

Call for Papers

“Ritual and Image: Textiles and the Revelation of the Sacred”

« In Christian teaching, faith is the belief in things unseen, then textiles help to create the conditions for faith by dividing the things that are seen from those that are unseen, the sensible from the intelligible. »

Warren T. Woodfin, « Sacredness »¹.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, textiles were endowed with highly symbolic significance. Both essential liturgical furniture and recurring iconographical motif, they were above all metaphors for flesh: human flesh that concealed and signified blindness, but also divine flesh, incarnated and consecrated in the Eucharist.

Since the middle of the thirteenth century, the Real presence of Christ in the Eucharist became physically exalted and devotional images flourished in churches and in domestic interiors. It led to a genuine visual appetite, an intense desire to see the sacred. As pliable, movable and ornamented material, textiles played a crucial part in the revelation of the invisible. As garments, they adorned and transformed bodies. As dossals, they were the backdrop for adoration. As veils, they delineated the frontier between the human and the divine. As lifted curtains, they participated in a visual theophany and emphasized a supranatural presence. **By this workshop, we want to explore the roles of textiles – be they real, fictional, material, painted or feigned – in the manifestation of the sacred, understood in its broadest sense, beyond the strictly religious sphere.** Their diverse forms, their multiple functions and their metaphorical potential will be the core of our reflections.

The materiality of textiles will be put into question considering their active and performative dimension through surviving testimonies, but also through texts and images. With regard to images, we wish to go beyond the widespread idea that a depiction of a textile is a

¹ Woodfin Warren T., « Sacredness », in *Textile Terms: a Glossary*, ed. Anika Reineke, Anne Röhl, Mateusz Kapustka, Tristan Weddigen, Emsdetten, Edition Imorde, 2017, p. 205-209.

simple illustration of real ones. Focusing on devotional images, we wish to investigate the representation of textiles within the debate on the status of religious images. From the thirteenth century, as images encouraged an increasingly visual and spiritual participation, they were an instrument of mediation between the visible and the invisible. In this context, the image acts as a veil playing on the presence and absence of what is represented. Therefore, as part of the composition of an image, textiles could strengthen the role of images : they made the *transitus* towards the sacred. Painted representations of textiles used in ritual contributed to sensory perception of the divine.

We wish to establish a dialogue between visible and invisible, material and immaterial, tangible and intangible, reality and fiction. What are the links and porosities between these two « modes of representation »? How were textiles *seen* in a liturgical or devotional context? What were their roles in the figured or sacramental revelation of the divine?

We will specially focus on clothes, canopies, carpets, curtains, linens and garments spread out around the altar, as well as on figured textiles in different artistic media (paintings, sculptures...). Even though the occidental Europe of middle ages and modern times constitute the preferred setting of this workshop, proposals on other cultural areas or periods could be accepted. We welcome proposals on themes including, but not limited to:

- **Identifying.** In the ritual and in the image, textiles are often considered as significant elements. By their colors, forms, movements, they characterized time and spaces and made the hierarchies and dignity of the wearers immediately visible. Their patterns could sometimes themselves be meaningful or even endorse a memorial or devotional function.

- **Adorning.** Textiles participated in church decoration as ornamental and furnishing elements: they clothed the celebrant and adorned the altar and the walls of the church. In iconography, they assumed similar uses, by glorifying the figures with whom they came into contact. Combining the brilliance of silk, the shine of metallic yarns and prestigious techniques, the precious materiality of certain fabrics, sometimes accentuated under the painter's brush, enriched the ecclesial or pictorial space. Therefore, they fully belonged to the notion of *decus*, meaning both ornament and honor.

- **Sacralizing.** Barriers or meeting points, the fabrics structured the space, both ecclesial and pictorial. Deployed around a holy figure or *sacralia*, they underlined their splendor and isolated them from the secular sphere. As absorbent materials, textiles thus placed in contact with the most venerated elements could themselves be sacred and become both agents and objects of the sacred.

- **Revealing, Unveiling, Exhibiting.** Often removable and pliable, textiles played an important role in the revelation of the sacred. Sometimes they concealed and veiled bodies, objects and places, sometimes they revealed their presence. Whether in the devotional image or around the altar, they cultivated a sense of mystery and physically, emotionally and spiritually engaged the worshipper in a resolutely sensory experience. Beyond a certain “theatricality” that we wish to question, the veil designated ignorance and secrecy. Unveiling, lifting or tearing the veil is a true hermeneutic, almost theophanic approach.

- **Incarnating.** Since antiquity, textiles have been the privileged metaphors for flesh. Complex analogies were woven between clothing, the act of taking a garment, and incarnation, the act of taking flesh. These objects then served one of the greatest mysteries of Christianity: the Incarnation, God made man in the world. Tangible materials, they imposed themselves as the equivalent of divine corporeality. In the time of ritual or in representation, they could enter into a close dialogue with the Eucharistic species and become a body in their own right.

Concepts: Textiles; Sacred; ritual; performance; gestures; space; unveiling; revelation; visuality; materiality.

Submission guidelines

We invite proposals for 20-minute papers in French or English from scholars across the arts, humanities and museum staff. Please submit a title, a 300-word abstract and a short CV in French or English **by February 15, 2020**, to the following address textiles.rituelimage@gmail.com. Presentations might be recorded and be followed online.

Scientific committee

Workshop, University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne, National Institute for Art History,
Vasary room, May 6-7, 2021.

Philippe Morel (University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne), Philippe Plagnieux (University of
Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne, École nationale des Chartes), Alain Rauwel (University of
Burgundy).

Partnerships

Centre d'Histoire de l'Art de la Renaissance (CHAR), Centre d'études en sciences sociales du
religieux (CéSor).

Conveners

Juliette Brack (University of Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne, CHAR), Julie Glodt (University of
Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne).