

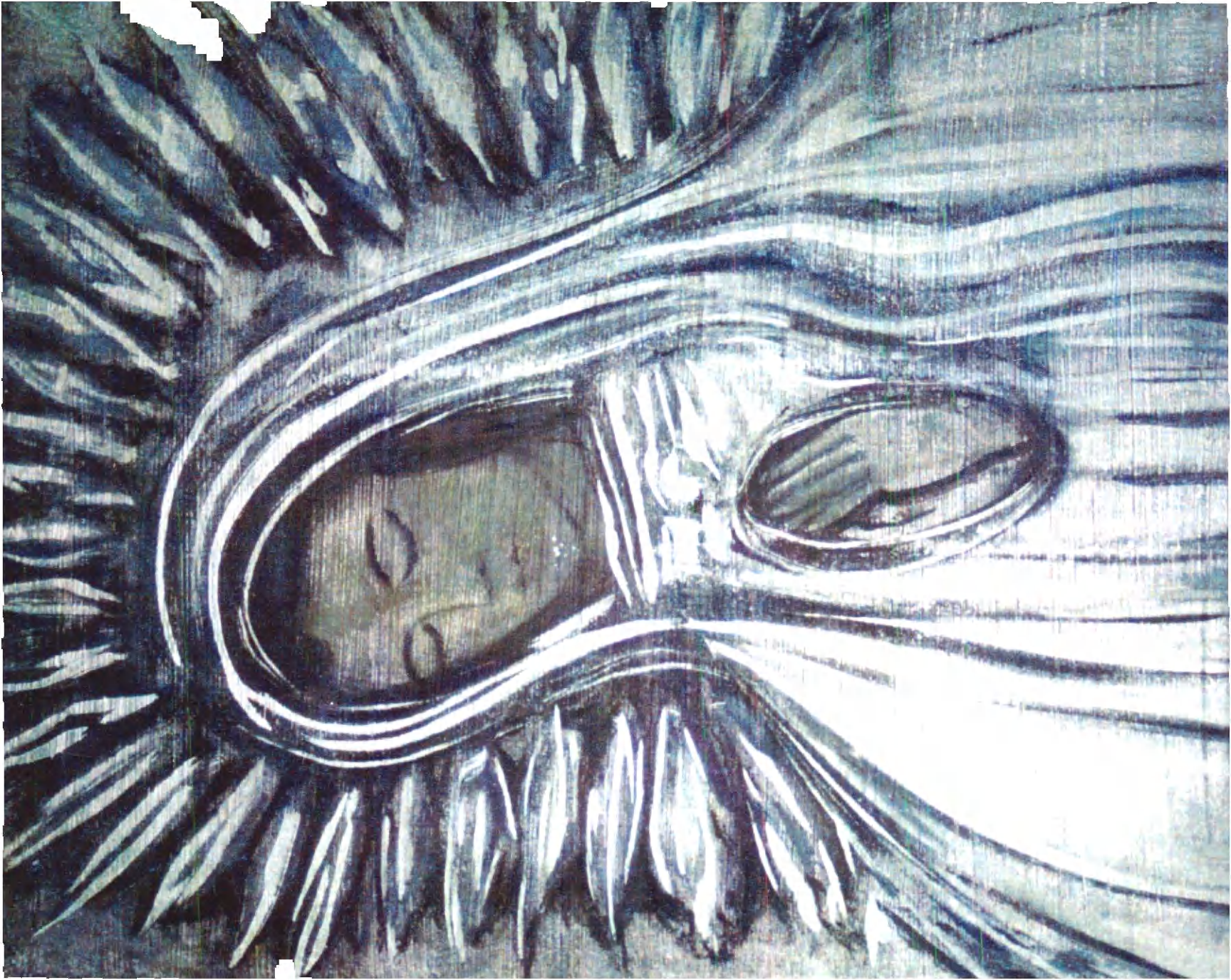
APPARITIONS

**By
Elias Martinez**

**Master's Project
for the
University of Houston-Clear Lake**

**School of Human Sciences
and Humanities**

Spring 2002



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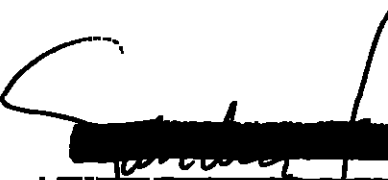
Elias Martinez

**Master's Project
for
The University of
Houston- Clear Lake**

**School of Human
Sciences and Humanities**

Spring 2002


We the undersigned, certify that we have read this project and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the Master's Degree in Humanities.




