

# Forgive Me, For I Have Sinned

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*I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.  
Psalms 41:4*

In 2011, while living in Israel as an exchange student, I undertook the process of recovery by going through a 12 step addiction recovery program (ARP). I felt guilty for my actions and wanted to change the way I lived my life. I was raised as a devout Christian and therefore was taught the concepts of sin and repentance. I wanted to repent, that my sins might be absolved and the negative feeling of guilt extinguished. However I thought more about the problem than the solution. The compulsively focused attention on the symptoms of one's distress—the wrongdoing, as opposed to its solutions, can become psychological guilt that punishes, rejects, and devalues the self. In my case, my guilt evoked self-punishment where I devalued myself, continuously feeling a lack of adequacy, and not always allowing myself to experience the fullness of joy that life has to offer.

As an artist going through a 12 step program, I created images as a therapeutic way to visually express what I was going through, although many of the images you will see were created as reflections of past experiences. After three years of traveling between The United States and Israel, the final outcome is a series of 12 photographic images titled *Forgive Me, For I Have Sinned*. This paper will analyze these 12 images, however in so doing I find myself in a unique position. Since I am attempting to critique my own creative work—work that is literally a self portrait and which deals with my own addiction recovery process, I find

myself playing not only the judge, jury, and accused, but now also the news commentator. This can be a difficult line to balance. This paper will *not* address art therapy nor the nature of art creation as a way to overcome guilt, pain, depression or any emotional or physical suffering. I recognize the personal nature of these images and the experiences from which they emerged, however this paper is *not* a personal narrative of my own journey through a christian-based 12 step addiction recovery program. The intention of this paper is to examine the 12 artworks mentioned above in relation to the phenomenon of guilt, self-punishment and repentance. What do we learn about these topics through the individual and collective narratives found in the 12 works of art? Answering this question will require not only a look at psychology and christian theology, but also some art history and photographic theory. This series will serve as an impetus for the argument that there is a difference between the feeling of guilt and that of “godly sorrow”. Guilt can be destructive and lead to punishment, whereas godly sorrow can be both a socially and personally beneficial emotion and does not need to induce self-punishment. Restitution and reconciliation for moral transgressions can be made without the guilty person having to be punished. Never before has one written about these images. This paper will be the first written attempt at analyzing and explaining these images and the associated catalyst.

The Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) Program, created in June 1934, clearly outlined 12 steps to recovery that were labeled numerically (i.e. 1, 2, 3, 4,...). In 1999, LDS Family Services (an organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), created a 12 step program of their own modeled after the AA program. The 12 steps of the LDS program however, are not only labeled numerically, but more importantly, each has a short title - *Honesty, Hope, Trust in God, Truth, Confession, Change of Heart, Humility, Seeking Forgiveness, Restitution and Reconciliation, Daily Accountability, Personal Revelation, and Service*. The 12 photographs are each individually labeled with one of the 12 step titles of the LDS program. This is significant because it indicates a clear progression, or narrative to the photos. It should be noted that the creation of this series began without the knowledge or intention of producing a sequential body of work. The photos were not created in order and were not assigned an order until roughly midway through the process. This background knowledge helps to illustrate that each photo can be seen, studied, and enjoyed or disliked individually, but when viewed collectively in the order outlined by the 12 steps, a story unfolds. It is this emotional narrative that I wish to use in considering the relationship between guilt, self-punishment, and repentance. Therefore I will first present the twelve images and then engage critical analysis.

## The Pictorial Narrative

We begin with the first photo titled, *Honesty*, where a man in a white dress shirt and a dark suit leans against a stone wall in the light of a street lamp. His hand is raised to the level of his mouth, his eyes are red, his hair disheveled, and his brow slightly furrowed. He sits crying, in what looks to be a damp alleyway as he stares off into nothing. Who is this man? What is he thinking? What is he feeling? Why is this photo titled *Honesty*?

*Hope* is the title of the second work, a title that perhaps at first glance seems to be the antonym of such a despairing image. Here we have our character, or protagonist if you will, front and center in a dark pit. He sits on the ground bent over, crying out in anguish. Three other figures sit behind him in the shadows. A hole at the top of the pit, made of jagged rocks and surrounded by weeds and roots allows light to enter.



