An interpretation of death and religion in Judith Mason's *Inferno* (2006) and *Purgatory* (2007)

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the commissioned artworks entitled *Walking with and away from Dante* by Judith Mason. It is an interdisciplinary study that depends on a contingency approach that leaves scope not only for the investigation of the works from Mason's point of view, but also allows for an interpretative reading of the artworks from a personal point of view. Notions of death and religion are explored from a Catholic and Pantheistic perspective.

As outlined by Roy Clouser (2005) in *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*, religious beliefs fall into three categories: the pagan, the pantheistic and the Biblical types. Religion as a construct is a loaded term associated with doctrines, belief systems and the belief in a higher power. Religion may have disconcerting doctrines predicated on the notion that our eternal fate is either heaven or hell. Therefore, conditions and influences pertaining to religion often directs our understanding of death and possibly of afterlife. Mason's interest in religion as depicted in the chosen paintings tends to depict a duality with regards to the concept of death. This dissertation focuses on Mason's religious images and personal iconography with reference to what this imagery reveals about herself and her peculiar view of religion, death and eternal life.

The chosen artworks represent a contemporary agnostic interpretation by the artist of Dante Alighieri's *La Divina Commedia*. In this commission, Mason visually portrays Dante's poetic writings of heaven, hell and purgatory. Questions arise on the obvious parallels that can be drawn between the symbology embedded in the artworks and the artist's view of religion. The dissertation thus focuses on how Mason's beliefs made manifest in the chosen works, *Inferno* (2006) and *Purgatorio* (2007). In spite of her views to the contrary, the works express a deep sense of religiosity; furthermore, the tension created in the use of dualistic constructs creates visual complexities that need to be investigated.

In my view, Mason uses art as a visual embodiment to make sense of what she finds challenging to interpret – in this case, the concept of religion. In this sense, artmaking could be described as a form of therapy that she visually "verbalises" in order to portray her deepest thoughts and her personal outlook on complex issues. The present study emphasises the idea that this process of creation can lead to a form of spiritual or emotional "healing" for both Mason and the viewer.

In this case, art functions as a mediator between her religious curiosity and her intuitive cynical agnosticism where she recognises death, and the result of this meditation is

profound – the acceptance of one's mortality in the face of the inevitability of death. Through the investigation of the chosen artworks and by suggesting that the artist exhibits a leaning towards Pantheism, the viewer could come to the conclusion that Mason comes to terms with death as an accepted reality of being human. In the commission *Walking with and away from Dante*, I found that Mason succeeds in expressing the incomprehensible; she renders the invisible visible.

Keywords:

Dante Alighieri, death, dualism, eternal life, heaven, hell / *Inferno*, Judith Mason, *La Divina Commedia*, liberation, Pantheism, *Purgatorio* / Purgatory, religiosity, suffering

OPSOMMING

Hierdie verhandeling ondersoek die kunsreeks getiteld *Walking with and away from Dante* wat deur Judith Mason as opdragwerk geskilder is. Dit is 'n interdissiplinêre studie wat die werke vanuit Mason se oogpunt ondersoek by wyse van die integrasie van verskeie formele metodes van analise, maar wat ook die lees en interpretasie vanuit 'n persoonlike verwysingsraamwerk bied. Tydens hierdie ondersoek word vrae oor die dood en godsdiens vanuit 'n Katolieke en Pantheïstiese oogpunt ondersoek.

In *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (2005) kategoriseer Roy Clouser godsdienstige oortuigings in drie kategorieë: die heidense-, die panteïstiese- en die Bybelse tipes. Die konsep van religie is 'n gelade term wat leerstellings, geloofstelsels en die geloof in 'n hoër mag betrek. Vir sommiges mag sekere leerstellinge oor die hiernamaals 'n bestemming in die hemel of hel behels. Sommiges mag worstel met hierdie gedagte wat ook in 'n groot mate as onverstaanbaar ervaar word. Religie vorm en beïnvloed dus ons begrip van die dood en hiernamaals. By wyse van die gebruik van binêre simbole gee Mason se belangstelling in religie aanleiding tot die konsep van dood. Hierdie studie fokus op Mason se religieuse beeldinge en persoonlike ikonografie, met spesifieke verwysing na wat hierdie beeldmateriaal oor haarself en haar besondere siening oor religie, dood en ewige lewe openbaar.

Die gekose kunswerke verteenwoordig 'n kontemporêre agnostiese interpretasie deur die kunstenaar van Dante Alighieri se *La Divina Commedia*. In hierdie kunsreeks het Mason Dante se digterlike geskrifte van die hemel, die hel en die vagevuur visueel vergestalt. Die parallelle wat tussen die simbole en die kunstenaar se siening van religie ontstaan, belig verskeie vraagstukke. Die verhandeling fokus dus op hoe Mason se religieuse oortuigings in die gekose werke, *Inferno* (2006) en *Purgatorio* (2007) manifesteer. Die werke ontlok 'n diep gevoel van godsdienstigheid; die spanning wat ontstaan in die gebruik van dualistiese konstruksies skep verder visuele kompleksiteite wat ondersoek moet word.

Myns insiens gebruik Mason kuns as 'n visuele poging om verskeie aspekte wat sy as uitdagend ervaar, te begryp – in hierdie geval die konsep van religie. Kunsskepping kan in hierdie konteks beskryf word as 'n vorm van terapie wat sy visueel “verwoord” ten einde haar diepste denke en haar persoonlike siening ten opsigte van komplekse konsepte te

konkretiseer. Die uitgangspunt van hierdie navorsing beklemtoon die idee dat die skeppingsproses tot 'n vorm van “genesing” vir sowel Mason as die kyker kan lei.

Kuns funksioneer vir die kunstenaar as 'n bemiddelaar tussen haar nuuskierigheid oor religie en haar intuïtiewe siniese agnostisisme waar sy die konsep van dood erken. Die resultaat van hierdie bemiddeling is diepsinnig; die aanvaarding van 'n mens se eie sterflikheid in die aangesig van onvermydelike dood. Die gekose kunswerke dui daarop dat Mason 'n neiging tot panteïsme toon en só kan die kyker tot die gevolgtrekking kom dat Mason die dood as 'n aanvaarde werklikheid van menswees beskou. In die kunsreeks *Walking with and away from Dante* kom ek tot die gevolgtrekking dat Mason daarin slaag om die onbegryplike uit te druk; sy maak die onsigbare, sigbaar.

Sleutelwoorde:

bevryding, Dante Alighieri, dood, dualisme, ewige lewe, hel / *Inferno*, hemel, Judith Mason, *La Divina Commedia*, lyding, Panteïsme, *Purgatorio* / Vagevuur, religie

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Introduction

1.1 Introduction and background

The aim of this study is to investigate death and religion as a dominant theme in the artistic commission titled *Walking with and away from Dante*[1] (2006 – 2008) by Judith Mason (1938 – 2016). *Walking with and away from Dante* originated as a commission from Ettienne Koekemoer that focuses mainly on two large panels, each consisting of three two-metre square canvasses entitled *Inferno* (2006) (Figure 35) and *Purgatorio* (2007) (Figure 56). Mason's *Inferno* contains various personal symbols and iconography as well as non-Christian elements. In the middle of the panel, one can see Satan with a dual gender (both male and female). Surrounding Satan are spirals that resemble the shavings of a drill bit cutting through steel, and that seem to transform into leather wings. Satan's body is inscribed with Dante's text in the form of tattoos. The second panel that forms part of *Walking with and away from Dante* (2006 – 2008) entitled *Purgatorio* (2007) "climaxes with a fire through which the penitents go. It's a purgative fire and it's like a defining layer of earthly experience – the annealing fire of the alchemists" (Mason, 2008a:91).

During the course of her life the South African artist Judith Mason made a provocative statement concerning her stance on religion: "I am an agnostic liberal-humanist" (Mason, 1989:131) (see section 3.2). Since Mason states that she is not committed to a particular religion, the selected works may well invite a religious-based interpretation. Furthermore, she asserted that: "My faith is inquisitive infidel – not atheist, as I loathe the condescension of their secular priests". Here she observes that atheism can be seen as a religion (see 3.1), she comments that she dislikes its dogmatic (doctrinarian) side. By speaking of "my faith", she complicates the picture further: she is not an "agnostic" in the classic sense of the word. She also noted that: "My mantra is that everything that lives is holy", thus adopting a pantheist-like belief system (Mason, 2011:28-43). Mason can, in this sense, be regarded as a curious non-believer who respects individuals who are devoted to a specific belief system. Clearly, Mason is prepared to speak about religion. While she is a self-proclaimed

[1] *Walking with and away from Dante* was commissioned by an architect, who is a collecter of international and contemporary South African art. He carved the three-dimensional totems that were painted by Mason. The commissioner chose to remain anonymous (Skawran, 2008:95).

agnostic, she nonetheless believes in certain elements of Roman Catholicism. Although an agnostic does not deny the existence of God, such individuals are usually quite sceptical and cynical regarding God. Thus Mason can be regarded as a questioner and doubter about religion, and is intrigued by religion and religious practices. In addition to doctrines, she does not like the idea of gods or a supreme being. This conviction may be linked to Pantheism:

> *"Some people will always need to wrestle with gods and their kind. The only good gods are dead ones, or at least ones capable of dying, regardless of their resurrection in spirit, corn or flesh. There is something rather touching about trying to dredge God up in paint"* (Mason, 1973:26).

Mason's personal iconography and symbolism recur in her oeuvre where a dense symbolic visual language expresses her personal view on diverse themes such as religion, mythological creatures and figures, socio-political concerns, as well as explorations of the self. Her personal symbols are complex and ambiguous – thus leaving room for different interpretations, depending on the viewer's background, ethos and mentality.

This dissertation focuses on Mason's religious images and personal iconography with reference to what this imagery reveals about herself and her peculiar view of religion, specifically aspects of Pantheism (see section 2.3).

The fact that Mason suggests that everything is holy can be linked to Pantheism which also associates God with nature and the universe. In Hobbs and Maurice (2008:3) she once referred to herself as "an agnostic humanist possessed of religious curiosity who regards making artworks as akin to alchemy". Thus as an agnostic, she does not deny the possibility of a deity, but refrains from any commitment to a particular religious doctrine. Pantheism is itself a religious doctrine. It regards the universe and nature as divine, and Mason addresses this notion in terms of the respect she has towards nature and animals.

This study therefore explores Mason's religious approach as a rationale and justification to all of her religious interpretations as a prominent theme within her body of work. The intention of making religious imagery is seen as one of two things: "The painter of religious themes ... does so as a reflection of his faith or an exploration of his doubts (Mason, 1973)."

Another aspect of Mason's works is a synthesis she suggests between binary terms such as beauty/ugliness, life/death, pain (suffering)/liberation and heaven/hell. This dualism creates tension and a sense of unease. The tension between eternal life and death, suffering and liberation as well as religion and a more secular view is explored in Mason's religious themed works – in light of her statement pertaining to religious affinity:

> *"Parallel with my need to address suffering, and my attempts to translate it, is my interest in religion. Belief is an art form, created as artworks are, in an attempt to understand the incomprehensible. But religions embrace doctrine, I need ambiguity"* (Mason, 2011:28-43).

Religion conditions and influences our understanding about death and the afterlife. In dual terms, one could say that Mason's interest in religion gives way to the concept of death. Death is also a concept she spoke about fearlessly. She incorporates this fascination with both religion and death in her personal iconography that recurs in many of her works – her works have been described as "ugly, death-centred and occasionally satanistic" (Mason, 1989:39). She uses this imagery as an attempt to make sense of things that intrigue her, such as religion and death. The concepts of religion and death are therefore explored from her agnostic and pantheist-like point of view as well as Dante Alighieri's (1265 – 1321) notion of these concepts.

In *Walking with and away from Dante*, Mason painted *Inferno* (2006), *Purgatorio* (2007) and *Reaching for Paradise* (2007). She visually brought into being Dante Alighieri's *La Divina Commedia*[2]. Mason wanted to read Dante through a contemporary agnostic point of view; she stated the reason why she wanted to envision Dante's definition of inferno, paradise and purgatory:

> *"I wanted to make a painting that would be an experience of hell, something we all understand and recognise as some sort of reality, the purgation of our own guilt and the acceptance of forgiveness... And then there is a desire for something much more beautiful, much better, much more interesting and complete than ourselves, Paradise"* (Skawran, 2008).

Mason regards religion and belief as an art form where art making functions as an attempt to grasp and understand the incomprehensible. By interpreting Mason's imagery, one would possibly arrive at a more profound understanding of her personal thoughts on religion and death (see section 2.2), including how art succeeds in rendering the incomprehensible in order to make it comprehensible.

[2] Dante's poem was originally titled *Commedia* where after Giovanni Boccaccio (1313 – 1375) later added *Divina*. *La Divina Commedia* is the original modern Italian title of Dante Alighieri's poem (World Digital Library, 2015). For the purpose of this study there will be referred to this specific title and not to the English translation thereof.

1.2 Context

1.2.1 Mason and Dante's *La Divina Commedia*

As stated, the works titled *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* have been selected for this study. *Inferno* portrays the idea of hell, but not as a place where the wicked would suffer. It rather portrays a more "realistic" view with which we may want to resonate: where the wicked and condemned have a fine and pleasurable time; it portrays evil people who enjoy doing evil (Mason, 2008a:86). The second panel that forms part of *Walking with and away from Dante* namely *Purgatorio* mainly consists of a landscape. This work shows the purgative fire where purification will take place.

When asked which book has had the greatest impact on her, Mason refers to Dante Alighieri's *La Divina Commedia*: "Suffice to say that his transcendental vision in the last canto of Paradiso has mattered to me more than anything I have ever read in my life" (Mason, 2014). According to Mason, *La Divina Commedia* is not an easy literary piece to read, but it serves as a functional tool to conceptualise one's own moral philosophy. *Walking with and away from Dante* is a response and a reinterpretation of *La Divina Commedia*. Mason respected Dante's world view and thus integrated her personal iconography into her visualisation of his work, which led to a series of open questions posed by the works that could stimulate questions in individuals' personal standpoints on where they might currently find themselves.

According to Jongeneel (2007:131), *La Divina Commedia* can be seen as an "epic about individual conversion and social reform", irrespective of one's religious views. In short, *La Divina Commedia* can be summarised as follows:

> *"Prompted by Heaven and assisted by divine grace, this pilgrim sets off for a journey through Hell, to the top of the Mountain of Purgatory and the Earthly Paradise, and through the celestial spheres of Heaven to the Holy Trinity. During his voyage the pilgrim is initiated into God's salvation plan that will bring humankind peace and happiness on earth and eternal beatitude in the hereafter"* (Jongeneel, 2007:131).

Dante Alighieri was an acclaimed Florentine poet best known for his *La Divina Commedia* (see section 4.2). Here Dante provides the reader with a critical view on religion during the peak of the Age of Faith[3] as Burger (2011) puts it, considering that there are numerous other

[3] The Age of Faith refers to the time period when the church, and more specifically the Roman Catholic Church, constitute the centre of culture and learning in Europe during the Middle Ages. The church played a central spiritual role and gave the oppressed (due to political unrest and uncertainty), hope in the form of the doctrine of the afterlife and the concept of repentance that would ensure eternal salvation (Burger, 2011).

possible interpretations of this concept. Although Dante was critical of the Roman Catholic Church, his work was loyal to the theological ideas of Thomas Aquinas (1224 –1274)[4] as well as the roots of Catholicism. The poem focuses on the journey of the soul trying to find its way to God – a rather universal idea in various religions: "What remains, however, is the desire to discover oneself and to discover God, which is where the universality of the *Divine Comedy* truly stems" (Bonan, 2013).

Mason's last major exhibition, *A Prospect of Icons* (2008), exhibited her oeuvre as an artist over the past few decades: "A prospect of icons is in a sense an inventory of her icons. The list vacillates between a painterly exploration of conventional, if not collective iconography to the development of a highly personal iconography" (Van Rensburg, 2008:11). It is important to note that this exhibition showcased icons that portray different important phases of her life.

Regarding the concept of religion and faith in light of an individual who describes herself as an agnostic and non-believer may ironically be an expedient endeavour: "The way that artists throughout history have tried to describe the mystery of life and belief absolutely fascinates me; I used aspects of these to draw a sort of an autobiography which tries to come to grips with what I feel about animals, being an artist, being old, being religious" (Mason, 2014). This sensible duality is what makes Mason such a complex, interesting and respected artist: "I am also innately religious although I am a non-believer" (Mason, 2014). This statement clarifies what she means by "non-believer". She does not accept "doctrine" and "gods", but she has her "faith", she is "religious" and has her "mantra" for life. In short, she is a "non-believer" in terms of doctrines and gods; but she has religious beliefs and commitments – thus agreeing with Clouser's (2005) thoughts on religion in *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (see footnote 6). For Mason, art functions as a mediator between this religious curiosity and her intuitive cynical agnosticism.

Mason considers painting and drawing as a stimulus to come to terms with aspects of life that intrigue her. Thus, her visual arts provides a solid framework for her disordered life (Mason, 2011:33), or as Mason comments on her specific impetus as an artist: "To create works of art that are 'holy ground' without picturing specific godheads is something I try, unsuccessfully, to do" (Mason, 2014).

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[4] Thomas Aquinas was an Italian Dominican Theologian and a Catholic priest. He is regarded as the founder of *Thomism* where one would believe that reason is not always scientifically provable but can be accepted from a spiritual perspective (Torrell, 1993:1-12).

A thorough contextualisation of death and religion requires an investigative theoretical basis in which terminology such as Catholicism, Pantheism, Agnosticism, Christianity and dualism/binary oppositions may be useful. This theoretical basis may help to clarify Mason's personal stance on religion and how art making is used to render the incomprehensible comprehensible. Such an approach can also provide a better understanding of how to read Mason's interpretations of Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatory* – taking into account how her personal iconography and symbols are interwoven (see section 5.2). These works are specifically investigated in the context of religious symbolism that influences her visual exploration of themes such as death, eternal life, suffering and liberation. Mason's symbology[5] can be seen as death-centred, filled with tension, although it is viewed as a form of religious art.

1.3 Theoretical foundation

Themes that are expounded theoretically include the conceptualisation of death and religion as thematic influences in Mason's artworks, with reference to apposite elements pertaining to Catholicism and Pantheism.

1.3.1 Religion as an influence on the interpretation of death, eternal life, suffering and liberation

For the purposes of this study, aspects of death and religion as thematic concerns are investigated from a Catholic and pantheistic point of view: "I accepted the whole Catholic theology on which it (*La Divina Commedia*) was based" (Mason, 2008b) (see section 2.2). Clouser (2005:35-48) categorises in *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*[6] the distinct types of religious beliefs in three categories: the pagan type, the pantheistic type and the Biblical type. I posit that Mason's approach is mostly pantheistic in nature, since Pantheism entails "the view that God is everything and everything is God … the world is either identical with God or in some way a self-expression of His nature" (Levine, 1992:17). Mason asserts that: "My mantra is that everything that lives is holy" (Mason, 2011:28-43). This mantra as a

[5] The term "symbology" refers to the study and interpretation of symbols. This term is often synonymously used with *symbolism* (Walkere, 2006).

[6] Clouser, R.A. 2005. The myth of religious neutrality. Paris: The University of Notre Dame Press.

personal outlook corresponds with the concept that: “Pantheism signifies the belief that every existing entity is, in some sense, divine” (Levine, 1992:17) (refer also .

Since one of the selected works focuses on purgatory, this subject matter requires an investigation apposite aspects of Catholicism:

> *“In the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, purgatory is a temporary resting place for souls that must be punished for sins and transgressions before ultimately being admitted to heaven… purgatory is a place of finale purification where souls are sent to be cleansed of unforgiven or unabsolved sins before being deemed worthy to proceed into heaven”* (Greene, 2014).

Purgatory is regarded as an intermediate realm, established as a doctrine by the Roman Catholic Church so that believers who are not yet spiritually fit to enter heaven can undergo penal and purifying suffering (Boettner, 1962:218). The concept of purgatory is not based on the Bible, but Catholics believe that sinners who have committed mortal sins that require temporal punishment will go through purgatory. Mason (1999) states her thoughts on death and the afterlife thus: “The aesthetic sense is profoundly moral. I am an agnostic with no metaphysical expectations. My behaviour is not governed by a fear of punishment or the hope of eternity or the notion that I am made in any transcendent image". Purgatory can be seen as a “destination” where deceased Catholics who are not considered to be completely free of sin and that have not undergone the process of salvation and purgation, are destined. It is therefore an intermediate state of purifying suffering before one could gain access to heaven (Boettner, 1962:218). This intermediate state is a type of “waiting room” before entering eternity; in short, purgatory can be described as a liminal space[7].

1.3.2 Binary oppositions

Binary oppositions literally refer to two concepts that are regarded as opposites. This notion stems from Saussurean Structuralist Theory[8] (Simms, 1997:9). Terminology as discussed

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[7] *Liminal* in Latin refers to the term *threshold*: “a point before a new situation, period of life” (Oxford Dictionary, 2010:1557). The term was first coined by anthropologist, Arnold van Gennep (1873 – 1957) in his work titled *Rites de Passage* (1906). Van Gennep explored the idea of liminality in the context of rituals in tribal communities. In turn, Victor Turner (1920 – 1983) emphasised the significance of liminality in his essay titled *Betwixt and Between: the liminal period in Rites of Passage* (1967). A liminal space is regarded as a place of transition; moving from one point to another. In short, liminality occurs during the transitional phase of one space to another (Bhabha, 1994:37). Skjoldager-Nielsen and Edelman (2014:33) define a liminal space as “a transitory and precarious phase between stable states”. Liminality thus creates a space of unsure and uncomfortable tension, where one does not want to be and anticipates a transition.

[8] Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 – 1913), a linguist and semiotician, can be regarded as one of the main figures in the development of both linguistics and semiology (Holdcroft, 1991). Structuralism focuses on the idea and relationship between units and rules within language; units refer to words whereas rules refer to the grammar/implicit meaning that structures words. He placed emphasis on the duality of language; this duality

in the preceding paragraphs often presupposes understanding of the opposite concepts, such as heaven/hell, death/life or forgiveness/condemnation. Binary opposites such as these are discussed in the following section. Binary oppositions are usually classified in terms of dominance where the one term is placed above the other: good/bad and beautiful/ugly.

In both Mason's iconography (see section 3.3) and in the selected works (*Inferno* and *Purgatorio*) the notion of oppositions are visually evident. In these works, she constructs a synthesis between binary terms such as beauty/ugliness, life/death, pain (suffering)/liberation and heaven/hell. This density of opposing images creates intricate suggestions as well as a sense of unease. Exploring these dualisms (see section 2.4) may yield valuable insights into Mason's thoughts. The present study therefore focuses on these dualisms between eternal life and death, pain (suffering) and liberation as well as religiosity as opposed to a secular view (see section 2.4). The concepts of heaven and hell present an obvious binary opposition with which individuals associate the afterlife. *La Divina Commedia* creates an inherent dualism:

> *"Hence the dualism of the Commedia: tumultuous and puzzling life on earth contrasts with the unchanging divine providence and divine rule"* (Jongeneel, 2007:132).

The dualisms suggested in both Mason's body of work and in Dante's *La Divina Commedia* are quite similar, especially when looking at the artist's synthesis of religion/spirituality and a profane view. It is of essence to note that Dante follows a similar binary approach as Mason's:

> *"He sets the vivid scenery in the three canticles of life and death, joy and despair, against an allegorical background of moral and religious dogma"* (Jongeneel, 2007:143).

1.4 Problem statement

Questions arise about the correlation between the iconography within the artworks and the artist's view of religion. The present study is therefore concerned with the problem of how Mason's beliefs manifest the chosen works *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. In spite of her ideas to the contrary, the works express a deep sense of religiosity[9]. As a result, the problem of this

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is manifested by aspects such as synchronic and diachronic linguistics as well as identifying the sign, the signifier and the signified within language.

[9] According to the Oxford Dictionary (2010:1244) religiosity refers to "the state of being religious". In the context of this study *religiosity* can be divided into two terms: *religious* and *curiosity*; thus an individual who is curious about religion and religious practices (Clouser, 2005:35-48).

research centres on how to interpret the selected works if one cannot do it within the context of a single belief system. This allows one to consider binaries in her work, for example, beauty/ugliness, eternal life/death, suffering/liberation and heaven/hell. These dualisms create tension and a sense of unease; they represent visual complexities that invite further exploration.

Research questions

From the problem statement, the research questions and objectives are formulated:

1. How can Dante's descriptions of *Inferno* and *Purgatory* in *La Divina Commedia* be contextualised when seen in reference to the interrelationship of concepts such as dualism/binary oppositions, death and religion? *This question can be answered by contextualising Dante's descriptions of Inferno and Purgatory in La Divina Commedia with reference to the interrelationship of concepts such as dualism/binary oppositions, liminality, death, religion and Catholicism.*
2. How can Mason's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* be interpreted with reference to religious frameworks? *I answer this question by interpreting Mason's Inferno and Purgatorio in terms of a possible religious framework associated with Mason's worldview.*
3. How can the constructs of death and religion be used to contextualise the interrelationship between Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatory* and Mason's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*? *I will explore symbols of death and religion contributing to the interplay between Dante's Inferno and Purgatory and Mason's* Inferno *and* Purgatorio.

