

# ***Exhibit at the Venaria Reale of Turin***

**March 26 – July 30**

**Working Title:**

## **Jesus**

### ***His Body and Face in Art***

During the special showing of the Holy Shroud at Turin in Spring 2010, an art exhibit at the Venaria Reale – the Savoy hunting palace just outside the city – will focus on Western artists' interest in the body of Christ as subject. With works of painting and sculpture from the late Middle Ages to the Baroque period (and some earlier pieces), the exhibit will parallel the religious event, shedding light on broader cultural attitudes underlying veneration of the Shroud. Thus, while in Turin pilgrims pray before the large cloth which, according to tradition, enveloped Christ's physical remains retaining their imprint, the exhibit will make it possible to rediscover the central role of the human body in European thought, and to reflect on the bond between human body and divine identity implicit in Catholic veneration of the Shroud and Veronica's Veil. In addition, the exhibit will invite reflection on the emotional impact of bodily expression of moral commitment in Western culture.

The works exhibited – a group of masterpieces loaned for the occasion together with paintings and statues from the churches and museums of the Turin area - will be arranged in an itinerary meant to suggest both the breadth of the Christian concept 'Body of Christ' and the functional echoes of this concept in church ritual. The separate stages of this itinerary (corresponding to the interrelated sections of the exhibit) are:

- I. 'Body and Personality';
- II. 'God Takes a Body';
- III. 'The Man Jesus' ;
- IV. 'The Body Given for Love';
- V. 'The Risen Body';
- VI. 'The Mystical Body';
- VII. 'The Sacramental Body'.

In the first section, 'Body and Personality', the idea of the exhibit is presented in synthesis in a space dominated by very few but significant works, among which a large painting representing either the deposition or entombment of Christ and a classical statue of an ancient individual, a nude athlete for example. In that way the stated theme of the exhibit, the physical body of Christ, is put before visitors as an open question about the body-soul relationship in Western thought and art. Today - in a culture that conceives the body in 'technical' terms focussed on altering its appearance and improving its performance – people are in fact fascinated by a corporeal presence expressive of interior

commitment, significant human acts and spiritual love: the kind of corporeal presence associated with Christ in the works shown.

The other sections of the exhibit illustrate Christ's bodily existence from his conception through his resurrection, with images of the Annunciation, Mary pregnant, the Nativity, Epiphany and Presentation in the Temple/Circumcision ('God Takes a Body'); from Christ's adolescence to his baptism and public ministry ('The Man Jesus'); various moments of his Passion including meditative subjects such as the 'Man of Sorrows', the Pietà and the Lamentation ('The Body Given for Love'); the Resurrection, Ascension and Second Coming along with iconic representations of the glorified Saviour ("The Risen Body"). The sixth section of the exhibit, 'The Mystical Body', illustrates that extension of the idea of Christ's body to include the Church, since the time of Saint Paul described in fact in bodily terms; the works shown suggest the relationship between Christ's physical body and the *Communio Sanctorum* which in its entirety comprises the 'Mystical Body' that extends Christ's presence in time and space. The works shown will include multiple-panel altarpieces with saints arranged around a central image of the Madonna and Child, representations of martyrdom and of saints like Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena who had a special relationship with Christ's physical body. The final section of the exhibit, 'The Sacramental Body', sums up these ideas in light of the liturgical tradition that, from early Christian times to the present, has insisted on the 'real presence' of Christ's body in the Eucharist; together with paintings on this theme, works in this section will include vestments and church vessels with 'corporeal' iconographical features.

The whole exhibit will be preceded by a brief art-historical section, intended to recall fundamental developments in bodily representation in Western art: the early Christian assimilation of Greco-Roman naturalism; the Byzantine spiritualization of the body; the new human emphasis given the body by Franciscan spirituality, and the rediscovery of the classically beautiful body in the thirteenth-century 'Proto-Renaissance'. These and other themes will be treated at length in the exhibit catalogue, which – in addition to presenting the exhibit as hung – will include essays on such related subjects as 'The Body in Jewish Experience'; 'The Body in the Church Fathers'; 'The Veneration of the Holy Face'; 'The Body and Human Emotion in Byzantine and Early Medieval Art'; 'The Body of Christ and the figure of Mary'; 'The Body in the Art of Michelangelo'; 'The Body of Christ in Contemporary Art'; 'The Imitation of Christ in Messianic Politics'.

The scholarly committee responsible for planning the exhibit, headed by Monsignor Timothy Verdon (professor of art history, Stanford University in Florence), is composed of Prof. Luccetta Scaraffia (Università La Sapienza, Rome); Prof. Michele Bacci (Università di Siena); Prof. Andrea Longhi (Politecnico di Torino); Prof. Andrea Gianni (Associazione Sant'Anselmo, Milano). The project is being organized in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Turin, represented by Monsignor Giuseppe Ghiberti, diocesan director of art and culture. Requests for loans are accompanied by letters from the Archbishop of Turin, His Eminence Cardinal Severino Poletto, and from the Secretary of State of the Vatican City, His Eminence Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone.

*Signed:* **Monsignor Timothy Verdon**  
**Florence, Italy**