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List of Slides

1. *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, 24" x 30"
2. *Discovery or Intrusion*, 36" x 46"
3. *The Almighty Father*, 28" x 30"
4. *The Shroud*, 28" x 30"
5. *Mary, Mother of Jesus/ Jesus*, 24" x 34"
6. *After the Storm*, 24" x 30"
7. *The Crayon Virgin*, 24" x 30"
8. *Mary's Tears of Blood*, 24" x 30"
9. *Mary Appears Over a Church Steeple*, 24" x 30"
10. *Cantinflas, Tortilla Jesus*, 24" x 34"
11. *Holy Land Miracle*, 24" x 30"
12. *God's Love is on the Island*, 24" x 30"
13. *Jesus on the Kitchen Cabinet*, 24" x 30"
14. *The Lady of the Rainbow*, 24" x 30"
15. *The Lady of the Light*, 30" x 40"
16. *Foundation Under God*, 24" x 30"
17. *Miracle Camera #1*, 24" x 30"
18. *Miracle Camera #2*, 24" x 30"
19. *Flying Rosaries*, 24" x 30"
20. *Heavy Metal Jesus*, 30" x 40"
21. *Heavy Metal Mary*, 24" x 30"
22. *The Resurrection*, 24" x 30"
23. *Ice Virgin Mary*, 24" x 30"
24. *Bleeding Heart of Jesus*, 24" x 30"
25. *The Radiant Heart of Jesus*, 24" x 30"

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Growing up in Encinal, Texas, a small community located between Laredo and San Antonio, I was raised by my parents with a strict Catholic upbringing. It was the only religion they as children were ever exposed to and taught. They passed the tradition onto me and my eight brothers and sisters. I have childhood memories of statues of the Virgin of Guadalupe and images of Jesus Christ hanging on the walls of our home and our church. These images were very much a part of my childhood when I served as an altar boy for our community church. They have remained close to my heart as traditions that my parents instilled in us for protection and strength. It was as a child that I first heard of mystical sightings or apparitions of the Virgin Mary as she chose to appear to very few people around the world. I believed that these apparitions were not made up stories or tales from the Bible, but actual occurrences to remind people on earth to pray and to have faith in the Lord.

These occurrences hold a fascination for me and are stored like a card file in the back of my mind whenever I hear of a sighting in Texas or near my hometown. Although I have been tempted many times to jump into my car to investigate an apparition, I have never had the opportunity to do so until I began this exploration of faith and beliefs related to these mystical sightings. Through my own art interpretation and research in support of apparitions, I witnessed an apparition and saw a firsthand account of such an occurrence, the intense reaction of the visionary, and the power she seemed to gain by being among the chosen. People truly believe in the power of these occurrences, and through my artistic expressions, I have tried to capture the feelings and compassion that are described as people communicate the vision and the messages that are received. In this analysis of apparitions, I will discuss the history and traditions of apparition sightings, how the apparition of the Virgin Mary to Juan Diego changed the religious world for the Hispanic culture, and how I have chosen to interpret many of these apparitions through the oil painting medium for my Master's Project.

What I consider an "apparition" is different than a ghostly sighting or an image that appears to take the form of a human. People have claimed to see ghosts for years. For my purpose, an apparition is the mystical appearance of a vision, which appears miraculously to a visionary. Some apparitions only appear to the visionary and not anyone else. Apparitions may take any form, but documented reports

indicate that many sightings are of a spiritual nature and have reinforced the existence of Jesus Christ through images of his mother, Mary. Apparitions were first recorded in 40 AD and have occurred to the present day. Through modern technology, apparitions have been photographed and televised to share with the public to spread the word or message they are trying to communicate. Millions of people over hundreds of years have traveled in pilgrimages to the sites of these spiritual apparitions to pay homage to Christ and Mary, pray for the healing of sick loved ones, repent for human sins, and participate in these miraculous sightings.

The first recorded accounts of apparitions include recorded dreams and images of Jesus' mother, Mary, in various forms and dress. Sometimes the apparitions have included the Baby Jesus, archangel, Michael, St. Joseph and St. John, the Evangelist. These sightings are known as the Marian Apparitions, and have been recorded from 40 AD to the present day. These occurrences are known all over the world and the locations of the sightings like Lourdes, France and Fatima, Portugal are famous and recognizable to the average person. Some of these sightings have been recognized by different denominations of religions and churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, which has granted official approval of a number of the apparitions. The Catholic Church has taken note of these appearances by constructing basilicas, churches and chapels to honor Mary's presence at each location. Each of the apparitions has been accompanied by reports of miraculous events including healings, and messages from heaven (Walsh, website).