Top: *Honesty*, Bottom: *Hope*

In the third image, we move from the pit into a small field or clearing at the base of a rock wall. This photo, titled *Trust in God*, shows three men in the same dark suit, gathered around what looks to be an altar. On top of it a body lies naked and lifeless. One of the suited men is crouching at the head of the altar, while the other two stand with their hands close to their face. Are these men praying or simply trying to maintain composure at the sight of a limp body lying naked across an altar? Is the man that was in the pit in the second image now the man on the altar, or is he one of the suited men standing by?

As we continue on, we now find ourselves in the middle of a fight scene. *Truth*, is the only photo in the series that depicts physical violence. In the center of the image our protagonist lies on the ground, his left arm up in a defense block. Another figure, whose face we can't quite see, yet who seems to be another personification of our protagonist, stands over him, ready to strike with a hard punch. To the left, a group of men watch somewhat apathetically the violence before them. To the right, two men on their knees plead with God in prayer. Who are they praying for? Our suffering protagonist on the ground or his other personified self standing over ready to punish?





Top Left: *Trust in God*, Bottom Left: *Truth*

Top Right: *Confession*, Bottom Right: *Change of Heart*

*Confession* is the title of the fifth image. Our protagonist is located in what looks to be a war-torn building. The floor is dirt and gravel, the walls are chipped, scratched, and marked. Four naked bodies lie on the ground to the right, their bodies slightly dusty, yet not battered or bruised. Are these men alive, awake, unconscious? To the left of the frame a figure in the same dark suit and white shirt walks quickly out of the room and out of the frame.

He leaves the room with four men on the ground in photo five and enters into the water in the sixth photo, called *Change of Heart*. Here we have seven men standing knee to thigh deep in a calm lake or river with a beautiful warm mountain range reflecting on the water. Six of the men stand waiting, watching, or praying, while one man grabs our attention. His hands are raised in the air and his head tilted back as he looks heavenward. His clothes are soaked. This seems to undoubtedly be some sort of baptismal ritual and as the title indicates, this is clearly a change from the crying man in the alley, the night time fight scene and the war-torn walls.

The seventh image, *Humility*, is the second work which presents only one figure. Here our

protagonist is again front and center, though instead of being in a pit or on the ground about to be punched, he is bent over on his knees in the middle of the desert. The bright sun casts a harsh shadow across the ground. The figure supports himself with his hand on the ground while his head is bent, concealing his face. Is he kneeling because he's praying or because he's tired from the heat or from the change that's happening as was indicated from the title of the last image? Why is he wearing a suit in the middle of the desert? Why is he always wearing a suit?

In photo eight, *Seeking Forgiveness*, the protagonist is again multiplied into various figures. He prays on a rooftop during early morning hours overlooking a city down below. A rug is laid out and their shoes are removed resembling an Islamic fajr prayer in the early morning. What is our protagonist here praying for?

The sun rises and we move from the rooftop into a unique outdoor space. This photo, *Restitution and Reconciliation*, consists of stone steps in the bottom right that lead to a flat open area where a large group of men stand talking and socializing. To the left is a pool of water where two men seem to be





In order from top to bottom: *Humility*, *Seeking Forgiveness*, *Restitution and Reconciliation*, *Daily Accountability*

participating in yet another baptism ritual. The pool is surrounded by those socializing figures, yet not a single one is acknowledging the baptism. It is as if it isn't happening. On close inspection, it can be seen that some of the figures are soaked and dripping.

After drying off, we move inside. The tenth photo, *Daily Accountability*, depicts the protagonist sitting on a bed looking thoughtfully out the window. The gentle light from outside illuminates his face. A second man sits in the shadows on the bed behind him while a third kneels at the side of the bed to the right of our the protagonist. What is he thinking about why is this titled *Daily Accountability*?

*Personal Revelation* is the title of the eleventh photograph. This is the third and last time that we see only one figure in the image. Here our protagonist stands in the middle of the forest, a rocky and wooded terrain, with his side and back slightly towards the camera. His gaze is again heavenward towards the light that falls upon him. His right hand is slightly outstretched as if trying to touch the light.

