

"Triskel are delighted to present *Chiesa Dei Miracoli* as its first commissioned exhibition for 2008, our thirtieth anniversary year. Since its foundation in 1978 Triskel has always championed the individual vision of the Visual Artist, whether emerging or established, and so we are especially pleased to present George Bolster's first solo exhibition for Cork, where he was born in 1972, at a time in his artistic life when he has come to prominence internationally."

– Tony Sheehan, Artistic Director, Triskel.



HYMNS FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM:

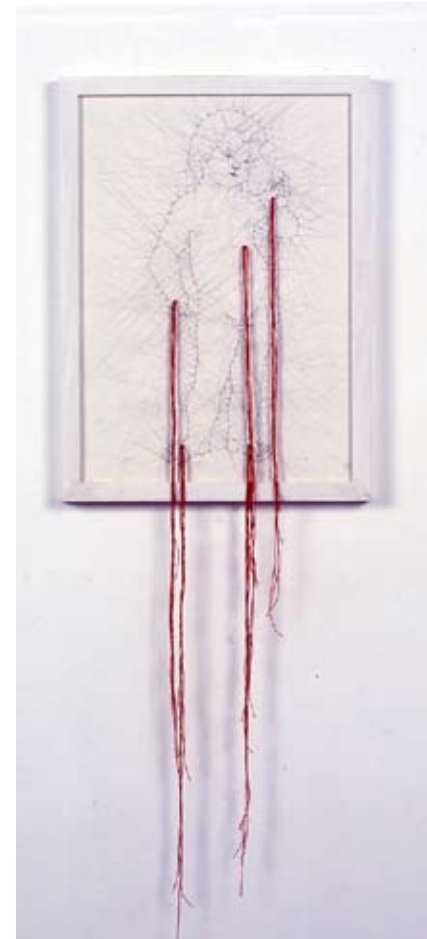
Culture And Religion In The Works Of George Bolster