1.5 Main objective

The purpose of this study is to investigate Mason's religious image-making and personal iconography and what this imagery reveals about the chosen artworks and her peculiar view on religion when also interpreted from her own pantheist-like point of view. Emphasis is placed on the dualisms she creates between eternal life and death, suffering and liberation, including religion and a more profane view. This study aims to prove that her art succeeds in expressing the incomprehensible. Her depiction of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* serve as examples of works that portray her iconography in a rather pantheist manner.

1.6 Central theoretical statement

I argue that Judith Mason uses art as an attempt to make sense of the incomprehensible, specifically in the works *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. Mason considers painting as a stimulus to explore the facets of life that intrigue her, in particular religion and death. In the commission

Walking with and away from Dante, Mason draws on Dante's *Divine Comedy* and her own personal Catholic background to explore her own religious views. Her personal iconography and symbolism present a dense symbolic visual language that serves as evidence of her personal view and standpoint on diverse themes such as religion and Christianity. Mason's works suggest a number of dualisms, and represent diametric oppositions for example, beauty/ugliness, eternal life/death, suffering/liberation and heaven/hell. These dualisms creates tension and even unease in the mind of the interpreter. For Mason, art functions as a mediator between her religious curiosity and her intuitive cynical agnosticism. Much of Mason's symbology can be seen as death-centred, imbued with tension, although her work is often regarded as a form of religious art. I argue that, for the most part, her works suggest a leaning towards Pantheism.

1.7 Methodological approach

The methodological approach is divided into two sections. Firstly, a literature study is conducted from which the theoretical basis is formed, according to which the artworks will be interpreted and analysed.

1.7.1 Literature study

This research uses a wide range of sources and is based on academic sources. This include books, the Internet, databases such as JSTOR, EBSCOHost and journal articles. Utilising the literature study, core concepts such as Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatory*, death, religion, Judith Mason, Catholicism, Pantheism, liminality and binary oppositions/dualism are defined and applied to interpret and explore the chosen artworks. Academic articles on Dante Alighieri's understanding of inferno and purgatory such as Jongeneel's *Art and divine order in the Divina Commedia* (2007) and Clouser's *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (2005) serve as some of the main sources in this study. The book titled *Judith Mason: A prospect of icons* (2008) in collaboration with the Standard Bank Gallery is an important reference regarding Mason's oeuvre and her disposition as an artist.

1.7.2 Method for interpretation of artworks

In the first step, the chosen works are described, after which the works are analysed with reference to stylistic elements as well as an iconographic exploration. Secondly, in order to identify the potential belief system from which to read Mason's symbology, an interpretation and analysis of the two selected panels follow. Lastly, the main arguments derived from the

interpretation of the two selected works are presented. The belief system applicable to the interpretation of the selected works are elaborated upon here.

1.8 Chapter layout

The introductory chapter presents the background and context of the study. This includes the problem statement, research questions, main objective and sub-objectives, central theoretical statement, method of investigation, as well as the chapter outline. In the second chapter, death and religion as thematic influences in the visual arts and from a Catholicism and Pantheism viewpoint are explored as a theoretical base for the study that suggest an opposite method of investigation. An overview of liminality and binary oppositions that transpire in the duality in both Mason's art as well as Dante's depiction of inferno, paradiso and purgatory is sketched. Chapter three presents an introduction to Judith Mason as an artist and her iconography. Her interest in Dante's *La Divina Commedia* contributes to the introductory thoughts on Mason's visualisation of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* in her commission titled *Walking with and away from Dante*. In the fourth chapter, an interpretation and analysis of the selected works is presented. A summary of the main arguments is the focus of the final chapter, where recommendations for further research are also suggested.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical framework: death and religiosity

"Religion in contemporary art is thriving as a consequence of society's openness to the exchange of diverse ideas and beliefs" (Lerner, 2013:17).

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the visualisation of religion as an influence on the interpretation of death, suffering, trauma and liberation is contextualised from a theoretical point of view, in order to motivate why these specific ideas have been selected to guide the present study. Because death is the dominant theme in the chosen artworks, it would be helpful to explore artworks related to the theme of death. Death as a theme is also an integral part of the writings of Dante on which these paintings are based. Mason utilised Dante's writings as a: "tool with which one can craft one's own moral philosophy" (Mason, 1989:129). It is evident that Mason's symbology is death-centred and suggests various tensions from which she is trying to make sense of complex thoughts and grappling with imagery dealing with eternal life and death (on which the *Divine Comedy* is based). Our understanding of death and the afterlife through the lens of religion are two interdependent concepts that have been utilised in the visual arts to commemorate loved ones, process loss and understand death.

The idea of death is something that humans generally find difficult to comprehend. When Mason renders the idea of death by way of painting it as subject matter, she feels that she can come to terms with this reality. Bertman (2018) states that: "death has always been a patron of the arts". Death has been a popular theme throughout art history, and the act of rendering it has been an attempt to communicate how dying might feel. In a similar fashion, the pain and suffering associated with death and mortality have also been communicated through the visual arts. It is therefore possible to suggest that the aim of visualising such a somber concept is an attempt to understand death, manage loss and to accept one's own mortality. Mason explains this notion when stating the following: "One paints because words can't do the work" (Skawran, 2008). Bertman (2018) summarises this correlation: "It is through the transmission by artists into potent symbolic translations that humankind's inner realities can be communicated and understood". We have an inborn instinct to make sense of the facets of life that baffle us, constantly searching for ways that can assist our need to comprehend complex concepts.

Important writings on the complex matter of death are discussed below with particular reference to the term *religiosity* (see section 2.2). The fascination with death within Western art is explored, and various themes such as art dealing with the plague as thematic material and anamorphosis as popular subject matters are perused. The way in which symbolism is used to visually "verbalise" these death-related themes follows below. The likely return of religiosity in contemporary society has given way to religious-themed art that is no longer as "conservative", sacred and straightforward as it once was – now it allows room for critique, doubts and debate. Humanity is always searching for understanding and meaning, grappling with how to come to terms with the incomprehensible. This chapter aims to highlight the religious dimensions of these complex facets of life: "The capacity for meaning in Western society has philosophical, literary, and aesthetic dimensions, as well as religious ones" (Mennekes, 2011:264).

This need for understanding and meaning can be seen as a sort of pilgrimage. Mason's pilgrimage is one of image-making through her art. This is not only a pilgrimage for Mason, but also for the viewer. A pilgrimage is defined as a religious journey or holy mission. According to Elsner and Rutherford (2006:220), a pilgrimage is "travel undertaken either for sacred or secular purposes". The motivation for such a journey is usually religious, or at least spiritual. Dante himself went on a pilgrimage through his writing on inferno, purgatory and paradiso. The purpose of his journey was to seek eternal salvation and to be able to understand God's divinity. His pilgrimage represents the souls' journey towards God (refer to the original text of *La Divina Commedia*). Mason's own pilgrimage aims to make sense out of the issues in her own life that have confronted her. Her pilgrimage takes the form of the creative process and artmaking. According to Mason (1973), art with a religious theme is either a reflection of an artist's faith or an exploration of his/her doubts. We tend to view art not only aesthetically, but on a deeper psychological and religious level (Johnson, 2005). This notion relates to a pilgrim's journey, seeking salvation, forgiveness or even God. For both Mason and Dante, this pilgrimage is an attempt to find inner peace, to understand the incomprehensible and to grasp that which baffles us as humanity. According to Skawran (2008): "… it's not only beautiful but also useful – a tool with which one can craft one's own moral philosophy".

This study mainly focuses on Christian-themed art with particular reference to the Catholic branch of Christianity. In addition, the role of the Reformation and the Council of Trent are elaborated on, as well as the impact it had on the visual arts. The way in which the arts played an integral role in religion and strengthening the superiority of the aristocracy is

investigated because of the significant influence it had on the arts, and following this an extensive look at how death, trauma, suffering and liberation can be understood from a Catholic and Pantheistic point of view is presented, including an attempt to define death from the perspective of Catholicism. The term *Ars Moriendi* is defined also in terms of how it relates to Catholic dogma. Furthermore, Pantheism is addressed with reference to how death can be understood from this viewpoint, as well as what the interpretation of religion from a Pantheistic view point entails. Lastly, an investigation of binary oppositions as well as dualism is conducted in light of how these relate to the chosen artist, artworks as well as the poetic writings on inferno, purgatory and paradiso.

2.2 Death and religion as thematic influences in the visual arts

In this section death as thematic influence is firstly discussed after which religion as a theme in the visual arts follows. Some of the influential writings on death is *The Meaning of Death*[10], *On Death and Dying*[11] as well as two academic journals titled *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, and *Death Studies*. These writings gave way to discussing a "taboo" topic, and it was seen as provocative but also very informative: "it widened our horizons on death and urged re-examination of fundamental beliefs, fears and anxieties about death" (Lamers, 2012:6). For the purpose of this study, there are two very important chapters in *The Meaning of Death*. Firstly, Feifel refers to "Modern Art and Death", emphasising the use of symbols that refer to death. These widely used symbols have changed throughout the history of art, but they still communicate the same subject: our fears, hopes and terrors regarding death and dying (Lamers, 2012:8). The second chapter is entitled "Death and Religion". There is an obvious correlation between these two concepts: "… religious individuals are more afraid of death than non-religious individuals" (Feifel, 1959:121). During the 1970s, various universities began to present courses focusing on death and dying. One's religion shapes one's "understanding" of death, unlike the thoughts of Descartes who debated that the mind should be free from the body so that science could be independent from religion:

> *"Religious teaching promised the certainty of a life after death, a life of either punishment or reward, a life over which one's current behavior and beliefs held sway"* (Feifel, 1998).

[10] Feifel, H. 1959. The meaning of death. London: Taylor & Francis.

[11] Kübler-Ross, E. 1969. On death and dying. New York: Scribner.

Death has been perceived differently by various people over different cultures, even though death is a universal truth, and the visualisation of death has been used to document the "process of aging and dying, grieving, and commemorating" (Annenberg Learner, 2017). The visual arts have been used as a medium to communicate thanatological ideas and mortality. Throughout the history of art, death has therefore been a constant dominant theme:

> *"The obsession with the eternal is deeply embedded within history; entire civilizations and cultures have developed belief systems surrounding the prospect of life after death. Elaborate artworks such as sarcophagi, tomb relics, religious paintings and even more abstract pieces, provide an excellent socio-cultural lens in which to understand specific beliefs, rituals and philosophical concepts regarding the afterlife" (Charles, 2015:3).*

It is ironic to think that although death is to a great extent incomprehensible to the living, it has been visualised repeatedly in artworks. It is significant but also obvious to mention that death cannot be experienced and explicated by the living, since only the dying can experience the final approach towards death (Herron & Bindeman, 2016:309). That is the very core from which our fascination stems as living individuals: "However simply acknowledging the inevitability of death, does not provide us with the ability to perceive and understand the event itself ... There are a thousand modes of dying, but only one 'death'" (Charles, 2015:2). The tension between the fragility of life and death results in death's ambiguity. This idea links well with Emily Dickinson's poem titled *I Could Not Stop For Death*[12] in which she states that "only the ambiguity of death can be realized" (Herron & Bindeman, 2016:310).

Thomson (1999:29) raises a self-reflective question: "Can we be certain of death? Not of what might happen after death, but of the brute fact that each of us will meet with his or her own death?". Humans tend to admit to the reality of death, but are we as humans really certain and convinced of our own death awaiting us? This unfamiliarity of, and fear of death have to be reconciled by way of accepting death and the possibility of dying (Kluger, 2018).

An important facet regarding death is the "death drive" or more commonly known as *Thanatos* used by Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) [13]. According to Freud, the death drive

[12] The lyrical poem titled "I could not stop for death" was written by Emily Dickenson in 1863. Death is personified as a gentleman suitor in this poem (Malan, 2007:66).

[13] Freud, S. 1920. Beyond the pleasure principle. London: International Psycho-Analytical.

(expounded in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920]), refers to the pursuit of death – contrary to the will to live (Razinsky, 2012:152). The death drive and instinct (as a counterpart to the life drive) are particularly complex terms. They are related to a dual dilemma experienced by human beings. On the one hand, almost everybody is afraid of death; on the other hand, humans are often aware of the notion of mortality. This creates an existential tension. Colman (2009:762) defines the death drive as follows: "In psychoanalysis, the unconscious drive towards dissolution and death, initially turned inwards on oneself and tending to self-destruction; later turned outwards in the form of aggression".

In Western art, the fascination with death has been portrayed regularly; think of Hans Holbein's (1497 – 1543) *The Ambassadors* (1533), Pieter Bruegel's (1525 – 1569) *The Triumph of Death* (1562), Hieronymus Bosch's (c.1450 – 1516) *The Seven Deadly Sins* (the 1500s) and Jacques-Louis David's (1748 – 1825) *Death of Marat* (1793). Death is also illustrated by means of symbolism, for example Paul Cézanne's (1839 – 1906) *Pyramid of Skulls* (1901) and anatomy, for example Rembrandt van Rijn's (1606 – 1669) *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp* (1632). Each of these artists treat the subject of death in different ways, and as such the possible variety of approaches or treatment of religious themes associated with death seems endless.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577 – 1640) is a fitting example of an artist who chose religious themes in his artmaking, such as the *Assumption of Mary (1626)*. Death plays a crucial role in these examples. Visualising death serves as a means to process pain and uncertainties. Themes pertaining to death often focus on pain, death, redemption and resurrection:

> *"Assumption of Mary" offers the faithful a clear look into their own future. It shows what they can expect: to receive God's grace and be taken up into eternal life. The assumption and coronation of the Mother of God in heaven are condensed here in a single image… She represents the first human being who, through baptism, is transformed into the death and resurrection of Christ"* (Mennekes, 2011:265).

2.2.1 The impact of the Black Death on the visual documentation of death

There are a few evident themes directly linked to the concept of death that originated especially during the late Middle Ages (14th century) when the Black Death[14] was an

[14] According to Byrne (2004:1) "the Black Death is the name often given to what has usually been identified as a widespread outbreak of bubonic plague in Europe, the Near East, and North Africa from 1347 to 1352. It is commonly, but inaccurately, said that the term originated in the skin discoloration – dark blotches – that accompanies the disease".

incurable epidemic. This horrific plague which resulted in an estimated 75 million deaths led to a period of hopelessness and distress with death hovering as a continuous presence. The Black Death would have an immeasurable effect on society and art for centuries to come. The plague returned to Europe many times between the 14th to 17th centuries. A wide variety of death-related themes emerged during this period that was more deeply explored by means of various thematic interpretations by many artists. According to Le Claire (2014), the following are some of the dominant death-related themes evident in visual art: plague art, death as a reaper of souls, the dance of death, anamorphosis and hidden symbols of death, death and the maiden, the triumph of death, the *dance macabre,* skulls in art and anatomy as art.

Art in which the plague is depicted was a direct response to the Black Death that repeatedly devastated large parts of Europe, and the visual arts flourished with death as its inspiration: "Unsurprisingly, an event of such horror and size deeply entered the public consciousness, and so its art. The Black Death was life. It was a daily concern. Death became an even more integral part of their art. Death was supreme" (Horse, 2016). The painting titled *Saint Roch in the Hospital* (1549) by Jacopo Tintoretto (1518 – 1594) is a realistic death bed scene of the dying, showing the swollen wounds and infections caused by the plague.

Figure 1. Tintoretto, J. *St Roch in the Hospital*. (1549).

The dance of death is also known as the *danse macabre*[15]. The danse macabre summons people from various stages of life to participate in the dance of death beside the grave, reminding the living of their own impending death. A fitting example is Bernt Notke's *Danse Macabre* (1633) where skeletons who personify Death dance with the living. These figures

[15] The danse macabre can be defined as follows: "In the medieval period, the dance macabre was a literary or pictorial representation of a procession or dance of both living and dead figures expressing the medieval allegorical concept of the all-conquering and equalizing power of death" (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

serve as *Memento Mori*[16], depicting the pope, emperors, working class as well as peasants (Le Claire, 2014).

Figure 2. Notke, B. *Danse Macabre*. (1463).

Anamorphosis[17] and veiled symbols of death in the visual arts are commonly associated with "hidden" images within the art work. Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533) portrays two wealthy men – an ambassador and a bishop. They are surrounded by objects symbolising wealth and knowledge. In the foreground, the viewer can see a distorted diagonal skull which is usually associated with death and mortality. This optical illusion, which needs to be seen from the correct view point so that the distortion can be corrected, serves as a type of *Memento Mori* to these wealthy young men.

Figure 3. Holbein, H. *The Ambassadors*. (1533).

[16] *Memento Mori* is a Latin expression defined as: "An object kept as a reminder of the inevitability of death" (Oxford Dictionary, 2018).

[17] Anamorphosis is "'the image within the image'… a technique sometimes employed in art to create hidden imagery that can only be seen properly from certain angles or under the right conditions" (Le Claire, 2014).

Death and the maiden is a theme which followed the dance of death. This theme had a more intimate and erotic connotation where Death embraces women, seducing and reminding them that their beauty would rot away. Hans Baldung's (1484 – 1545) *Death and the Maiden* (1520) shows a: "voluptuous young maiden turns to receive the kiss of her lover, only to discover, to her horror, Death. The skeletal figure gently holds her head, a gesture that belies the finality of his impending bite" (Web Gallery, 2018).

Figure 4. Baldung, H. *Death and the Maiden*. (1520).

The triumph of death also focuses on the inevitability of mortality. As a reaction to the plague, these paintings depicted the threat of death and the horror of hell. The delight of heaven was usually juxtaposed in these depictions. Death is here shown as an "instrument of chaos and destruction, a brutal dictator whose minions sweep over everything, destroying all in its path" (Le Claire, 2014). For example, Pieter Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death* (1562) portrays a medieval village destroyed by an army of skeletons. Here, the living have no chance against Death.

Figure 5. Bruegel, P. *The Triumph of Death*. (1562).

With the anamorphosis displayed in the Ambassadors by Holbein, as discussed above, skulls in art are often incorporated in still life paintings. The skull is a universal symbol directly connoted with death and the living's mortality. Conterio (2015) defined the use of the skull: "Skulls remind us of what strangeness exists just beneath the armour of flesh. They are also pure emblems of death". Paul Cézanne painted a *Pyramid of Skulls* (1901), four skulls that are stacked in a pyramidal formation and placed in the foreground of the painting. One is unsure as to why Cézanne painted skulls; it could be to contemplate death or to simply portray skulls due to their interesting shape and depth.

Figure 6. Cezanne, P. *Pyramid of Skulls*. (1901).

Researching death as a thematic influence in the visual arts is not a new concept; Mennekes (2011:263) confirms that: "The relationship between art and death in Art History is not unfamiliar". Within human culture, death has been "banished" and is regarded as an existential threat. One can argue that death has to be treated as the exact opposite: "If we

would liberate death from the taboo zone and turn it into a positive experience like the birth of child" (Mennekes, 2011:276). In so doing, death is celebrated by way of commemorating those who once lived and viewing death as a succeeding realm where to the dying can look forward to. When placing death into context with art, the following is noteworthy:

> *"Historically, art has often been present in the face of death. Many pictures of the crucifixion and images from ars moriendi books – along with martyrdoms, dances of death, and images of consolation – speak emphatically of this last moment of life… These images remind one of death and at the same time exhort one to deal meaningfully with one's own finale moments: promoting mindfulness, a readiness for conversion, and an opportunity to search for meaning and consolation"* (Mennekes, 2011:264).

2.2.2 Religion as thematic influence in the visual arts

When researching religion as a theme in the visual arts, it is evident that from a terminological point of view, religion has clearly defined meanings as opposed to the visual arts that can be considered a much more fluid term. These two terms are interdependent, depending on the context: "For some, aesthetics must *a priori* always be subject to theology, for others, beauty has led inexorably to the divine" (Prickett, 2014:1). Religious-themed paintings tend to be endowed with much symbolism that portray various aspects of divine and religious practices and doctrines. According to Lerner (2013:1), there has been a revival in the contemporary art of religion as subject matter. Today we live in a "post-secular society" which can be defined as "a return to the religious ties that steadily and dramatically lapsed after the Second World War" (Lerner, 2013:1).

The book entitled *On the Strange Place of Religion and Art* (2004) written by art historian James Elkins is one of the key texts used in this study, especially when referring to religion as a thematic influence in the visual arts. Elkins (2004:47) states that:

> *"The art world can accept a wide range of 'religious' art by people who hate religion, by people who are deeply uncertain about it, by the disgruntled and the disaffected and the skeptical, but there is no place for artists who express straightforward, ordinarily religious faith".*

The same author (2004:47) mentions that contemporary religiously themed art has to comply with various criteria. The art has to reflect that the artists have second thoughts or doubts about religion; these religious ideas has to be interwoven into the artwork. A second criterion is that "the artist is meditative and uncertain about both art and religion: ambiguity and self-critique have to be integral to the work. And it follows that irony must pervade the art, must be the air it breathes" (Elkins, 2004:47). It is also crucial to consider the role of the

creative process in art: it could be seen as a ritual to get to know the self through creative expression, but more so within a religious context to express one's religious standpoint and to critique or reflect on religion and religious practices. One of the main criteria or characteristics of art with a religious theme is a sense of religiosity. In the context of this study, *religiosity* can be divided into two terms: *religious* and *curiosity*, thus referring to an individual who is curious about religion and religious practices (Clouser, 2005:35-48). Lerner (2013:3) points to the relevance hereof: "visual representations of religiosity had never really disappeared from the world of art".

Furthermore, contemporary artists tend to juxtapose different religious beliefs. Fusing these divergent religions nonetheless portray the divine and sacred. The concept of the sacred is quite relevant at present; various exhibitions have explored how in our secular world the search for spirituality is a persistent theme within contemporary visual art. One of the most comprehensive exhibitions titled *Traces du Sacré* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2008, showcased the persistent visualisation of sacredness and spirituality, constantly questioning religious beliefs and practices – regardless of the decline in being faithful to a particular religion in our present society.

The book titled *The Return of Religion and Other Myths: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (2009) by Hlavajova *et al*. looks at how twenty-first-century Westerners are unexpectedly confronted with religion again. This phenomenon suggests the need to be able to connect and understand religion once more. Religion has shaped certain imagery and the way in which art has become a powerful tool in these contemporary debates and discourse.

In terms of an art historical review, it is notable that past events and anarchy were the driving forces for painting sacred and apocalyptic themes: "Religious unrest and unsettling historical events led artists such as Albrecht Dürer (1471 – 1528), Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475 – 1564), Luca Signorelli (1445 – 1523), and William Blake (1757 – 1827) to depict the apocalypse in a variety of images. The figure of the Antichrist and scenes of the *Last Judgement* and Revelation are, by far, the most common artistic renditions" (Lerner, 2013:15). Here apocalyptic themes refer to either heaven or hell.

For an art historical appraisal of religious art, this study focuses on Christian themed art as well as the Catholic branch thereof. With the rejection of polytheism by the Romans, a new belief in monotheism emerged, meaning, of course, a belief in one god. Catacomb paintings and sarcophagi were among the first artistic expressions of the Christian religion (Fleming, 2005:120). Primitive mosaics were also used as a vehicle to visualise biblical stories in the

portals of Roman churches as well as the interior of mausoleums. These images portrayed popular subjects such as Christ the Good Shepherd that leads His flock, Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac and other Old Testament tales that were reinterpreted.In the fairly early stages of the Roman Empire, Christianity was regarded as one of the official religions and equal to the traditional Roman gods by Constantine when he issued the Edict of Milan (313). This gave way to Italy's financial support to build the basilica of St Peter in the Vatican, St Paul Outside-the-Walls and the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. Christ is often seen as the protector: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Only after 380, when Christianity was decreed the official religion of Rome, was Christ depicted in various roles other than the good shepherd. In depicting Christ in these other roles, a new iconography had to be established, including the incorporation of a halo, purple robe and throne, into early Christian visualisations to symbolize power and rule (Kleiner, 2009, 239).

Figure 7. Unknown. *Christ as the Good Shepherd*. (425 – 450).

Early Christian buildings were often decorated with mosaics as a form of mural and vault decoration: "mosaic, in the service of Christian theology, was the medium of some of the supreme masterpieces of medieval art" (Kleiner, 2009:245).

The influential force defined as Catholicism followed shortly thereafter:

> *"Meanwhile, a third force, the more enduring power of the Roman papacy, was becoming increasingly influential. Despite its opposition to the Roman Empire, Catholicism eventually emulated the orderliness and hierarchy that had allowed Rome to maintain its vast domain. With the decline and fall of Rome, the Catholic Church emerged as an international organization, with Latin as its international language and Roman roads providing its means of communication"* (Fleming, 2005:122).

With the separation of the Empire into eastern and western centres after the death of Constantine (337 AD), Roman art was split into two distinct styles known as Early Christian (western-centred) and Byzantine (eastern-centred) art. At this stage, visual art was a popular medium for decorative as well as pedagogical purposes. Mosaic frescos, dome mosaics and mosaic portraiture illustrated biblical themes and stories.

Figure 8. Unknown. *Last Supper*. (c. 520).