The first recorded Marian apparition appeared to one of Jesus' Apostles, James (the Greater) in Saragossa, Spain in 40 AD, where he traveled to spread the word of Jesus. Because he felt a failure in his mission, Mary appeared to him and presented a wooden statue of herself and asked him to build a shrine in her honor. This was the first built church ever dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

Another documented and historical apparition occurred in 352 AD to John of Rome and his wife, Mary, in Italy. They both had similar dreams that Mary appeared to them and asked them to build a church in her honor at a specific site. When they investigated the chosen site, they found the church

outlined in the snow-covered hill and erected the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, one of the largest churches in the world.

One of the most widely known and accepted apparitions among the Hispanic culture is the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the Aztec Indian named Juan Diego, in central Mexico in 1531. The apparition appeared to him on top of a hill and asked him to build a church in her honor. When Juan Diego informed the local Bishop of his vision and the request, the Bishop asked for proof. After several appearances, Juan Diego produced roses from a desolate hilltop to the Bishop as proof. When the roses spilled from his tilma (peasant cloak), an image of the Virgin Mary appeared on the material and has remained after hundreds of years, surviving natural disasters and wars. The origin of the name "Guadalupe" is controversial although many people believe it derived from the Aztec word "coatlaxopeuh," which is pronounced "quatlasupe." In a description to Juan Diego, the Virgin called herself "one who crushes the serpent" or "coatlaxopeuh" and from Aztec to Spanish, the translation changed to Guadalupe (ng.netgate.net).

In 1858, in a grotto near Lourdes, France, the Lady of Lourdes (the Virgin Mary), appeared eighteen times to a fourteen year old girl named Bernadette Soubirous. Bernadette was told to drink from the grotto, although no water appeared there until she started to dig. These waters still run near the church that was erected in Mary's honor and are believed to have healed many people who flock there in pilgrimages even to this day (Walsh, website)

Another well-known apparition includes three children in Fatima, Portugal in 1917 that witnessed the Virgin Mary, now known as Our Lady of Fatima. In Garabandal, Spain, between 1961 and 1965, four girls between the ages of ten and twelve witnessed the Virgin 2,000 times with the archangel, Michael. Mary warned of punishments that could be averted by sacrifice and penances. In the Coptic Church of St. Mary in Zeitoun, Cairo between 1968 and 1971, the Lady appeared on the dome of the church surrounded by doves, witnessed by many people, and is documented as a location where many cures occurred (Walsh, website).

All of these documented apparitions have crossed the globe, ethnicities, gender and age. They have been documented as actual events and phenomena that people truly believe in whether they were actually involved in the sighting or have heard or read the history of it. People, through their religious beliefs, accept these apparitions as true communication between Jesus and Mary and the people who believe in them. People heed the warnings of Mary, accept the messages she sends with each vision, and continue to flock to the historical sites of apparitions, as well as, newly reported events, which seem to make headline news every couple of months across the world.

For all of the apparitions that are well known to many people today, there are hundreds that are not documented or authenticated by a church. The Roman Catholic Church has approved cases of apparitions, but it is not a simple process. In order for an apparition to be approved by the Roman Catholic Church, it must be thoroughly investigated by scientific and religious authorities, and typically takes more than ten years after the apparition has stopped appearing. The Catholic Church has denounced more visions than acknowledged or approved them. Four distinct phases of investigation must occur before an apparition is labeled as "authentic." The first phase includes a thorough evaluation by a commission created by a local diocese. A bishop issues a statement of support of the apparition or event by stating that it contains nothing contrary to faith or morals and is supernaturally inspired or worthy of devotion. When the bishop approves the statement, the second phase involves a lengthy period of devotion by the faithful that results in a life of self-denial and prayer. The third phase is papal acknowledgement. The Pope will state publicly that he accepts the events and contents of the apparition. The fourth phase includes liturgical recognition by placing a celebration of the apparition on the Church's official liturgical calendar. For all of the apparitions that have appeared to hundreds of people all over the world, the Catholic Church has recognized very few of them as authentic (Walsh, website).