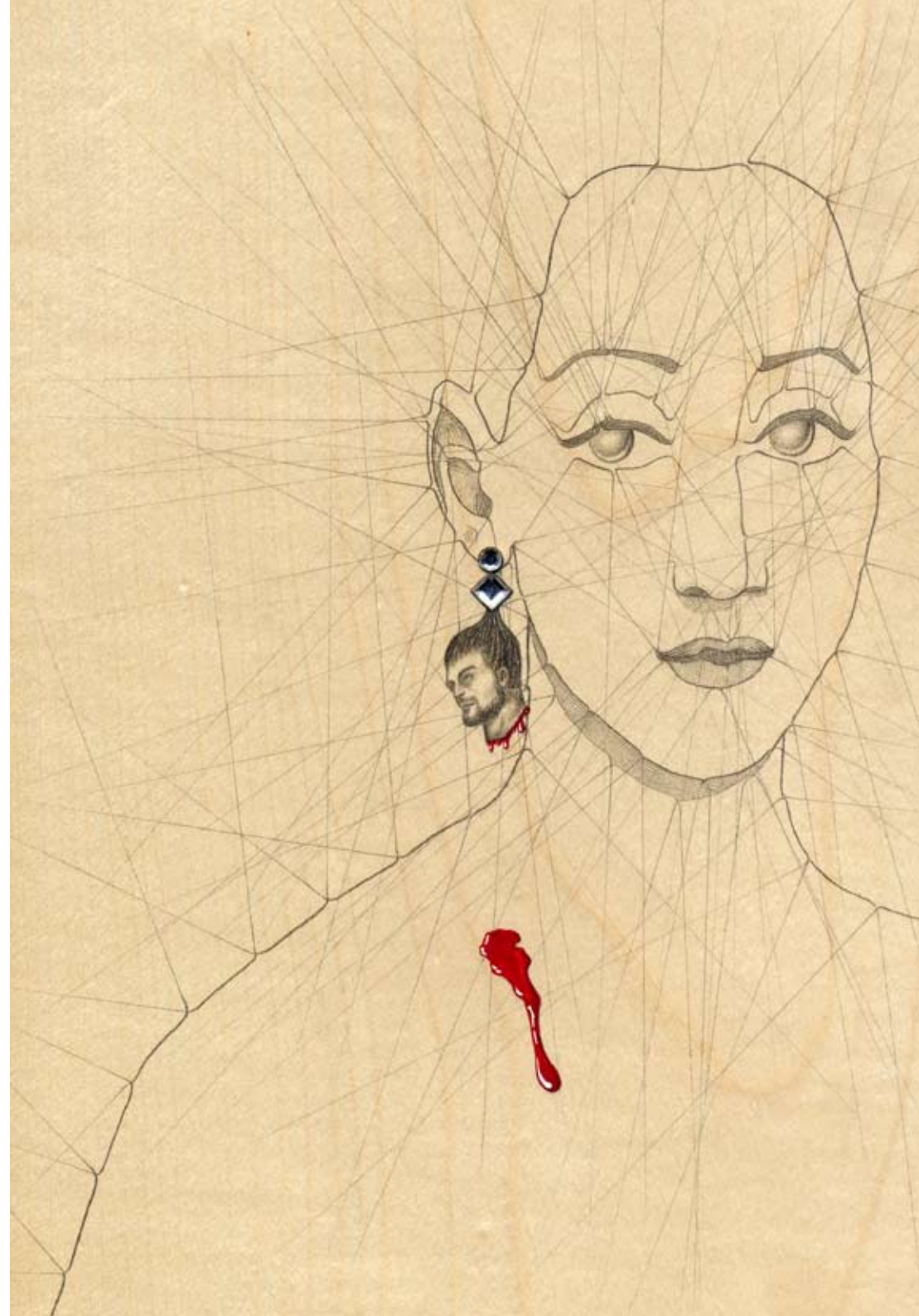
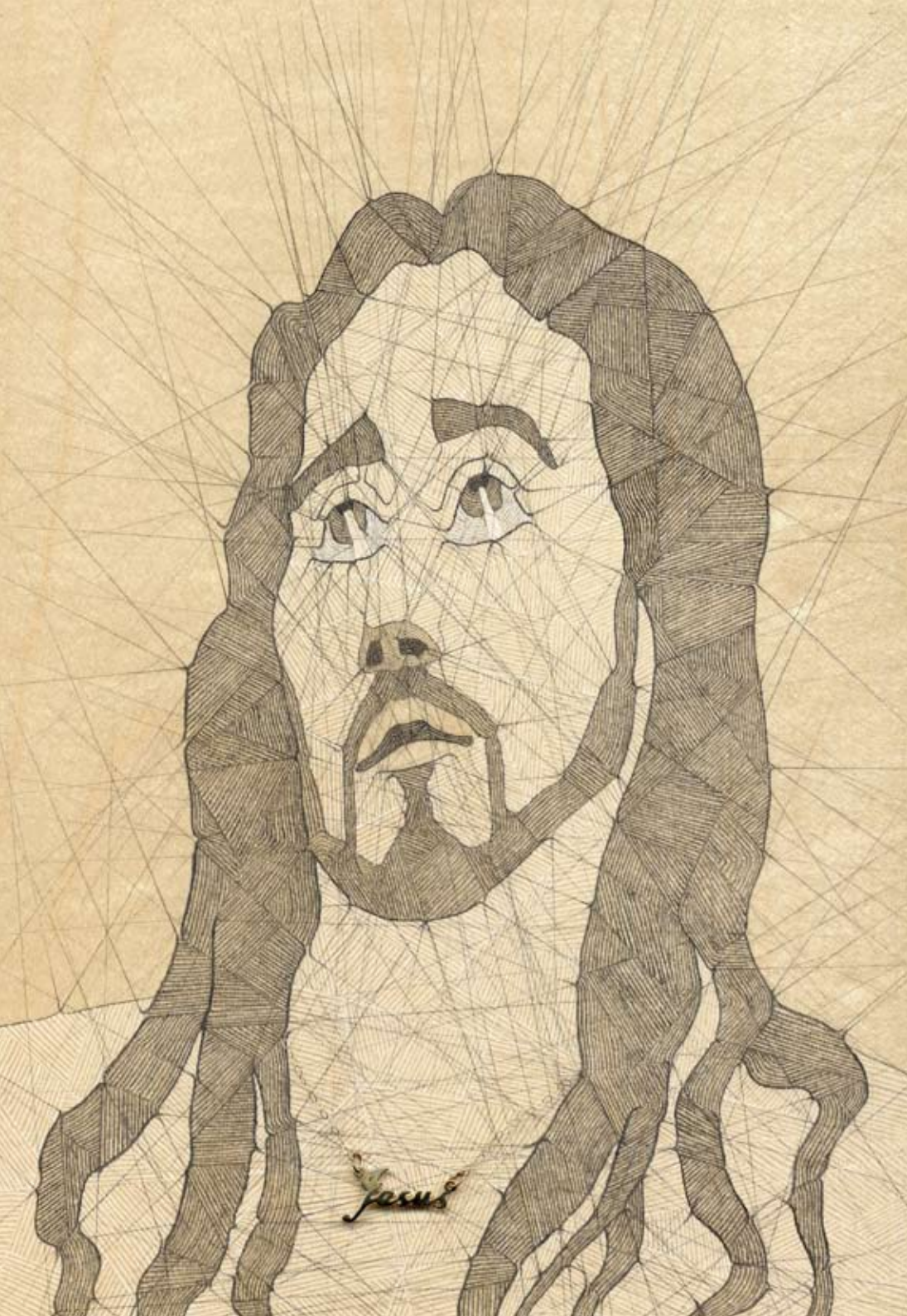
by Denise Markonish

*"A lot of people come up here and thank Jesus for this award.
I want you to know that no one had less to do with this award
than Jesus. Suck it Jesus. This award is my God now."*

– Kathy Griffin

In her 2007 Emmy Award speech for best television reality show, comedienne and self-proclaimed d-list celebrity, Kathy Griffin brought to the forefront the merging of culture and religion. Griffin was of course 'crucified' by Christian conservatives, but for others the speech actually rang true. We are in a culture today where religion, once the realm of pious contemplation, has become a Hollywood accessory. Hip-Hop is synonymous with Jesus; pop musicians are increasingly seen sporting red strings around their wrists hailing their devotion to Kabala; and more and more actors seem to be falling under the spell of Scientology. When did religion move from the church to MTV? Is Madonna to blame, when she kissed an effigy to Jesus and brought him to life and then went on to dance in front of a field of burning crosses in her *Like A Prayer* video? Madonna is now sporting one of those little red strings, so even her sacrilege has turned into another form of devotion. But this is just part of a century's old lineage of merging culture and religion, which goes back to the very moment when iconic images of devotional topics moved from the church to the museum.







Amidst all of this spiritual schizophrenia and trend setting, the work of George Bolster comes to mind. Bolster himself is not a traditionally religious man, but you could say that his beliefs lie in the sublime beauty found in religious iconography and the way this beauty can be used and manipulated to comment upon society's current (mis)use of religion. For Bolster, the very existence of religion and its imagery becomes belief. You might say; that just as Kathy Griffin's god is her award, Bolster's god embodies both the culture of religion and the religion of culture. This shift in the symbolic meaning of religion is evident in Bolster's new installation, *All Good Rappers Go To Hell* (2008), in which he presents his viewers with stack of skulls with speakers for eyes playing *Rollin' Wit You* by Ol' Dirty Bastard, a typical rap song, which in one moment condones violence and misogyny while in the next goes on about the virtues of Jesus. This contradiction is a direct result of the ways in which pop culture has consumed religion to the point of absurdity. People get uptight about Kathy Griffin's proclamation; yet happily ride down the street with lyrics as contradictory as:

'Jesus I'm rollin' with you'

and

'Sting you with the venom kill your joy! / Bitches throw
hands in the air like to be sodomized'

blaring.

Similarly dealing with the collision of religion and culture, is *Asylum Seeker* (2005), which like all of Bolster's work, cleverly subverts the act of looking, and provides its viewers with multiple stories of religion and culture. In this work, Bolster delicately draws a cherubic looking small boy, hip slightly askance with attitude and red string flowing from his hands, feet and side like







stop-motion stigmata. However, this is a two-sided work, and the flipside reveals the boy's street-cred, as 'Jewish' is tattooed across his back in hip-hop style lettering, branding himself just as a rapper like 50 Cent would. This statement brings to mind the Jewish faith of Jesus and makes one ponder the moment that he became separate from his faith (or turned his back), becoming the ultimate symbol of Christianity. Bolster's gesture is doubly ironic since the young Jesus figure is tattooed, an act forbidden by Jewish Law, which states in *Leviticus 19:28* that:

"Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead,
nor print or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the Lord."

As a tattooed person, raised in the Jewish faith, I cannot help but revel in Bolster's subversion.

Just as music provides a nexus for the impact of culture upon religion, it is also an important factor in Bolster's work through his use of audio soundtracks and musical iconography. Music in Bolster's work, like the church choir's divine sound of god, is now heard through the gothic atheism of bands like the Smashing Pumpkins and Depeche Mode. There is a conceptual thread that runs through the music that Bolster chooses to accompany his works, a gothic strain that is precisely about the contradiction between a lack of belief and the need to be saved. I am at once reminded of the lyrics to the band Spiritualized's song *Lord Let it Rain On Me*, which state:

"Jesus Christ, / When your back's against the wall / It's
sure hard to be grateful When you've nothing here at
all / You say that Hell's below us, Lord / Heaven can be
mine / I don't believe your promises / I don't believe
your lies." (2005, *Amazing Grace*).







Though Bolster does not quote the above lyrics, the song's message of the failings of hope and religion channels Bolster's work. However, Spiritualized's music, despite their lyrics, lifts you up with swirling choirs and elegiac strings, before coming back down to reality. This song thus provides a personal choir as I contemplate the complex ways in which Bolster blends music and culture with iconic religious imagery.

Bolster has his own soundtrack as well; his antithesis to the church choir begins with the Smashing Pumpkins, a symphonic band, whose song *Bullet With Butterfly Wings* lends its title to one of Bolster's ambitions installations. In this song's ode to the artist's disillusionment with the music industry, Smashing Pumpkins' singer Billy Corgan's, screams:

"The world is a vampire, sent to drain / Secret destroyers,
hold you up to the flames / And what do I get for my
pain? / Betrayed desires, and a piece of the game /
Despite all my rage I'm still just a rat in a cage / Then
someone will say what is lost can never be saved /
Despite all my rage I'm still just a rat in a cage / And I
still believe that I cannot be saved."

(1995, *Melancholy And The Infinite Sadness*).

Bolster takes this symbolic plea for salvation and uses it to inform his work. However it is the band's song *Disarm* (1993, *Siamese Dream*), which eerily serves as the soundtrack for Bolster's piece. In this song Corgan, once again, evokes, dark emotion as he sings:

"Disarm you with a smile / And leave you like they left
me here / To wither in denial / The bitterness of one
who's left alone."