Figure 9. Unknown. *Baptism of Christ surrounded by the Twelve Apostles*. (c. 458).

Irrespective of the collapse of the Roman Empire in 1453, the Church of Rome became a stronger force, expanding beyond its original boundaries of the classical Roman world: “bringing with it an international organization, the increased authority of the pope, and a transnational identity for believers” (Fleming, 2005:155). This is where the word “Catholic” originates; which can be defined as *universal*. During the Romanesque period the bishop, archbishop and pope played an integral role in the spiritual wellbeing of the people where God the Father was the centre and had various representatives and functionaries (pope, bishops and the like) on earth. The view of Christ as the good shepherd shifted drastically towards the mighty King, enthroned and awaiting or performing the last judgement (see

section 4.4). The tympanum (half-moon-shaped space above a door) of the Saint-Lazare in Autun, France, portrays this theme where souls are weighed to determine whether they should be sent to hell or heaven (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006).

Figure 10. Gislebertus. *Last Judgement*. (1135).

According to Kleiner (2009:334), building churches became an obsession during the Romanesque period. Castles and monasteries were also regarded as important centres, the monastery functioned as a core of artistic production and knowledge. The abbey at Cluny was such a religious Romanesque centre. Monks undertook vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, living a life dedicated to God by way of prayer and meditation. Fleming (2005:185) contextualises how religion became a form of traditionalism during the Romanesque period:

> *"The veneration of past traditions figured strongly in Romanesque thought. The divine order of their world had been handed down in the Scriptures, where the word of God was manifest".*

After the Romanesque period, the Gothic followed during which time the great cathedrals were built. Even though sculpture and stained glass windows adorned the churches, freestanding panels were often painted. Artists increasingly painted frightful judgement day themes as well as ordinary biblical stories. It is also during this period that extraordinary writers such as Dante Alighieri were exiled from their native cities (Rubin, 2005:103). Also during the 14th century, Dante's poetic writings on the afterlife in the *Divine Comedy* contributed to the medieval worldview about what the afterlife for devout Catholics would entail. (A contextualisation of Dante Alighieri is presented in Chapter 3.)

With the emergence of the Italian Renaissance, art adapted to the new creative spirit and themes altered to express this new spirit. Religion as a thematic theme in the arts still

prospered, but artists became interested in humanity and the natural world. Portrayals of Christ shifted from the mighty and powerful to a more emotional connotation where humans, God and the environment were painted in greater harmony. The visualisation of Mary became dominant where she is often portrayed with the infant Christ, a completely different image of that of God in majesty that proliferated during the Gothic period: “The emotional element in the Passion was largely conveyed through compassion for the Virgin as the mother of sorrows” (Fleming, 2005:238).

Figure 11. Di Bondone, G. *Madonna Enthroned*. (c.1310).

During the Renaissance, the Reformation[18] also took place. Anything that did not appear in the Bible, could not be regarded as the Word of God. Salvation depended on faith and not good works and money paid to the church to save one from one’s sins. The key assumptions and received wisdom of Christendom were questioned since the majority thereof could not be found in the Bible. The church was under close observation initiated by Martin Luther as a Protestant reformer, who questioned the all-powerful and manipulative authority of the church. Because of this newly completed cathedrals played an integral role in the cities, forming part of the focal point of the community with political, legislative and religious

[18] “The Reformation was not an attempt to divide the Roman Catholic Church, rather an attempt to reform it. However,he Reformation became the schism that divided the Roman Catholic Church and ended the old unity of Christendom. The Reformation was an attempt to return to the original teachings and values of the early or ‘Apostolic’ Church. It claimed that only the Bible could teach and instruct people about the Word of God and had little regard for the received wisdom and authority of the legitimate Catholic church doctrine (Daily History, 2017).

authority. The Renaissance was a return to reason and rationality following the Middle Ages, and out of this classical humanism, scientific naturalism and Renaissance individualism arose (Fleming, 2005:271-274). This led to some people realising that they do not have to allow the dictating role of the Pope and that religion entails a personal relationship between man and God. Through prayer, believers could address God directly and thus the mediation through the Catholic priest was regarded as irrelevant. The emphasis shifted from the authoritative priesthood to the individual him- or herself. The Renaissance therefore gave way to a new religious outlook through the Protestant Reformation. The Church of Rome lost its powerful hold over Northern Europe. During this time, some of the most influential masterpieces were painted: Masaccio's (1401 – 1428) *The Tribute Money* (1427), Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* (1450), Piero della Francesca's (1416 – 1492) *Resurrection* (1463), Sandro Botticelli's (1445 – 1510) *Adoration of the Magi* (1475) and Leonardo da Vinci's (1452 – 1519) *Madonna of the Rocks* (1483) as well as his *Last Supper* (1498). The Renaissance was thus directly linked to individualism where "private patronage began to rival church patronage" (Fleming, 2005:273).

In Cinquecento Italy, artists often worked for wealthy private patrons as well as for the Church. The Pope commissioned Michelangelo Buonarroti for the ceiling and altar wall frescoes of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican palace. The Catholic Church was thus the leading art patron. Pope Julius II realised the propagandistic potential of visual imagery, thus prescribed images of authority which would emphasise not only the dominating authority of the Catholic Church, but also his own powerful rule. Thus Michelangelo had to integrate Church doctrine with the Pope's agenda. In his religious art, Michelangelo focused on the human figure where "the body was the manifestation of the character of the soul" (Kleiner, 2009:559). Some of the frescoes were popular and well-known biblical tales such as the *Creation of Adam*, *Temptation and Expulsion* and the *Last Judgement*.

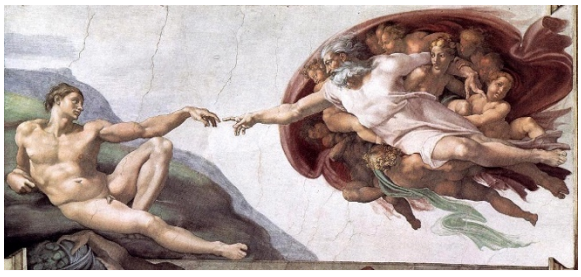

Figure 12. Buonarroti, M. *The creation of Adam.* (1511).

Figure 13. Buonarroti, M. *The temptation and expulsion of Adam and Eve.* (1512).

It was evident that both the aristocracy and church were dependent on the richness and grandeur of the visual arts to strengthen their high-ranking and superior positions within the society.

A new viewpoint of the relationship between man and God also emerged in the Catholic Church. Practices such as the sale of *indulgences*[19], nepotism and the pursuit of personal wealth within the Church structures added to the frustration of questioning Catholics, and as noted above, contributed to the Reformation. The Council of Trent (1545 – 1563) aimed to erase the pursuit of power and money by the Church, and the functions of priests and the sacraments were reinforced by the Catholic church. The role of art now emphasised that "the arts should function within a narrow scope, literally depicting biblical stories and other sacred texts" (Fleming, 2005:299-300). The effect of the Reformation on the visual arts was quite extensive. Since Popes knew and understood the contributing role that visual imagery portrayed in reinforcing ideological ideas, they tended to exploit this imagery to strenghten the role of the church and to consolidate their own power. This would eventually form the backbone of the Counter-Reformation. The initial effect that the Reformation had on art during these tumultuous times was, amongst others, that sources of patronage were disrupted, which led to a lack of funding for decorative and architectural programmes in the countries influenced by the Reformation. A Reformationist view was held by some that one could not make an image of God, which resulted in iconoclasm in certain regions. Adapting existing Roman Catholic churches led to removing sculptures and any over exaggerative decorative elements. Reformationist churches kept decorative elements to the minimum, focusing rather on the function of the church, namely preaching. The communion altar no longer displayed relics of the saints. The representational arts underwent dramatic changes:

[19] According to Kleiner (2009:652) "Indulgence were Church-sanctioned remittances of time Catholics had to spend in Purgatory for confessed sins. The increasing frequency of their sale suggested that those who could afford to purchase indulgences were buying their way into Heaven".

> "*…sculpture suffered the most because its lifelike three-dimensionality was believed to bring it close to idol worship and because graven images were forbidden by the second commandment. Painted altarpieces were also out of the question… The views of Reformation leaders on the proper place for the arts varied from partial acceptance to total exclusion"* (Fleming, 2005:322-323).

Historical religious painting and biblical stories shifted towards different iconography, and portraits, expressions of experiences, feelings and reactions became commonplace. The landscape also became a favoured subject, directly placing emphasis on God's creation as well as the physical evidence that God does exist. Palpable objects were also common, but a moral message was required to avoid suggestions of materialism. The term *Vanitas* is of relevance in this context, with reference to the Bible (Ecclesiastes 1:2), and which refers to a religious message focused on the insignificance of worldly pleasures and juxtaposed by objects of morality:

> *"Flowers, fruit, dead animals, and skulls were classed as Memento Mori, reminders of the passage of time, the brevity of life, and the inevitability of death"* (Fleming, 2005:324).

Figure 14. Claesz, P. *Vanitas Still Life*. (1625).

During the Counter-Reformation (1534) also called the Catholic Reformation, the arts played an integral role in religion and strengthening the superiority of the aristocracy. The reform of Roman Catholicism was visually evident in the arts where "Catholics deemed art as valuable for cultivating piety" and "Protestants believed religious imagery encouraged idolatry and distracted the faithful from the goal of developing a personal relationship with God" (Kleiner, 2009:617). Ideally, the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church had to find ways to coexist, but this never came to pass. These oppositions led to a conflict in style and thus a mixture of stylistic trends during the Baroque: "This aesthetic inclination cannot be

detached from the tumult within the Church of Rome, especially the actions taken at the Council of Trent to meet the challenge of the Reformation… Liberal religious attitudes hardened into strict church doctrines" (Fleming, 2005:361). In the Catholic church the image of God changed again, God was now regarded as a terrifying judge and no longer an endearing father figure.

A new world order was therefore on the rise where the new Counter-Reformation shaped Roman Catholicism in the 17th century. The reform forced art in a specific direction, especially artists who were producing paintings for churches:

> *"The overly refined, sensuous, and excessively dramatic art of mannerism could not endure the new stern religious climate. Venuses reverted to Virgins; Bacchuses and Apollos to bearded Christs"* (Fleming, 2005:362).

After the 17th century themes on death, eternal life, Purgatory and Inferno diminished.

2.2.3 The visualization of Christ's life

Due to the inevitable relationship between the story of Christ and the many depictions of the last judgement by the artists included in this research, it is deemed necessary to include a brief investigation on how Christ was portrayed in art.

The life of Jesus in the visual arts has been a prominent subject in Western art. According to Kleiner (2009:240-241), the cycle of Christ's life can be divided into three phases. It begins with conception and includes his earliest years: "the first cycle of the life of Jesus Christ consists of the events of his conception (incarnation), birth, infancy, and childhood" (Kleiner, 2009:240). This first phase is characterised by themes such as the Annunciation to Mary, Adoration of the Magi, the Massacre of the Innocents, the Flight to Egypt and the Dispute in the Temple. The second cycle entailed the "public ministry". Here, Christ is shown performing miracles and offering teachings. Some of the relevant themes here are the Baptism, Calling of Matthew, Miracles and the Cleansing of the Temple. The third and final cycle is the *passion* which refers to "suffering" as taken from Latin, and it "includes the episodes leading to Jesus' trial, execution, resurrection, and ascent to heaven" (Kleiner, 2009:241). Themes such as the Entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper and Washing of the Disciples' feet, Betrayal and Arrest, Carrying of the Cross, Raising of the Cross and Crucifixion, Deposition, Lamentation and Entombment as well as the Resurrection and three Mary's at the tomb, are some of the dominant themes in this final cycle, and had a direct influence on the ways in which artists developed painterly themes such as Purgatory and Inferno.

2.3 Death viewed through religion: A Catholic and Pantheistic view

When looking at death from a religious perspective, specifically from a Catholic point of view, emphasis is placed on the inevitability of death. This notion is supported by the belief that Christ has risen from the dead, thus demonstrating that there is life after death. Death is regarded as the moment when all biological functioning of a living organism ends. According to various religions, the deceased's life does not end after death, because death is followed by eternal life in heaven or hell, depending on how one lived his/her life on earth. According to Moore (2018), death viewed from a Catholic viewpoint can be described as follows:

> *"Catholics believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus have changed the meaning and the effects of human death. Death is no longer the end of individual human identity, because the soul continues on after death. The Catholic Church teaches that a soul may go to heaven, purgatory or hell, depending on the quality of a person's life on earth".*

In the case of Catholicism, death is defined as the ending of all bodily functions and the departure of the soul to eternal beatitude. According to the *Art of Dying Well* (2018) "We are stripped of all our attachments to this world; our body lies corrupt; and our immortal soul goes to meet the Lord. We will see the whole truth of our lives, and we will face God's judgement". This frightening belief is not the only outlook on death; religious individuals believe that eternal life awaits them and that death has already been conquered by God by way of Christ's death on the cross, even though the acquisition of eternal life is not that simple. However, not all Catholics are believed to be spiritually "fit" to enter heaven; some have to undergo the purification of purgatory so that they can be purified before entering heaven (see Chapter 3). Their loved ones as well as the church pray for them to obtain ultimate salvation. By contrast, those who choose to turn away from God and His mercy face eternal suffering in hell.

To a certain extent, Catholics can prepare for death: "At the end of life, in sickness or old age, we prepare for death through prayer, acts of love, the Sacraments of Penance (Confession) and the Anointing of the Sick, together with Holy Communion" (Art of Dying Well, 2018). The reality of death is a consequence of the sin of Adam: "Sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death" (Romans 5:12). God planned for humans to be holy and live a sacred life and share the eternal life with Him. The term *Ars Moriendi*, created by the Roman Catholic Church, is applicable here: it refers to two Latin texts written in 1415 and 1450 that translates to "the art of dying", which Gould (2016:175) defines as a particular spiritual discipline practicing to prepare Christians to end life in a state of grace.

In researching a historical understanding of Roman Catholicism, it can be said that it is the oldest religious institution in the western world to date (Stanford, 2011). Roman Catholicism has portrayed an integral role in art, architecture, political rule and the governance of the Roman people. “Catholicism” refers to the beliefs, traditions and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Catholics stem from the Christian Church and are thus regarded as a Christian denomination (Oxford, 2010). The early Christian religion led by Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Catholic faith, and this faith is therefore seen as a continuation of Christendom. The Pope also serves as the Bishop of Rome, and he is based in Vatican City. The term *pope*, which roughly translates to *father*, is regarded as the sole successor of Saint Peter to whom God gave the authority as head of the church. Catholics are focused on being faithful to God and to be obedient to the papacy[20].

Catholics obey the sacraments that form part of their obligation as religious individuals: “Catholics are encouraged to attend weekly mass and are under an obligation during the Easter season to attend the sacraments of reconciliation (formerly known as confession) and Holy Communion” (Stanford, 2011). The doctrines and traditions of the Catholic Church are outlined in the Nicene Creed[21], and was also adopted by other churches within the Christian faith. Catholics believe in one God, the Nicene Creed is regarded as the symbol of faith which contains the key points of the Catholic faith in text:

> *“I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the*

[20] The term “papacy” refers to “is the position, power, and authority of the Pope, including the period of time that a particular person holds this position” (Collins Dictionary, 2018).

[21] “The Nicene Creed is the declaration of the Christian faith for all Catholics and Orthodox as well as many Protestants. It is also called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, because it was defined at the Councils of Nicaea (325 A.D.) and Constantinople (381 A.D.). The Nicene Creed explains the Church's teachings about the Trinity and affirms historical realities of Jesus' life. The creed does not directly quote Scripture, but it is based on interpretations of biblical truths” (Catholic News Herald, 2016).

prophets. And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen" (Catholic News Herald, 2016).

2.3.1 Religion shaped by a Pantheistic view on death

A Greek translation and breakdown of the word *Pantheism* translate to *pan* meaning "all" and *theos* meaning "God". According to Lerner (2013:15), Pantheism can be defined as "the reverential, immanent view that the Universe, Nature, and God are one and the same". Pantheism is a religious doctrine which not only aligns God with the universe, but recognises it as a declaration/exemplification of God. It regards the universe and nature as divine, where God is the immanent cause of things; thus confounding God with the universe (Levine, 1992:17). The definition given by Grula (2008:160) summarises Pantheism thus:

> *"The doctrine that God is not a personality or transcendent supernatural being but that all laws, forces, manifestations, and so forth of the self-existing natural universe constitute an all-inclusive divine Unity".*

In *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*[22] Clouser (2005:35-48) categorises the distinct types of religious beliefs in three categories: the pagan type, the pantheistic type and the Biblical type. For the purpose of this study, the pantheistic type aligns with the selected artist. Pantheism entails "the view that God is everything and everything is God … the world is either identical with God or in some way a self-expression of His nature" (Levine, 1992:17). Pantheism therefore regards and identifies all facets of life as sacred: "Pantheism signifies the belief that every existing entity is, in some sense, divine" (Levine, 1992:17). The term can also be better understood as the opposite of atheism, since it regards everything as a manifestation of God. It is also not seen as a strict religious position, but rather a philosophical mantra to live by. Levine (1992:17) propounds that it is a metaphysical as well as a religious belief system. Pantheism as a Western concept was theorised as a theology by the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza in his book titled *Ethics* (1677). He states that God and nature are one entity and cannot be regarded as two separate things, thus there is no personal, omnipotent God. God/Universe or the divine Unity, is self-existing and self-creating (Grula, 2008:164).

In terms of a pantheistic outlook/opinion of death, Harrison (1997a) notes the important role of death: "Death is indispensable to nature and evolution. Without death, there would be no

[22] Clouser, R.A. 2005 The myth of religious neutrality. Paris: The University of Notre Dame Press.

emergence of new individuals with genes better adapted to the changing environment. Without death, there would be no room for new species to emerge". It is important to note that death has become denatured; the dead are supposed to return to nature and become one again with the earth. Pantheists follow the same approach to death as they do to life:

> *"In life, we are an inseparable part of the divine reality and of nature. In death we should aim to remain so. Death should be treated as a natural part of a life led as part of nature. Medicalized, hospitalized, sanitized death - death that denies death that stifles grief - should be replaced by natural death and natural grief"* (Harrison, 1997b).

The avoidance of prolonged suffering is nonetheless essential, even though death awaits everyone. The idea of death in nature offers a sound example of this view. Since pantheists believe that God is one with nature, it is thus self-explanatory that individuals would choose to reunite with nature. This notion links well with how animals approach death. They remove themselves from others and become one with nature whilst awaiting their death. As stated by James (2012) in the article titled "Thoughts on death and afterlife", a naturalistic pantheistic understanding of death is to view death as the return to nature; that "the forms of 'afterlife' available to humans are natural ones, in the natural world". Although pantheists do not believe in an afterlife in some type of realm, Pantheism promises a more natural approach towards death:

> *"Pantheism promises only natural forms of afterlife – we will live on in the memories of those who knew us and in our genes passed down through our children. But Pantheism also goes further…it says that at death we begin a process of transformation, of changing or recycling"* (James, 2012).

Death is thus regarded not as an ending, but rather a transformation. In death, pantheists become a part of nature once again – just as nature is seen as sacred and one entity with God. In the same manner in which the universe is constantly recycling and regenerating itself, humans are believed to be "recycled" after death in the sense that they become a part of nature.

2.4 Binary oppositions and dualism

As stated, binary oppositions refer to two concepts that are regarded as opposites (see subsection 1.3.2). Binaries and their dualistic nature are central to the present study. As noted, I specifically focus on the dualism that Mason creates between eternal life and death, pain (suffering) and liberation as well as religion and a secular viewpoint. In a certain way, Mason's work reconciles these binary oppositions. She places oppositions such as beauty and ugliness next to one another to form a coherent whole. On the other hand, the selected

works imply inherent polarities. The concepts of heaven and hell constitute an obvious binary opposition with reference to the afterlife. *La Divina Commedia* proposes this inherent dualism:

> *"Hence the dualism of the Commedia: tumultuous and puzzling life on earth contrasts with the unchanging divine providence and divine rule"* (Jongeneel, 2007:132).

This dualism created in both Mason's body of work and in Dante's *La Divina Commedia* demonstrates salient similarities, especially when looking at the synthesis that Mason achieves between religion or spirituality and a profane perspective. One notices a similar synthesis of opposites in Dante's text:

> *"He sets the vivid scenery in the three canticles of life and death, joy and despair, against an allegorical background of moral and religious dogma"* (Jongeneel, 2007:143).

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the theoretical basis regarding death as viewed through religion within the visual arts, as well as the understanding of death from a Pantheistic and Catholic point of view, have been investigated. In the first place it was deemed important to engage with the obsession humanity has with the eternal and a possible afterlife. This obsession has led to numerous artistic renditions informed by different stances on religion with different views of death. Death and the visual arts are brought together by a desire to grasp the incomprehensible. Indeed, Bertman (2018) states that "death has always been a patron of the arts". Death has been represented in the visual arts in an effort to portray how dying feels. This is where the use of symbols comes into play; symbolic interpretations represent death as well as the direct correlation to a particular religious perspective. Religious-themed artworks are typically characterised by recognisable symbolism to communicate various aspects of the divine and religious practices.

In our mostly secular world, the search for spirituality remains a persistent theme within the contemporary visual arts; the depictions of death, eternal life, Purgatory and Inferno as discussed above focus primarily on the period up and until the Barok. As explained previously these themes were less dominant in the years after the Barok. An art historical appraisal of religious art was contextualised where the focus was mainly on Christian themed art as well as the Catholic branch thereof. The role of the Counter-Reformation (1534) as well as its role in the arts had a major influence on religion and in strengthening the superiority of the aristocracy.

To conclude this theoretical chapter, the Pantheistic and Catholic interpretation and understanding of death as well as binary oppositions and dualism were discussed as points of departure for the interpretation of Mason's art, as elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

Contextualisation: Judith Mason

3.1 Introduction

Mason is widely regarded as a remarkable artist in the South African art scene, especially in the context of her use of visual arts as a therapeutic and healing platform: for her, painting is a self-expression vehicle to process her experience of life as chaotic as well as her hardships.

3.2 Judith Mason

Judith Mason was born in Pretoria in 1938. She studied BA (Fine Arts) at the University of the Witwatersrand and obtained her degree in 1960. A position as drawing lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand followed shortly thereafter. In 1964, Mason's first solo exhibition was held at Gallery 101 in Johannesburg. She established herself as an artist especially in the 1970s and 1980s in South Africa – a difficult time both culturally and politically for South Africa due to cultural and racial segregation and associated internal tensions and exclusion from international events – also in the arts (Peffer, 2009:139). In this regard, Crompton (2006:6) argues that: “The white minority population in South Africa stood behind the government in bringing about a complete separation between whites and blacks, Indians, and colo[u]reds [during apartheid]”. Of course, this statement does not apply to all white persons, especially not to all artists – for example, reference can be made to the so-called resistance art that has received much exposure in Sue Williamson's well-known *Resistance Art in South Africa* (1989) publication that took a stand against apartheid practices. In this publication, the relationship between art and society, trauma and resistance and the injustice of apartheid is emphasised. In a later publication, Williamson (2004:8-10) stated that: “art cannot exist without society. The progressive effect of art on society gives rise to cultural growth. The artist in South-Africa must seek new forms of changing his society for the better”.

During this period – before the time of international exclusion of South African artists - Mason was chosen to represent South Africa at the Venetian Biennale (1966), an international art exhibition in the later sixties, as well as Art Basel, an international art festival. She subsequently established herself in Florence, Italy, from 1989 – 1991 and as a lecturer in art history. Upon her return to South Africa, her work form part of the South African School

of Art Curriculum (a further indication of her stature in the South African art world) and has since been considered as a leading artist in South Africa and within the international sphere who still produced artworks during the 21st century (Redroom, 2015). After a career as an artist and teacher of almost 50 years, Mason was therefore still active within South Africa's art scene (Mason, 2008b).

Her motivation to pursue a career in visual arts can be described thus: “Making artworks has been the one constant in my otherwise disordered life” (Mason, 2011:33). This motivation reflects the notion that visual arts serves as a therapeutic and healing platform. In this way Mason expresses her psyche in a highly subjective manner through her process of art making. Mason (2011:38) further contends that creating art supports her way of thinking – for her an artwork is the midpoint between something (an experience, a perception) and a thought. Also, for Mason artmaking is a mechanism that she uses to reflect and understand her personal stance on religion, senescence and being an artist: “The way that artists throughout history have tried to describe the mystery of life and belief absolutely fascinates me; I used aspects of these to draw a sort of an autobiography which tries to come to grips with what I feel about animals, being an artist, being old, being religious” (Mason, 2014). She regards herself as an innately religious individual, but she is also a non-believer.

Her works are represented in a remarkable variety of exhibitions and collections worldwide. Important exhibitions include: Art on Paper in Johannesburg (2002 and 2005); Pretoria Arts Association (2002); East End Gallery (New York) and Art Basel in Miami (2009). Her works are further featured in all major South African National Art Collections and Museums (such as the Standard Bank and Sasol Collections) and in both private and public collections in Europe, the United States of America and Australia, including Yale University and the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Commission work, like her tapestries, are found in a variety of locations countrywide, for example in Durban (The Royal Hotel) and Johannesburg (Great Park Synagogue). Artworks representing Mason's career and oeuvre have been published in several books, such as *Dante in South Africa*, *Nag Journaal* and *Talking Pictures* (Redroom, 2015). Her works are also featured at the North-West University in Potchefstroom, like *The Tin God* and *The New Jerusalem* (1983) – a ceiling painting in the foyer of the Hennie Bingle Auditorium. At an international level, she established herself as an artist and also as an academic in 1993 in the field of art history, when she taught at the Michaelis School of Art (Mason, 2008b).

