



# Photographing Mary

Miraculous Photographs in the Global Marian Movement

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American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting  
San Antonio, Texas, November 20, 2016

# Miraculous Images



- ▶ “Acheiropoieta,” i.e. icons of the Virgin Mary not produced by human hands, were known since the first centuries of Christianity. Today, there are still images of the Virgin Mary (and Jesus) produced as a result of visions or special spiritual experiences, such as those painted by Illinois’ child prodigy Akiane Kramarik (born in 1994), who produced her most famous works from age 8 to 11 (left)

# Miraculous Photographs



- ▶ Photography, however, created the possibility of entirely new images: actual photographs of Virgin Mary obtained in different ways
- ▶ The more common were images where Mary was not seen by the naked eye but allegedly appeared when developing photographs and film, normally taken at the sites of Marian apparitions (left, examples from Medjugorje)

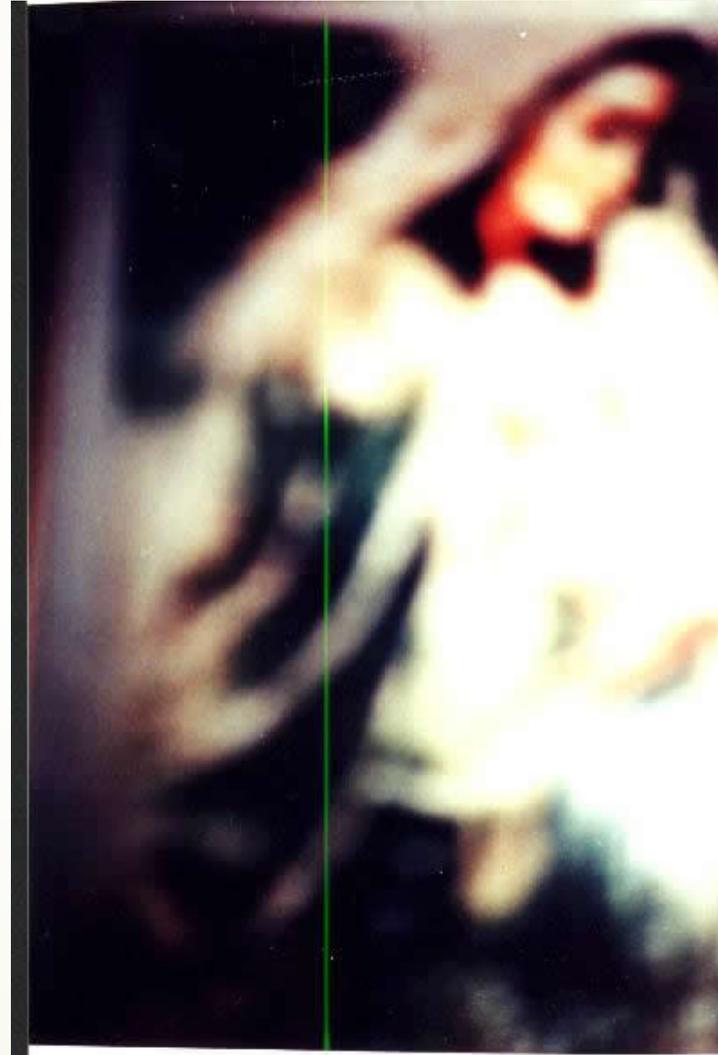
# A Precedent: Spirit Photographs

- ▶ An obvious precedent, but perhaps one the Marian movement would prefer not to hear mentioned, were photographs of spirits. They appeared in pictures taken in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the presence of Spiritualist mediums and “spiritual investigators” such as William Hope (1863-1933, right). Spirit photographs were often denounced as frauds, obtained through double exposures and other devious means



# A Photograph from Venezuela

- ▶ Similar claims started appearing after World War II after developing photographs taken at the sites of Marian apparitions. This example is from Betania, Venezuela, where the apparitions to Maria Esperanza de Bianchini (1928-2004) were recognized by the local Bishop in 1987



## Scottsdale, Arizona



- ▶ These are from Scottsdale, Arizona, the site of (non Church-approved) Marian apparitions that started in 1988 – the Virgin even appeared in a picture of the local priest delivering a sermon

# Around Veronica Lueken

- ▶ This one was taken in 1978 in the Flushing Meadows Park, New York, where Veronica Lueken (1923-1995) experienced some of her (non-approved) apparitions of Virgin Mary