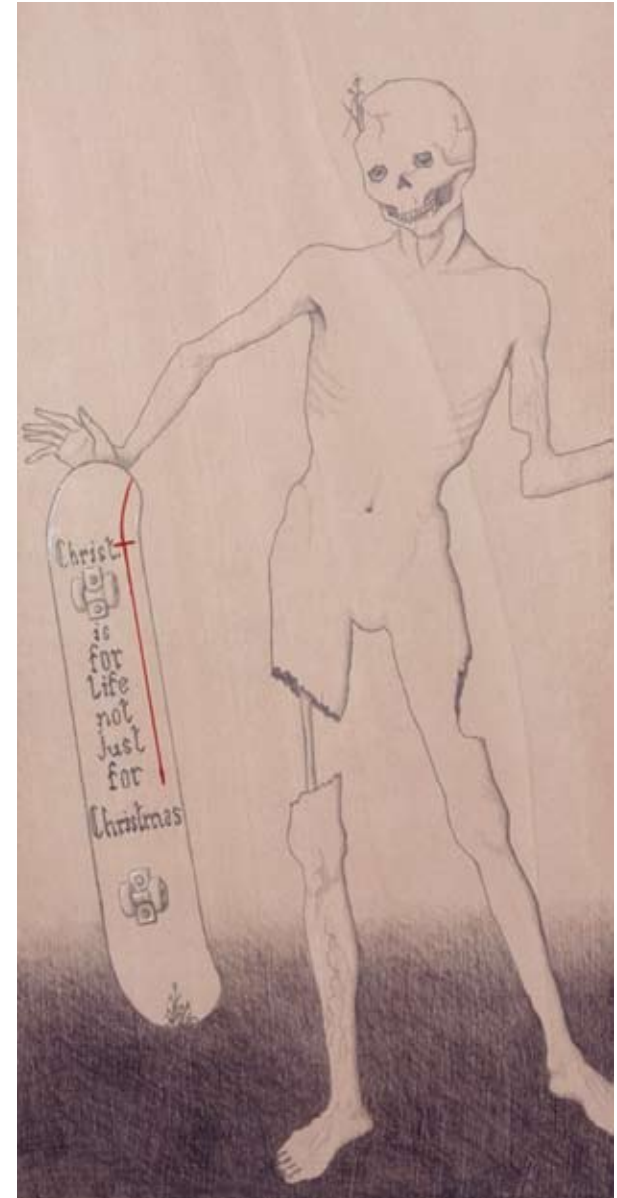


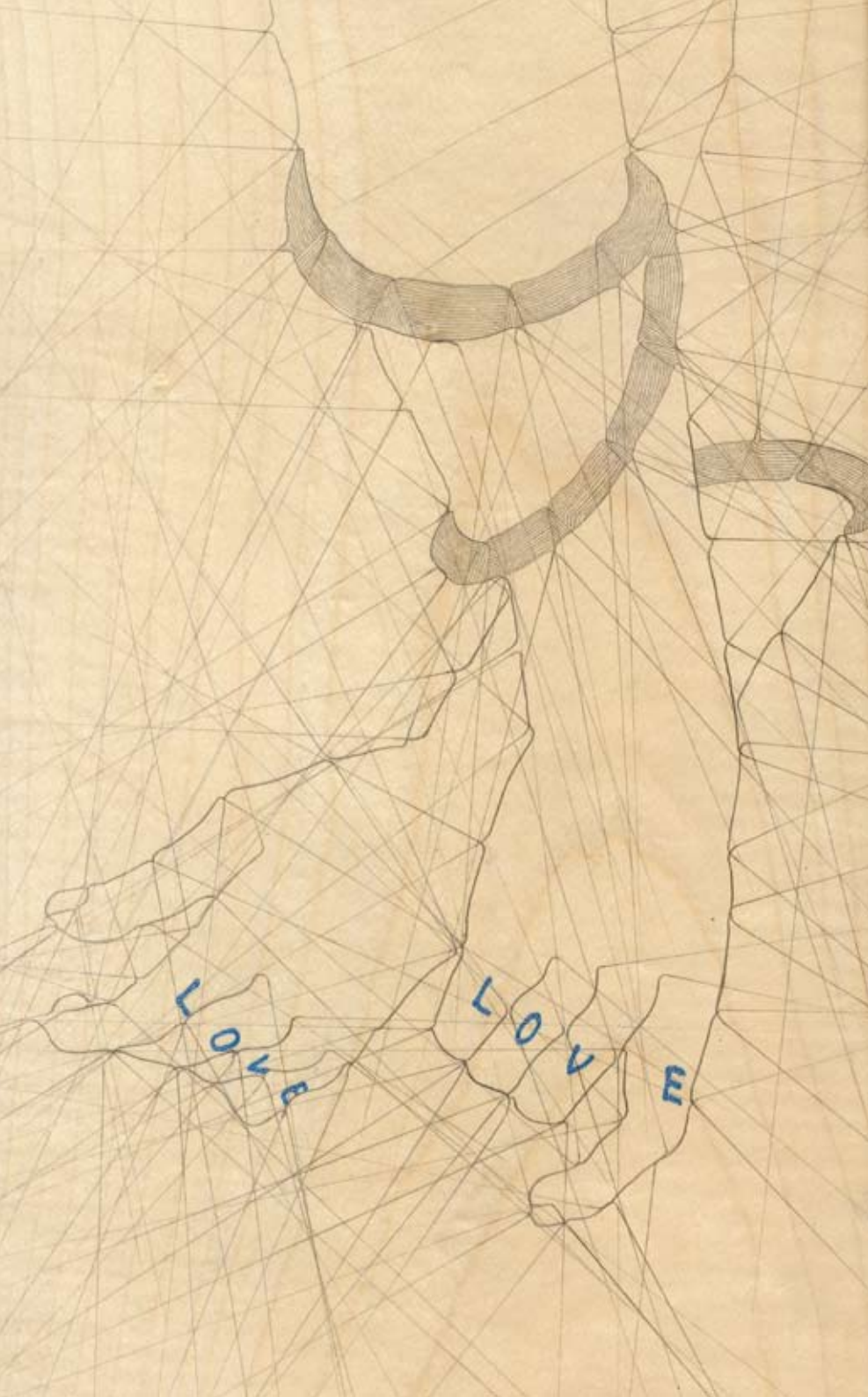




These lyrics are even more eerie in Bolster's hand as they accompany a diptych featuring the crucifixion. Here Jesus is a lonely symbol, a pop icon upon the cross; however, with his long hair and heavily tattooed body he could almost be rockstar Tommy Lee. Jesus's tattoos serve as a symbolic tracing of his life through art history and literature, from the unicorn as a symbol of resurrection to the fish and the scarab beetle used by early Christians. This history thus cements the figure of Jesus, or here the pop icon of Jesus, through the cultural meaning of his image, begging the question of whether or not he can be seen without the layers of meaning placed upon his image. The crucifixion panel here is combined with a modern-day Madonna in a kimono along with the speaker-bearing skull, a symbol of Christ's triumph over death evident through art historical imagery dating back to the 3rd Century. All of these elements: image, symbol, and audio, combine together to create a truly contemporary version of religious stardom and cultural worship, an altar piece for the 21st Century.