In contrast to other important contemporary artists including Jane Alexander (1959-), Willie Bester (1956-), Willem Boshoff (1951-) and Sue Williamson (1941-), for example, whose

works tend to be socially focused, Mason's works are more personal and subjective; this approach and development of personal symbols would soon also give rise to recognition at international level:

> *"Judith chose to follow a more individual path and deal with issues of personal experience, identity and social comment. While others looked to the symbols of Africa, Judith built her own catalogue of symbols, a path that has now become fashionable in the Post-Modernist era"* (Cooper, 2008:7).

3.3 Themes and iconography

Mason's works are eclectically unique in terms of her use of diverse themes and influences such as poetry, religious reflection, self-portraits, subjective comments on socio-political issues as well as war and politics; themes that are always treated in a very subjective way (Hobbs & Maurice, 2008:1). Her oeuvre as an artist and iconographer is further characterised by certain themes and symbols, in particular aspects of Christian iconography, spirituality, mythology and also the expression of psychological pain and suffering. In her presentation of these themes, a personal approach is attached to each one: "We do not see things as they are. We see things as *we* are" (Mason, 1999:132).

In the following section some of her iconographical choices are discussed as well as where and how they were deemed relevant. The schematic timeline is added in Addendum B to clarify how her oeuvre can be categorized. For the purposes of this study, however, this was not deemed necessary at this point.

3.3.1 Religion and Christianity

Mason uses various religious systems, such as Judeo-Christian (Catholicism) and Buddhist aspects, incorporating it with mythology. She states that Judeo-Christian thought unintendedly forms part of our culture. She also explains the importance of her research on religious themes not necessarily related to her own religious preferences: "The painter of religious themes, whether he does so as a reflection of his faith or an exploration of his doubts, makes icons" (Mason, 1973). Mason (1973) further noted that there is a personal experience with the incorporation of God within visual arts: "There is something rather touching about trying to dredge God up in a painting". Furthermore, Mason describes herself as an "agnostic humanist possessed of religious curiosity" (Hobbs & Maurice, 2008:3). As previously stated, Mason was a religious person although she was a non-believer. Mason believes that "some people will always need to wrestle with gods and their kind" (Mason,

1973). Thus coming to terms with the concept of religion and their associated gods, is a constant process of comprehension and reflection.

Figure 15. Mason, Judith. *Pietà*. (2003).

Figure 16. Mason, Judith. *Crucifix into Scarecrow*. (1975).

3.3.2 Mythological figures and creatures

Mason emphasises human nature in pursuit of immortality and recreating itself through the use of mythological figures and creatures. Her fascination with mythology is combined with her respect for animals that she documented in a visual manner. She characterises this correlation as: “The phoenix, two headed amphis-bands and other figments of the collective imagination (which had a certain credibility in the bestiaries of the time) share mythical attributes with real creatures such as the pelican” (Mason, 1989). She drew a parallel between the mythological creatures as well as her respect towards animals with the demonic beasts as described in Dante’s *La Divina Commedia*: “The beasts mentioned in [Dante’s] Commedia are generally commonplace, especially from an African perspective. The lion, the wolf, the eagle, horses, sheep and goats, the staples of Gothic imagery and medieval

life, are occasionally interspersed with exotics like the leopard" (Mason, 1989). The chosen creatures in Dante's *La Divina Commedia* are used to represent the moral side of things.

Figure 17. Mason. Judith. *Thunderbird*. (1998).

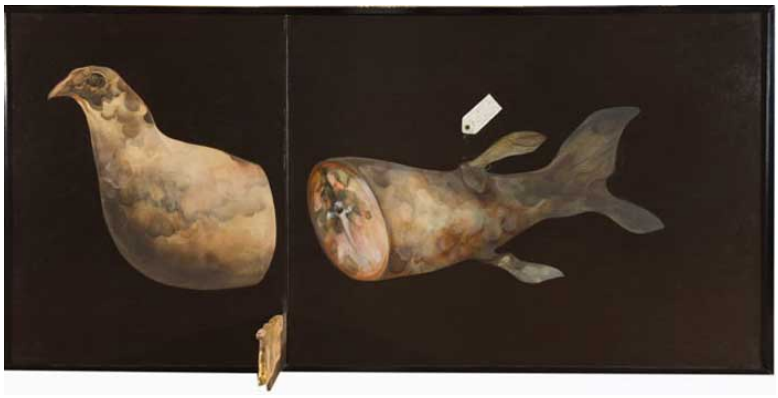

Figure 18. Mason, Judith. *Song of the Nightingale*. (1978).

3.3.3 Socio-political concerns

Socio-political issues such as homeless people, HIV and Aids, abortion, war and apartheid are among the themes that Mason addresses in this sphere of visual work. The trials of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission also inspired Mason to use art as a medium to highlight pressing social issues – always viewed from her subjective and fairly esoteric perspective on matters (Mason, 2006). Mason regards her own socially-focused art as not political art, but as a form of heroic art. Heroic art visually communicates grand gestures. She visualised the untold stories of the victims who were not granted the opportunity to tell their own.

Figure 19. Mason, Judith. *Man under a Bridge*. (2002).

Figure 20. Mason, Judith. *Jean Genet in Loop Street*. (1995).

3.3.4 Self and space

As mentioned earlier, Mason's works are very personal in nature. Her works speak of both personal and collective pain, suffering and trauma. Thematically, these issues are documented by specific personal symbols, where she considers personal experience as a driving force for creativity: “I am persuaded that personal inadequacy is only one of many spurs to creativity, but the one about which I can speak with some experience” (Mason, 2008c:138). In terms of the self and space, Mason speaks of her aesthetic sense which is the driving force of her actions:

> *“It provides the ethical framework without which I would be a barbarian. This is why I believe the arts are important to artists and art lovers alike. I do not kill things,*

because I find life beautiful. I don't litter, because I find it ugly. I try not to waste, because I find it disgusting. My sense of other people's autonomy is based on my own aesthetic experience" (Mason, 1999).

Figure 21. Mason, Judith. *Not being able to paint*. (1992).

Figure 22. Mason, Judith. *Himalaya Landscape I*. (2002).

3.4 Judith Mason art historical timeline

See Addendum A & Addendum B on page 134

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter focused on Mason's oeuvre as an artist and iconographer. A thorough biographical investigation was conducted, focusing on her life and key events. Important themes and iconography which is dominant in Mason's body of work were discussed and how a personal approach is integrated into each one. Themes such as religion, mythology, socio-political concerns and the self with applicable examples were shown as visual support.

CHAPTER 4

Contextualisation: Dante Alighieri

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out to contextualise Dante as a renowned poet with reference to his views on the realms of the afterlife as well as how the infamous theme of the *Last Judgement* was portrayed and the role it played for future visual interpretations. Furthermore, this chapter aims to indicate the direct influence Dante's interpretation of heaven and hell had on various artists.

In the second place, this chapter provides a biographical overview of Dante. This overview is followed by a contextualisation of *La Divina Commedia* (1320). The poem is divided into three sections and consists of three canticles: *Inferno*, *Purgatory* and *Paradiso*. *Inferno* was completed first, followed by *Paradiso* and *Purgatory*. These three afterlife spheres are discussed in both theoretical and literary terms. Secondly, a contextualisation of the *Last Judgement* as a popular theme in specifically Christian art and various stylistic elements follows. In this section, particular attention is paid to the possible influences of Dante's poetic writings of the *Last Judgement* on the visual interpretations thereof.

After the contextualisation of Judith Mason as an artist and iconographer in Chapter Three, this chapter also draws parallels between her work and Dante Alighieri's writings. It is notable that in the same manner as Mason's fascination and appreciation of nature and earthly beings, Burge's (2011:14) argument about Dante's work can be seen as a correlation with Mason: "In all his work he displays a fascination with nature and how and why things work". Both Dante and Mason make use of certain Christian and mythological iconography. In *Inferno*, the character of Farinata echoes the same abject parody of the risen Christ, while in *Middle-aged Daphne – Middle-aged Eve* (1972) Mason integrates both mythological and religious symbols (Kleinhenz, 2003:278).

4.2 Dante Alighieri

The Italian writer and poet Giovanni Boccacio, the author of *Vita di Dante* in 1347, described Dante's visual features as follow:

> *"Our poet was of middle height; and when he had reached maturity he went somewhat bowed, his gait grave and gentle … His face was long, his nose aquiline,*

his eyes rather large than small; his jaws big, and the under lip protruding beyond the upper. His complexion was dark, his hair and beard thick, black, and curling. And his complexion was ever melancholy and thoughtful" (Hunt, 2011:23).

Figure 23. Botticelli, Sandro. *Portrait of Dante*. (1495).

Born as Durante Degli Alighieri in the summer of 1265, the precise date of his birth is unknown (Hunt, 2011:20). He was commonly known as Dante. He lived during the papacy of Pope Boniface VIII (1235 – 1303) who would later have a significant impact on his work and was responsible for the exile of Dante from Florence (Burge, 2011:11). His family was classified as higher status citizens of Florence, Italy:

> *"While not nobility, his family was significant in Florentine life. His father, Alighiero di Bellincioni, had status in the city, and his mother, Bella (or Gabriella) Degli Abati, also came from a family of modest privilege. The family's prominence continued after the Battle of Montaperti in 1260"* (Hunt, 2011:20).

His family was associated with the Florentine Guelphs, a political affinity who supported the Papacy (the Pope of the Catholic Church in Rome) of Italy. The opposition was known as the Sienese Ghibellines who advocated the beliefs and was supported by the Holy Roman Emperor during the political battles of medieval Italy. Dante's mother died in 1274 or 1275. Dante at the tender age of nine became infatuated with the infamous Beatrice Portinari at a May Day celebration. He wrote about her in his poems and she would later become one of the most important characters of the *Divine Comedy*. An arranged marriage between Dante at the age of 12 and Gemma di Manetto Donati, the daughter of an aristocrat, followed. The prenuptial arrangement was executed at the age of 20. They had four children named Pietro, Jacopo, Giovanni and Antonia. At the same time, Beatrice also got married to a Florentine

banker; Dante never spoke to her again but: “she would occupy his and the world’s imagination ever after” (Hunt, 2011:21).

It is uncertain where Dante studied, but it is known that he studied Tuscan poetry and was well versed in having been educated in Latin, seemingly at a Florentine school attached to a church or monastery. It is possible that he also studied at the University of Bologna where he researched Aristotelian traditions. He believed that Aristotelian traditions were the manifestation of human knowledge. Aristotle was regarded as the master of “those who know”. It seems as if Dante found moral guidance in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (340 B.C), and through Aristotle’s scientific writings he garnered a deeper understanding of nature (Minio-Paluello, 1998). It is also during this time that Dante befriended members of the Florentine literary circle (Hunt, 2011:21).

Dante formed part of the *Dolce Stil Novo*[23] literary movement. Translated to the “sweet new style”, all Tuscan members were referred to as *stilnovisti*. They were mainly influenced by Tuscan poetry and the teachings of the Sicilian school. Poetry was written in Latin and the main theme the *stilnovisti* wrote about, was love (*amore*). He started forming his own poetic style: “the young poet Dante had immersed himself in troubadour verse that espoused courtly loving and its elevation of women” (Hunt, 2011:21).

His first major work, titled *Vita Nuova*, focused on the spiritual dimensions of love, with the figure of Beatrice featuring as an integral influence, even though Beatrice and Dante were only acquaintances. Dante admired Beatrice from afar but never truly knew her, but her death in 1290 still had a devastating effect on him.

At this stage, Dante could not devote all his time towards literature. He was part of the White Guelphs and fought in the famous Battle of Campaldino in 1289. The undefeated Guelphs divided into two parties – the White Guelphs and the Black Guelphs. Dante later devoted himself more fully to philosophy, poetry, literature and politics. He also mastered the teachings of Thomas Aquinas at the Dominican School of Santa Maria Novella in Florence.

Dante entered politics in 1295 and according to Hunt (2011:23), the year 1300 established an important point of departure for the Italian poets’ most notable literary work:

> *“The year 1300, when Dante was thirty-five, is an important watershed year for the Divine Comedy. Pope Boniface VIII had declared it to be a jubilee year celebrating a*

[23] “The ‘sweet new style’ is normally described as a kind of lyric verse which is formally elegant, linguistically refined, and aurally attractive, and which presents a view of love as intellectually and spiritually ennobling” (Lansing, 2010:310).

milestone of Rome's religious life; Dante mirrored this date as a personal touchstone as he chose Easter of this year as the fictional date of his journey in the Inferno".

In 1301, he became an emissary of Pope Boniface VIII even though all evidence suggests that Dante and the Pope did not agree on many issues. In 1302, Dante was exiled from Florence, who was under Black Guelph rule. All of his assets were seized the same year (1302) and he never returned to Florence. His initial two-year exile resulted in a permanent exile, since he was unable to pay his fine due to losing his assets. He stayed in Verona after his exile as a guest of Bartolomeo I della Scala at the Palazzo of Cangrande della Scala. In 1319, Dante moved to Ravenna as a guest of Guido II Novello da Polenta, the lord of Ravenna (Hunt, 2011:23). It was during his exile that he wrote *La Divina Commedia*, perhaps best described as self-therapy. This was a direct reflection on the fact that he lost his freedom, financial stability, home and his family. This is how the poem starts, a lonely and lost man in a dark wood. This "treatment" therefore assumed the form of a poem which would result in a journey through hell, purgatory and paradiso. This epic poem was completed in 1320. Dante died in Ravenna after visiting Venice where he presumably had been infected by malaria at the age of 56 in September 1321. His remains are interred in a tomb in Ravenna. The city of Florence built a monument tomb in honour of Dante in the Basilica of Santa Croce. On the engraving of the tomb he is described as the most exalted poet. The tomb quotes Inferno Canto 4, where ironically the last line is not engraved, which states that: "His spirit, having departed from us, returns," since the tomb in Florence is still empty.

Dante verbally inspired and gave visual meaning to the abstract concept of inferno, purgatory and paradise using a first-person narrator. From a philosophical Christian viewpoint, Dante shed light to what could happen to humanity after life. Virgil, the Roman poet leads Dante through inferno and purgatory, and Beatrice leads him through Paradiso.

4.2.1 *La Divina Commedia*

Dante originally named this acclaimed poem *Comedìa*, thereafter Giovanni Boccaccio added *Divina* to the title. Harrison (2011:35) compares the poem to architecture: "To modern readers the *Divine Comedy* appears as a great Gothic cathedral made not of stone but of verse".

Burge (2011:11) states that this poetic masterpiece "provides the modern observer with a unique insight into the worldview of a thinking man at the height of the Age of Faith". It is noticeable that Dante's unwavering faith is evident in almost every line of the *Divine*

Comedy. Burge (2011:11) stipulates that religion should have turned him into an unquestionable puppet of the pope and opposing scientific enquiry, but ironically, he chose to study the universe, morality, politics and science. These fields of study were usually opposed to the writings of the Bible.

Because this poem is written as a narrative in the fictional first person, there is a personal tone that can be discerned. The poem has a triadic structure where each canticle is grouped in tercets. This choice of three verses grouped together reflects the Trinity of God. The rhyme scheme is called terza zima[24] and is regarded as "the most dynamic, forward-moving rhyme pattern in all of Western poetry" (Harrison, 2011:42). The way in which this rhyme scheme moves forward but also lends rhyming words from the previous verse (backward), echoes the movement of Dante who wants to incorporate the pagan legacy but also wants to transcend it.

The poem is set in contemporary Italy and focuses on earthly matters, social realities and eternal beatitude. A vast variety of topics are featured; including theology, philosophy, politics, cosmology, music, poetry, sculpture and painting. Jongeneel (2007:135) describes Dante's poetic quest as a literary work of great art; a poem that is not only a quest to find the truth but also to attempt to persuade the reader to believe this truth. It makes use of the biblical life span, which is defined as a period of threescore years and ten (Psalm 90). This sets the scene for the year 1300:

> *"During his voyage the pilgrim is initiated into God's salvation plan that will bring humankind peace and happiness on earth and eternal beatitude in the hereafter. Back on earth, Dante the poet has to undertake a second journey for which again he needs holy assistance: a journey into the abysses of artistic memory in order to write down the effable revelation of divine truth given to him. The capital lesson that he learned is that the way to earthly happiness and divine bliss is the way of contrition, sorrow and penitence, by means of which human reason is enlightened by God's grace and human will is rescued from the bondage of sin. In short, the hundred cantos*

[24] It literally translates to "third rhyme". According to Harrison (2011:42) "Terza rima is an extraordinary, yet basically simple, pattern that Dante invented for the purposes of this poem alone. It follows a readily discernible pattern: *aba, bcb, cdc, ded*, and so on. This is not a closed but an open pattern that potentially could continue on forever. According to its scheme, once a canto gets under way, every rhyme is repeated three times (except for the first and last tercets of each canto). The middle verse of each tercet contains a new rhyme word that looks forward to the next tercet, where the rhyme is repeated twice. Thus while the middle rhyme looks forward, the other glance backward to the previous tercet".

that constitute the Commedia are about how to become a Christian" (Jongeneel, 2007:131).

Christian conversion is visually verbalised by way of a spiral motion. The motion that leads Dante upwards to purgatory is used to descend towards hell. Harrison (2011:46) explains this odd idea: "the most humble rise the highest, while the most prideful (Satan) sink the lowest".

It is evident that Dante drew on real-life experiences and people when he was writing *La Divina Commedia*. One such person he incorporated in his poem was Pope Boniface. He hated this pope, who was the force behind the political meltdown of Florence. Dante shows this hatred by way of literary damnation. In the poem he integrates aspects regarding the influences of Pope Boniface VIII:

> *"Dante devises a precise description of what will happen to him when he dies. He will be stuffed head-first into a fiery hole in the ground while flames lick around his feet… Boniface is by no means the only pope to be mentioned as being condemned to an eternity in Hell"* (Burge, 2011:12).

One of the main themes of the poem is sin as well as the accompanying punishment. Another main theme is the journey towards forgiveness. Anderson (2011:41) contextualises this by also referring to sin: "when one sins, one incurs a debt to God, and forgiveness involves the repayment of what is owed". The act of almsgiving was especially practised by Catholics who believed that they could still benefit from this act after death. Forgiveness is more than just being regarded as innocent; it is also a spiritual transformation process, and not all achieve this before death.

Figure 24. Di Michelino, Domenico*. Dante and the Three Kingdoms*. (1465).

4.2.1.1 Inferno

Inferno consists of nine spirals in a downward, inverted funnel illustrated by Botticelli in his *Map of Hell* (1485).

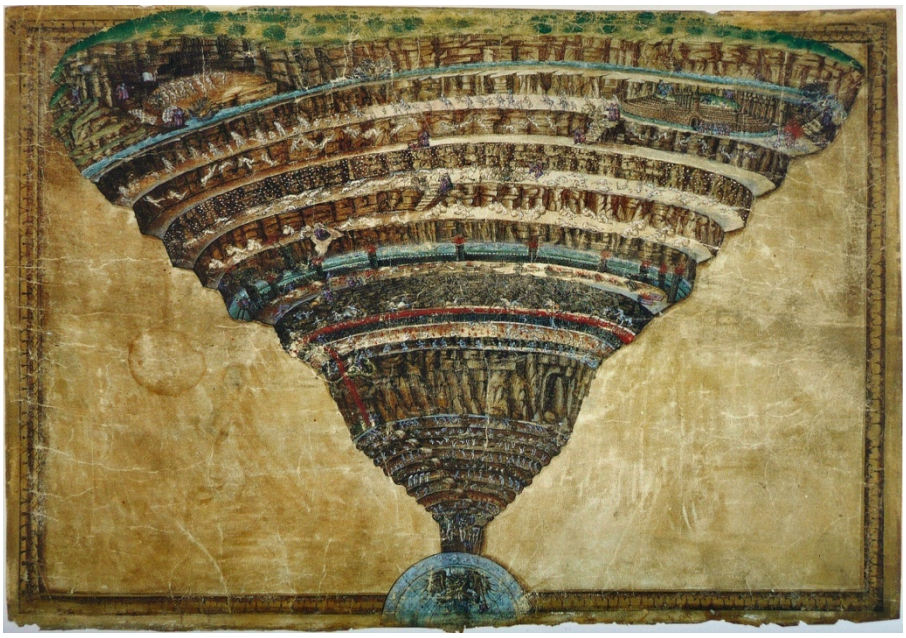

Figure 25. Botticelli, Sandro. *Map of Hell*. (1485).

The most controversial part of the poem focusing on eternal punishment, is *Inferno*. *Inferno* is described as a place of "divinely ordained punishment" (Burge, 2011:12). Webb (2011:49) propounds that "souls are tormented by an eternal storm that 'never rests'". According to Harrison (2011:35) "*Inferno* is a bewildering canto". The pilgrim finds himself in a dark forest. The landscape changes from a deserted shore to the foot of a mountain where the pilgrim comes face to face with three beasts representing sins such as violence and self-indulgence. The pilgrim is lost and at a dead end. He is dependent on the Roman poet, Virgil for guidance. Virgil, however, has been dead for over a millennium:

> *"This is a bizarre apparition: a pagan poet coming to the rescue of a lost soul in the most Christian poem ever written"* (Harrison, 2011:36).

Virgil tells Dante, who wants to find salvation, that the only way to the top of the mountain is by way of going down into the depths of the earth. Thus the only way upward is downward, and according to Dante the way to pursue salvation is never a straight and narrow path, but rather follows a somewhat circular route: Dante follows Virgil through the spirals of hell and the levels of Mount Purgatory.

> *"O honor and light of other poets, let me long*
> *study and great love avail me, that has caused me to*

search through your volume.
You are my master and my author. . . .” (Inferno I, 82-5).

Dante chose Virgil to lead him since he was regarded as an authoritative figure regarding the Inferno since he had already been to hell before. In terms of the literature, Dante and Virgil are the only two individuals who have been to hell and back. Harrison (2011:38) substantiates this ironic choice: “It is extremely unusual and unorthodox for Dante to have chosen a poet and a pagan – rather than, say, a saint or an angel – to lead him, through the Christian afterlife”.

History and myth coincide in *Inferno* even though biblical references are often adapted and even minimised: “he summons real rather than imaginary personages who curse their chosen hells alongside imaginary beasts and creatures of poetic lore” (Hunt, 2011:245). The monsters serve as instruments who punish the sinners. It is a notable choice to place monsters and sinners in the same context, because sin is related to the ugly and monstrous. The monsters are also seen as the personification of fear and they can be seen in every spiral of Hell.

Non-Christians and unbaptised pagans are placed at the first spiral with the lustful situated on the second spiral. The souls of characters like Paola Malatesta and Francesca Da Rimini are found at the outer edges of the pit since they are guilty of being lustful and acted bestially. Paolo was Francesca’s brother-in-law. These characters were killed by Francesca’s envious husband, Gianciotto Malatesta.

Those guilty of gluttony are in the third spiral and the fourth spiral depicts the greedy; the wrathful and sullen are punished for their sins in the fifth spiral; homosexuals are placed in the sixth spiral of hell. Those who enacted violence, can be found at the seventh spiral, while the other spirals of hell are filled with those who are guilty of anger, heresy, fraud and treachery (Lombardo, 2009:2).

The protagonist travels to the centre of the round earth, a fact that Dante does not particularly emphasise. In retrospect this is noteworthy; it is obvious that he has studied science and therefore suspects that the earth is round. One may ask how science and religion could cohesively coexist at this time, because “… the ‘science’ of Dante’s day was approved by the church and therefore not susceptible to rigorous debate” (Burge, 2011:14).

Kleinhenz (2003:278) summarises hell as follows: “Death stands triumphant, proclaiming eternal victory, while the train of his captives – captives to lives of sin, deserters from Christ’s hopeful army – passes through to damnation”. Dante’s *Hell* differs slightly from the widely

accepted meaning of this realm. This is where Dante's Inferno can be distinguished from earlier medieval literary works describing hell. Dante is much more precise, because he describes the nature of each sin as well as the associated punishment. Sin is defined by a psychological state and not by a specific act (Webb, 2011:55). Sin is therefore recognised as ways of being and ways of acting.

4.2.1.2 Purgatory

After exploring the depths of hell, Dante and Virgil ascend to the Mount of Purgatory. The mountain is situated on an island which formed during the fall of Satan. Purgatory is divided into seven terraces, each reflecting one of the seven deadly sins. These sins are, once again, based on psychological aspects rather than physical actions (Corbett, 2014:271-272).

The earliest roots of purgatory can be traced back to ancient Hebrew Scriptures, particularly in 2 Maccabees 12:41-46, where it is described as an abstract concept that few can grasp. It is an intermediate realm where sinners have to undergo final purification before they can be spiritually fit to enter heaven. Webb (2011:59) defines purgatory as "a realm of self-purification".