# On a Lamp, in Australia



- The image of Mary appeared on a lamp in a picture taken in 2003 at the Holy Family House of Prayer in Rockingham, Australia, a pilgrimage site established around a weeping statue of the Virgin Mary

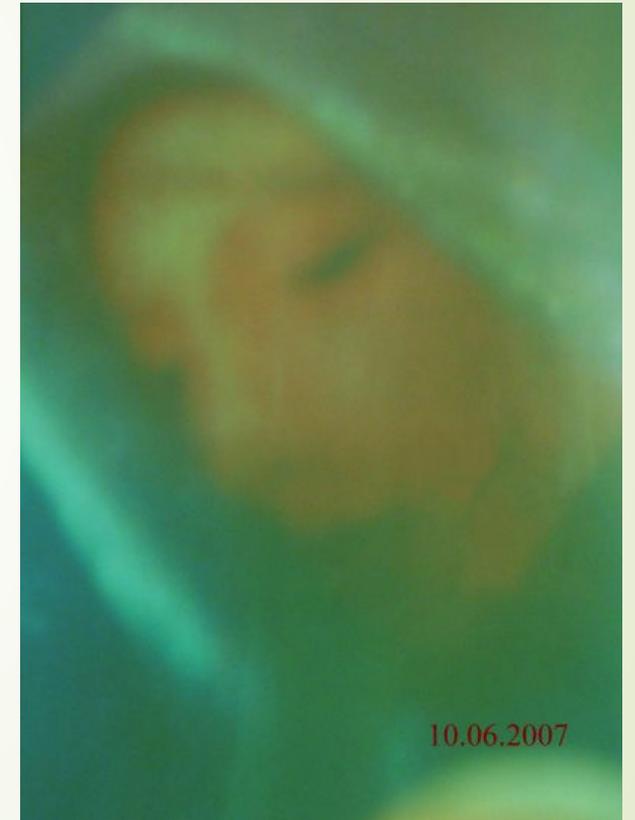
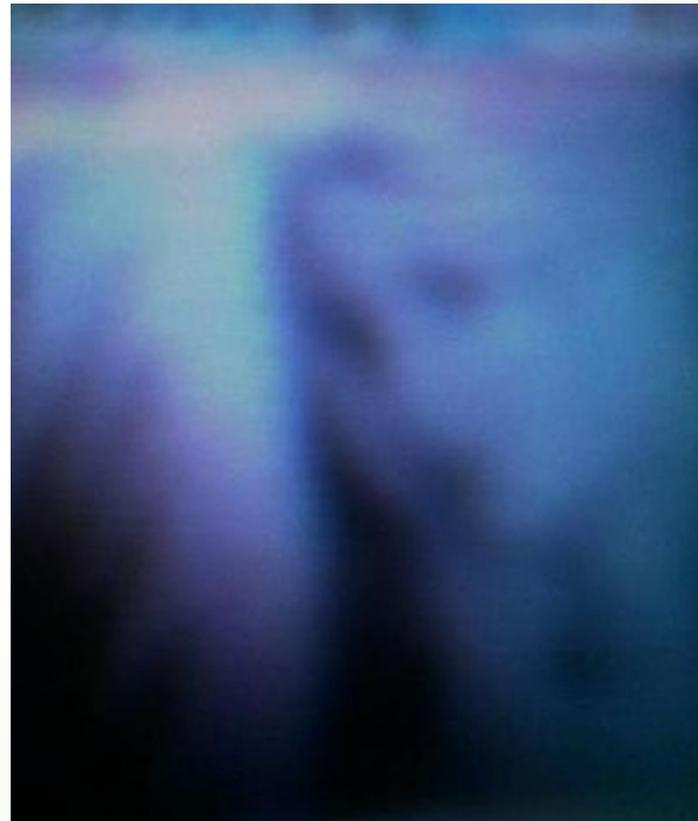
# Mary's Footsteps



- Allegedly, Mary also walked, and left her footsteps to be photographed (left), at the Holy Family House of Prayer

