

TOPICA PICTUS

Kenjirō Okazaki
TOPICA PICTUS /
La Cienega

July 17 – August 14, 2021
Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

岡崎乾二郎
TOPICA PICTUS
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La Cienega Boulevard
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聖衣剥奪 /

General examination of conscience

Jesus was bare when crucified, indicating that he must have been disrobed at some point. I cannot help but think that El Greco painted the very moment when clothing was being ripped off of him.

There is no obvious passage in the Four Gospels indicating so, however. The Gospel of John does mention the disrobing of Jesus; however, it happened after Jesus was crucified.

“When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.”

Does it mean that the “seamless” underwear was woven continuously as in the form of a cylinder? How would one weave something like that?

El Greco surely did not paint Jesus in the nude. He painted a man holding the collar of Jesus’ robe as if to evaluate its value. Even if the title *The Disrobing of Christ* suggests that men took clothing off of Jesus, the timing of that may have been after Jesus was already on the crucifix.

Nevertheless, El Greco’s painting conjures a few questions. Jesus made a point of being in a physical body to appear in this world. It seems almost redundant to

cover the body with secular clothing. In other words, couldn’t Jesus have demonstrated his existence even if he had no clothing? That said, as long as Jesus was perceived to be there, he needed to occupy a physical body and even be covered with clothing for practical purposes. If so, what kind of clothing would he have worn? Could we identify Jesus as being Jesus as a worldly characteristic figure?

The assumption that Jesus would not wear plain clothing was also applied to John the Baptist in the wilderness. In fact, there is an actual description of John wearing camel leather and a leather belt around his waist (Matthew’s Gospel Chapter 3), indicating that he wore uncommon garments. It then makes one wonder why there is no description of what Jesus wore. For Jesus, being in a physical body and wearing clothes had both been conditions he had to accept to participate in this world. Even if he accepted those conditions, he would not have agreed to wear a specific type of clothing. The type of clothing or physical features were not an inherent part of who Jesus was. Being stripped of clothes for him would have been the same as being stripped of the mundane details of this world. If so, being disrobed would not have been humiliating to Jesus in any way.

Standing next to Jesus, a soldier is wearing a new armor, being proud to wear it and appearing out of place from the surroundings. The bright red garment



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2020

Acrylic on canvas

8 1/8 x 6 1/2 x 1 1/2 inches



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Giotto di Bondone

Legend of St Francis: 2. St Francis

Giving his Mantle to a Poor Man

1297–99

Fresco

106 1/4 x 90 1/2 inches

Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi, Assisi, Italy

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El Greco

El Espolio (The Disrobing of Christ)

1577–78

Oil on pine panel

21 13/16 x 13 5/8 inches

Upton House, Warwickshire (National Trust)

worn by Jesus is being appraised by a man and appearing as grand as the shiny armor. The garment being evaluated does not differ from the armor as it suggests the owner's stature and character within this world. Being appraised is the character.

Jesus appears as if he had waited for the very moment, as he gazes towards heaven in joy and ecstasy. Is this an expression of relief that he is free from the suffering of this world and about to return to heaven?

It is said that no one had painted the theme of The Disrobing of Christ before El Greco. However, I cannot help but recall a fresco painted by Giotto di Bondone about 280 years prior to El Greco's. The series of murals Legend of St. Francis of San Francisco at the Basilica di San Francesco in Assisi was led by Giotto di Bondone, and the very first mural (the second scene) called *St. Francis gives a mantle to a poor man* was painted by Giotto di Bondone himself.

Francisco, the son of a wealthy textile merchant, meets a poor knight on the road and has a revelation. He takes off all of his clothing and gives it to the knight. At that moment, the blue color of the sky flows into his body, and his body melts into the sky. Against the sky, forming an inverted triangle, Francesco's body appears as if it is being raised and floating in the sky. Perhaps symbolizing the choices the young Francesco struggles with, between being a knight or selecting a religious path and belonging to a church, there is a city surrounded by a rampart on top of a mountain on the left and a church on the mountain on the right across the inverted triangular sky. Both of the choices are mundane, only allowing him to serve the authority. Instead, Francesco chooses to strip his own clothing.

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