Not all Christians believe in the existence of a dimension called purgatory. This domain is often regarded as an unusually strange place, to be explicated only in Catholic doctrine. Protestants do not believe in the existence of purgatory since it does not have any biblical support. "Christian Scriptures seem to allude to such an intermediate state in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (see Luke 16:19-31) and in the purifying fire St. Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 3:12-15, a fire that burns away all of our idols and illusions so that we can be fully saved in God" (Lamoureux, 2016:72).

Catholics tend to pray for sinners who undergo purification. This abstract, intermediate realm raises many questions that could be seen as make-belief, because the notion of purgatory is based on assumption and not on true facts. Anderson (2011:39) raises an important question:

> *"If salvation essentially involves transformation – and, at the same time, we cannot be united with God unless we are holy – what becomes of those who plead the atonement of Christ for salvation but die before they have been thoroughly transformed?"*

This is not an easy process, but the result thereof is spectacular and rewarding. Anderson (2011:39) explains this eternal reward when purification is reached: "Only when we are

entirely sanctified or fully perfected in this sense are we truly fit to enjoy the beatific vision of heaven".

Purgatory also offers gradual moral and spiritual purification: "a process that can extend beyond the confines of a finite human life" (Anderson, 2011:43). Not all are freed from sin when they die and this is where purgatory is the "destination" where the deceased can achieve final purification.

Sinners in purgatory have a desire to change, and are given a second chance, a chance to better themselves and break free from sin. God is seen as a forgiving entity who tolerates the sin of individuals placed here so that they can be freed from their wrongdoings. Dante expresses a measure of tolerance towards homosexuals, who are placed here and not in Inferno. They have, however, to undergo purification to be able to enter heaven. "Purgatory represents a secular journey guided by philosophical principles to a temporal happiness" (Corbett, 2014:266).

Finally, purgatory should serve as the moral guide and pathway to God. There is quite a difference between purgatory and inferno: the sinners in purgatory can work towards the purgation of their sins that will lead to their ascent to Paradiso. Those who suffer in hell cannot work towards salvation; they are stuck in hell for all eternity. In this case, therefore, time matters, because inferno is not linked to time and time is forever lost.

4.2.1.3 Paradiso

According to Jongeneel (2001:133), *Paradiso* communicates Dante's worldly concerns. It consists of nine spheres, with the moon, Mercury, Mars, Venus and the sun forming part of these spheres. Beatrice, who guides Dante through these nine spheres, explains to him the purposes of God's creation (Pistelli, 2017). Beatrice has shifted from someone who Dante was infatuated with to a holy authority leading him through *Paradiso*. Throughout the history of art, many artists attempted to illustrate this journey. In the depiction of Paradiso by Gustave Doré (1832 – 1883), Beatrice and Dante are shown looking at the "highest heaven" (named The Empyrean).

Figure 26. Doré, Gustave. *Paradiso Canto 31*. (1868).

As a realm, *Paradiso* follows a more theological point of departure in which Dante has a conversation with some of the saints of the church as well as with Thomas Aquinas. The concept of sin cannot be found in *Paradiso*. Heaven as described in the Cantos is only a visual representation of what Dante's human eye can see.

Harrison (2011:47) brings *Paradiso* into context: "The heavens revolve in perfect circles around the unmoved Mover who created them, namely, God. Yet Dante makes it clear throughout his *Paradiso* that paradise is not located in the heavenly spheres through which he travels with his new guide Beatrice. Paradise is beyond the space-time continuum altogether; it has no 'place' in the material universe at all".

The heavens are moved by love. Love is firstly directed towards God: "Souls in Paradise are free to love all that is beautiful" (Webb, 2011:61). The conclusion of the poem lies within the last verses of Paradiso, it is translated as follows (refer to the original text of *La Divina Commedia*):

> *"[my] desire and will were moved already – like*
> *a wheel revolving uniformly – by*
> *the Love that moves the sun and other stars".*

Paradiso is thus regarded as the endless motion of love, where love is never ending and eternal. The end is seen as the beginning and the beginning moves one back to the end (Webb, 2011:61).

4.3 The relationship between Dante and the *Last Judgement*

In the previous section reference was often made to iconological aspects that resonate throughout the history of art. Both in terms of use of symbols and the *dramatis personae* that populate Dante's works parallels can be drawn with the many depictions of the *Last Judgement*. As a prominent theme within the visual arts throughout art history, many artists availed themselves of contextual references to Dante and his literary works. In the next section a brief overview of selected depictions of the *Last Judgement* are used to contextualise to this salient topic in Catholic art with an emphasis on the *Last Judgement* by Michelangelo Buonarroti. Because of the direct referential links between the works of Dante and Michelangelo, this discussion anticipates a later contextualisation of the possible covert influences in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* as opposed to the overt influences in the texts by Dante.

In the *Divine Comedy*, outlining Dante's journey, he gains a personal clarification of what the afterlife entails. He states that not all are spiritually fit to enter heaven and that some have to pay for their sins by suffering in hell for eternity. Some undergo spiritual purification in purgatory, a second chance to hopefully be worthy of entering heaven. This journey contextualises the fate that awaits humanity and in many ways replicates the *Last Judgement*, and what it means and implies. The *Last Judgement* does not focus on the journey through these realms, but rather portrays the moment when Christ descends from heaven when He judges all to determine their last and final eternal destination by virtue of the weighing of the souls.

The *Last Judgement* contains various direct references to Dante and the *Divine Comedy*. Michelangelo knew the *Divine Comedy* well and used figures, Dantesque features and inspiration from this poem in his fresco. Dante's poem served Michelangelo as a deciphering mechanism to better conceptualise his own depiction of the *Last Judgement*.

The correlation between Judith Mason's work and Dante Alighieri's poem is obvious, yet potentially this idea of a deciphering mechanism can also be traced in Mason's works. For example, Mason stated that there is a definite relationship and resemblance between her landscapes and the lower slopes of purgatory (Mason, 2008a:86); furthermore, Mason noted why she chose to affiliate her work with Dante:

> *"I have remained enchanted and exasperated, the images creeping uninvited into my work from time to time… His political anger is familiar to me… I share too, his delight in the discourse of Statius and the logical arguments of Aquinas… Reading the Commedia is like coming across a wonderfully wrought artefact from an ancient and*

> *alien civilisation, which on inspection proves to be not only beautiful but also useful – a tool with which one can craft one's own moral philosophy"* (Mason, 2008a:86).

As such, Mason reinterpreted Dante's *Divine Comedy* as a way to modernise this complex poem in visual terms: "I wanted to bring contemporary elements into hell and redefine hell in terms of how I understood it rather than this medieval construct" (Mason, 2008a:87).

Mason gives the viewer a visual idea of hell, and this visualisation can be related to what Dante experienced through his journey while accompanied by Virgil, including the desire to have something much more beautiful to look forward to, and therefore heaven is also painted as a binary opposite to hell. Mason wants to allow the viewer the opportunity to visually experience that which she read, and through her reading personally experienced in Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

> *"My efforts remain a response to Dante rather than an attempt to accurately capture what he may have visualized"* (Mason, 2008a:131).

To Mason, Dante was an ideal choice to help contextualise what she wanted to paint. Perhaps in this Dante could be said to be the ultimate poetic master of the afterlife.

4.4 The *Last Judgement*

The *Last Judgement* has been a prominent theme in the context of Christian art. This theme refers to the second coming of Jesus Christ and is known to be the last and eternal judgement made by God on humanity. According to Hall (1975:85), the purpose of *Last Judgement* visual interpretations were to "present the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body".

According to Catholic belief, souls undergo eternal judgement where the current condition of their souls determine whether they will go to hell, heaven or purgatory. According to this doctrine, as soon as the dead have been resurrected and reunited with their bodies, the last judgement will occur. Paul the Apostle describes this unification in the Bible by stating that: "when the last trumpet sounds, all of us, living and dead, will instantly be changed into 'spiritual bodies'" (Hall, 1975:87). Saunders (1994) contextualises this dramatic event in accordance to the Bible:

> *"Our Lord in the Gospel spoke of His second coming. He indicated that various signs would mark the event. Mankind would suffer from famine, pestilence and natural disasters. False prophets who claim to be the Messiah will deceive and mislead people. Nations will wage war against each other. The Church will endure persecution. Worse yet, the faith of many will grow cold and they will abandon the faith, even betraying and hating one another".*

Saunders (1994) also refers to Saint Peter's prediction: "The day of the Lord will come like a thief and on that day the heavens will vanish with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and all its deeds will be made manifest" (2 Peter 3:10). There will be no more death and all believers will receive a new body in accordance to His body. A distinct separation between souls will be conducted: "Those who have done right shall rise to life; the evildoers shall rise to be damned" (John 5:29).

Various artists have painted the *Last Judgement*. For an art historical appraisal of diverse *Last Judgement* depictions, an analysis of an appropriate and representative selection of works follow below.

4.4.1 Giotto di Bondone – *Last Judgement* (1306)

Figure 27. Di Bondone, Giotto. *Last Judgement*. (1337).

Christ appears in the centre of this fresco in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy. The Twelve Apostles and the angels are divided to His right and left. This leads to the greater divide between hell on the right and heaven on the left. Christ is encircled with a bright coloured mandorla where He serves as Judge over humanity. The saved and the damned are placed below Him, awaiting final judgement that would lead to eternal life in paradise or inferno. Enrico Scrovegni, who commissioned Giotto to paint various frescos that would cover the interior of the chapel, also appears on this particular fresco: "At the threshold

of Giotto's hell, Giotto depicts his patron, Scrovegni, delivering the chapel as his gift of penance" (Artbouillin, 2013). Giotto's visualization of hell can be described as follows:

> *"Giotto's hell is a remarkable place. It seems to pour out of a lava pool from the foot of an enthroned Christ figure, who looms with stiff majesty above flanks of angels. The lava pool is a tangle of tortured bodies set against a dark background. Some are strung up like drying meat, other lie limply, like rags, and still others writhe in pain. Interspersed among them, we find teams of gray-blue demons, who prod and torment the hapless naked damned. There is also a hanging Judas. Elsewhere in the cycle, Judas appears, hook nosed, receiving a payoff for betrayal, with a shadowy demon coaxing him on"* (Artbouillin, 2013).

Satan is portrayed as enormously big compared to the damned, placed at the centre of inferno. He is placed on a type of man-eating dragon. At his feet, sinners cringe helpless and defeated. It appears that Satan is devouring a sinner[25], only the legs are still visible. Giotto, just like Michelangelo did not include the weighing of the souls and in effect the act of judgement has been removed[26] (Hall, 1975:89).

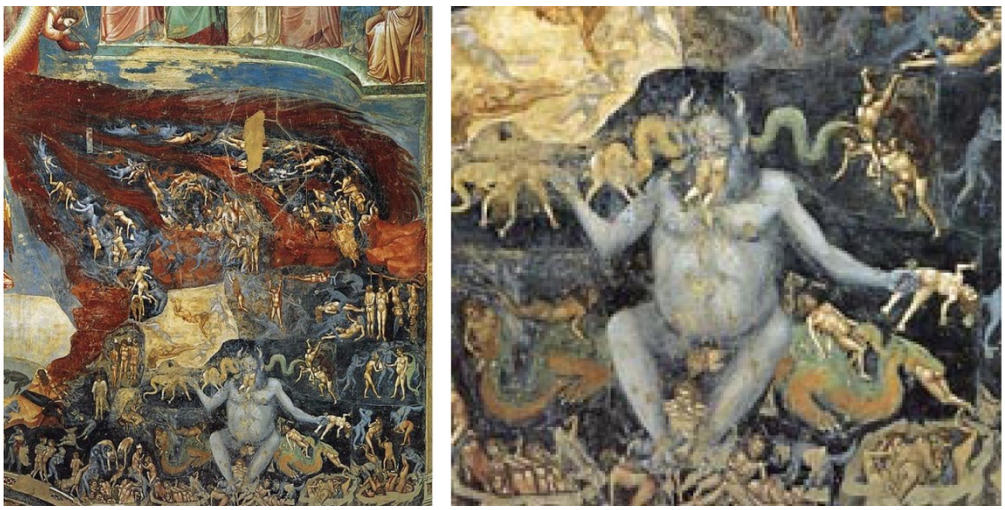

Figure 28. Di Bondone, Giotto. Detail from the *Last Judgement*. (1337).

[25] The devouring of a sinner is a contextual reminder of one of Francisco Goya's (1746 – 1882) black paintings, *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1819 – 1823). This painting refers to the Greek myth where Saturn believed that he would be overthrown by one of his children. Out of fear, he ate them moments after they were born (Museo Del Prado, 2018).

[26] According to Hall (1975:89) the weighing of the souls comes from Coptic Books of the Dead. It was used by the Christians as an illustration of Dan.5:27: 'You are weighted in the balance and found wanting,' and Job 31:6: 'Let Him weigh me in a just balance'".

4.4.2 Buonamica Buffalmacco – *Last Judgement and Hell* (1336 – 1341)

Figure 29. Buffalmacco, Buonamico. *The Last Judgement and Hell*. (1336 – 1341).

This portrayal of the Second Coming and inferno is on the south wall of the Campo Santo in Pisa. The Campo Santo, which translates to a *holy cemetery/ground,* is on the north side of this cloistered quadrangle, the Cathedral Square in Pisa, Italy. The frescoes in the Campo Santo were badly damaged due to bombings during the Second World War.

This fresco's main focus is the monumental depiction of both Jesus Christ and Mary placed within a mandorla. They are seated on rainbows with the twelve Apostles evenly divided either side of the main figures. Below the two central figures, angels are blowing on trumpets to announce the final judgement. Saint Michael that appears below the angels acts as the "divider" between the saved and the damned. An angel appears to push the damned away and another angel is leading the saved. It is evident that this fresco is deliberately divided into two scenes: to the left the *Last Judgement* where the saved are separated from the sinners, and to the right there is a depiction of hell "which represents the torments imposed for each of the seven deadly sins" (Mills, 2005:42). According to Mills (2005:42), the "fresco is noteworthy as a whole, in that it transforms hell from being a relatively abstract zone of terrifying torment to a highly structured judicial theatre". The representation of eternal punishment is summarized by Mills (2005:42-43) as follows:

> *"The painting divides hell into various zones, each infernal place corresponding to the punishment of a particular fault. The six lower zones punish one of the seven deadly sins; the top zone, representing those opposed to the religion of Christ and the unity of the Church (heretics, soothsayers, simoniacs, Muhammed, the Antichrist, an excommunicate), seems related to Pride, the only one of the seven sins not represented in the lower zone"*.

And:

> *"Representing the subdivision of sinners in hell according to seven typologies directly inspired by the Seven Deadly Sins. Buffalmacco's painting constituted a model for further representations of the scheme; in particular, the iconographic motif describing the way a sin is punished is prominent in the Pisa painting, including the depiction of a mean person as someone who eats burning coins"* (Roest & Uphoff, 2016:203).

The way in which the fresco focuses on the divide between the saved and the damned compels the viewer to read the visual representation in terms of binary oppositions: This visual representation can refer to several ideas: good/bad, saved/damned, God/Satan, heaven/hell and redemption and disobedience. The visual divide therefore refers to the symbolic divide in Christian terms, an idea which was also seen as prominent in the fresco by Giotto (refer to section 4.4.1).

4.4.3 Fra Angelico – *Last Judgement* (1425)

Figure 30. Fra Angelico. *Last Judgement*. (1425).

In this painting by Fra Angelico, Christ in judgement appears within a mandorla, with Mary, John the Baptist and the twelve Apostles in a kneeling gesture, surrounding Him. His left hand is pointing toward hell whilst his right hand is pointing toward heaven in a blessing gesture. On the viewer's left-hand side heaven appears, where the saved souls of the righteous are being led into heaven set between picturesque gardens. On the right, the damned are being forced into hell where pain and torment await them. Satan appears to be chewing three damned souls and hell is portrayed as a layered and mountanious sphere. In this sphere, different punishments are being neted out to the damned befitting their specific sins. Some sinners are burnt whilst others are strangled by snakes. In the middle of the

panel broken tombs can be seen, from which the risen has undergone judgement that would lead them into heaven or hell (Theophanidis, 2015).

4.4.4 Rogier van der Weyden – *Last Judgement* (1445 – 1450)

Figure 31. Van der Weyden, Rogier. *Last Judgement*. (1445 – 1450).

This polyptych, also known as the Beaune Altarpiece, was painted by the Netherlandish painter Rogier van der Weyden (1400 – 1464), totalling nine panels and fifteen individual paintings (Campbell & Van der Stock, 2009:214). Christ is typically centrally placed, but in this case seated on a rainbow whilst delivering the final judgement. His right hand is raised and his feet are placed on a golden globe with Archangel Michael to be seen below Christ engaged in the weighing of souls. The weighing of the souls echoes the identical gesture of Christ's hands. Mary, John the Baptist and the twelve Apostles appear on the right and left-hand side of Christ (Rudy, 2016:185). Above the Christ figure, angels show different symbols associated with his crucifixion. On the left, the Gates of Heaven are visible and on the right, the eternal flames await the damned. The lower panel forms a continuous landscape where one sees how the saved and the damned are directed to their eternal destiny:

> *"Those declared righteous are judged suitable for heavenly bliss and head towards the New Jerusalem … As they rise and move away from their graves they become more individual and "human". The damned on the other hand, emerge from their graves and as they move towards hell they become hunched, bowed and less human in form. Their individuality begins to disappear. They become part of a mass of undifferentiated humanity. In hell, the damned become a chaotic mass of limbs and body parts"* (Paradise and Perdition, 2015).

The hand gestures of the Christ figure in this polytych are identical to Fra Angelico's painting. It is as though Christ's right hand is raised in a blessing gesture; Christ in judgement is blessing those who are saved that will be joining Him in the afterlife.

4.4.5 Hans Memling – *Last Judgement* (1467 – 1471)

Figure 32. Memling, Hans. *Last Judgement*. (1467 – 1471).

This symmetrical triptych was painted by the German-born Flemish painter, Hans Memling (1430 – 1494). Jesus as Maiestas Domin[27], again enthroned on a rainbow, just as in the Van der Weyden painting (see section 4.4.4). This also seems to represent the earth, which appears in the centre and shows Christ surrounded by Mary and John the Baptist who prays for the salvation of human souls. The Archangel Saint Michael is weighing souls to determine who will go to heaven or hell (Bolton *et al*., 2018:274). Hell is portrayed in the right panel with the naked bodies of sinners. On the left side, heaven appears where Saint Peter awaits the righteous on a glass stairway to guide them into heaven where they are clothed by angels. The left and right panel are juxtaposed in terms of the orderly ascent on the left and the chaotic scene of a volcanic hell filled with demons who carry weapons of torture. It is said to be a reinterpretation of Rogier van der Weyden's Beaune altarpiece discussed in section 4.3.6. When looking at Christ and the twelve Apostles the similarity is obvious. The proportional differences between the divine and earthly figures evident in Van der Weyden's work are not as pronounced as in Memling's depiction. In Van Der Weyden's

[27] This term can be roughly translated from Latin to "the majesty of the Lord". It refers to the iconic image of Christ on the throne in majesty, dating back from the 4th century. His holy status is visually represented by the mandorla surrounding His entire being (Snyder, 1967:143).

altarpiece Saint Michael is shown as a priest whereas in Memling's altarpiece he is depicted as a soldier (Ridderbos *et al*., 2005:136).

The weighing of souls is a prominent depiction in most of these *Last Judgement* paintings. The nakedness of sinners throughout many of these visualisations makes the viewer feel uncomfortable; this is a device often used by Judith Mason when she feels the need to confront the viewer with human fragility, also her own. In a way, this also directly links to the unpleasant feeling of realising how significant one's sins are and how often we are fighting a lost battle since we are so susceptible to sin.

4.4.6 Hieronymus Bosch – *Last Judgement* (1482)

Figure 33. Bosch, Hieronymus. *Last Judgement*. (1482).

> *"There is a tradition of pictures of the Last Judgement known as "doom" paintings and Bosch was its greatest practitioner: he painted paradise, too… but doom was his default and the devil is in his detail"* (Prodger, 2016:82).

The *Last Judgement* (1482) as painted by Hieronymus Bosch is a triptych where the left panel displays the Garden of Eden, the central panel is the Last Judgement and the right panel integrates with the central panel which displays hell. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on the central and right panel. Christ appears at the top of the panel enclosed by the apostles, John the Evangelist and Mary. He will judge all and decide whether they will enter heaven or hell. The upper third of the painting is seen as celestial, depicting the few who are saved from eternal punishment. In contrast with the heavenly bright blue, the rest of the panel is filled with an overwhelming brown colour. This apocalyptic scene in the

foreground is filled with images of torture, mutilation and fire. Satan appears in the middle of the right panel. Demons inflict physical pain onto naked sinners. Prodger (2016:83) suggests that these sinners' distorted humanly form is a result of the fact that "they have forfeited the grace of God, have undergone a process of reverse evolution and lost their human form to become the agents of evil". The depiction of hell warns sinners of what will await them in eternal inferno. Although Bosch painted two versions of the *Last Judgement*, this version was chosen for the present discussion because this depiction of hell offers no escape or redemption. This painting is disturbingly dreadful, focusing mainly on the damned (Bosing, 2004:33-44); it is as if the scene is totally overwhelmed by hell, there is only a glimpse of heaven visible to the viewer. Most *Last Judgement* paintings focus mainly on God, heaven, the Apostles, John the Evangelist and Mary. Hans Memling's depiction of hell is painted on a relatively large scale, in effect predicting the monumental scope of the *Last Judgement* by Michelangelo.

4.4.7 Michelangelo Buonarroti – *Last Judgement* (1536 – 1541)

Figure 34. Buonarroti, Michelangelo. *Last Judgement*. (1536 – 1541).

The *Last Judgement* by Michelangelo is a painted fresco on the altar wall of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican City. Michelangelo in contrast to northern paintings mostly done on panel, this fresco largely consists of Biblical references but also contains a few mythological references that can be read intertextually, and that according to Hankins (2017:5) "aim to reimagine old myths and Bible stories". Christ is the focal point of this work where He is placed in the upper centre of this depiction of the Second Coming, with saints encircling Him. The process begins in the lower left that shows saved souls ascending to heaven whereas the lower right reveals damned souls that are descending to hell. With this upward movement one becomes aware of the reclothing of some skeletal figures into flesh whilst the demonic figures are trying to drag some of the saved souls downwards. The weighing of the souls is visually and symbolically referenced by the obvious ascension of the figures on the left as opposed to those descending on the right. Those who have been already saved dominate the top part of the fresco.

The composition is filled by partially nude muscular figures, where Michelangelo used the image of the human form to provoke emotional and spiritual reactions (Hankins, 2017:5). The physique and grandeur of Christ echo earlier depictions of Apollo, Hercules and specifically *Apollo Belvedere*, the immemorial Greek Hellenistic sculpture applauded for its ideal beauty and perfection. According to Duffy (1999:49), the fresco is: "filled with figures whose athletic bodies and facial types are inspired by antique statuary". Their muscular bodies are also associated with Greek gods.

It seems as though He is looking down on the damned with His right hand in an upward gesture revealing His wounds from the crucifixion. Mary's usual depiction where she pleads for humanity is replaced here with a mere glance at the saved and of acquiescence in terms of the eternal judgement. The semi-circular spaces (*lunettes*) at the top contain the symbols of Christ's crucifixion: "thus connecting this triumphal moment to Christ's sacrificial death" (Camara, 2018). John the Baptist and Saint Peter are placed on either side of Christ, holding the keys of heaven. Furthermore, Christ is surrounded by the twelve Apostles and Saints are depicted with their attributes: "Some hold the instruments of their martyrdom: Andrew the X-shaped cross, Lawrence the gridiron, St. Sebastian a bundle of arrows, to name only a few" (Camara, 2018). Saint Bartholomew's attribute of his martyrdom is his skin:

> *"…in the flayed skin of Saint Bartholomew of the Last Judgement Michelangelo portrayed himself*. This image, it has been further suggested, is informed by Dante's allegory of Marsyas" (Barolsky, 1990:31).

Saint Bartholomew's attribute is regarded as Michelangelo's self-portrait with Dantesque features. His flayed skin is placed strategically between heaven and hell, perhaps a realisation of his own mortality and uncertainty regarding his salvation. The image of Satan is not shown in this fresco; it is replaced with Minos, a direct reference to Dante's Inferno where he oversees the damned who are entering hell. Further references are also made to the Bible, where in the Book of Revelations there is a reference to the seven angels blowing trumpets. There is also a shift in the traditional portrayal of Christ in this fresco:

> *"He has evolved a Christ resurrected, and not a judging Christ, as the centre of his fresco. His transformation of Christ from the placidly seated, mandorla-enclosed figure of traditional Last Judgements into a powerful, active figure who now not only stands but also moves forward and upward"* (Hall, 1975:89).