Many of the images represented in my Master's Project include images of Mary in different forms. Mary as an icon has had a huge influence across the world, especially in Mexico because it has come to represent the union of the Aztec Indians and the Spanish conquerors that occurred close to 500 years ago.

Before the Spaniards arrived, the native religion was very mythological and visionary with pyramids erected for the Sun and the Moon gods. This visionary and colorful culture was overthrown by the Spanish conquest and forced to assimilate their religion with Spanish Christianity. Those of the Christian faith slowly replaced the native visions and images, and temples replaced the pyramids when Spain took control and began to “save” the natives.

The apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, an Aztec native, is known throughout Mexico as a message from God that was sent directly to the Hispanic culture. She spoke in the native tongue, was dark skinned like the natives and had an Indian hairstyle, which Aztecs immediately identified with. The image appears bigger than the sun behind her representing that she is bigger than the Sun god. The crescent moon appears below her feet representing that the Moon god had no significance to her. Aztecs recognized these meanings, which enforced the power of the image even more to them.

Juan Diego and his vision represent a race of people that were looking for salvation and a message directed to them. This vision served as an answer to why their people suffered and the many questions posed during their rule by the colonial powers (Portugal, Spain, etc.). It also served as the union between the Spaniards and natives. Historians often regard the Virgin apparition as the agent for integration in what was once a divided land. Within seven years of her appearance to Juan Diego, Mexican history witnessed the conversion of eight million Aztecs to the Catholic religion introduced by the Spanish. Mexico today, is still the second largest Catholic nation on Earth with 90% of its citizens believing in the Roman faith. Hispanic people recognize themselves as a people that have suffered and have developed a unique spiritual relationship with God, Jesus and Mary. To the present day, people continue to flock to the apparition site where a basilica was constructed in Mary’s honor and Juan Diego’s tilma remains on display to share with the world (Cullison, 50).

The controversy rages on as depicted in the Sunday, February 17, 2002 edition of the Houston Chronicle, which stated, “Debate Grows Over Juan Diego Canonization.” The article discusses the four-year investigation that just concluded Juan Diego did exist because of rising political pressure to canonize him as a saint. Although a meeting of cardinals was scheduled to give final approval of the

recommendation for sainthood, the Pope had already scheduled a visit to Mexico before the meeting to approve of the recommendation. People are still caught between accepting what has become a beautiful and traditional story as fact or fiction. Whether one believes the story to be true or not, there is no disputing the cultural significance of the image.

As a Hispanic, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was instilled in me as a source for power, protection and strength. No matter what my religious beliefs are today, having studied world religions, I accept the relationship Guadalupe has with my culture and believe in the power of faith that people embrace with her image. She stands as a patron and symbol of Mexico's faith, culture, solidarity and strength for a culture that continues to experience much suffering, poverty and political weakness. Because her image is so present and significant in my culture, I began a series of apparition paintings with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe and then continued to explore other sightings, which understandably include Mary as a major focus.

The images I chose to paint for my Master's project are a combination of true apparition sightings reported on television, newspapers and websites, as well as, interpretations or my own visions based on these occurrences. There are twenty-five oil paintings included in the series depicting apparitions, and my ideas and thoughts surrounding them.

La Virgen de Guadalupe (24" x 30") is my interpretation of the apparition that appeared to Juan Diego in 1531. The rays of sunlight behind her head do not appear in any other depiction of Mary than that of Guadalupe. These rays are the rays of the sun that Mary appeared to conquer helping to dismiss the Aztec people's Sun god. I have portrayed Mary as dark-skinned with long black hair reflective of the Hispanic and native culture. Her eyes are closed with hands held in prayer as she prays to a higher being than she. The bold and bright colors are reflective of the expressive and colorful culture that Guadalupe has come to symbolize and represent.

In *Discovery or Intrusion (36" x 46")*, I painted a scene reflective of the Spanish conquest of the indigenous peoples of Meso America. When the Spaniards arrived, the whole world of the natives, Aztec and Mayan, was interrupted and history changed forever. We will never know how the Indians would

have progressed without this change in history. What we do know is the outcome of the conquest. I have always thought and studied this subject because it is reflective of the person I am today. For me, this image captures a moment in time when the world changed forever for a race of people. As the image describes, the Spaniards introduced their music, their horse, cattle and religion. The image of the Madonna and the baby Jesus is wrapped in the items that were brought to the New World. The native is shown in the foreground perhaps believing that his God has arrived. This painting is meant to foreshadow and warn of a new world to come as an apparition can also heed a warning.