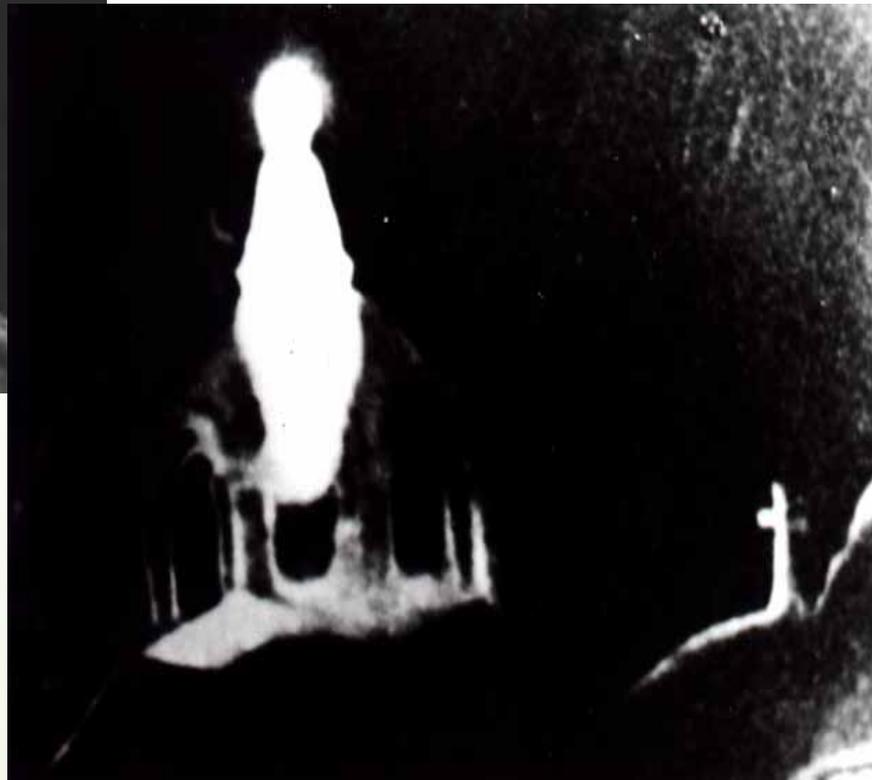
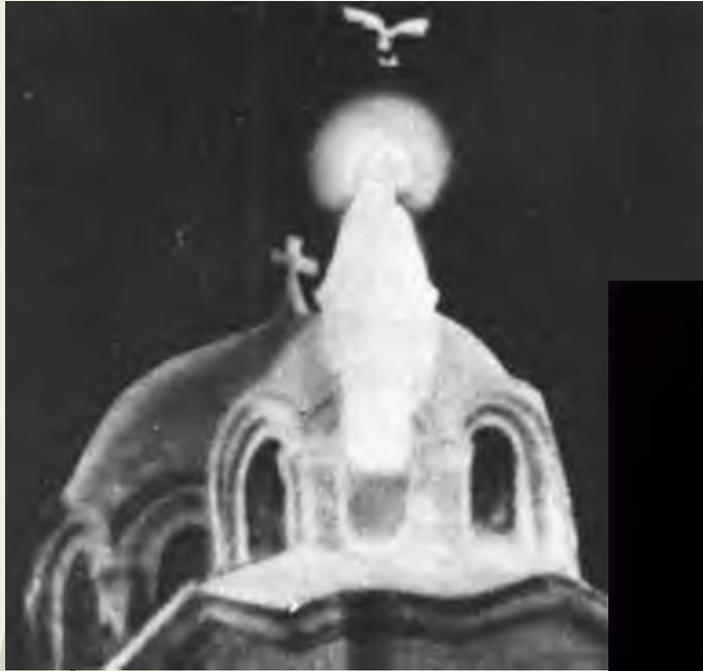
# Keningau, Malaysia

- ▶ The case of the apparitions in Keningau, Malaysia, in June 2007, is somewhere in the middle between the first category of miraculous Marian pictures (where Mary appeared only when the photograph was developed) and the second, where the camera captured what was also visible to the naked eye. In fact, thousands claimed to have seen similar images in Keningau



# A Mass Phenomenon: Zeitoun, Egypt

- Between 1968 and 1970 at least 250,000 Copts saw, and many photographed, night lights above a church in the Zeitoun district of Cairo, Egypt, which they interpreted as manifestations of the Virgin Mary. Skeptics remained unconvinced, but the highest instances of the Coptic Orthodox Church recognized the miraculous character of the events



# Warraq, Egypt



- ▶ The Zeitoun, phenomenon was replicated on a smaller scale elsewhere in Egypt, including in Warraq, near Giza, in the night of December 11, 2009. Skeptics were even more critical, and the Coptic Church, while acknowledging the phenomena, did not insist on them as vigorously as it did for Zeitoun

# Mary in the Clouds: Conyers



- A large category of photographs came from alleged sightings of the Virgin Mary in the clouds. These sightings, and corresponding photographs (left), became somewhat typical of the 1990-1998 apparitions in Conyers, Georgia (not approved by the Archdiocese of Atlanta, which however tolerated that the local Ukrainian Catholic Church, Eastern Rite, took the pilgrimage site under its protection)