This favoured scene from the Bible is an event Christians fear but also look forward to, where mortality ceases and salvation is attained. Michelangelo masters a great variety of muscular poses on an enormous scale divided into smaller groupings, in effect rendering a huge composition interspersed by many smaller individual groupings. This is reminiscent of the way in which Judith Mason often subdivides her large compositions. This fresco focuses primarily on the triumph of Christ where the sovereignty of heaven dominates. There can be nou doubt that Michelangelo's visual interpretation of the Second Coming is a masterpiece inspired by Dante's *Divine Comedy*:

> *"Like Dante in his great epic poem, the Divine Comedy, Michelangelo sought to create an epic painting, worthy of the grandeur of the moment. He used metaphor and allusion to ornament his subject. His educated audience would delight in his visual and literary references"* (Camara, 2018).

Barnes (1995:65) states that Michelangelo knew Dante's writings well and used them to present hell within the *Last Judgement* as a *poetic parentheses*. With the obvious use of figures such as Charon and Minos, Michelangelo instructs the viewer to use Dante's *Divine Comedy* as a deciphering mechanism to better understand the famous fresco. The intertextuality of Dante's figures is relevant since it was regarded as an appropriate way to approach the Divine. This association with Dante can be taken further by looking at Signorelli's portrayal of the *Last Judgement* in the Capella Nuova in Orvieto Cathedral.

The *Last Judgement* by Michelangelo was regarded as the assertion that the Christian doctrine of the afterlife was true. After the death of Michelangelo, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation had taken place. The authority of the Pope in Rome was brought under question by Protestants, Catholicism shifted towards a more orthodox and militant form (Gayford, 2013:49).

Michelangelo succeeds in communicating the urgency of the theme: “Michelangelo forces us to confront this unyielding truth. More than any other artist, he keeps us searching, and thinking. And that is why he continues to matter” (Rabb, 2006:59).

According to Hall (1975:91-92), the fresco consists of two dualistic ideas; “man’s nobility and his absolute dependence upon God, between free will and divine predestination”. To conclude, I refer to Hall (1975:91) who refers to the obvious dualism present in Michelangelo’s portrayal of the *Last Judgement* that links with the dualism that Mason creates in her works:

> *“This duality between fear of damnation and hope of salvation is the essence of the scriptural message about the last day. Both are articulated: Matt.24-25 and Revelation on the other hand; 1 Cor.15, 1 Thess.4-5, Romans 8 on the other. This duality creates tension and it is this, I believe, that activates Michelangelo’s Last Judgement”.*

The fact that Christ is not enclosed within a mandorla but stands in majesty differentiates this fresco from the *Last Judgement* visualisations discussed earlier in this chapter. Michelangelo included himself by painting his self-portrait into this fresco, adding a personal touch that is mostly absent in all the other renderings of the *Last Judgement* discussed above. The one exception, the painting by Bosch, contains numerous pictorial references that should be read very subjectively; it is still not a painting that directly links the painter with the enfolding drama. The references to Dante in Michelangelo’s depiction is obvious and overwhelming. This intertextuality directly links this *Last Judgement* scene to the writings of Dante Alighieri’s *La Divina Commedia*, as does Mason’s interpretation of heaven and hell.

4.5 Conclusion

During various eras, the purpose of *Last Judgement* visual interpretations was to reflect on the Christian doctrine of the resurrected body of Christ. This theme was salient in many Catholic churches during the Renaissance; therefore, one can say that these visual interpretations were painted to grasp the incomprehensible, and to try to understand how and why religious individuals unquestionably believe what they have read in the Bible. A visual representation thereof creates a “realistic” view for Christians to verify their faith and its concomitant doctrines.

From a Catholic point of view, this interpretation of Christian dogma allowed for Christians to verify their faith in terms of unwavering belief in an effort to make sense of both their

present life on earth and preparing for eternity. This dualistic approach is also evident in Dante's poetic interpretation of the afterlife. According to Corbett (2014:266), man has two ethical goals: one goal is temporal and one is eternal. Dante incorporated various mythological and real-life elements into his epic religious poem to contribute to its overwhelming, though comprehensible storyline. For many, purgatory is an odd concept which gives hope to those who are not spiritually fit to enter heaven: "Our thoughts about heaven and hell are as confused as those about purgatory" (Lamoureux, 2016:71).

In the same manner in which various artists rendered diverse approaches to the interpretations of the moment of judgement, in effect showing the figure of Christ weighing humankind, so too Dante gives us a large and encompassing "canvas" depicting hell and purgatory. In the *Last Judgement* paintings, a large variety of images portraying hell have been discussed. It is especially in the *Last Judgement* by Michelangelo that we find the closest parallels between the painter and the texts by Dante. It is, however, abundantly clear that in order to render visually the extremeties of Dante's imagination, different artists would follow many different routes to depict more or less the same thing.

Even while Michelangelo follows Dante's texts quite literally, he still leaves much scope for a personal interpretation and the addition of both biblical and mythological iconography. It is therefore to be expected that when a contemporary artist such as Judith Mason uses the same text as a point of departure for her paintings, her own and very personal interpretation can be expected to be equally unique and exceptional.

To conclude, this poem reflects the poet's own uncertainties, but at the same time verifies believers' questions about the afterlife: "The Divina Commedia is one of the first literary texts in Western civilisation that openly mirrors the artistic self-consciousness of its maker. The humanist Dante shows a growing interest in poetry as a source of vintù and moral and religious perfection" (Jongeneel, 2007:142).

CHAPTER 5

Interpretation and analysis

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, a biographical overview of Dante Alighieri was outlined. It was followed by the contextualisation of *La Divina Commedia*. In conclusion, the theme of the *Last Judgement* was discussed with reference to how it has been historically portrayed and the role these could play in visual representations of the theme in future interpretations. It is clear that Dante's interpretation of mythological and real-life elements and symbols represents humans' two goals: the one being temporal, with the other operating on the eternal plane. In considering the incomprehensible concept of heaven, hell and purgatory which Dante verbally brought into being, it is in the works chosen as the topic for this dissertation that it manifests how Mason rendered her own unique interpretation of these concepts in a personal iconography.

As noted, *Walking with and away from Dante* is a response and a reinterpretation of *La Divina Commedia*. In these paintings metaphors, symbolism and reality merge together where Mason incorporated and drew from Dante's idea of eternity and her personal iconography. Mason stated in the limited edition artist book titled *Walking with and away from Dante* (2011:2) that "Dante has been the bedrock that much of my imagination rests on". Here it is evident that Dante's writings could help to better understand Mason's symbology in her reworking of heaven, hell and purgatory. For the purposes of this interpretation, it is important to refer to Elkins (2004:1) who states that: "art simply is religious", and in outlining different types of religious beliefs, as noted before, Clouser (2005:35-48) summarises religious beliefs into three categories: the pagan type, the pantheistic type and the Biblical type.

Mason's religious standpoint and visual interpretations of religious subjects do not necessarily fit into such distinct categories, and her visual renderings are much more complex because these concepts are inextricably intertwined. I would like to argue that the essence of the analysis of Mason's visual reinterpretation of Dante's writings rests on the following:

> *Modern art is "a religion assembled from the fragments of our daily life" and "faith in art is reborn out of doubt"* (Elkins, 2004:64-68).

This notion can be linked to the manner in which Mason incorporates fragments of her own life into her art, making her art very personal. She further asserted that artmaking is an exploration of one's doubts. Thus Elkins' writings on the notion that art is reborn out of doubt serve as a vital viewpoint for this interpretation. This is important since exploring religious themes and belief systems (Clouser's four types of religious beliefs) through art is also at times a reflection of one's doubts.

In the aforementioned chapters concepts such as religiosity, Catholicism, eternal life, death, inferno, heaven, purgatory, dualism and Pantheism were defined based on the writings and visual interpretations of Dante Alighieri's *La Divina Commedia*. The conceptualisation of these concepts are used to developing the method for interpreting Mason's artworks.

While customary methods of formal analysis of art works such as Wöfflin's principles of comparison, Panofsky's iconological model as well as Kuijers's model (1986) still add value to contemporary readings of paintings, the possibilities afforded by a contingency approach as inspired by Dante Alighieri's writings on the four senses of allegory are deemed to apposite for this study.

As art historian and researcher I always integrate more formal methods of analysis, but for the purpose of this research I am inspired by Dante Alighieri's writings on the four senses of allegory. In the book titled *Il Convivio* written by Dante Alighieri between 1304 and 1307, he speaks about the four senses of allegory, which refers to a narrative or visual interpretation that has a hidden or loaded moral meaning. According to Lewis (2016), this concept is not only suitable for medieval contexts, as it originally was intended, but can also be used to interpret contemporary works.

The first sense is called the literal. This first level of interpretation does not go beyond the surface of a text, whether written or visual. Lewis (2016) refers to the fact that in order to understand the deeper meaning, we must start with the basics – that which we see as well as the literal meaning. The second level of interpretation is called the allegorical. According to Habib (2008:211), it is the "truth hidden underneath a beautiful fiction". The third sense of interpretation is the moral sense. Habib (2008:211) defines this sense as we "should intently seek to discover throughout the scriptures" for our own as well as others' benefit. In simpler terms, we should apply that of the Bible in our own lives where applicable. The fourth and last sense of interpretation is of crucial value. It is defined as the analogical or spiritual sense, the modern work's literal meaning relates to higher matters.

According to Habib (2008:211), this sense can be signified by means of the things that form part of the supernal facets of eternal glory. It is usually a spiritual interpretation beyond our consciousness. Lewis (2016) distinguishes between the last two senses of interpretation:

> *"While the moral is directed inwards to the human, the analogical is directed outwards or upwards to the heavens or to the greater universe (depending on your spiritual beliefs)".*

Reynolds (2006:70) mentions that all four senses can be interpreted in the same work as a guideline for the method of interpretation. Thus, in the method I will follow, the four senses are integrated with Kuijers's model (1986:6-11) where he proposes three steps to describe, analyse and interpret artworks. These three steps are respectively form, idea and content. The allegorical and moral sense have been placed together since these two senses are interlinked, both focuses on the deeper religious interpretation of the symbols identified.

5.2 Method

Method of investigation	
1. The literal	I. Physical description II. A description of the artworks, as well as the title, date, medium, dimensions and current collection III. Identification of symbolism and visual observable elements
2. The allegorical and the moral	I. Identification of religion as an influence on the interpretation of death, eternal life, suffering and liberation II. More in-depth religious reading of symbols
3. The analogical	I. Defining the tension between diametric oppositions II. Visual art as a vehicle to express the incomprehensible III. Defining Mason's unique religious view

1. INFERNO

This a work of very large proportions, measuring 200cm x 600cm, and is done in oil on canvas. *Inferno* forms part of the commission titled *Walking with and away from Dante*, and is currently part of a private collection in Cape Town.

Discussion of the physical qualities of the painting

Figure 35. Mason, Judith. *Inferno*. (2006).

Inferno can be regarded as the most well-known sphere of the *Divine Comedy:* "It is violent, gruesome, funny, full of the delights of schadenfreude[28], ominous with the stench of evil" (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:23). Hell is a concept with which we are all familiar and associate with endless terror, torture, pain, misery and, of course, sin.

The artwork is filled with various images, all dealing with the concept of evil. The most overwhelming figure is Satan confronting the viewer. He is adorned with various symbols such as his bat-winged arms, a crowd of heads, three mouths eating sinners, twisting torso, thighs, genitals, three rivers, weapons – all related to evil. His twisted torso is decorated with tattoos narrating Dante's poem. The mythological figures such as Apasmara Purusha, the Minotaur and dogs are place on the left. Sinners' faces seem to intertwine whilst others appear ghost-like in a horizontal position. A woman reveals pain and anguish whilst she is being stoned by burning coals.

The male figure on the right is a tribute to Richard Berger, for whom the Dante project was created. The black river swirls out of Satan's wing. On both sides of the black river symbols

[28] "Schadenfreude can be regarded as a type of joy, but also as a specific and seemingly atypical type of joy. Whereas joy concerns with being pleased about a desirable event, schadenfreude concerns being pleased about an event presumed to be undesirable for someone else (Van Dijk & Owerkerk, 2014:7).

such as a violated baby and an orange mesh bag filled with infant skulls are visible (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:23). The river is filled with photo-negative images of horrific well-known events or people such as Hitler and the execution of Saddam Hussein and ends with the image of an electric chair. A hunting dog appears on the left of the black river, consumed by fire.

Three themes are evident in this work: weapons of destruction, burning blood and the violation of the body as well as violation of innocence.

Part of Inferno are the free-standing mobiles taken from A Dante Bestiary which were all placed in front of the large scale painting. These mobiles integrated the *Divine Comedy* and created a three-dimensional space where the viewer could walk through the exhibition. For the purpose of this study, only the paintings are investigated, and the free-standing mobiles are not dealt with.

Identification of symbolism

The following symbols have been identified in this painting: Satan/*Dis*[29] (bat-winged arms, three mouths, torso and thighs), three rivers, film negatives, human figures, faces, burning coals, the Minotaur[30], Dogs of War, copper and gold leaf, a woman being stoned, a naked child, an orange mesh bag filled with infant skulls and a hunting dog.

These symbols form part of Mason's artistic iconography and have been selected not only because they relate to the *Divine Comedy*, but also bear testimony to Mason's own ideas and opinions.

Mason's iconography in this commission is therefore loaded: not only with religious and psychological meanings, but also very personal. She emphasises historical events that symbolise injustice by means of the unique symbols she used. Combining contemporary elements, Mason could redefine hell as a construct that she understood (Mason, 2008a:87). In this context, it is clear that when interpreting the *La Divina Commedia* Mason understands it to not only be beautiful but to also be of practical value:

> "*A tool with which one can craft one's own moral philosophy"* (Mason, 2008a:86).

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[29] *Dis* is a Roman god of the underworld. This term is synonymous with the underworld or a part of the underworld (Monaghan, 2014:33).

[30] The Minotaur is a well-known figure used in Greek mythology and was regarded as a monster. He had a human body and his head and tail was reminiscent of that of a bull (Garcia, 2013).

In terms of the literal meaning, Inferno is regarded as a place where the damned rejoice and the victims suffer (Mason, 2008a:86). According to Christian belief, someone who is damned is already destined to go to hell to pay for his or her sins. This work serves as an experience of hell, something we can recognise as some sort of abstract reality. Hell is painted as an overcrowded place; it overwhelms the viewer.

Identification of death as an influence on the interpretation of death, eternal life, suffering and liberation

This step focuses on the second and third senses as outlined in the book titled Il Convivio. The truth or deeper meaning of the chosen symbolism will be defined (Habib, 2008:211). In also investigating the moral significance of the painting, questions could be raised as to Biblical referencing as well as the potentially personal benefits in interpretation. In searching for answers to these questions, it is important to not only identify the visual references pertaining to religion, but to also explicate its influences on the interpretations of death, eternal life, suffering and liberation as found in this painting. It follows that an investigation into Mason's opinion and ideas of these themes would provide the necessary clues in order to come to a feasible conclusion regarding her religious frameworks.

Although Dante's *Hell* is based on Aristotelian ideas as well as Christian symbolism, as noted, Mason's rendering thereof is more personal and draws on certain mythological ideas and historic events. Inferno embodies our thoughts on both religion as well as eternal life, death, suffering and the opposite of liberation. For many Christians, religion goes hand in hand with a fear of eternal death, and the idea of eternal death is synonymous with Inferno (Jackson, 2019). Dante Alighieri was the first to use the word inferno to refer to hell. In the *Divine Comedy* Dante refers to Inferno, a place that consists out of 9 spirals of pain and torture where sinners suffer for eternity (refer to the original text of *La Divina Commedia*).

According to Mason and Koekemoer (2011a:6) *(t)he Inferno is the most popular of the three books in the Divine Comedy. It is violent, gruesome, funny, full of delights of schadenfreude, ominous with the stench of evil*. It can therefore be said that this painting is a visual reference of the end of life and the embodiment of eternal death.

In the Bible, there are numerous verses that help to define hell and its relationship to eternal life, death and suffering:

> *"He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury"* (Romans 2:6-8).

and

> *"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death"* (Revelation 21:8).

and

> *"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell"* (Matthew 10:28).

and

> *"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name"* (Revelation 14:11).

and

> *"… and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 13:42).

According to the abovementioned references it is clear that those who live in sin without repentance are destined to eternal death, with hell being described in terms such as a lake burning with fire and sulphur, a furnace of fire in a place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

It can be deducted that inferno is a place that reminds one of pain, torture and suffering. While all this pertains to physical distress, the ordeal and the complexity of being in this condition goes much deeper. "Dante's *Inferno* is defined by a psychological state, or by a means of approaching life, rather than by a specific act" (Webb, 2011:55). It is also a dangerous place where one could easily get trapped: "Hell is seductive. You are drawn to it. Only when you are close to it do you feel and see its venom. But then it's too late" (Mason, 2008a:91).

The nine spirals represent different types of punishment according to what sins the sinners have committed. Each punishment is by means of a contrapasso[31]: “he sews their eyelids together, puts their heads on back to front (Mason 2008:129). Mason remarks that Dante’s *Inferno* is visualised as Catholic theologians saw it: “An endless torment for those sinners who died unrepentant, forever separated from God, and punished by demons in the service of Satan (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:6). Mason thus asserts that hell is a place of terror, disorder and misery that exists across cultures in acts of treachery, cruelty and greed (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:6).

Reading of symbols from a religious context

The symbols are identified and analysed from the central panel and moves then from the left panel to the right panel.

I. Satan/*Dis* (bat-winged arms, three mouths, torso and thighs)

Figure 36. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Inferno*. (2007).

[31] Contrapasso in this sense refers to Dante’s *Inferno* where sinners were individually punished in a specific way for their sins: “The punishment fits the crime. The idea that whatever sins you committed will dictate your suffering for eternity. Fortune-tellers walking backward blind. Adulterers stuck together. Sometimes the punishment is ironic, sometimes not” (Armstrong, 2009:48).

Mason combined Satan and the idea of who *Dis* is. Both are ruling figures of the underworld (hell). According to Mason and Koekemoer (2011a:7), Satan is the most commanding figure in this painting. Satan's bat-winged arms stretched in a twirling movement stretching horizontally over the canvas. He has three mouths, mimicking the Holy Trinity whilst chewing on Judas, Cassius and Brutus, three well-known traitors with only parts of their bodies being visible to the viewer. For Dante, traitors were regarded as the worst type of sinners. His machine-like torso spirals downward into the base of hell and his leather belt has studs that points inwards and transforms his pelvis into a gin trap (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:16), inevitably causing him to be portrayed as a female encapsulating a male. On Satan's arms, torso and thighs the narrative of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is inscribed like a tattoo. This allows the viewer to read the *Divine Comedy* in comic novel form. For Mason there is something theatrical about Satan, like a superstar or a political figure. Mason and Koekemoer (2011a:7-8) describe Satan as follows:

> *"Satan strides towards the viewer, and, cropped at legs and wings, he confronts us. He forces us to engage with him, and his cohorts. He is the epicenter of pure power, unmediated by reason, hence his headless mouths that chew within the infinite darkness he drags behind him like a cloak. He traps us by his massive presence".*

Satan is painted against a cobalt blue background that stretches into infinity, embracing the viewer with an overwhelming darkness. (Mason, 2008a:89).

Satan, in the vernacular more commonly known as the devil, or sometimes referred to as Lucifer, is obviously synonymous with sin and hell. Featuring regularly in art of the western world since the advent of Christianity, he is a figure often visually depicted in various other guises: as the tempter, as a goat, as a snake and many other forms. (see Chapter 4, section 4.4). A fallen angel who disobeyed God, he was the Angel of Light who wanted to usurp the power of God (Ezekiel 20: 14-18). He was cast out of heaven and was destined to go to hell as the ultimate sinner. When God created earth, Satan took the form of a serpent who tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit. Satan is thus regarded as the catalyst of sin and temptation, where His name translates to "adversary" in Hebrew, and he represents is portrayed an integral role in the ultimate fall of humankind.

According to Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Satan is described as a demon with three faces and bat-like wings, a grotesque being. As he moves his wings, everything around him freezes in

the ninth spiral[32]. He is most infamously portrayed as a commanding figure in paintings illustrating the *Last Judgement*. He is a terrifying figure portrayed as the incarnation of evil, ruler of hell and tormentor of humanity (Mejía, 2017). Such visual interpretations of Satan are a culmination of our fears, ideologies and ideas, as can be seen in the following select examples:

In the 13th century medieval Byzantine mosaic by Di Marcovaldo (1225 – 1276), the devil is depicted devouring the lost souls. This image forms part of a larger *Last Judgement* mosaic in the dome of the San Giovanni Baptistery in Florence. In William Blake's version the devil is horned as a ram coming up out of the earth. Francisco Goya, in turn, paints the devil where he is surrounded by witches, he is portrayed as a goat. The surrealist interpretation painted by Salvador Dalí (1904 – 1989), depicts the devil with female features.

Figure 37. Di Marcovaldo, Coppo. *The Hell*. (1265 – 1270).

[32] Dante's *Inferno* consists of nine circles. These circles are limbo, lust, gluttony, greed, anger, heresy, violence, fraud, and treachery. The ninth circle is the deepest circle where Satan resides. The sinners are placed accordingly (Burgess, 2019).

Figure 38. Blake, William. *The number of the beast is 666.* (1805).

Figure 39. Goya, Francisco. *The great he-goat*. (1821 – 1823).

Figure 40. Dalí, Salvador. *Hell canto 17 – the black devil*. (1963).

II. Three streams

Figure 41. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Inferno*. (2007).

The three streams originate from Satan's wings. Each stream represents different aspects of devastation and human error; the stream towards the left symbolises weapons of destruction and the willingness to use them. The central stream consists of burning blood, commenting on the violation of the human body. The third stream is black and is portrayed as a twisting reel of film negatives, presented in documentary fashion revealing Hitler, Abu Ghraib and the execution of Saddam Hussein. The film negatives end with an electric chair serving as a channel to the abyss below. A corpse still wearing its torn uniform lies at the bottom of the stream, with Satan depicted as the actual source of all three streams.

Water is a powerful symbol throughout the Bible to symbolise life and forms part of the sacrament of baptism. A river flowing from the Garden of Eden parted into four streams; Dante, however, refers to five streams in the *Divine Comedy*. In the second *cantica* of *Purgatorio*, he describes how the remorseful reach the Garden of Eden, placing it at the top of Mount Purgatory. The memories of their sins are washed away by the streams and only good memories remain. After the purgation of their sins, they can drink water from the stream called Lethe and be absolved: "You will remember many of your sins, but you will know that they have been forgiven. Gone will be the pain of the knowledge that you have sinned" (Bruce, 2018:287).

III. Faces/Crowd of heads

Figure 42. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Inferno*. (2007).

These are painted beneath Satan's wings. This portrayal comments on Michelangelo's *Jehovah*[33]. In this painting, God embraces Eve whilst reaching towards Adam. The group behind God's embrace is reminiscent of the aforementioned crowd of heads. In Mason's *Inferno*, the faces not only look at the destruction below them, but try to make eye contact with the viewer. These disturbing faces dissolve into one another, losing their individuality. They are the embodiment of greed and self-indulgence.

[33] Michelangelo Buonarotti's visual interpretation of *The Creation of Adam* in The Sistine Chapel in Rome.

IV. The Minotaur

Figure 43. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Inferno*. (2007).

In Mason's rendering of the Minotaur he is painted towars the left of the canvas, on tiptoes in the open plane trying to avoid hand-grenades and landmines. The Minotaur is a popular figure used throughout art history, and this imaginary creature has appeared in works by many artists (Phaidon, 2019). Artists such as Pablo Picasso (1881 – 1973), William Blake and Jackson Pollock (1912 – 1956) integrated this mythological beast in their artworks. Picasso incorporated the Minotaur in his bestial works of the 1930s, and here myth is still relevant and engages into conversation with modern life. In an illustration of the *Divine Comedy*, William Blake depicted the Minotaur as guarding the seventh spiral of hell. Pollock's rendition of the Minotaur focuses on the eroticism and bestiality of the Minotaur.

All in all, the Minotaur echoes the sinister embodiment of a warlord, lurking children into his army. A modern phenomenon being interlinked with Greek mythology.

Figure 44. Picasso, Pablo. *Minotaur in love with a female centaur*. (1933).

Figure 45. Blake, William. *The Minotaur*. (1824 – 1827).

Figure 46. Pollock, Jackson. *Pasiphaë*. (1943).

V. Dogs of War/hunting dogs

Figure 47. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Inferno*. (2007).

"The bodies of the 'dogs' are commando-like, almost invisible, made up of ammunition belts and weaponry, while their heads are mounted on shields evocative of hunting trophies and medals" (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:10). Real dogs appear behind them, running away from the chaos whilst their bodies are burning. In the right-hand panel only one dog is visible, suggesting the extinction of this dog species (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:10).

In William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (1599) the phrase "Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war" is mentioned by the character Mark Anthony whilst he is standing next to Julius Caesar's body after his assassination. His intention is to encourage the crowds to stand up against the assassins. The first part of this quotation is defined as when a military commander instructs soldiers to cause disorder and destroy a specific area. The dogs of war can refer to literal dogs trained to fight during war or the more figurative meaning would imply that the dogs of war refer to soldiers or weapons of destruction (Crocker *et al*., 2007:3). Dogs are usually seen as loveable creatures, but in William Blake's portrayal they represent violence. Guarding the third spiral of hell named Gluttony, was Cerberus – a hellhound with three heads. He did not allow the living to enter or the dead to leave; Blake's illustration of Cerberus (1827) is a fitting example here (Tate Britain, 2019). In the *Divine Comedy* Dante relates the negative behaviour of dogs (such as aggression and threat) to the inhabitants of hell.