God is the father of Jesus Christ and regarded as the Almighty Father in prayers. In *The Almighty Father* (28" x 30"), I painted God as a vision in the sky over the desert sands of Jerusalem. He is portrayed as the King of Kings, or Rey de los Reyes, as an older man with a kingly manner and a crown upon his head. This vision in the night sky shows a God that reigns above humanity, guides and watches us. This image is one that many artists have portrayed in their depiction of God and very reflective of the *Shroud of Turin*, so I acknowledge the influence of images seen before. The image evokes a feeling of quiet tranquility, peace and calmness with a surety that we as a human race are in the hands of something much greater than we are, whether it is portrayed as a man, a king or a vision of constellations in the night.

The Shroud (28" x 30") is very reminiscent of the *Shroud of Turin*. The *Shroud of Turin* is a very controversial piece of linen cloth discovered in the 1300s to have a full body image of a man that was crucified. People believe that the image is Jesus Christ and have protected it for hundreds of years. Scientists have spent years researching, carbon dating and analyzing every inch of the cloth. It remains a mystery today, but is highly guarded and housed for its preservation. The painted image surprisingly is the backside of *The Almighty Father*, with a heavy build up of paint that has seeped through the canvas and become a very different image.

Mary, Mother of Jesus/Jesus (24"x 34") was inspired by the many marble carvings that have been carved in Mary's honor. I chose to portray Mary as a beautiful, but suffering woman. She has a delicate, but stone chiseled appearance. The look of sweetness and sadness of her face portrays the grief for the

loss of her son. The chiseled points of her features portray the hardness of her spirit at having witnessed the crucifixion of her son, Jesus. The brilliant blue also captures her serene and sad feelings of compassion and the cold marble effect of her sculpted features. The features and lines of her veil are exaggerated as marble statues of the Renaissance exaggerated the draped effects of clothing. Jesus stands as her protector and strength behind her with a strong and hard stance, with the reassurance of his prophesy.

After the Storm (24" x 30") is an image that came to me after a terrifying experience at my home in March of 1998. I live in a subdivision on Galveston Island known as Tornado Alley. One summer evening, a storm blew across the island leaving much destruction behind. During the storm, I could only try to keep my wife and daughter calm as we felt the house tremble with the roar of a tornado that was very close by. We felt the air pressure drop and our ears popping as the wind blew hard enough to send roof shingles flying everywhere. We could not venture outside until the wind died down and it was not until the next morning that we discovered that a substantial part of the roof had been torn off. Debris were all over the yard, and a huge mulberry tree in our backyard lost a major branch just near our roofline. The rest of the neighborhood sustained lots of damage as people soon discovered upside down airplanes at the airport across the street, and many roofs torn off of buildings. I could only thank God that my family was safe and that the house was still mostly intact. I was reflecting on these thoughts as I came across the hole in the tree where a large branch had fallen. The painting is the completed image that I quickly sketched that day in 1998 as I imagined my guardian angel watching over and protecting my loved ones and me. The image depicts the Virgin of Guadalupe coming through a tangled mass of broken branches and leaves as the morning clears up after the storm.

The apparition of *The Crayon Virgin* (24" x 30"), occurred in Houston, Texas. A little girl left her crayons outside on the sidewalk of her apartment complex, and returned the next morning to find that the hot sidewalk had melted the crayons into an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Many people went to see the image and placed candles along the sidewalk. One man was restrained after he declared the image to be an evil sign and tried to destroy it. The painting depicts several crayons that were left while the others

melted into the image of the Virgin. The candles are painted in the foreground, while shadows of people are cast on the sidewalk next to the image as they gather around to observe it.

In *Mary's Tears of Blood* (24" x 30"), the painting depicts a statue of the Virgin Mary that cries tears of blood. The statue was located in a residence in Austin, Texas and discovered to bleed in the year 2000. The owners had the statue removed from their home and placed in their church, The Sacred Heart Catholic Church, to share with the community. It is unclear whether experts tested the statue or determined the apparition to be authentic. I chose to present Mary as a child in a veil and dress of white to represent her innocence. Her face is full of sorrow and captures a look of pleading. She cries tears of blood, which represents the blood of humanity if one does not accept Jesus Christ into his life and repent for his sins. Mary's face poses a question that asks, when will people change their way of life and devout to a life of Christianity.