# Mary-Shaped Clouds

- Sometimes, clouds appear to the faithful as shaped “just like Virgin Mary,” as happened with this picture taken in Medjugorje – at least, when the picture was rotated



# Hospital Window, Boston



- ▶ Marian image may appear “naturally,” as a result of decoloring or other phenomena. This one appeared on a window of Milton Hospital, Boston, in 2003, attracted hundreds of Marian devotees and curious, and was widely interpreted as an anti-abortion message, until the skepticism of the Archdiocese prevailed. In these cases, even when the actual object no longer exists, photographs perpetuate its memory

# Hospital Window, Malaysia



theSun ON WEDNESDAY | NOVEMBER 14, 2012

## 'Virgin Mary' glass panel to be removed

BY CINDI LOO  
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**PETALING JAYA:** A glass panel allegedly bearing the image of the Virgin Mary (pix) at Sime Darby Medical Centre (SDMC) in Subang Jaya will be removed and handed over by the hospital management to a church in Klang.

Subang Jaya's Church of St Thomas More parish pastor Rev. Simon LaBrooy said the decision was made after consultation with the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, Tan Sri Rev. Murphy Pakiam, to move the glass panel from the hospital to the Marian Church of Our Lady Lourdes Klang for more conducive prayer and reflection sessions.

"The Catholic Church is in agreement with SDMC that the present situation cannot continue as we are concerned about the direct effect this may have on the hospital's emergency services," he said in a statement yesterday.

However, he said the move does not confirm the authenticity of the image as an apparition of Virgin Mary.

"The Catholic church will withhold any further official comment until the image has been tested and verified by theologians and church authorities," he said.

He added that the operation to hand over the glass panel will be closely supervised by officials from the Church of St Thomas More.

Thousands of devout Catholics gathered at SDMC over the weekend to personally witness the image after pictures of the image went viral on social media.

Catholics believe the sighting of Virgin Mary, as mother of Jesus Christ, is a divine apparition.



- Here, however, the object still exists. A similar "apparition" on a window of Sime Darby Medical Center, Subang Jaya, Malaysia, in 2012 was taken more seriously by Catholic authorities and in 2012 the window was moved inside the church of Our Lady of Lourdes in Klang

# Our Lady of Clearwater



- ▶ An extraordinary story concerns the light effect that appeared in 1996 on a window of the Seminole Finance Corporation building in Clearwater, Florida, and was recognized by many local Mexicans as an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. In 1998, Cincinnati-based Shepherds of Christ Ministries leased the 22,000-square-foot building, then bought it for more than \$2-million. It was converted into the Our Lady of Clearwater Catholic retreat center. In March 2004, the window was shattered by ball bearings thrown with a slingshot by a local teenager, and the popularity of the center declined, although it still exists

# Car Wash Virgin in New Jersey, 2012

- Similar phenomena continue to be reported in the news. On October 15, 2012, Alex Leiva, an immigrant from Honduras working at the Olden Avenue Car Wash in Ewing, New Jersey, noticed that smoke from the car wash tunnel had formed on its window the image of the Virgin Mary holding baby Jesus. He photographed it, and made the local news