Figure 48. Blake, William. *Cerberus*. (1827).

VI. Burning coals

Figure 49. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Inferno*. (2007).

Burning coals are thrown at the bleeding figure (see IX). Mason places the viewer in an uncertain position, where he or she feels like a helpless bystander of the horrific action. The burning coals are encircled with orange flames that constitute a focal point that draws the viewers' attention. Because burning coals are associated with flames and heat, a sense of pain and suffering prevails. Dante wrote in the *Inferno* about the demon named Charon (Kline, 2000), describing his eyes as made of burning coals.

VII. Woman being stoned

The depiction of the woman being stoned with burning coals is the visualisation of evil and suffering (see Figure 49). Her raised arms and pouring blood shows how dreadful this is. The Bible often refers to people being stoned for their sins. This punishment was already common practice during the Old Testament; according to Exodus 21:28, both animals and people could be victims of stoning. Sins such as murder, idolatry, blaspheming and worshipping other gods were punished by means of stoning, with death very often being slow and extremely painful as visualised in Rembrandt van Rijn's painting below. Victims would die an agonising death with bystanders witnessing the pain and suffering of the sinner, as explicated in the *Divine Comedy* where Virgil leads Dante to the third terrace of purgatory and they have to witness how Saint Stephen is being stoned:

> *"… he sees Saint Stephen sinking to the ground as the stones strike him, already being weighed down by his impending death; yet, throughout the stoning, St. Stephen's eyes remain fixed toward Heaven, as if they were the very Gates of Paradise"* (Bruckman, 2011:330).

Figure 50. Van Rijn, Rembrandt. *The Stoning of Saint Stephen*. (1625).

VIII. Two racists

Towards the centre right of the painting, Mason depicts two figures that she identifies as racists (see Figure 49). They are painted in different colors. Hands are mounted on their necks, their faces are not visible whilst they snarl at each other and tear each other's heads off. For Mason, killing someone due to racial indifferences is the pinnacle of evil: "often this rage against the 'other' is exacerbated by sexual fury, so I made the genitals into claws that rake at the opposition" (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:23). For the artist, this image is personal: "I often create images by finding where the tension is in my own body" (Mason, 2008a:90).

IX. Victims

A family of victims bundled in sheets appears in the foreground (see Figure 49). They represent the mass graves evident in so many conflict zones of the world; from Babi Yar to Treblinka, from Serbia to Iraq. One may question why these victims are found in *Inferno*, because as victims they suffered and died by the hands of their murderers. Here they are placed in juxtaposition with those who are guilty of sin.

In all aspects of life people can become victims: victims of injustice, malevolence, crime, abuse and rape to just name a few. This image correlates with the reference to genocide in the artwork (see XI).

X. Dwarf

Figure 51. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Inferno*. (2007).

An analysis of the figure on Satan's wing reveals it as the "ignorant dwarf", Apasmara Purusha[34], who was crushed under Shiva's foot. In this depiction, the artist synthesises Christian and Hindu iconography, and by her own admission, Mason respects the cosmology of Hinduism as a vehicle for conveying truths. This dwarf challenges the viewer with its glance whilst literally tearing life apart.

[34] According to Hindu mythology Apasmara Purusha was a demon called Forgetfulness. This dwarf-like creature symbolises blindness and man's ignorance (Zimmer, 1990:153).

At the same time, Mason also draws a connection with the broader world of images by way of referencing 19th century romantic art, because this figure is an obvious reference to a similar dwarf-like figure in Henry Fuseli's (1741 – 1825) *The Nightmare* (1781). It shows a woman sleeping with a demon-like dwarf sitting on her stomach. The painting comments on the erotic and the subconscious (Kleiner, 2009:762).

Figure 52. Fuseli, Henry. *The Nightmare*. (1781).

XI. Naked baby

Figure 53. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Inferno*. (2007).

A baby is falling from space, the body unrecognisable with a distorted hand reminiscent of a rooster's claw. The claw rips the canvas out of desperation, making the canvas an important participant of the narrative. The face is not visible, emphasising its anonymity and, according to Mason, this image refers to helpless and defenseless children due to adult malevolence (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:20).

Mason also noted that the naked baby reminds us of how we enter the world, unwillingly born into sin. We are fragile, vulnerable and inherently guilty of sin. It also links to the time before the fall of mankind, when Adam and Eve did not even realise that they were naked.

XII. Orange mesh bag filled with infant skulls

Figure 54. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Inferno*. (2007).

This orange bag symbolises genocide. According to Mason (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:27), this part of the painting is a vehicle by means of which the artist attempts to come to terms with her own perceived lack of insight: “Like most of the violence described in my vision of hell, I cannot grasp how such deeds were done. It testifies to my easy life, never being put through the de-humanising trauma of battle… Visualising is my way of trying to remedy my ignorance” (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:27).

In Greek “geno” means race or group and “cide” translates to kill: “Genocide is understood by most to be among the gravest crimes against humanity. It is the mass extermination of a whole group of people, an attempt to wipe them out of existence” (BBC, 2016).

XIII. Human figure

Figure 55. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Inferno*. (2007).

In Chapter one, I referred to the fact that the Dante project originated as a commission from Ettienne Koekemoer. Ettienne's partner Richard Berger is depicted as the figure standing towards the right side of the painting, and this portrait is therefore a tribute from Mason to him. For Mason this figure resembles Dante when referring to his stance and the way he looks at the world, but also comments on the medieval habit of including patrons in paintings. This depiction of Berger contains a tongue-in-cheek reference to the way in which Michelangelo depicted Biagio da Cesena on the bottom right hand side of his *Last Judgement*. The poet's laurel wreath is placed on his shoulders and not on his head. Richard Berger loves fast cars, and the placement of the laurel wreath on his shoulders mimics Grand Prix trophies. "This figure has no role in the narrative, but simply observes from the margin, with his white robe shining the light of normality onto the immediate foreground" (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011a:24).

2. PURGATORIO

The artwork is done in oil on canvas. This work was also produced on a very large scale and measures 200cm x 600cm. *Purgatorio* forms part of the commission titled *Walking with and away from Dante*. It is part of a private collection in Cape Town.

Discussion of the physical qualities of the painting

Figure 56. Mason, Judith. *Purgatorio*. (2007).

The second artwork is *Purgatorio* (2007) which also forms part of the commission entitled *Walking with and away from Dante*. Purgatory is the uncertain space where we have a longing towards heaven and a fear of hell. The individuals who find themselves here have to repent their sins and be purified before they can be spiritually fit to enter heaven. The assumption is even though they have made mistakes, repentance shows a willingness to rectify those mistakes. Regardless of this in her depiction of purgatory, Mason's interpretation differs: "The sinners in Dante's purgatory knew that they were saved; they just had to serve their time. In this secular purgatory we have no such assurance" (Koekemoer & Mason, 2011b:2). This rendering of Dante's *Purgatory* is therefore reinterpreted in a secular and contemporary way, with purgatory visually portrayed as an enormous curved landscape with a nuclear fire in the background. Colourful bits of land and sea are placed against dreadful, burning rubble overwhelmed by the atomic shadow, and the landscape is filled with elements that are juxtaposed:

> *"Hundreds of separate images from fields to lucky beans, from war graves to lucky simians, from a paper boat to metal tacks, from a ladder to heaven to chicken wire, from the Hanged man of the tarot to the Burning Man of prehistoric sacrifice, jumble together"* (Koekemoer & Mason, 2011b:4).

From the point of view of the iconography as revealed through the symbolism in this painting, it could be said that these messages are of a religious nature, since there are numerous references to Christianity and the Bible. Mason inferred that while the meaningful content of the painting may not be portrayed as triumphant, as many religious artworks are, the emphasis here falls on the more tragic aspects of faith (Koekemoer & Mason, 2011b:4). The use of colour in this painting reminds of similar palettes seen throughout Mason's body of work, especially in works such as *Thunderbird* (1998) and *Not being able to paint* (1992) - see section 3.3.2.

Identification of symbolism

The following symbols can be identified in this painting: land, sea, atomic shadow, fields, war graves, floating simians, paper boat, metal tacks, a ladder to heaven, chicken wire, Hanged Man of the Tarot, Burning Man of prehistoric sacrifice, rubble, orchards, two scarecrows and monkeys.

Focusing on the literal meaning of *Purgatorio*, this work is overshadowed by a purgative fire. According to Mason (2008:91), purgatory is a place of "experimentation and risk-taking, making messes, and compensating for them".

Identification of death as an influence on the interpretation of death, eternal life, suffering and liberation

In the following paragraphs the focus shifts to the second and third senses of Dante's four senses of allegory as outlined in the book titled *Il Convivio*. In the reading of the artworks as outlined in this section, the first step is to identify and subsequently interpret the deeper meaning of the chosen symbolism, or in terms of the artists' rendition thereof, her idea of the "truth" underlying her way of interpreting the chosen symbols (Habib, 2008:211). This search for underlying truths and meanings also necessitate an investigation into aspects of morality embedded within the work. While performing this analysis, the verity of references to Biblical passages must be questioned, including the extent to which these references could be interpreted for the benefit of the viewer. In this case, it is not only crucial to identify the visual references to religion and its influence on the interpretation of death, eternal life, suffering and liberation, but specifically Mason's opinion and ideas thereof, affording the opportunity to arrive at conclusions regarding Mason's religious framework. Mason summarises purgatory as follows:

> *"The second book of the Divine Comedy, although less popular than the Inferno, has passages of great beauty, describing the landscape of the lonely island where sinners are cleansed of their vices before entering the earthly paradise, and finally, heaven itself"* (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:1).

Mason's interpretation of purgatory is, as noted above, interpreted in a contemporary, secular way. This becomes important when considering the fact that investigation of both Dante's and Mason's texts indicate a subtle difference in their diverse approaches: According to Mason, the sinners in Dante's *Purgatory* know that they will be saved after undergoing purification. In Mason's secular *Purgatory*, however, there is no such assurance, and this confronts the viewer with a fear of death and dying. Mason confirms this when she refers to the fact that in her version of purgatory individuals are made to feel uncertain and are faced with eventual annihilation (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:3).

According to Pasulka (2015:3): "Purgatory is a doctrine of the Catholic Church, which means that Catholics are obligated to believe in it". The concept of purgatory first appears in the 11th century and cannot be extracted from the Bible as such, and thus it is impossible to bring it into context with any biblical references. It is still regarded as a religious concept, however, and can be understood in the context of Catholicism since it is a construct and untouchable place in which all Catholics believe (Manganini, 2017). It is also incumbent for Catholics to pray for the souls of fellow Catholics that they believe might be suffering in purgatory.

Since purgatory is a place for believers who are not yet spiritually fit to enter heaven and who have to undergo penal and purifying suffering, they are confronted by both death and life (Boettner, 1962:218). It is therefore an intermediate state of purifying suffering before one could gain access to heaven (Boettner, 1962:218). If sinners do not succeed to redeeming themselves, they cannot move on to heaven, and must face eternal death. Purgatory could even be seen as a domain that gives sinners a second chance to achieve eternal life, where they can be liberated from hell and eternal death. The prerequisite remains the concept of purgatory as a place of penal suffering, but also with the potential as a place of liberation.

It is uncertain what exactly this penal and purifying sufferings entails, or to establish whether it is painful or not. Since the Bible does not mention purgatory, it is difficult, even impossible, to come to a definite conclusion to which extent this suffering might be painful.

Reading of symbols from a religious context

The symbols are identified and analysed from the central panel and moves then from the left panel to the right panel.

I. Sea & land

Figure 57. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Purgatorio*. (2007).

Towards the right of the explosion depicted in this painting acid rain falls into the sea. This placement of sea and land shows how one had to travel through the sea to reach the midlands, and this correlates with how Dante set sail for better waters after he left hell (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:12). In the *Divine Comedy* Dante elaborated mainly on how hell, purgatory and heaven would look like, but he also focused on landscapes and various geological descriptions. Bressan (2016) explains that: “In Dante's *Inferno*, geology even plays a role in the punishment of the sinners. In the third spiral, the simonists (people who sold holy artefacts for profit) are driven upside down into the ground”. Dante’s writings gave a thorough understanding of the geology of the 14th century where it revealed a map of medieval nature (Bressan, 2016).

II. Atomic shadow

Figure 58. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Purgatorio*. (2007).

In the upper part of the central panel an atomic shadow is seen due to a nuclear explosion. It "symbolises an existential ring of fire in contrast to the spiritual fire at the top of Dante's *Purgatory*", it is a reminder that our good intentions and skills fail miserably in creating a safer world and controlling power. Mason and Koekemoer (2011b:5) describes this as follows:

> *"Purgatory is where we try to make amends, and where, because of our human nature, our technological inventiveness has outstripped our capacity to anticipate consequences".*

III. War graves

Figure 59. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Purgatorio*. (2007).

Mason and Koekemoer (2011b:4) describe the overwhelming number of war graves as: "… an extensive plantation of trees fading into acres of war graves". The war graves confront the viewer with the horrible reality of eternal death, and with the consequence of war. Mason asserts that war is an attempt to get rid of some sort of evil, where she specifically references an orchard near her home who had to be lime washed to prevent termites after a fire. Thus it is evident that war implies inevitable death and, seeing these numerous graves grouped together is a heart-breaking sight.

IV. Burning Man of prehistoric sacrifice

Figure 60. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Purgatorio*. (2007).

The burning man appears in the rubble of the collapsed Twin Towers in the foreground. He symbolises a form of human sacrifice where Mason refers to the biggest sacrifice of them all: “[it] made Christ’s crucifixion so profoundly significant” (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:4).

V. Two scarecrows

Figure 61. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Purgatorio*. (2007).

This imagery reminds of her earlier work titled *Crucifix into Scarecrow* (1975) – see section 3.3.1. These two scarecrows are placed in the foreground where they support a barbed wire fence. They try to attract the attention of those who want to reach the central meadow (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:3). Mason drew the image of these two scarecrows from a painting of scarecrows she painted in the early 70's (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:5). Their hands are covered with face gloves and their eyes seem to be blindfolded with facemasks. The reddish tone of their hair symbolises the malnutrition sickness called kwashiorkor (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:5). It is evident that they are screaming for attention. They hold posters of reptile and eagle eyes in their hands, as well as a page torn from the Book of Genesis that reads: "let us make man in our image, after our likeness, let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air … over the cattle, and over all the earth".

According to Mason and Koekemoer (2011b:5), this is rather a dangerous instruction to give to humans. They are greedy and sinful by nature and are the cause of animal extinction and suffering. A tattoo is inscribed on one of the scarecrows, reminiscent of a concentration camp number. This inscription symbolises discrimination within the same species (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:5). Those inscribed numbers are a visual symbol of the thousands of prisoners' residence in a so called hell. This also relates to governments controlling citizens with Pass Law and Patriot Acts (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:7). The one scarecrow is holding tightly onto a rosary of lucky beans, which means that we all rely on certain rituals

to get through the day. Van Rensburg (2008:11) states that for Mason the use of scarecrows serves as participants in a divine puppet show, an image she has used from time to time throughout her artistic career.

VI. Christ figure

Figure 62. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Purgatorio*. (2007).

Mason explains the use of Christ coming down from a cross:

> *"This represents the increasing secularisation of the world, the sad truth that the beatitudes are now a mark of tribal affiliation, rather than a recipe of human behaviour, and that sacrifice is losing its meaning. In my own mind it is a reminder that post-religious art need not be concerned only with the profane, but can still address the sacred"* (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:5).

His nailed arm suggest the same movements of that of the scarecrows. He is the only living figure amongst the rubble whilst carrying a disintegrating cross. Mason chose to visually integrate a defeated Christ portraying Him after the crucifixion. This is in contrast of typical Middle age art which usually depicted triumphant religious scenes:

> *"I am increasingly interested in producing work that deals with the tragic aspects of belief without resorting to satire, and this Christ figure is one of them"* (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:6).

The story of Christ in the Bible is one with which most people are all familiar. He was born in Israel 2000 years ago, as a young adult he worked as a carpenter. He taught people about

God where the Word of God had to be a clear message to all: “The core belief that only God is divine, as well as teaching the content of God’s covenant of redemption which are the secondary beliefs necessary for humans to stand in proper relationship to him. By becoming subscribers to this covenant, or treaty of salvation, people become members of his Kingdom and receive eternal life” (Clouser, 2005:44).

Gradually the word spread and everyone knew about this man claiming to be the Son of God. This was a direct violation of the Jewish law. The religious leaders convinced Pilate, a Roman governor to approve the execution of Christ. Christ was tortured and his hands were nailed to a horizontal wooden beam. This method of execution made it hard for Him to breathe, ensuring death within three hours. Three days after His death, He rose from the grave. It was now evident that he was the Son of God. After forty days He ascended to heaven.

In the *Divine Comedy* Christ is never mentioned in *Inferno*, but in *Paradiso* he is mentioned regularly. This sacred poem popularised Catholic theology (Tompsett & Winchester, 2013). The Christian belief forms the basis of this epic poem with Christ as the central figure.

Since the first century of the Roman Empire, Christianity gradually became the dominant religion, and the Christian church was born. It also rapidly became the most influential patron of the visual arts. A specific Christian iconography was developed, sending a preconceived visual message to all worshippers. Higher taxes and indulgences lead to more elite art that adorned Christian buildings. Throughout early Christian Roman art up until the Renaissance, Christ was portrayed as the central focus point: firstly visualised as a loving figure and later transformed into a figure of judgement, penance and punishment, even though a literal rendition of these motives cannot be seen in Mason’s *Purgatorio* (see Chapter 4).

VII. Metal tacks / A ladder to heaven

Figure 63. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Purgatorio*. (2007).

From the sky tractor tyre chains hang and form an unstable, hanging ladder that connects the sky to the water. This ladder made out of chains offer a possible escape, it is an image of salvation. According to Mason and Koekemoer (2011b:9) it symbolises Jacob's ladder from the Bible. In Genesis 28:10-15 Jacob has a dream of a stairway that rests on earth and reaches towards heaven with the angels of God continuously ascending and descending from it. This journey of ascent also relates to Dante's journey to heaven.

VIII. Human hand

Towards the right of the metal ladder a hand can be seen holding an old cloth (see Figure 63). The hand appears to be wiping away visual mistakes made whilst painting, this artistic gesture refers to the sinners in purgatory that are trying to repent for their sins: "The hand of the artist is wiping away mistakes in the same way as the people in purgatory live away

their mistakes by undergoing some sort of penitence and suffering" (Mason, 2008a:91). Here Mason painted her own hand, and for her this is a symbol of any artist trying to achieve artistic perfection just like some sinners are tirelessly striving to be spiritually fit to be able to enter heaven: "The pattern of trial and error makes any work of art, in effect, purgatory" (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:9).

This shows that artistic error is part of the creative process; it is Mason's personal imprint on this work.

IX. Hanged Man of the Tarot

This ancient figure[35] is painted underneath the metal ladder; he is a small figure dangling from the skies as a metaphor of our hope of heaven and our fear of hell (see Figure 63). This figure also echoes the horrifying image of people jumping of the burning Twin Towers, metaphorically finding themselves as a fleeting image between heaven and hell.

X. Monkeys

Figure 64. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Purgatorio*. (2007).

[35] The Hanged Man is a symbol found on a Tarot card. He symbolises selflessness, sacrifice, change and rebirth. Reflection needs to occur before moving forward is possible (Thierens, 2003:65).

The monkeys are freeing human souls whilst providing access to the central meadow (Mason, 2008a:86). The group of monkeys is intertwined with mesh, whilst they are releasing souls from their mental constraints. Monkeys have a good sense of how to control their Freudian ego structure; they lead a graceful life and know how to control their instinctual habits. One of the monkeys is holding a human infant, a metaphor of Charles Darwin and his evolution theory – bringing humans and monkeys together. Monkeys tend to be mischievous creatures that lack the feeling of guilt (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:9). Ironically, this is a constant burden that individuals bear in purgatory.

I. Paper boat

Figure 65. Mason, Judith. Detail from *Purgatorio*. (2007).

The paper boat in this scene leads the eye into the work, as it constitutes a focal point. The paper boat is inscribed with the first lines of Dante's *Purgatory*: "For better waters heading with the wind my ship… leaves that ocean of despair behind" (Mason & Koekemoer, 2011b:9).

Defining the tension between diametric oppositions, visual art as a vehicle to express the incomprehensible and defining Mason's unique religious view

For the third and conclusive step of the analysis of Judith Mason's *Inferno* (2006) and *Purgatorio* (2007) the analogical or spiritual sense of interpretation as outlined in Dante Alighieri's *Convivio II* serves as a guideline to gain insight into how the contemporary work's literal meaning relates to higher matters of deeper value. Habib (2008:211) refers to this sense as a spiritual interpretation beyond our own consciousness and according to Lewis (2011) as directed upwards towards the heavens and universe.

Defining the tension between diametric oppositions

The beauty of both Dante's writings on heaven, hell and purgatory and Mason's interpretation thereof is that they both draw on diametric oppositions. These obvious binary differences are placed in juxtaposition next to one another, creating tension and commenting on each other.

The binary oppositions manifest quite early within the three canticles. Eternal life as opposed to death, joy as opposed to despair, pain (suffering) as opposed to liberation as well as religion as opposed to a more secular view are evident. Juxtapositioning these oppositions comments on the tension they create for not only Mason, but also for the viewer. By using these oppositions Mason recognises the possibility of not only living, but also dying. According to Van Rensburg (2008:12) Mason's work has been concerned with the bodily drive, specifically referring to life and death. On the other spectrum, her work not only shows the experience of pain and suffering, but also that of being liberated and freed from agonising pain.

These paintings are a visual manifestation of what all human beings face: life, death, possible salvation, suffering as well as bondage and liberation. Recognising these oppositions proclaims Mason's attempt to visually comprehend the incomprehensible by rendering visible the abstractions of purgatory and inferno. Throughout this dissertation it has been a basic point of departure that, for Judith Mason, that religion is regarded as an incomprehensible concept with which she struggled throughout her life. In her paintings she continuously reflected on vicarious aspects of religion. *Purgatorio* and *Inferno* show her journey between extreme poles in a visual way. By painting both ends of the religious spectrum, Mason tries to understand what they entail and what her own views and opinions

on these overwhelming concepts are. Art serves here as a mediator with which to come to terms with her own religious convictions, conclusions and ideas.

Visual art as a vehicle to express the incomprehensible

Mason's iconography in both *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* is imbued with personal meaning. This eclectic compilation is a testimonial for making sense of the things that baffle her. Mason confirms this when she states that: "The painter of religious themes, whether he [*sic*] does so as a reflection of his faith or an exploration of his doubts, makes icons" (Mason, 1973).

For Mason, resorting to the development of personal icons can be seen as the mediators in finding answers and understanding certain aspects of religion which she struggles to comprehend. Religion is an abstract concept in itself, as well as the intricate meaning of death and eternal life in a higher beatitude. It is significant to remember that she regarded herself as an "agnostic humanist possessed of religious curiosity" (Hobbs & Maurice, 2008:3). Mason was a sceptic and somewhat cynical in expressing her beliefs in the divine. Even so, she was simultaneously curious about many facets regarding religion and thus grappled with iconography that she drew from various influences and beliefs to come to some sort of conclusion about God, Satan, Christianity, heaven, hell, purgatory, life, death and the eternal afterlife.

Mason tried to pinpoint and make sense of the overwhelming incomprehensible by dredging it all up in *Walking with and away from Dante* (2006 – 2008). This attempt is completed by way of using undeniably strong religious references as a visual representation of her thoughts. Choosing to visually reinterpret Dante's outlining of heaven, hell and purgatory which is regarded as a poetic masterpiece that exists already for hundreds of years, shows how serious Mason regarded this particular visual attempt.

She reiterated what was to her still important and steadfast, but she also incorporated what she personally regarded as crucial to this narrative. Such imagery includes notable historic events, mythology, death-centred symbolism as well as very personal references, making this rendition her own, but also showing her respect to that which is unquestionable. The process of making icons and imagery encompass that what words cannot entirely define.

Defining Mason's unique religious view

Mason has mentioned that her faith is inquisitive infidel. She refers to her "faith" which acknowledges the fact that she is not an agnostic as one would typically assume. Being an agnostic, she is cynical and sceptical when referring to religion. Although this makes her still a questioner when it comes to religion, she is curious about religion and religious practices as evident in her works with religious themes: "She pursued religious influences throughout her career" (Pienaar, 2017)

For a non-believer who is innately religious she somehow still subscribes to a worldview that construes everything living as holy. These notions align with Pantheism which regards the universe and nature as divine. Mason recognised the fact that she did not associate herself within a specific spiritual group, but she understood and appreciated the concept of spirituality (Botha, 2013:105).

In referring to *Walking with and away from Dante,* Mason shows not only her interest in religion, religious beliefs and practices, but she unconsciously proves to the viewer her wonderful religious knowledge. She understands Christianity and more specifically Roman Catholicism, our longing for paradise, the intricate complexities regarding sins and the fear for eternal death:

> *"As a young woman, I fell in love with Catholicism and was a devout Catholic for about ten years. It me with a moral and aesthetic education. I have always been grateful for the intervention of Catholicism in my life"* (Mason, 2008a:87).

