


**ARTEFATOS RELIGIOSOS COMO AGENTES:
A INTERSEÇÃO ENTRE ESTÉTICA, ESPIRITUALIDADE E CULTURA****RELIGIOUS ARTIFACTS AS AGENTS:
THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN AESTHETICS, SPIRITUALITY AND CULTURE****ARTEFACTOS RELIGIOSOS COMO AGENTES:
LA INTERSECCIÓN ENTRE ESTÉTICA, ESPIRITUALIDAD Y CULTURA**

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RESUMO

O presente estudo tem como objetivo analisar a interseção entre arte e religião sob a perspectiva antropológica de Alfred Gell (1998) em “A pessoa distribuída”, complementada por entrevistas com praticantes de diferentes tradições religiosas. Os artefatos religiosos são compreendidos não apenas como objetos estéticos, mas como elementos ativos na vida espiritual e social dos indivíduos. De natureza qualitativa, a pesquisa fundamenta-se em revisão bibliográfica, incorporando, além de Gell (1998), as contribuições teóricas de Latour (2008) e Vernant (1990, 1992). A investigação empírica revelou que católicos e adeptos de religiões de matriz africana atribuem às imagens religiosas um papel de mediação entre o humano e o divino. Nesse contexto, entende-se que as obras de arte são dotadas de um sistema de agência, sendo capazes de influenciar e moldar as experiências espirituais dos sujeitos. As imagens religiosas são percebidas como canais de comunicação e símbolos que conectam o sagrado à vida cotidiana, exercendo profundo impacto emocional, simbólico e cultural.

Palavras-chave: Artefatos religiosos. Sistema de agência. Divino. Imagens religiosas.

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to analyze the intersection between art and religion from the anthropological perspective of Alfred Gell (1998), in "The Distributed Person", complemented by interviews with practitioners of different religious traditions. Religious artifacts are understood not merely as aesthetic objects but as active elements in the spiritual and social lives of individuals. This qualitative research is based on a literature review, incorporating, in addition to Gell (1998), the theoretical contributions of Latour (2008) and Vernant (1990, 1992). The empirical investigation revealed that both Catholics and followers of Afro-Brazilian religions attribute to religious images a mediating role between the human and the divine. In this context, works of art are endowed with a system of agency, capable of influencing and shaping individuals' spiritual experiences. Thus,

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religious images are perceived as channels of communication and symbols that connect the sacred to everyday life, exerting a deep emotional, symbolic, and cultural impact.

Keywords: Religious artifacts. Agency system. Divine. Religious images.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar la intersección entre arte y religión desde la perspectiva antropológica de Alfred Gell (1998), en "La persona distribuida", complementada por entrevistas con practicantes de distintas tradiciones religiosas. Los artefactos religiosos no se entienden simplemente como objetos estéticos, sino como elementos activos en la vida espiritual y social de los individuos. Esta investigación, de naturaleza cualitativa, se basa en una revisión bibliográfica que incorpora, además de Gell (1998), las contribuciones teóricas de Latour (2008) y Vernant (1990, 1992). La investigación empírica reveló que tanto los católicos como los seguidores de religiones de matriz africana atribuyen a las imágenes religiosas un papel de mediación entre lo humano y lo divino. En este contexto, las obras de arte están dotadas de un sistema de agencia, siendo capaces de influir y moldear las experiencias espirituales de los sujetos. Así, las imágenes religiosas se perciben como canales de comunicación y símbolos que conectan lo sagrado con la vida cotidiana, ejerciendo un profundo impacto emocional, simbólico y cultural.

Palabras clave: Artefactos religiosos. Sistema de agencia. Religiosidad. Imágenes.



INTRODUCTION

In his book "Art and Agency", Alfred Gell (1998) introduces the idea that artifacts are not merely decorative or aesthetic, but play the role of an active figure in people's social and spiritual lives. The anthropologist argues that artifacts can be seen as agents that distribute the identity and presence of the individuals or entities they represent. This concept is known as the "distributed person."

According to Gell (1998), religious art objects, such as sacred images, sculptures and ritualistic objects, function as extensions of the spiritual or divine entities they are representing. These objects, in addition to representing these entities, also materialize their presence and influence, allowing the faithful to interact with the sacred in a tangible way.

Gell's theory (1998) is based on the idea that agency is not limited to human beings, but can be extended to objects that mediate social and spiritual relations. In this way, religious artifacts become powerful mediators that distribute spiritual presence across time and space, connecting believers with the divine.

Other authors, such as Bruno Latour (2008) and Jean-Pierre Vernant (1990, 1992), have also provided relevant contributions to understanding how art and religion interact in the contemporary world. The work of Latour (2008) offers a critical reflection on the modern cult of fetishes and the production of images in the religious and secular context. Vernant (1990), in turn, brings a historical and philosophical perspective when discussing images and myth in Ancient Greece, in texts such as *Do Duplo à Imagem de Mito e Pensamento entre os Gregos* (1990) and *Figuração e Imagem* (in *Revista Antropológica*, 1992).