In the end, I can't help but come back to the idea of religion as a new cultural accessory. In *Saint Peter's Keys* (2007), Saint Peter, who was the rock upon which Christ built his church as well as the keeper of the keys to the kingdom of Heaven, is seen in musical revelry with a set of headphones surrounding his head like a new halo. On Saint Peter's headphones Bolster drew tiny little churches, one for each ear, morphing religion into a musical accessory. Bolster then made a three dimensional version of the headphones in *Saint Peter's Halo* (2006), further pushing the boundaries of the religious and cultural object. In *Salome and J to the B* (2005) and *Jesus* (2006), Bolster again turns to religion as accessory. In the first, Salome wears John the Baptist's head (or 'J to the B' as his friends in the 'hood know

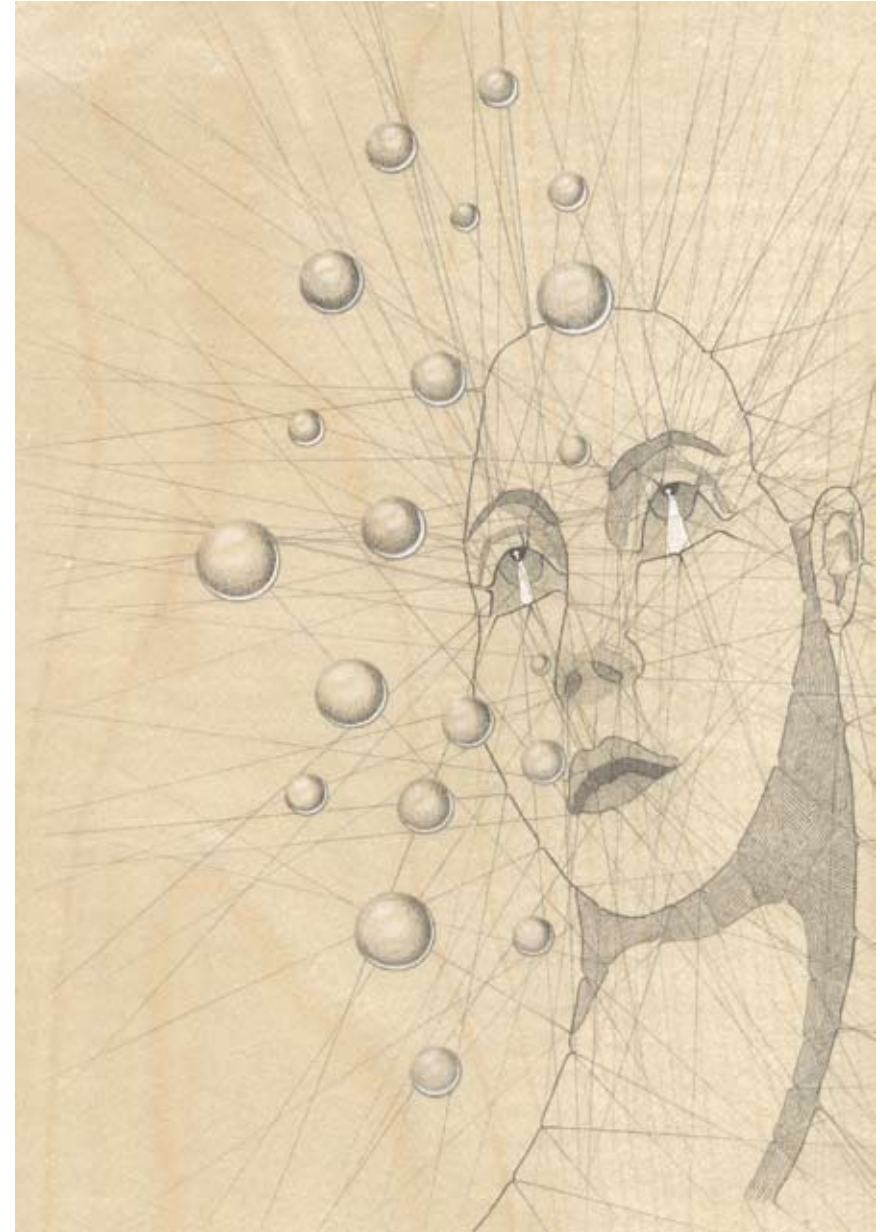






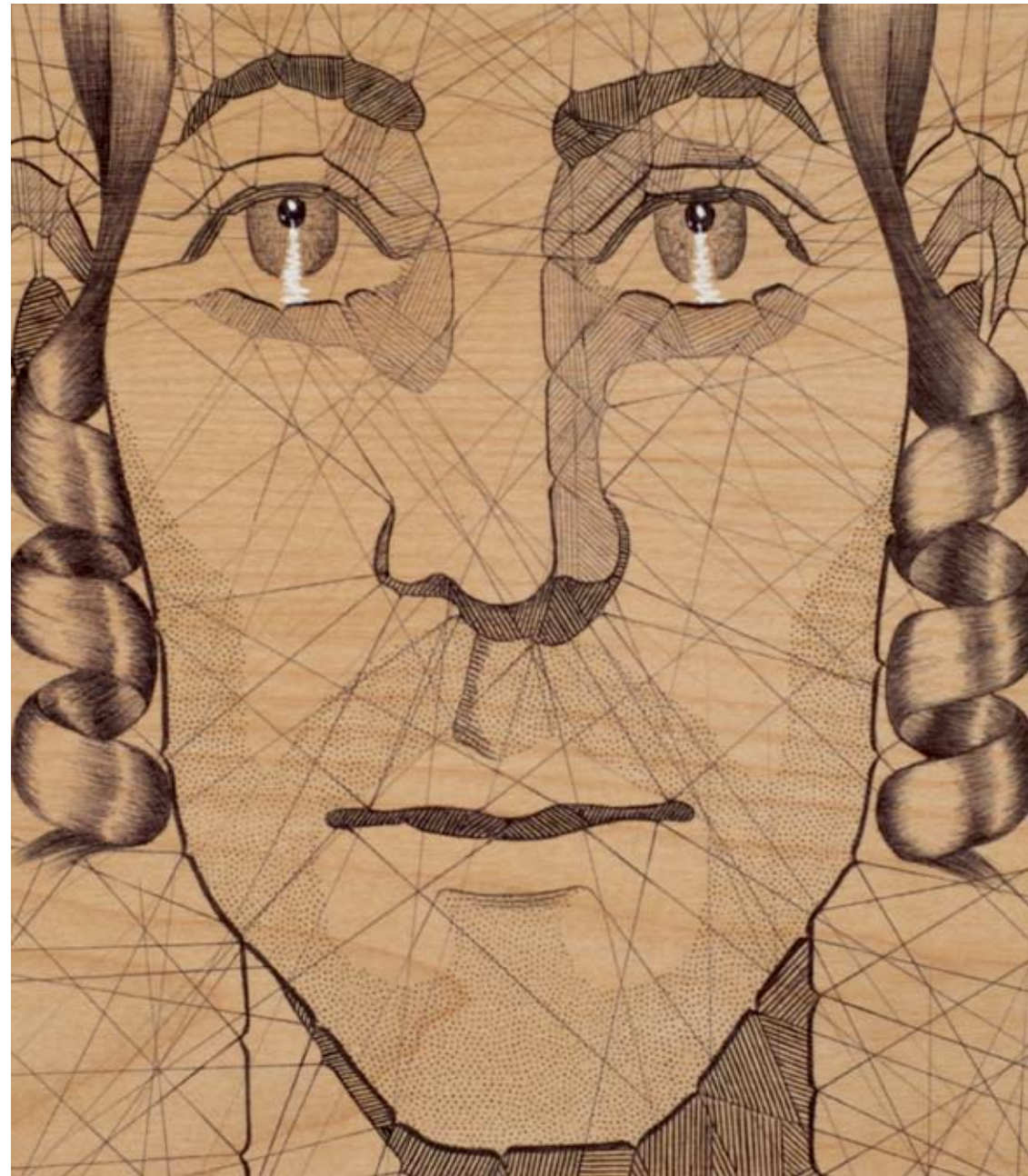
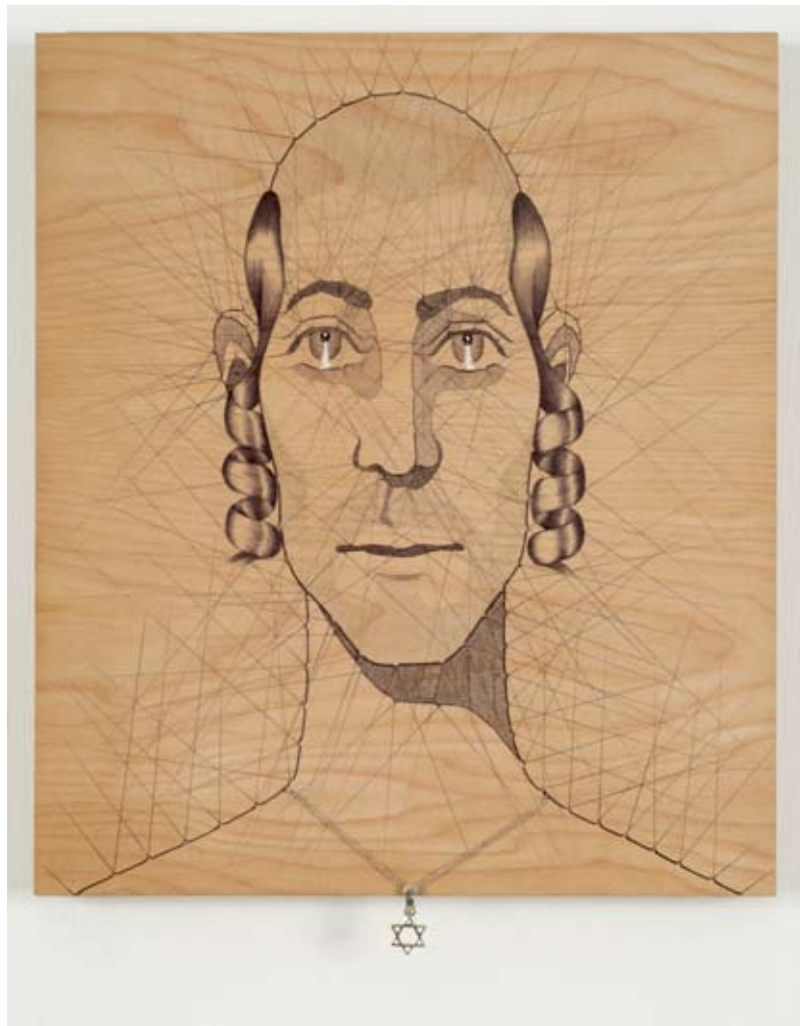
him), like a trophy in the form of an earring, with just a bit of blood trickling from his neck down her's, like a new form of 'bling.' Lastly we have *Jesus* (2006), perhaps Bolster's most funny and irreverent work, in which the subject wears an actual gold chain, bearing his name, across his neck, the juxtaposition of the delicate pencil on wood drawing with the garish and cheap looking gold chain is a potent symbol of just how culturized religion has become, where even Jesus needs some bling. In Bolster's vision it seems Jesus believes, as Sean 'P. Diddy' Combs would say that, "it's all about the Benjamin's."

