when we are in danger of death."²

According to the Catechism, this sacrament has been compared to tonic for the soul. "In order to enter heaven, the soul's love must be perfect, and this sacrament prepares for this by healing the weakness and sluggishness of live of God which is left even after the wounds of sin have been healed."³

After opening the doors to the individual "sacramental" boxes, the closet door presented another experience for the participants. Photographs of each participant's front door were taken. And those photographs were used for paintings (Figs. 9 - 15) which consisted of only fragments of each door. So upon entering this small environment,

lud. Furthermore, a civil marriage (one not ministered by a priest) is considered adulterous and mortally sinful.

²Ibid., p. 209.

³ Ibid.

there was a personal recognition. There was also, on the far left wall, a type of altar containing two candles, a copy of the <u>maltimore</u>

<u>Catechism</u>, and an urn, into which the keys were to be placed.

*bove the altar was a naturalistic painting in color of double doors which served as a type of icon. The reflective mirrors of the painting revealed an enigmatic figure. Flanking this painting were the seven 9" x 12" black and white paintings of the fragments of the participants" doors.

After each participant individually experienced the "event", he went into an antercom to wait for the others. When all six of the participants had gathered in the room, bread, wine, and conversation were shared. While the conversation following the first "event" was very much a part of the "experience", I feel that the sacrament piece was complete when the last door was closed. Subsequent discussion seemed anticlimatic.

has been working with total art and viewer involvement concepts since the 1950's. While his "happenings", are spontaneous, people oriented activities, my "events" are essentially private and intellectual. His art seems to be centered primarily around audience participation, but I have hoped to evoke responses through individual involvement. My "events" were created to be visually impermanent; the content or concept being almost as important as the works themselves. The immediate future direction of my art, therefore, will continue to revolve around Catholic symbolism, since there is still much more to be said.

Interestingly enough, all the keys but two were placed in the urn. One key was placed in box 5, another in box 7.

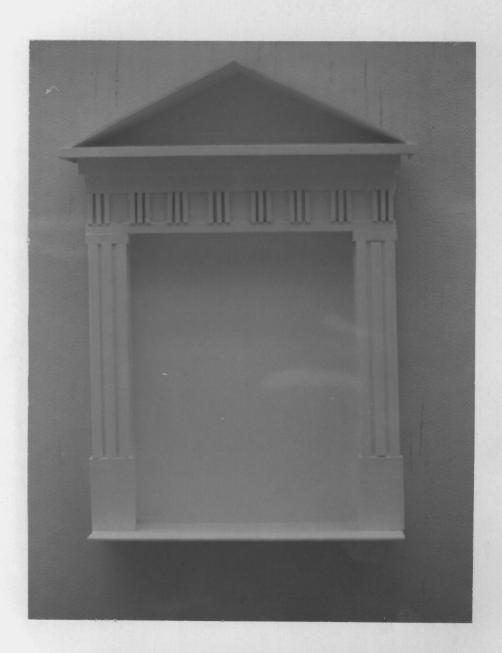


Fig. 1. One of nine reliquaries from the "experience", Spectrum of Parochial Education.



Fig. 2. Baptism, from the Seven Sacraments.



Fig. 3. Confirmation, from the Seven Sacraments.



Fig. 4. Penance, from the Seven Sacraments.



Fig. 5. Holy Eucharist, from the Seven Sacraments.



Fig. 6. Holy Orders, from the Seven Sacraments.



Fig. 7. Matrimony, from the Seven Sacraments.