The final image of the series, and therefore the end of the collective narrative, is titled simply, *Service*. It is a close up of our protagonist trying to lift or hold another figure. For the first and only time in this series of photographs, the viewer is introduced to another character, someone other than our main protagonist. The protagonist is clothed in his normal dark suit, while this new character is clothed in what looks like only a pair of grey underwear. His back is exposed to the viewer's sight and there we are drawn to a large tattoo of a crucifix. How do we read the crucifix in this context? Why is this photo the only photo with another character? And why is he wearing only underwear?

Now that the twelve images have been introduced, another narrative will be presented—the psychological and theological process of moving from the guilt of wrongdoing to repentance and change through Jesus Christ. As Margaret Olin, art historian and religious studies professor at Yale University said, “Addiction recovery programs are by their nature, very Christian programs” (Olin). Thus it is critical to first make this religious and psychological process clear in order to compare it with the series of photos. Doing so will then allow for a clear analysis of the work and for the introduction of photo theory and art history in order to better understand the issues presented in this body of work.

## The Psychological and Theological Narrative

Step 1 in the LDS ARP Manual, says that, “Rarely do people caught in addictive behaviors admit to





Top: *Personal Revelation*, Bottom: *Service*

being addicted. ...we tried to minimize or hide our behaviors. ... When we, as addicts, resorted to lies and secrecy, hoping to excuse ourselves or blame others, we weakened spiritually” (LDS Family Services). An honest recognition of one’s addictive behavior often triggers the feeling of guilt or sorrow, especially for the religiously inclined. But what exactly is guilt?

According to the Encyclopedia of Psychology, guilt functions on two levels. It is cognitive in that one must be consciously aware of the perceived failures or wrongdoings, and secondly it is emotional. Guilt occurs when a person realizes or believes, whether accurately or not, that he or she has compromised his or her own standards of conduct or has violated a moral standard (Guilt). Rob Nelissen, a social psychologist at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, wondered whether guilt is exclusively related to moral transgressions, as opposed to shame that can be experienced following public displays of incompetence. Studies performed in 2008 indicated that guilt can be evoked “without violation of a norm” (Nelissen) and therefore guilt is not exclusive to moral transgressions.

S.B. Narramore, a well published Christian Psychologist of the 70s and 80s distinguishes

constructive sorrow (what I call “godly sorrow”) from psychological guilt. Narramore (1984) explains that constructive sorrow is a desire to change that is motivated by loving concern for others and oneself, whereas psychological guilt is self-punitive and destructive toward oneself. Many Christians and even psychologists don’t fully understand this distinction. Narramore presents a viewpoint from Eli Chesen’s book entitled *Religion May Be Hazardous to Your Health*, in order to illustrate this point.

*“I would summarize that religion even when loosely practiced by a family, can ...give rise to an inordinate number of double messages to growing children. These messages confuse and frustrate children and often lead to feelings of guilt. This can do nothing less than inhibit, to a varying degree, the normal healthy progress of emotional growth.”*

Narramore believes that Chesen’s view represents a significant portion of practicing psychotherapists, stating, “Many are convinced that religion is largely a guilt producing phenomenon that contributes to the development of neurotic patterns” (Narramore, 137). There is a lot of truth to this. Many Christian teachings seem to make people feel sinful. Often unachievable ideals can make believers feel worthless. It is certainly easy to argue that religion’s primary emphasis appears to be conformity motivated by fears of guilt, punishment, and condemnation as opposed to the humanistic emphasis of self-love and self-acceptance. The counter to this, and what all christians and psychologists need to understand, is that the word *guilt* is never once used in the New Testament in the sense that most of us consider guilt today—that inner emotional state of self-condemnation, punishment, and rejection. Guilt is used in a legal or judicial sense (Matt 26:65-66; Mark 14:64; James 2:10). And it is used to describe our condition as fallen people alienated from God by virtue of our sins (Matt 23:17-18; Rom 3:19-20; 1 Cor 11:27). In other words, when speaking about the emotion that motivates one to change, the New Testament uses the term “godly sorrow”.