Mary Appears Over A Church Steeple (24" x 30") was painted to portray the apparition sighting that occurred in San Marcos, Texas on August 17, 2000. The painting depicts the image of Mary as I imagined the apparition hovering over the church steeple with doves flying around her. I chose to paint an early evening and darkening sky with Mary as a translucent image in motion. The doves reflect the beauty and catch the movement in the brief appearance she made there.

The apparition of the *Tortilla Jesus* appeared to a man in Benito, Texas on October 6, 2000. A man found the image of Jesus Christ on the tortilla he was about to eat. He saved the tortilla and displayed it for people to witness. Since the sighting, the tortilla has not spoiled although nothing special was used to preserve it. A similar sighting occurred in the southwest United States. I chose to display the visionary man and the tortilla as conjoined paintings because the visionary is not usually portrayed. Without knowing what the man looks like, I depicted him as Cantinflas, a very recognizable face to the Hispanic community. Cantinflas is a well-known comedian and has appeared in such films as *Around the World in Eighty Days*. I felt that Cantinflas next to the tortilla could also depict the humor that some of these apparitions contain. In my exploration of apparitions, although I always wish to respect the visionary, sometimes the image is quite remarkable.

Holy Land Miracle (24" x 30") is an apparition that appeared in a roll of film that a Pennsylvania couple shot on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When the woman first received her developed photos, she thought the image was a mistake and took it back to the photo shop. The shop pointed out that the image was on the roll of film that was developed. The woman asked her husband if he took the image and he said he had not. After much investigation, it was determined that the image was an apparition. The image appeared in newspapers across the country including *The Tiempo de Laredo* on Sunday, April 16, 2000 when I obtained a copy. The text below the image explained the details of the event, the trip to Jerusalem and said that it was believed by many that this was the true image of Christ. People were asked to display the image in their homes as a display of their faith.

God's Love is on the Island (24" x 30") was inspired by a sign posted on a church I drive by everyday located just off the feeder road of I-45 in Galveston. The sign reads, "God's Love is on the Island." I kept this in mind as I drove across a bridge over Offat's Bayou, which offers a scene of beautiful water, amazing sunsets and the three pyramids of Moody Gardens in the distance. As I looked at this scene one particular day, I noticed a pier sticking out of the water resembled a man. Between the sign that I had just read and the double take on the pier, this painting was created and became the visible image to the sign. The image of Jesus is standing in the water where his outstretched arms become a part of the horizon behind him. His arms embrace the earth between the sky and land to envelop everything located at that level. The three pyramids behind him are symbolic of another world, although realistic in color. The blue sky fades into the blue water, as it appeared that day. This painting for me really does say that God's love is on the island.

Jesus on the Kitchen Cabinet (24" x 30") was painted after I personally experienced an apparition in Seabrook, Texas. I saw a news report on local station, Channel Two in Houston, that described an apparition seen on the door of a kitchen cabinet. The apparition was the face of Jesus. Through contacts by a friend that knew the family, I was able to visit the home and witness the apparition for myself. I took photographs and painted the image as it appeared on the cabinet. The face clearly stood out from the normal pattern of wood grain running the length of the door. Shirley, who first witnessed the

face, had a specific spot in the kitchen where the face was very visible, but once the image was spotted, it undeniably stood out from all angles. The most interesting aspect of the apparition was Shirley's account and surprise at finding it. She was very interested in sharing her experience and excited that someone would paint it. The face itself appears to be a man's face in a downward position. Shirley believes that it is the face of Jesus gazing down in prayer. I find the reaction to this image fascinating because Shirley believes that she has received a message and wants to share it with others.

The Lady of the Rainbow (24" x 30") is an apparition that appeared in Clearwater, Florida in December 1996 on a three-story office building on Route 19. The event was documented in the August 25, 1997 edition of Newsweek magazine. It appeared that the image was created because of an oily substance that had built up on the surface of the glass wall cladding. When the glass got wet, the image of Mary appeared on the building surface across the panes of glass. This theory proved to be false as glass experts investigated and determined that the elements of the glass coating were corroding. This explanation does not explain the image of the Virgin Mary though. People flocked to the site in droves, and eventually the Ohio-based Shepards of Christ Ministries leased the building. I painted a close-up detail of the image as it appeared on a website.