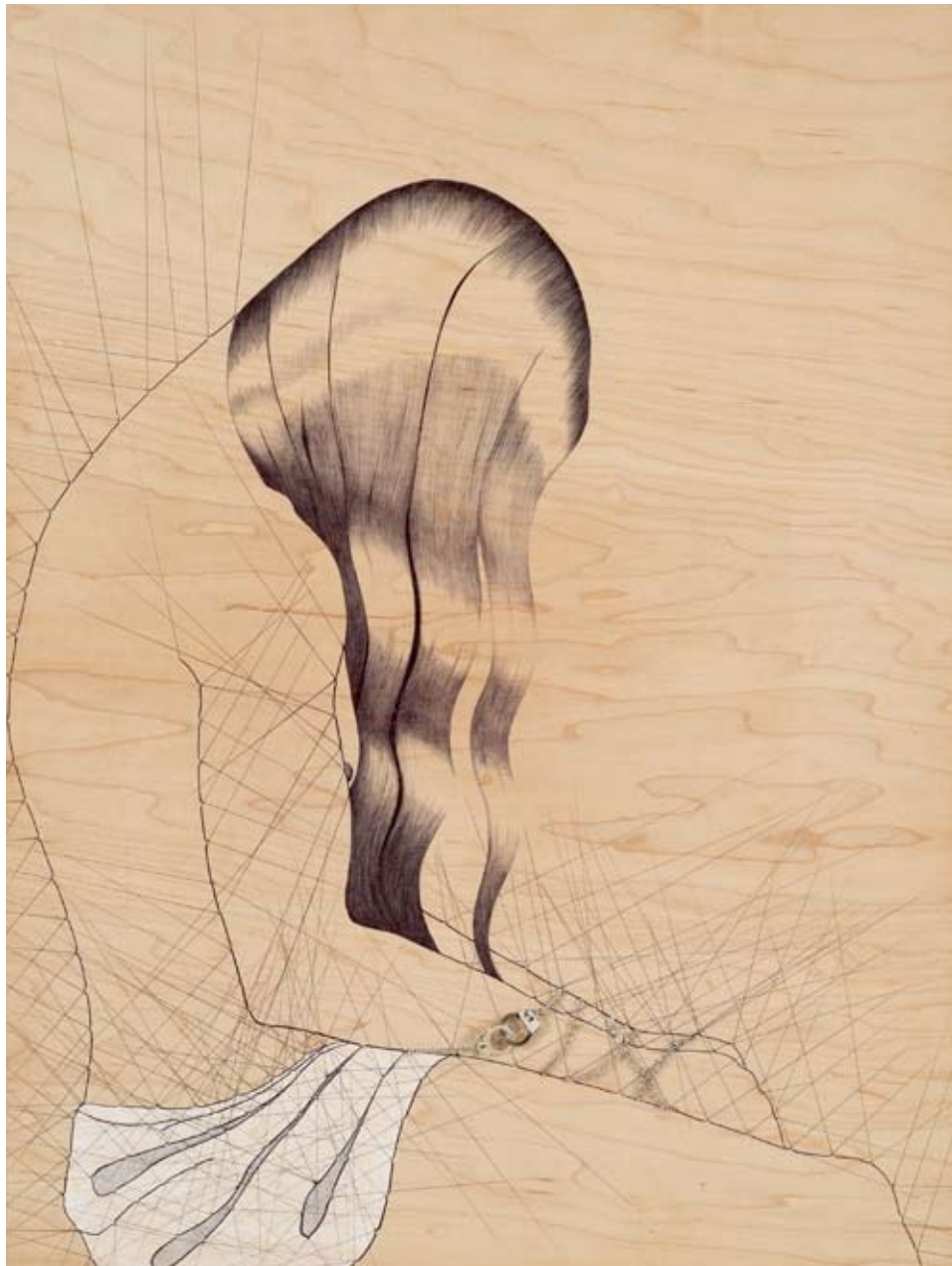
– Denise Markonish is Curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Massachussetts.











BIOGRAPHY

George Bolster was born in Cork in 1972. He lives and works in London.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Eye Of The Needle*, Pallas Heights, Dublin, Ireland (2005). Recent group exhibitions include: *Urban Gothic*, Dilston Grove, London (toured to Quartair Contemporary Art Initiatives, The Hague, Netherlands and Broadstone Gallery Dublin, Ireland); *Drawing 200*, The Drawing Room, London (2007); *Flip*, Chung King Project, Los Angeles; *Damaged Collateral*, Context Gallery, Derry Northern Ireland (2006); *Passing Through*, The Glucksman Gallery, Cork; *E+VA*, Bourne Vincent Gallery, Limerick, Ireland (2005).

His forthcoming shows in 2009 include solo exhibitions at Chung King Project, Los Angeles and Galway Arts Centre, Ireland. He will also be part of a group exhibition at Mass MoCA, USA.