The ideas of Narramore are echoed in 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, in which godly sorrow produces repentance that leads to salvation but not regret; whereas worldly guilt is linked to death. According to New Testament theology, godly sorrow is being “made sorry after a godly manner”; one who “sorrowed after a godly sort”. So we see here that guilt and godly sorrow are incredibly similar with one key difference. Guilt can lead to self-punishment, whereas godly sorrow leads to repentance.

There are a number of triggers for self-punishment—depression, mental disorders, and guilt, just to name a few. Ritualized self-punishment is an aspect of human cultures that can be seen throughout history. It seems to derive from a common belief that suffering brings relief from sin (Glücklich, 2001). We can see this very clearly with Medieval European flagellants who publicly beat themselves to atone for their sins. Flagellation as a practice goes back to the beginnings of Christianity with its larger moments during the Late Middle Ages until the Catholic Church deemed it heretical. Gordon Leff, a historian at the University of York wrote that flagellants had a very elaborate ritual and rigorous code of conduct. They would process two by two to the church and then to the marketplace, divest themselves of their outer garments, and then drop to their knees. With scourges in their hands, which “consisted of three knots each with four sharp points,” they would beat and scourge themselves while singing of the Virgin’s and Christ’s suffering. For the flagellants, “fear of God’s retribution lead them to seek forgiveness [of their sins] through self-chastisement” (Leff).

Yoel Inbar, an Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto, argues that a major tenet of Western moral thought is the view that transgressions must be balanced by pain inflicted on the transgressor and that “this belief is strong enough that people may sometimes inflict pain on themselves in order to balance their misdeeds” (Inbar). The idea that people seek suffering to reduce feelings of guilt may seem implausible—why would choosing to feel worse in one respect help one feel better in another? Several behavioral studies in this area have been completed by Nelissen, Inbar and others. Some studies show that self-punishment purifies or alleviates guilt while others leave open the possibility that other negative emotions might also lead to self-punishment. Perhaps the cause is a general motivation to distract oneself from negative emotional states rather than making an effort to relieve the feeling of guilt in particular. Of course it should be noted that “a motivation to balance the scales need not lead to self-destructive behavior, and ideally it might lead to other-serving behavior instead (or perhaps in addition)” (Inbar). Inbar informs us that a significant experimental literature shows “that people often deal with their guilt over a bad deed by doing a good deed for someone else or for society in general” (Inbar). This will be discussed further in the next section of the paper where the photos are analyzed.

It is important to note that the titles of the photos are important in understanding the images and the theology behind them. Image five is titled

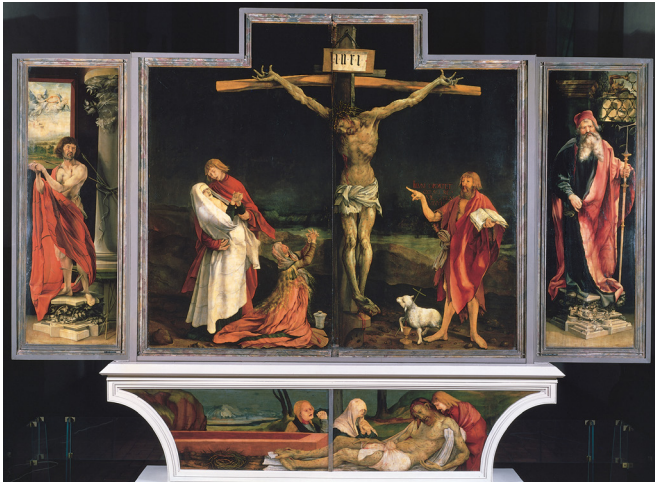
*Confession*. Confession is a formal statement admitting that one is guilty of a crime or offense. Step 5 of the LDS ARP manual states: “Confession began a process of disclosure where we shared expressions of remorse with friends, family, and others” (LDS Family Services). In some Christian traditions, formal confession takes place when an individual enters the office of the pastor or priest and admits the wrongs committed. This vulnerable process is meant to cleanse and purify the individual by helping them let go of secrets, negative emotions, and sin. When the person walks out of the room, he is beginning the process of true repentance. President Spencer W. Kimball, former president of the LDS Church declared that, “Repentance can never come until one has bared his soul and admitted his actions without excuses or rationalizations” (Kimball, 4).