The Lady of the Light (30" x 40") is an apparition that appears on the driveway of a home located in the Heights of Houston, Texas. A beam of light reflected off of the chrome hubcap of a truck parked in the driveway creates an image of the Virgin Mary on the driveway. People have come to see the image since it first appeared in the year 2001. So many gathered at the home making offerings and praying until the early hours of the morning, that the owner was forced to shut her gates at 10:00 p.m. every night. The image I painted shows the tire of the truck with the beam of light reflecting off the hubcap onto the driveway. The image of the Virgin Mary is cast onto the concrete floor. She is wrapped in a cloak and appears as a translucent image.

Foundation Under God (24"x 30") represents a report of the appearance of an apparition in a Hispanic barrio or neighborhood in New York City. The apparition was the face of Jesus on a tree. The image of the tree and face is in the foreground while the cityscape is illuminated in the background by the

full moon. During the painting of this image, the events of September 11th occurred and the painting took on a very different meaning for me. I painted a much different cityscape including the skyscrapers of Manhattan and then added the two translucent ghostly images of the World Trade Center Towers. The apparition of the face of Jesus on the tree appears to be hovering over a city in great despair. The overall image is radiant with light, peace and tranquility, although the recent events had turned the city into chaos and turmoil. In light of what had taken place and the fact that I was painting New York, the image reflects the reported occurrence of the apparition and the current events of what had recently occurred.

Miracle Camera #1 (24" x 30") and Miracle Camera #2 (24" x 30") are different versions of the same apparition that occurred in Bayside, Queens, New York. A series of Polaroid photographs were taken and when instantly developed showed the face of the Virgin Mary. The images are known as the Miraculous Photographs of Bayside. In *Miracle Camera #1*, the image shows the side profile of Mary in detail as it appeared in the photograph. In *Miracle Camera #2*, I painted the image from a further viewpoint to show the profile of Mary and another image of her walking in front of the profile. Hundreds of miraculous photos have been taken at this site and people claim that Mary has requested that images are captured with Polaroids so skeptics cannot question the validity of the photograph.

The Rosary is a form of prayer that has been used for more than one thousand years. It is believed to date from the Middle Ages when strings of beads were used to count "Our Fathers" and "Hail Marys." The prayer of the rosary is a meditation and chant focused on the lives of Jesus and Mary with the recitation of 50 Hail Marys. St. Dominic is credited with spreading the use of the rosary in his missionary work and has been used in Catholic communities since the thirteenth century. In my life, I have used the rosary in the prayers for ill loved ones and at funerals for those who have passed on. The *Flying Rosaries (24" x 30")* is an apparition that occurred at the miraculous sightings at Bayside. With Polaroid film, the image immediately appears so it is hard to justify how anyone could enhance or change the photograph when the image develops before your eyes. What appeared was an image of rosaries flying through the sky. There are no reports that indicate that anyone intentionally manipulated the image, or that the film had been exposed to the sun or chemicals prior to taking the photograph. The painting is my interpretation

of the photograph. The image captures the motion and sizes of the different rosaries. I added a real rosary and pieces of rosaries that I have collected over many years to add a three dimensional quality and layering and textures of the various rosaries.

The idea for *Heavy Metal Jesus* (30" x 40") and *Heavy Metal Mary* (24" x 30") came to me in my trips across the United States-Mexican border to Nuevo Laredo. The border towns are always full of tourists and the storeowners usually stock items that they love to purchase. These usually include silver jewelry, glasses and pitchers, shoes and hats and tee shirts. Some of the items that have always fascinated me are the plates and platters that are made of pewter. What catches my attention is the heaviness, the shininess and the textures that artists achieve with this material. My goal for the two paintings was to depict the heavy burdens that humanity has placed on Jesus and Mary in our prayers, pilgrimages and sacrifices by using textures and colors to portray the images in a state of heavy metal. The use of silvers and bold strokes reflect the pewter material and weight of the material in the burdens we choose to place on Jesus and Mary. Christianity places blind faith in a religion and Catholics choose various saints to ask and pray for healing, money, solutions to problems, etc. If these responsibilities were placed onto human beings, they would be crushed by the weight of the burdens. These images capture the weight of the responsibility as well as the luminescent quality that each image sustains. *Heavy Metal Mary* will always seek prayer and turn her faith to Jesus. She has the power to sustain with Jesus at her side. *Heavy Metal Jesus* lifts his head toward the heavenly sky as he sustains in his own power, God's power and love, as well as the reason for which he was placed on earth reflected in the cross behind him.