DETAILS OF WORKS

Cover image
St. Peter's Halo, 2008
Pencil, silver and pen on maple wood veneer
60cm x 45cm

Inside cover
The Ascension Of The Virgin, 2008
Fabricated plastic, edition of 100
7cm x 3cm x 3cm

Page 2 and 3
All Good Rappers Go To Hell, 2008
Self-firing clay, gold, silver, crystal, glass
beads, acrylic paint, speakers and sound
60cm x 25cm x 25cm

Page 5
Asylum Seeker, 2005
Pencil and thread on paper (double sided,
front)
36cm x 52 cm
Private Collection

Asylum Seeker, 2005
Pencil and thread on paper (double sided,
back)
36cm x 52 cm
Private Collection

Page 6
Jesus, 2006
Customised gold jewellery, pencil and paint
on sycamore wood
30cm x 19cm
Collection of Blake Byrne

Page 7
Salome And J To The B, 2005
Diamante, pencil and paint on sycamore
wood
29cm x 19cm
Collection of Blake Byrne

Page 8 and 9
Resurrection Of Sound, 2006 (detail)
Hair, speakers, pencil, paint, crystal, ribbon,
Cd-player and sample from *Enjoy the Silence*
by Depeche Mode on maple wood

Page 11
St Peter's Halo, 2006
Headphones, ceramic and industrial paint
33cm x 27cm

Page 12 and 13
Bullet With Butterfly Wings, 2007 (detail of
Mary)
Human hair, pencil, pen, paint, glue, ceramic,
speakers, sound (Smashing Pumpkins),
diamante and ribbon on maple wood veneer
Dimensions variable

Page 14
Bullet With Butterfly Wings, 2007 (full
installation shot at Dilston Grove, London)
Human hair, pencil, pen, paint, glue, ceramic,
speakers, sound (Smashing Pumpkins),
diamante and ribbon on maple wood veneer
Dimensions variable

Page 15
Bullet With Butterfly Wings, 2007 (detail of
Christ)
Human hair, pencil, pen, paint, glue, ceramic,
speakers, sound (Smashing Pumpkins),
diamante and ribbon on maple wood veneer
Dimensions variable

Page 17
Bullet With Butterfly Wings, 2007 (detail of skull
sound piece component)
Human hair, pencil, pen, paint, glue, ceramic,
speakers, sound (Smashing Pumpkins),
diamante and ribbon on maple wood veneer
Dimensions variable

Page 18 <i>Resurrection Of Sound</i>, 2006 Hair, speakers, pencil, paint, crystal, ribbon, Cd-player and sample from <i>Enjoy the Silence</i> by Depeche Mode on maple wood 270cm x 130cm	Page 26 <i>His Head Came Off, And Milk Gushed Forth</i>, 2006 (detail) Leather, pen, paint, ribbon, crystal and maple wood 90cm x 100cm	Page 33 <i>St. Peter Martyr</i>, 2007 (detail) Swarovski crystal beads, silver lined glass beads, thread and pencil on pine wood veneer 30cm x 25cm (plus glass threads)	Page 41 <i>Jesus</i>, 2008 (detail) Ink, customised jewellery and paint 21cm x 26cm
Page 19 <i>Cultural Erosion</i>, 2006 Pre-fabricated plastic, paint and ceramic 12cm x 5cm	Page 27 <i>His Head Came Off, And Milk Gushed Forth</i>, 2006 Leather, pen, paint, ribbon, crystal and maple wood 90cm x 100cm	Page 35 <i>The Casting Of The Pearls</i>, 2006 Pencil and paint on sycamore wood 29cm x 17cm	Page 42 <i>Death Killer</i>, 2008 Ink, jewellery and paint 60cm x 45cm
Page 20 and 21 <i>Revelations: Death Of The Floating World</i>, 2006 Concealed speakers, sampled 80's video games on loop, pencil, colouring pencil and pen on maple wood 125cm x 125cm	Page 29 <i>Christ Is For Life Not Just For Christmas</i>, 2006 Pencil, paint, pen and maple wood 10cm x 18cm	Page 36 <i>La Vierge Et l'enfant Et Son Dior</i>, 2008 (detail) Ink, jewellery, pen and vinyl on maple veneer 60cm x 45cm	Page 43 <i>Death Killer</i>, 2008 (detail) Ink, jewellery and paint 60cm x 45cm
Page 23 <i>Revelations: Death Of The Floating World</i>, 2006 Concealed speakers, sampled 80's video games on loop, pencil, colouring pencil and pen on maple wood 125cm x 125cm	Page 30 <i>Christ The Prisoner</i>, 2005 Glitter and pencil on sycamore wood 29cm x 19cm	Page 37 <i>La Vierge Et l'enfant Et Son Dior</i>, 2008 (detail) Ink, jewellery, pen and vinyl on maple veneer 60cm x 45cm	Inside back cover <i>The Ascension Of The Virgin</i>, 2008 Fabricated plastic, edition of 100 7cm x 3cm x 3cm
Page 24 <i>Madonna Of The Tears</i>, 2006 Concealed reservoir, water, sunglasses, varnish, pencil and paint on maple wood 30cm x 39cm	Page 31 <i>Flames Rose To Her Roman Nose And Her Walkman Started To Melt</i>, 2007 Pencil and paint on maple 18cm x 30cm	Page 38 <i>La Vierge Et l'enfant Et Son Dior</i>, 2008 Ink, jewellery, pen and vinyl on maple veneer 60cm x 45cm	
Page 25 <i>Madonna Of The Tears</i>, 2006 (detail) Concealed reservoir, water, sunglasses, varnish, pencil and paint on maple wood 30cm x 39cm	Page 32 <i>St. Peter Martyr</i>, 2007 (installation shot Dilston Grove, London) Swarovski crystal beads, silver lined glass beads, thread and pencil on pine wood veneer 30cm x 25cm (plus glass threads)	Page 39 <i>Sharing The Pain</i>, 2008 Magnets, iron filings, pen, paint and gold on maple veneer 30.5cm x 30.5cm	
		Page 40 <i>Jesus</i>, 2008 Ink, customised jewellery and paint 21cm x 26cm	

CHIESA DEI MIRACOLI

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9th of April – 31st of May 2008

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