Mason emphasised how important she regarded her humanist beliefs and philosophy, and in the completion of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* she succeeded to draw from her deep insight and profound knowledge regarding religion and spirituality (Mason, 2008a:87).

We are always seeking salvation, forgiveness and certainty, irrespective of your chosen religious group: "it is delightful to forever seek the Holy Grail" (Mason, 2008c:137). By painting and integrating religious ideas, symbols and imagery, Mason was also always searching. Painting is the stimulus which sets the painter free to craft one's own moral and religious philosophy. In Mason's case art, functions as a mediator between her religious curiosity and her intuitive cynical agnosticism.

CHAPTER 6

Summary of main arguments and conclusion

"Art does not render the visible; rather, it makes visible" (Read, 1964:182).

This study investigated Judith Mason's visual interpretations of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* and *Purgatory* in *La Divina Commedia* (1320). The aim of the study was to investigate death and religion as thematic concerns in the commission entitled *Walking with and away from Dante* by Judith Mason. She has made some outspoken remarks on religion and this study aimed to show what her personal outlook on religion is and how this informed her visual interpretations of *Inferno* (2006) and *Purgatorio* (2007).

Both of these artworks are imbued with personal and religious iconography that is visually portrayed in Mason's iconic painterly style. Taking into account the artist's remarks on religion as well as her obvious visual integration of Christian symbology, this study demanded a religious-based interpretation.

I argued that Judith Mason used art as an attempt to make sense of the incomprehensible. For Mason, painting is a stimulus to explore the facets of life that intrigue her, in particular complex ideas such as religion and death. By interpreting the poem of Dante Alighieri and her own personal Catholic background, she explored her religious views. Her unique iconography and symbolism served as evidence of her personal view and standpoint on diverse themes such as religion and Christianity. I argued that art is the visual mediator between her religiousity and her intuitive agnosticism. Irrespective of the fact that Mason's symbology is death-centred and imbued with tension, it is viewed as a form of religious art. I argued that, for the most part, her works suggest a leaning towards Pantheism.

This study did not aim to reflect Mason's symbology and remarks on religion with absolute clarity or authoritative finality, or to identify definite religious frameworks or ideas as discussed in this thesis; that could have been interpreted as presumptious at best. Rather, the intention was to contribute to the discourse about religion and how art can serve as mediator to visually verbalise one's own stance on such a complex construct.

This conclusive chapter consists of two sections. Firstly, a summary regarding each chapters' main arguments is presented, followed by a conclusion on death and religion as thematic influences in the specific context of the commission *Walking with and away from Dante*.

6.1 Summary

In Chapter One, the chosen commission titled *Walking with and away from Dante* was introduced. Introductory thoughts on death and religion as thematic influences within the context of the artworks were outlined. Mason's unique use of personal icons and religious imagery were briefly identified to explain to her peculiar view on religion. Pantheism as a suitable religious framework aligned with this view. The obvious synthesis that Mason creates between binary oppositions suggests tension and unease which is visually "felt" by the viewer. A brief context on Mason as well as Dante's *La Divina Commedia* was sketched. A theoretical foundation of religion as an influence on the interpretation of death, eternal life, suffering and liberation contributes to the possible applicable religious framework to be able to read Mason's artworks.

The second chapter included the visualisation of religion as an influence on the interpretation of death, suffering, trauma and liberation from a theoretical point of view. Because death is the dominant theme in the chosen artworks, it was imperative that artworks related to the theme of death had to be explored. The accompanying pain and suffering associated with death and mortality were communicated through these selected artworks, particularly within Western art that focused on the visualisation of Christianity. Furthermore, death was interpreted from a Pantheistic perspective which correlates with Mason's unique religious views. It is an attempt to understand death, manage loss and to accept one's own mortality. The dualism within Mason's body of work as well as in Dante's *La Divina Commedia* was addressed to determine how this polarity reconciles the tension between eternal life and death, pain (suffering) and liberation as well as religion and a secular view.

Chapter Three focused on a biographical overview of Judith Mason's personal and professional life. The themes and iconography in Mason's artworks attest to how versatile she was as an artist. Religion and Christianity, mythological figures and creatures, socio-political concerns and the self and space are recurring themes and iconography that are unique to Mason's body of work. An infographic showcased an overview of Mason's life as an artist and iconographer was also visually presented.

The fourth chapter offered a biographical overview of Dante Alighieri and a contextualisation of *La Divina Commedia*. The three afterlife spheres that are referred to in this Latin poem namely *Inferno*, *Purgatory* and *Paradiso* were discussed in both theoretical and literary terms. In this chapter, certain parallels between Mason and Dante were drawn. This chapter investigated Dante as a renowned poet, the realms of the afterlife as well as how the

infamous theme of the last judgement was portrayed and which role it played for future visual interpretations. An art historical analysis on key artworks representing the *Last Judgement* was presented. Furthermore, this chapter verified the influence that Dante's interpretation of heaven and hell had on various artists.

In the interpretation chapter, a contingency approach as inspired by Dante Alighieri's writings on the four senses of allegory in the book titled *Il Convivio,* served as a guideline to formulate a method of interpretation. The contingency approach integrated here is regarded as additional to the method of interpretation. The literal, symbolic and more in-depth religiously based analysis of inferno and purgatory was implemented. By identifying the symbology used in both artworks it was clear that they represent death, suffering, trauma and liberation. The symbols visually articulate these loaded constructs and guide the viewer and Mason to reflect on their own religious views. Parallels were drawn between significant artworks throughout art history and how their symbolism links with Mason's iconic symbols. Both Dante's writings on heaven, hell and purgatory and Mason's interpretation thereof draw on diametric oppositions; the binaries create tensions that comment on one another. In this way, Mason explored both ends of the religious spectrum to understand what they entail and what her own views and opinions on these overwhelming concepts were. Art served as mediator in coming to terms with her own religious convictions and opinions. These works are a visual attempt to understand the incomprehensible where the value lies in the visual endeavour. Mason's own religious views were identified by referring to her outspoken remarks on the topic and how it aligns with existing religious frameworks such as Pantheism.

6.2 Main arguments and conclusion

Substantiating the aim of this study is the renowned quote by Paul Klee: "Art does not render the visible; rather, it makes visible" (Read, 1964:182). Klee places emphasis on the significant purpose of art: "A painting is not a sort of mechanism that captures and displays existing visible data, but an engine to create a way of looking" (Elderfield, 2013). Therefore, if art can render visible for the artist, it can also make visible for the viewer. This idea has an even more significant meaning which relates fittingly to what Mason achieved when rendering the visible:

> *"When he (Klee) talks of the visible, he seems to be using it in its two senses of what is commonly seen and whatever can be seen. Thus, art does not reproduce the visible - what is commonly seen - but makes visible - what commonly is not seen, but which the artist has intuited in his or her own uncommon seeing, and makes visible to us"* (Elderfield, 2013).

This is where Mason used her religiosity to her advantage – her works contain remarkable depth where she showed her respect towards religion and religious practices, but also questioned this inborn doctrine that religious individuals may never have questioned. This religiosity is visualised by way of symbology where she presented a visual interpretation of inferno and purgatory. Reading and analysing her unique symbology, one can decipher her personal stance and view on religion. This depth that lies within her symbols, holds deeper meaning as to why she painted the selected subject matter as well as where she stood as an innately religious person.

The title *Walking with and away from Dant*e has a possible implicit meaning – the notion that Mason agrees but also disagrees with Dante's ideas. Mason moves back and forth from Dante's poetic ideas, and her art making functions as mediator expressing her own congruous artistic impression of inferno and purgatory.

In terms of Mason's approach when creating art, she took anecdotes of her own life and incorporated it into her works; to create art by using the materials of the human soul in a symbolic manner. Above all, Mason wanted to create art, and that is why she used symbols as medium or communicator. She addressed one's deepest fears, uncertainties, feelings and thoughts and visually translated these through painting.

Art making for Mason was a process of discovery, where she communicated the deeper aspects of her psyche to herself and to the viewer. This process of discovery leads to a form of healing: one comes to terms with oneself and explores one's own outlook on religion. The artist learned to accept her ingrained and deep-rooted perspective on where she personally stood as an innately religious person as well as her thoughts on death, suffering, trauma and liberation.

Art is a remedial platform that offers healing. Art making accepts all aspects of the psyche and offers the artist the opportunity to accept it as well.

The selected works show a connection between religion and biblical undertones. Using religion as an all-embracing theme inherently implies a very personal approach and outlook. Mason combined her personal experiences with religion, specifically Catholicism – it has formed her outlook and has influenced her greatly as a spiritual person:

> *"I was brought up by austerely atheist parents. Then, as a young woman, I fell in love with Catholicism and was a devout Catholic for about ten years. It provided me with a moral and aesthetic education. I loved the rules, but came to feel that so much of it was too exclusive, and I found myself walking away from it. I have always been grateful for the intervention of Catholicism in my life. I needed to be in love with God for a while"* (Mason, 2008a:87).

Mason considered art and art making as a form of therapy; art has been a constant in her disordered life that has assisted her in visually "verbalising" her deepest thoughts and outlook on personal subjects such as religion, death, trauma, suffering and liberation.

Mason's visualisation of Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatory* is an interwoven visual concept between her own religious outlook and Dante's literary interpretation of one's spiritual journey to eternal beatitude. In the selected works, Mason explored her doubts as well as her religiosity; the viewer is thus invited to take part in the visual conversation, being granted the opportunity to perhaps share in the artists' thoughts.

Art making functions as a coping mechanism where the artist can visually articulate his or her thoughts and doubts and hopefully acquire inner peace and serenity. Mason's works involve a deeper level of humanity; she worked creatively with the material of the human soul. She visually articulated that which the human soul struggles to comprehend and even more so, struggles to submit to. It is evident that the artist succeeded in bringing the visual arts and constructs such as religion and death together. Also, the selected works serve as a *Memento Mori*; reminding the viewer of impending death. In short, this term translates to the remembrance that one has to die. *Memento Mori* aims to place emphasis on the immortality of one's soul and whereto one is destined after earthly life (afterlife).

Religious themed art often emphasises the evanescence of earthly pleasures which inherently gave way to the constant reminder of mortality and death. When one is able to reflect on inescapable death, the idea thereof can alter into an acceptable concept.

Reflecting on one's own mortality does not have to be a painful and sombre concept; it can be used as a "tool to create priority and meaning" (Daily Stoic, 2018). This tool has led to gaining insightful perspective on the serious/critical matter of death:

> *"To treat our time as a gift and not waste it on the trivial and vain. Death doesn't make life pointless but rather purposeful. And fortunately, we don't have to nearly die to tap into this"* (Daily Stoic, 2018).

Art is thus used as the mediator or tool to admit to oneself the ultimate reality of death. By accepting death, death as a painful and unpleasant concept shifts towards a harmonious

and accepting idea. This shift in thought is a crucial aspect of living a fulfilled life and not fearing death.

Painting, for Mason, served as a stimulus to explore the facets of life that intrigued her, in particular, religion and death. Art functioned as a mediator between her religious curiosity and her intuitive cynical agnosticism. This mediation resulted in something harmonious and beautiful; the acceptance of one's mortality in the face of inevitable death. Thus for Mason, death was an accepted reality where she focused on being present in her day to day life.

Moreover, regarding Mason's religious standpoint, for the most part, her works suggest a leaning towards Pantheism. The fact that she suggested that everything is holy aligned with Pantheism which associates God with nature and the universe. Thus as an agnostic, she did not deny the possibility of a deity but refrained from any commitment to a particular religious doctrine. The fact that Mason suggested that everything is holy thus aligns with Pantheism. Mason was not an atheist, but she was a religious person. She was also not an "agnostic" in the classic sense of the word. She said "My mantra is that everything that lives is holy", thus adopting a Pantheist-like belief system (Mason, 2011:28-43). She respected devoted religious followers, but she did not align herself with a specific belief system. She was a self-proclaimed agnostic but also believed in certain elements of Roman Catholicism. She could be regarded as a questioner and doubter about religion, and was intrigued by religion.

To conclude, Mason utilised the visual arts in such a unique way that the art making process and the subsequent works served as a mediator as well as a tool. It mediated her self-proclaimed agnosticism and her innate need to be religious, treating life as holy and sacred. It served as a tool to understand the incomprehensible, making sense of things that intrigued her, such as religion and death. To quote Mason: "The painter of religious themes ... does so as a reflection of his faith or an exploration of his doubts (Mason, 1973)."

I therefore argue that Mason's art succeeds in expressing the incomprehensible. She visually verbalised her own idea of religion and death, suffering and liberation. By visually "facing" these unpleasant concepts, Mason came to terms with a number of baffling ideas. Exploring one's doubts or reflecting on one's faith is what Mason visually brought into being. She stated her personal religious standpoint and found a way to comprehend it – since it cannot be placed into the typical "religious types" society knows.

6.3 Recommendations for further research

It would have been of great value to also interpret and analyse the third artwork that forms part of *Walking with and away from Dante*. *Reaching for Paradise* (2008) is an artwork painted on both sides of a large vertical supawood panel. According to Mason, it represents an aspiration towards Paradise rather than portraying Paradise itself (Mason, 2008:87). For the purposes of this study, only *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* were chosen due to its similarity in terms of size, as well as the aspects of its loaded symbology connected to the themes of death and religion. Paradiso should be seen as an end destination fitting for a further study.

While context regarding the history of religious art in South Africa may be seen as a potential field of further study, particularly regarding valuable contributions in this regard, from both a conventional as well as a controversial point of departure, it was also regarded to be outside the scope of this research.

During my research and at a relatively late stage there in, I was made aware of a series of totems that connect thematically with the artworks chosen for this study. The totems from *Walking with and away from Dante* was not originally planned to form part of the commission; being separate double-sided panels mounted on wheels and causing the viewer to experience this extension of the primary artworks in a three-dimensional visual space. It can be seen as a possible further field of study even though the totems were added at a much later stage. For the purposes of this study, the totems were excluded because they did not contribute to the underlying problem as explicated in Chapter one.

In terms of this dissertation it would have been of great value had it been possible to have had more interviews with Judith Mason. Unfortunately, her passing away on the 29th of December 2016 brought an untimely and sad end to any further possibilities of personal interaction. There are still unanswered questions regarding *Walking with and away from Dante*, due to her unexpected passing. Thus the enigma of Judith Mason will always remain.

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ADDENDUM A: CHRONOLOGICAL TIMELINE

1938 Born as Judith Seelander Menge on the 10th of October in Pretoria

1956 Matriculated from the Pretoria High School for Girls

1957 Enrolled at the University of Witwatersrand

1959 - 1975 Married Professor Revil John Mason, changed her name to Judith Mason

1960 Graduated (BA degree in Fine Art)

1960 “Seated figure” - Drawing

1960 “Macho Angel” - Drawing

1962 “Wild Dog” – Oil on board

1963 Won second prize at U.A.T competition

1963 - 1978 Taught drawing and History of Art at Witwatersrand University

1963 “Prisoner” – Oil on canvas

1964 First solo exhibition at Gallery 101, Johannesburg

1964 “Prisoner & Cloud” – Oil on board

1964 “The Last Supper” – Oil on board

1965 Gallery 101, Johannesburg

1965 “Crucifixion” – Oil and collage on hardboard

1965 “Crucifixion II” - Drawing

1965 “The Fourth Plague” – Oil on canvas

1965 “Christ at the Column” – Oil, paint, wire and cloth on board

1965 “Leopard of Delight” – Oil on board

1965 “She-wolf” – Oil on hardboard

1966 Represented South Africa at the Venice Biennale

1966 “Judas” – Oil on canvas

1966 “Infant in uterus” - Drawing

1966 Her first daughter Tamar Mason was born

1967 “War Memorial” – Oil on canvas

1967 - 1968 Served on Transvaal of Executive of Liberal Party

1968 “Archangel Gabriel” – Oil and mixed media on board

1969 Gallery 101, Johannesburg

1970 Her second daughter Petra Mason was born

1970 “Gate” – Oil on canvas

1970 “Roar” – Oil on canvas

1970s - 1980s Represented by the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg

1971 Represented South Africa at the São Paulo Biennale

1971 “Leopard’s Breath” – Oil on canvas

1971 Durban Art Gallery, Durban

1971 SA Graphic Art Touring Exhibition Holland, Belgium and West Germany

1972 “Middle-aged Daphne – Middle-aged Eve” – Oil on canvas

1972 Gallery 101, Johannesburg

1973 Represented South Africa at the São Paulo Biennale

1973 “A Prospect of Icons: Some reflections on the use of religious imagery in painting” – Essay as part of a tribute to Prof Martienssen on her retirement

1974 Goodman-Wolman Art Gallery, Cape Town

1974 Pretoria Art Museum

1974 Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg

1974 Represented South Africa at the São Paulo Biennale, Brazil

1975 “Crucifix into Scarecrow” – Oil on canvas

1975 “Crucifixion” triptych – Oil on canvas / mixed media / mixed media, wood, organic forms

1975 Contemporary SA Art, Athens

1977 Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg

1977 “Calvary of Sop of Vinegar” – Oil on board

1978 75th Anniversary of Tatham Art Gallery Commemorative Exhibition: Judith Mason

1978 Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg (Guest artist with Marguerite Stevens)

1978 Johannesburg Art Gallery, Johannesburg

1978 Artist’s Books – “Ballot Box”

1978 “Boxer” - Oil

1978 “Song of the Nightingale” – Oil on canvas on board with gilded saw

1978 Prestige Exhibition, Pretoria Art Museum

1979 Valparaiso Biennale

1979 “Woman in a fur coat” – Oil on board

1979 Guest artist, Johannesburg Art Gallery

1980 Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg

1980 Represented South Africa at the Houston Biennale

1980 Artist’s Books – “Lifecycle of a Relic”

1980 “The Plague” – Oil on canvas

1980 “Man in Armour” – Oil on board

1981 - 1996 Married Bruce Attwood

1981 “Shroud So Far” – Oil on board

1982 Retrospective Exhibition, Rand Afrikaans University

1982 Artist’s Books – “The Gospel according to Judas”

1982 Group Exhibition, Houston Arts Festival, USA

1982 Art Gallery of the University of Stellenbosch, Cape Town

1982 “Human Flight” – Oil on board

1982 “Wardrobe Paper Doll I, II & III” – Drawing

1983 Illustrations for “Waar die liefde lê” – Documentary

1984 Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg

1984 “Monkey Shrine” triptych – Oil on board

1984 “Shiva Slowing Down” – Oil on canvas

1984 “Self-portrait” – Oil on board

1984 “Battery Hen” – Oil on board

1984 Basel Art Fair

1985 Natal Playhouse, Durban

1986 “Gandhi” – Oil on board

1986 “Media Fed Hunger” - Tapestry

1987 “Tombs of the Pharaohs of Johannesburg” triptych – Mixed media

1987 “Civil Defence” - Drawing

1987 “Tin God” – Oil on board

1989 “From the Tombs of the Pharaohs of Jo’burg” (“Talking Pictures”)

1989 Gallery on the Market, Johannesburg

1989 “Tourist Icon” - Drawing

1989 - 1991 Taught painting at Scuola Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence, Italy

1989 “An essay on encountering Dante’s creatures”

1990 “Risen Christ” – Oil on canvas

1990 Ombondi Gallery, New York, USA

1990 Gallery on the Market, Johannesburg

1990 Artist’s Books – “A Dante’s Bestiary” (Mason illustrated selected texts from the *La Divina Commedia* for this hand-bound book)

1990 Taught History of Art and Painting at the Michaelis Shool of Art in Cape Town

1991 Artist's Books – "How to make a print"

1992 Karen McKerron Gallery, Johannesburg

1992 Artist's Books – "The Fish Hoek Reader"

1992 Artist's Books – "Heaven and Hell and Daljosaphat"

1992 Artist's Books – "The House at Montanino"

1992 Artist's Books – "A Book for Dada"

1992 Artist's Books – "Selected Poems by Patrick Cullinan"

1992 "Not Being Able To Paint" – Oil on canvas

1993 Karen McKerron Gallery, Johannesburg

1993 Elizabeth Gordan Gallery, Durban

1993 Artist's Books – "A very brief Chaucer Reader"

1993 "Porcelain Dolls in Plastic" – Oil on board

1993 "You Write Your Life Across My Face" – Oil on board

1995 Chelsea Gallery, Cape Town

1995 Karen McKerron Gallery, Johannesburg

1995 "Jean Genet in Loop Street" – Oil and mixed media

1996 "Arachne" – Oil on board

1996 Karen McKerron Gallery, Johannesburg

1996 "Self Portrait as my own Ventriloquist" – Oil on board

1996. "Mary Magdalene" series – Oil on board

1997 "Phoenix Cabinet" – Oil on walnut wood

1997 Chelsea Gallery, Cape Town

1997 Drosdy Gallery, Pretoria

1997 "The Woman who kept Silent" – Oil on board

1998 Karen McKerron Gallery, Johannesburg

1998 “The Man who Sang and the Woman who kept Silent” triptych – Oil on board / sculpture / oil on canvas

1998 “Thunderbird” – Oil on board

1998 “A Landscape for Beethoven II” – Oil on board

1998 “Daljosaphat” – Oil on board

1998 “Artist’s Block” (desk) – Oil on wood

1999 Karen McKerron Gallery, Johannesburg

1999 “The Artist” (“Art in Communication”)

1999 “Resurrection at the Taxidermy” – Oil on board

1999 “Catwalk Boy” – Oil on board

1999 “Catwalk Girl” – Oil on hardboard

2000 Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg

2000 Karen McKerron Gallery, Johannesburg

2001 Chelsea Gallery, Cape Town

2001 “Scorpion” - Pencil

2001 “A Landscape for Beethoven I” – Oil on canvas

2001 “Fortress” – Oil on board

2002 “Himalaya Landscape” – Oil on board

2002 Art on Paper Gallery, Johannesburg

2002 Association of Art, Pretoria

2002 “Man under a Bridge” – Oil on board

2002 “Himalaya Landscape I” – Oil on board

2003 “Pietà” – Oil on canvas

2004 “Pregnant Woman” - Pencil

2004 “Our Lady of the Transit Camp” – Oil on board

2004 “The Puppeteers Puppet”

2005 Art on Paper Gallery, Johannesburg

2005 “Waiting Room” - Pencil

2005 “Laundry: Bushbuckridge” – Pencil

2005. “Hyena” series - Drawing

2005 “Walking with and away from Dante”

2006 “Anatomy of Violence I” – Paper, pencil and coloured pencil

2006 “Walking with and away from Dante. Inferno” – Oil on canvas + 8 totem polls (supawood)

2007 “Anatomy of Violence II” – Coloured pencil

2007 “Anatomy of Adam” – Pencil and wash

2007 “Walking with and away from Dante. Purgatorio” – Oil on canvas + 6 totem polls (supawood)

2008 Standard Bank Gallery exhibition – Judith Mason: A Prospect Icons

2008 “Waking with and away from Dante”

2008 “Reaching for Paradise” – Oil on supawood

2008 “Reaching for Paradise” – Oil on supawood

2009 Sasol Museum – Judith Mason: A Prospect of Icons

2009 - 2011 The making of the 8 exclusive “Walking with and away from Dante” artist’s books

2011 Art on Paper, Johannesburg

2011 “Mouthpiece Commandment” – Pencil and coloured pencil on paper drawing

2011 Receives Medal of Honour for Painting from the South African Academy of Science and Art

2013 Art on Paper, Johannesburg

2014 Art on Paper, Johannesburg

2014 “Moth Opera” – Mixed media

2015 “Self-portrait” – Oil on board

2015 “Drifting down the styx” - Drawing

2016 Abalone Art Gallery, Hermanus

2016 “Yoruba Death Leopard” – Drawing

2016 Dies on the 28th of December in White River

Commissions

Pretoria Art Museum

Nation Gallery, Cape Town

King George V Art Gallery, Port Elizabeth

Hester Rupert Art Museum, Graaff Reinet

Rembrandt Fundation

University of the Witwatersrand

Tatham Gallery, Pietermaritzburg

Durban Art Gallery

Pietersburg Municipal Gallery

William Humphries Art Gallery, Kimberley

Ann Bryant Art Gallery, East London

University of South Africa

Rand Afrikaans University

Sandton Municipal Gallery

Work in public collections:

Tapestries woven by Marguerite Stephens

Royal Hotel, Durban

State Theatre, Pretoria

Sand du Plessis Theatre, Bloemfontein

Playhouse, Durban

Sandton Sun Hotel

Ceiling mural, Students Union Building, University of Potchefstroom

Altarpiece, John F Kennedy Memorial Chapel, Witkoppen School Sandton

Illustration in H.F Oppenheimer presentation volume 1985

Triptych of Sage Holdings 10th Anniversary

In addition, Judith Mason exhibited in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Chile, Germany, Switzerland and the United States of America.

Commissions: Ettienne Koekemoer

“Conception life & death” triptych

“Phoenix cabinet”

“Artist block” (desk)

“Walking with and away from Dante”

“Walking with and away from Dante”artist’s books

ADDENDUM B: SCHEMATIC TIMELINE