The Resurrection (24' x 30") is another painting inspired by the pewter material commonly used in Mexico and a request by my mother-in-law several years ago to paint an image of Jesus Christ rising above the clouds on his cross. The image represents the resurrection of Jesus when his body rose to heaven and people were not able to find him after his body was locked away. His body and cross are painted in silver to portray the weight and burdens he has taken on as his will to save humanity from suffering. The resurrection is his journey as he travels up to heaven to be with his father forever.

The *Ice Virgin Mary* (24" x 30") is an apparition that appeared to a family in their freezer from a drip in the ice machine, which created the form of the Virgin Mary. The painting is my interpretation of the written events of the story found on the Internet. The Virgin is shown as a translucent piece of ice with head and hands in prayer. The light from the freezer creates a glow to accentuate the form that was miraculously created by the drip of water. It was not clear whether the ice could be preserved or if experts investigated the event.

The *Bleeding Heart of Jesus* (24" x 30") was inspired by an apparition witnessed in a town in Columbia on February 14, 2000. A framed picture of Jesus began to bleed from the heart as depicted in the painting. Experts were called in to examine the image, but no explanation was reached. The event was portrayed on local station Channel 48 in Houston, Texas. In this image, Jesus holds his robe open to show the radiant heart that is bleeding. The bleeding of his heart depicts the suffering and blood he spilled for the sins of humanity that seem to have been forgotten today.

***The Radiant Heart of Jesus* (24" x 30") shows a vague image of the face of Jesus with an oversized radiant heart of gold. People describe the goodness that one can find within themselves when they lead a Christian way of life. This painting represents the radiant and golden heart of Jesus and the luminous glow that is cast around his body. His body is not shown because with the goodness in his heart, his body ceases to be of any importance. When one accepts Jesus into his or her mind, they have accepted a spiritual feeling or a sense of this being. This is the message that many apparitions communicate and is the feeling that many people try to achieve while they are still a part of the earth. The heart is also torn in two pieces and bleeding. This signifies the suffering that Jesus endures for the sins of all humanity. Why do people continue to see apparitions if there was not still a message that is trying to be communicated? This message says that Jesus will continue to have a bleeding heart as long as people sin and do not accept him into their lives.**

As an artist, it has been a unique experience to explore and interpret the many apparitions I have researched since starting this project. There are endless sightings and so many choices to depict. As a person, I found that people continue to search for answers regarding life, death and the way of the world. I

understand many aspects of the apparitions because of my own Catholic upbringing and identify with this search for answers. Many of the apparitions I researched cannot be explained scientifically and will never be analyzed. The people who choose to believe in them have an unquestionable faith and the skeptics will always find a reasonable doubt. As a Hispanic, I explored a part of my culture, beliefs and faith that I never explored before. I understand another layer of my culture that has been deeply rooted for over 500 years in the faith surrounding the images. It is not my intent to judge or voice an opinion regarding the apparitions, the manner in which they occurred or the visionaries, but to use the medium of oil painting and artistic expression to communicate these ideas, messages, interpretations and voices.

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List of Slides

1. *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, 24" x 30"
2. *Discovery or Intrusion*, 36" x 46"
3. *The Almighty Father*, 28" x 30"
4. *The Shroud*, 28" x 30"
5. *Mary, Mother of Jesus/ Jesus*, 24" x 34"
6. *After the Storm*, 24" x 30"
7. *The Crayon Virgin*, 24" x 30"
8. *Mary's Tears of Blood*, 24" x 30"
9. *Mary Appears Over a Church Steeple*, 24" x 30"
10. *Continflas, Tortilla Jesus*, 24" x 34"
11. *Holy Land Miracle*, 24" x 30"
12. *God's Love is on the Island*, 24" x 30"
13. *Jesus on the Kitchen Cabinet*, 24" x 30"
14. *The Lady of the Rainbow*, 24" x 30"
15. *The Lady of the Light*, 30" x 40"
16. *Foundation Under God*, 24" x 30"
17. *Miracle Camera #1*, 24" x 30"
18. *Miracle Camera #2*, 24" x 30"
19. *Flying Rosaries*, 24" x 30"
20. *Heavy Metal Jesus*, 30" x 40"
21. *Heavy Metal Mary*, 24" x 30"
22. *The Resurrection*, 24" x 30"
23. *Ice Virgin Mary*, 24" x 30"
24. *Bleeding Heart of Jesus*, 24" x 30"
25. *The Radiant Heart of Jesus*, 24" x 30"