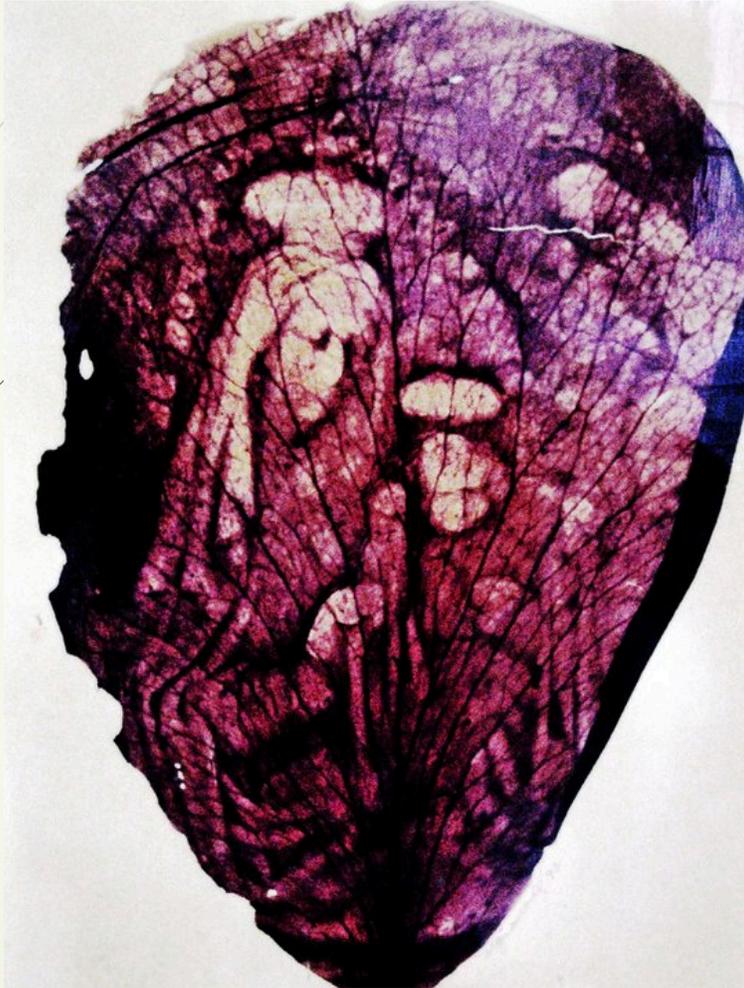


# Mary on Wood Ribs, New Mexico, 2014



- ▶ While restoring a wooden church in Questa, New Mexico, in 2014, the Virgin Mary holding a lamb in a beam appeared in the wood ribs of a log – or so the workers claimed, attracting reporters and visitors

# The Extraordinary Case of Rose Petals



- ▶ Perhaps, the most extraordinary case concerns pictures of Mary miraculously appearing on rose petals, a specialty of the Philippines. It all started when petals with Marian and other images (left) fell from the sky during the apparitions of Lipa (1948) to Carmelite postulant Teresita Castillo

# Contested Apparitions

- ▶ The apparitions to Teresita Castillo (who is still alive, right) were declared not genuine by the local Catholic Bishops in 1951. In 2015, the Archbishop of Lipa, Ramón Cabrera Argüelles, reexamined the case and declared the apparitions supernatural – only to be overruled by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, which claimed that the decision of 1951 had been confirmed by the Vatican and was definitive



# Petals and Holy Frost



- However, in the Philippines, miraculous images continued to appear on thousands of rose petals given to their devotees by a dozen or more visionaries. The most famous of them is Brother Carmelo Villanueva Cortez, a layman also known for the “holy frost” appearing on the forehead of those blessed by him

# Institutional Preaching



- ▶ Unlike other “rose petal” visionaries, Brother Carmelo is supported by his local bishop and by many bishops in both the Philippines and the United States, where he is often invited to preach in Catholic churches. He was even presented to Pope Francis in Rome together with his wife, aptly named Rosita

# Rose Petals Miracles

- ▶ During Carmelo's services, petals are pressed just below each person's collarbone. Images appear on the petals only once Carmelo has placed them on a person's chest



# Miracles or Frauds?



- ▶ Answering Filipino Web sites claiming he is a fraud, Brother Carmelo now often asks devotees to bring their own roses to the services, in order to counter the objection that his own petals are prepared to reveal the images in due course



# Pope Francis and the Virgin



- ▶ Brother Carmelo continues to enjoy the supports of several bishops and is a devoted son of the Catholic Church. Recently, an image with Pope Francis with the Virgin Mary appeared on one of his rose petals

# Alternative Interpretations



- ▶ The cases of Brother Carmelo's petals and of photographs reproducing traditional images of Virgin Mary are open to two interpretations only (again, reminiscent of incidents involving Spiritualism): they are either frauds or miracles

# Rorschach Tests?



- ▶ As for clouds, lights in the night of Egypt, cracks in windows, or ribs in the woods, a more convincing parallel might be found in the Rorschach test: who was the first to interpret these images as the Virgin Mary? And why did some see Mary and others nothing at all? The apparition, often, is in the eye of the beholder

# Postmodern Acheiropoieta



- ▶ On the other hand, while the question “Who did see the Virgin here first?” is relevant for the ethnologist, the psychologist, and the historian, sociology may focus on the photograph per se as a cultural artifact with a life of its own. We have already seen this picture: it originated in Scottsdale but you may find it in Internet as reportedly taken in Medjugorje, New Jersey, or Connecticut. In the end, the origin of the picture becomes less interesting for the devotee than the image in itself, confirming that miraculous photographs are today new and portable acheiropoieta for postmodern shrines, perhaps located in the Internet only



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Image: The Last Supper on one of Brother Carmelo's rose petals