Repentance is usually summarized as remorse, restitution, and renewal—a change in the direction of one’s life. The New Testament informs us that Paul said, “John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4). Baptism, as shown in *Change of Heart*, is a symbol of renewal and part of repentance. Repentance also “hinges on an honest understanding of the problem and involves constructive [godly] sorrow of one’s transgression” (Witvliet, 223). In their essay and study titled, *Responding to Our Own Transgressions*, Witvliet, Hinman, Exline, and Brandt, all graduate students in psychology, write: “Beyond a privatized, emotion-focused response to oneself by oneself and for oneself, studies are emphasizing the importance of both responsibility and reparative behaviors toward the victim as important precursors to self-forgiveness” (Witvliet, 224). However in looking at two of the photos in the series, *Seeking Forgiveness* and *Restitution and Reconciliation*, it would appear that the protagonist is not seeking forgiveness from another person nor trying to make amends or reconcile with anyone other than himself. He is the victim and therefore his self-forgiving and restorative process is a completely privatized “response to himself by himself and for himself”. It is between himself and God.

So did one need to suffer guilt and punishment in order to repent? What of those who never feel guilt? Doesn’t justice demand punishment for one’s wrongs? Perhaps the real question is can restitution and reconciliation for moral transgressions be made without the guilty person having to be punished? The answer lies in the final photograph, *Service*. Here, for the first time in the series, we see a representation of a savior figure. Inked on the back of the man on the ground is



a large tattoo of a crucifix. The tattoo turns out to be a reproduction of the Isenheim Altarpiece, where Christ distorted body hangs on the cross (*see figure 13 below*). For Christians, Jesus Christ is the answer. It is because of him that a guilty person does not need to suffer if he



(Figure 13): Isenheim Altarpiece by Niclaus of Haguenau and Matthias Grünewald. 1512–1516.

or she will repent. Narramore declares that “Christ’s atoning death once and for all paid the penalty for the believers’ sin, ... removed the danger of divine punishment and rejection (God’s wrath), and established the foundation for freedom from self-condemnation” (Narramore, 142). The scriptures make it clear that there is no place for self-punishment and rejection, although notably there *is* a place for divine correction (chastisement), remorse, and repentance. In Romans 5, the apostle Paul writes: “being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” (v.9). In chapter 8 Paul writes: “*There* is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (v.1). Christian theology teaches that because Jesus suffered, we don’t have to. Through repentance, a guilty person can receive a pardon by allowing the punishment to be placed upon Jesus Christ. This is the great miracle claimed by Christianity—the miracle of repentance and forgiveness brought about by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

## Comparing the Narratives

As we look at the series *Forgive Me, For I Have Sinned*, we have to ask ourselves whether it exemplifies in some way the feelings of guilt and/or godly sorrow and the Christian narrative of change? The opening image to the series is a self portrait of the artist (our protagonist) crying in a stone alleyway. There is sorrow in his eyes, yet it is not certain that he

is feeling guilt or godly sorrow. It could be any number of negative or weighted emotions. Margaret Olin (mentioned above) and Lisa Kereszi, an artist, critic, and Director of Undergraduate Studies at the Yale School of Art, both sat down to examine the twelve photographs. Regarding *Honesty*, Kereszi stated, “I feel like sky’s the limit. My imagination can completely take over. I can also relate and connect with this character” (Kereszi). Olin remarked that, “Individually guilt can definitely be seen in some of the images, but collectively guilt is nowhere to be found. When you read the images as a whole, there is a clear direction and progression of the character. He is our hero at the center of almost every frame and therefore not at any moment is he really abandoned.” Olin explained this further by referencing saints and suggesting that even though many saints and even Jesus Christ himself suffered and changed, according to Christianity, none of them were ever guilty or are known for feeling guilt. “In this way”, Olin says, “the character here is like a heroic saint.” In commenting on this, Kereszi stated, “I don’t see there *not* being guilt or self-punishment, even if he emerges heroic at the end. What’s wrong with that? I don’t see the end negating the beginning. I mean, there’s rebirth so there is negation, but in a good way. So I don’t think [the collective narrative] makes it so that I don’t see the guilt and self-punishment.”