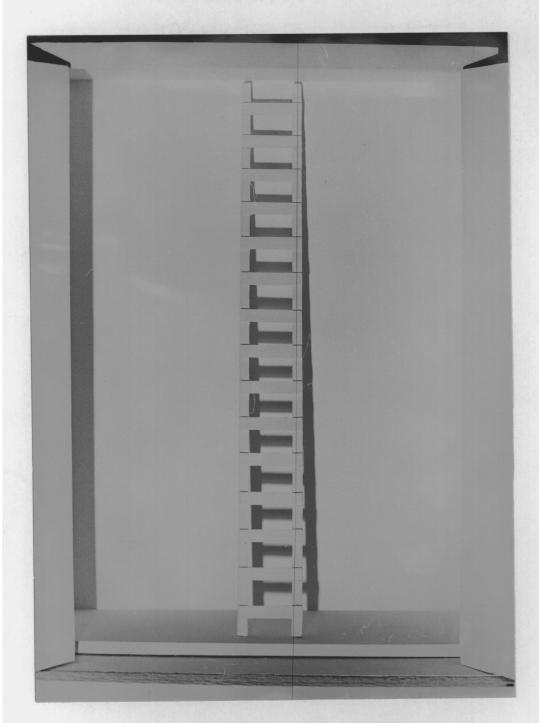


Fig. 8. Extreme Unction, from the Seven Sacraments.

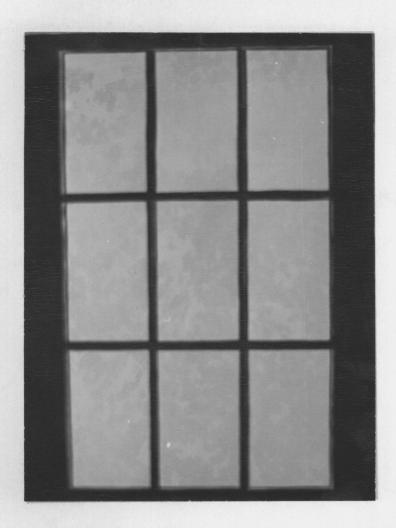


Fig. 9. Karabasz door (inside looking out), from the Seven Sacraments.



Fig. 10. Moldroski door, from the Seven Sacraments.



Fig. 11. Wilen door, from the Seven Sacraments.

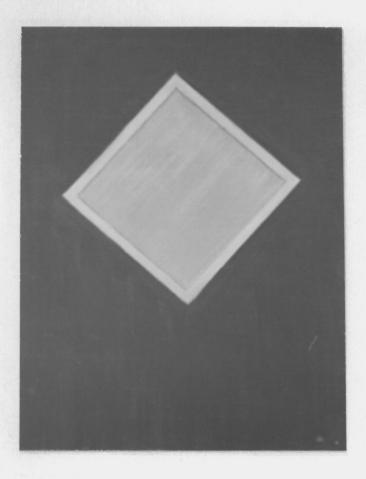


Fig. 12. McRoberts door, from the Seven Sacraments.

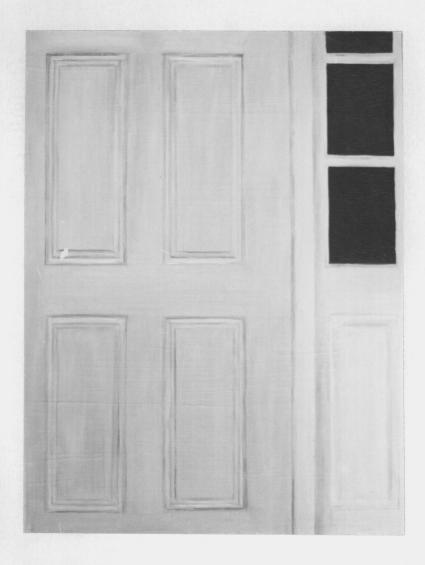


Fig. 13. Hadwiger door, from the Seven Sacraments.

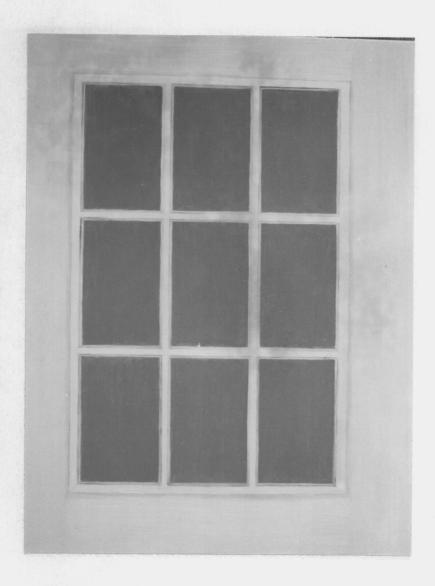


Fig. 14. Karabasz door (outside looking in), from the Seven Sacraments.



Fig. 15. Fite door, from the Seven Sacraments.

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