Olin’s point about saints is interesting to compare here. Indeed there are several ties to the narrative of saints in art historical imagery. Surely the contemplativeness of *Daily Accountability* can be compared to Rembrandt Van Rijn’s painting *St. Paul in Prison* (1627). And the common trope of looking up into the heavens with outstretched hands that is so famously identified in *St. Francis in Ecstasy* (c. 1480) by Giovanni Bellini, is almost exactly duplicated in *Personal Revelation*. Even the story of St. Jerome in the wilderness could perhaps be seen in the photos, *Hope* or *Humility*. These saintly comparisons and tropes were not intentionally mimicked by the artist in the creation of the work. Therefore, perhaps this speaks to more universal christian understandings of sorrow, contemplation, enlightenment and change. On the other hand, I must acknowledge that the majority of the photos were created in Israel and Palestine, the land of Bible Stories and where the artist’s (read ‘my’) addiction recovery process began. Therefore the locations and stories of the Bible clearly are associated with several of the images. For example, *Trust in God*, can be seen as a symbol of the Sacrifice of Isaac, where Abraham placed his son on an altar to offer him as sacrifice according to God’s command. *Change of Heart* could represent the Baptism of Christ by John





(Figure 10 Above): *Daily Accountability*



(Figure 11 Above): *Personal Revelation*



(Figure 14 Right): *St. Paul in Prison* (1627) by Rembrandt Van Rijn

the Baptist just before he goes into the wilderness to pray, not unlike what we see in *Humility*. In fact, the location of the desert photo was taken in an area known today in Israel as Beit Ha Arava, a location just west of the Jordan River close to Jericho, which many scholars believe to possibly be the location where Jesus was tempted and tried by Satan before his ministry. The final image, *Service*, can clearly be seen as a representation of the Good Samaritan—a parable where a Samaritan lifted a suffering Jew from the road and cared for him. The relationships with Biblical stories forces one must recognize that this series is grounded in a Christian perspective.



(Figure 15 Right): *St. Francis in Ecstasy* (c. 1480) by Giovanni Bellini

The fourth photo, *Truth*, contains a world of emotion. The fact that our protagonist is ready to inflict pain on himself, while also apathetic to the self-punishment, and praying to God for help, indicates an psychological whirlwind. “It’s a little over the top, but it works.” Kereszi commented. She continued, “Personally I’m more drawn to the ones where there is an individual figure. Maybe because they’re more believable, but I also recognize that your project is not reality. You’re trying to say something else.” Indeed, the repetition of one character in both a single frame and throughout the series places the work in a “fight-club-esque” pseudo reality. Another artist who has also worked in constructed pseudorealism is Cuban-American Anthony Goicolea. And although for him his work deals more with identity and cultural assimilation, and not with psychological responses to addiction and repentance, the repetition of the same character seems to alter time and space and move from the physical



world to the psychological.

It is clear that the images are highly constructed and that there is a degree of drama and theatricality to the works. Indeed, as the artist who created the images, I can rightly say that it often felt like acting. The large majority of the time, I was creating images that did not represent current emotions or experiences, but rather, emotions and events I experienced in the past, whether in recent months or years ago. In this way, the images reconstruct a sense of reality not unlike the Italian Neorealists.

In an interview at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, art photographer Jeff Wall addressed this issue of acting. He agreed with Marlon Brando that we are all actors, almost all the time. “Acting is inherent in being” he said. He continued by saying that “the inherent nature of, this thing called acting, is something that then complicates photography. If we think of cinema, one of the most complex achievements ... is probably associated with neorealism, who use people who aren’t actors playing themselves. Whether they’re fishermen or whoever. They get to play themselves. Are they faking it?” This is interesting to consider in regards to this series of photographs. On one hand, the majority of the images do not depict reality as it happened in real time. The artist took pictures of himself acting out the different emotional characters and from them created a digital montage. These are not documentary snapshots capturing the emotional psyche as they unfold. They are theatrical reenactments. However, on another level the photos are more real than fake because, like the Italian neorealist, no paid actors portrayed the protagonist nor his different emotional selves. The artist created work about real emotions and events in his life and used his own image to do so. What we see here is a self-portrait. When viewing the work, with the understanding that they were created based off of the artist’s own 12 step addiction recovery transformation, the viewer can understand that the actor is not faking it, but rather expressing, or rather re-expressing, reality from the very depths of his soul.

In her essay, *The “Eternal Return”: Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment*, art historian Amelia Jones suggests that often in self-portrait photography “the truth value ... is mitigated” because “the artist performs her [or his] body reiteratively such that the artistic subject (who is both author of the image and the figure in the image) is overtly enacted as representation” (Jones, 952). According to Jones, the reiteration, or multiplication, of the figure in the *Forgive Me, For I Have Sinned*, in some respect negates the personal and direct link to

the artist himself. Rather, the artist as the protagonist simply becomes a representation—in this case, a representation of the emotional and psychological process of christian repentance.

One narrative that unfolds in the first third of the photo series is one where our protagonist feels guilt which causes him to punish himself. Perhaps the idea of the flagellants conflates with this part of the series, in that self-chastisement becomes a means of seeking forgiveness of sins. However, to contrast with the flagellants, the function of witnesses is completely different. The medieval flagellants would enter into the public square before beating themselves, making the public the witnesses, whereas in *Truth*, the only witness to the character’s punishment is himself. In this case, the act of violence is done in private, much more akin to Saint Jerome’s self-inflicting punishment, where he often beat himself on the chest with a rock while alone in the wilderness.

After the scene of punishment in *Truth*, our protagonist then confesses and feels godly sorrow, which leads him to change and repent. Speaking about the photo *Confession*, Olin said, “This is most engaging of them all, because it is the most ambiguous. The main character is not only *not* in the center or identified, he is walking out of the frame. And what is his relation to the naked figures? I am incredibly intrigued and that makes this a strong piece for me.” Olin was specifically looking for ambiguity in the work. For her, many of the images in the series have a one to one ratio—what you see is what you get—allowing little room for the double meaning and creative exploration for the viewer that permeates so much of today’s contemporary art work. “Some of it is really obvious,” said Kereszi, “but I think with what you’re trying to do though, it has to be”. Ever though Kereszi felt that the works needed a sense of directness and certainty in order to convey the larger narrative of change, she preferred the images that allowed innumerable possibilities, such as *Honesty*. In regards to *Confession*, Kereszi said, “It seems that, although there are different storylines that could be interpreted, there’s a limited number [of them]. Unlike Olin, Kereszi seemed to be viewing the series more like cinema. She wanted to relate with the character in the narrative. Unlike the first image, Kereszi felt like she couldn’t relate at all with the character in *Confession*, which for her made it less appealing.

In this series, we see that the guilt expressed in the beginning led to self-punishment (see *Trust in God* and *Truth*), and that it is not until after true repentance that we see service come into place in the final image (see *Service*). Yoel Inbar was quoted earlier as suggesting that people often deal with guilt by performing a

good deed for someone else. In the representation of guilt-management as collectively illustrated in *Forgive Me, For I Have Sinned*, guilt led to the protagonist punishing himself. However, after the fourth image, we don't see the tears, anguish, or sorrow that are present in the beginning. Instead we see soberness, contemplativeness, and even a smile in *Restitution and Reconciliation*. This could illustrate that the protagonist is no longer experiencing guilt and self-punishment, but rather, is not feeling godly sorrow and is motivated to true repentance. However, this is not to suggest that these emotions are representative of only godly sorrow. One can certainly be sober and contemplative after feeling guilt. What I am suggesting here is that the service depicted in the final image was caused not by guilt, but by godly sorrow. This assumption comes from my own experiences going through this process and not from the photographic series itself. The series itself does not make this clear. If this was an objective of the artist, then it certainly falls short.

## Conclusion

I have attempted in this paper to take an honest look at my own creative work and to objectively critique the work and ask what can be learned about guilt, self-punishment and repentance through the individual and collective narratives found in the 12 works of art. The nature of art makes for very subjective opinions; however I argue that these photographs attempt to illustrate a difference between the feeling of guilt and that of "godly sorrow" and that restitution and reconciliation for moral transgressions can be made without the guilty person having to be punished. *Forgive Me, For I Have Sinned*, certainly demands more study, analysis and critique because as Margaret Olin suggested, "Life doesn't really work in clear steps. Life is circular. 'The 12 Steps' should probably be called the '12 Facets of Life'" (Olin).



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