This article aims to explore the intersection between art and religion from the anthropological perspective of Alfred Gell (1998) in his book "Art and Agency" analyzing how art can be understood as a means of religious agency, distributing the identity and presence of spiritual beings through objects. In the first part of the article, a brief bibliographic review on the subject was carried out, bringing Gell's theory as a basis and incorporating the theoretical contributions of Latour and Vernant, in the second stage, interviews were conducted with ten subjects practicing Catholicism and religions of African origins, where they presented their view on the role of images within their religion.

ART AND RELIGION

The relationship between art and religion is a deeply explored topic in anthropology, as it offers a rich perspective on how human beings create and maintain symbolic and spiritual systems. While religious images are often seen as purely aesthetic elements or representations of something sacred, they play a much deeper role, serving as mediators



and agents that connect the human to the divine, organizing spiritual experience, and sustaining social cohesion.

From Gell's theory in *Art and Agency* (1998), we can understand that religious artifacts have an active power in the organization of social and spiritual life. For Gell (1998), art is not limited to representing or illustrating a worldview; It has a function that goes beyond mere aesthetics. Artistic artifacts, especially religious ones, are agents of action, with the power to influence people's relationships and behaviors. Gell (1998) introduces the concept of the "distributed person", suggesting that religious images, such as icons or sculptures of saints, are not simple representations of the sacred, but extensions of the divine itself. These objects not only represent the divinity or spiritual force they evoke, but also materialize that presence, making the sacred tangible and accessible to the faithful.

This process of mediation is crucial for understanding the role of religious images. Religious art creates a space in which the divine and the human can meet, establishing a symbolic relationship that not only reflects spiritual reality, but also transforms and reinforces it. Gell (1998), therefore, challenges the idea that art is only a form of passive representation. He proposes that religious art should be seen as an active practice, an intervention in social and spiritual reality, which organizes the beliefs, actions and rituals of individuals.

When applied to an analysis of the relationship between art and religion, Gell (1998) highlights how artistic manifestations, especially in the religious context, can be seen as instruments of symbolic power. Religious icons, images of gods, temples, and other spiritual artifacts are understood as forms of "power art," which not only express beliefs, but have the power to mediate between the human and the divine. These objects are, for Gell (1998), "agency artifacts", which function as mediators of spiritual and transformative experiences.

Religious art, for Gell (1998), can be seen as a way to establish direct communication between people and deities or spiritual entities. It has an agency that transcends its mere aesthetics, becoming a tool of religious mediation. In the case of sacred icons or images, art can have an effect of spiritual "presence", in the sense that, for the faithful, these representations can operate as intermediaries of divine power.

In Gell's (1998) anthropological view, religious art is not only a way of representing the transcendent, but also a way of conveying meanings deeply rooted in symbolic belief systems. These meanings are conveyed visually, often nonverbally, allowing religious art to act as a link between human experience and divine order. The artistic object, then, becomes a means by which religious meanings can be accessed and experienced.



Gell (1998) also proposes that the experience of religious art depends on the interaction of the observer with the work. In religious contexts, the reception of an image or symbol can invoke spiritual, affective, or even transformative responses in believers, and is a vital component of religious practice. For Gell (1998), this implies that the agency of the work of art is not restricted to its creator, but is also shaped by the interpretation and experience of the observer.

In many cultures, for example, the veneration of religious images is not only due to an aesthetic appreciation, but to a deep belief that these images have a force that can influence the spiritual world. Thus, religious art has the power to reinforce faith, to bring individuals closer to a high spiritual state, or even to act as a channel of communication between the earthly and the divine.

Latour's (2008) reflection expands this idea by addressing the contemporary relationship with images and iconoclasm (destruction of images) in modern societies. Latour (2008) analyzes how the destruction and veneration of images are intertwined in a dynamic that goes beyond the simple worship of objects or icons. Rather than considering the destruction of images solely as an act of rejection or criticism of the sacred, Latour (2008) suggests that the cult of images remains a central phenomenon, even in societies that consider themselves secular. He proposes that religious images, and more broadly cultural and political icons, have the power to mobilize and transform social reality. Even in a modern world in which traditional religion has lost part of its centrality, images continue to perform a fetishistic function, in which objects and symbols take on an agency that organizes the relations of power, identity, and culture.

Latour (2008) also criticizes the idea that religious images are only "false" or "illusory". For him, images have a symbolic force that can be transformative, whether for worship and worship, or for the construction of collective identities and the organization of social realities. He notes that in the modern world, we are no longer just dealing with traditional religious images, but with contemporary fetishes, ranging from mass media to icons of political and social power.

Even in contemporary societies, the worship of images, whether through media, technology, or consumerism, remains a significant force, which, in a similar way to religious worship, continues to mediate the relationship between the collective and the sacred. The phenomenon of new religions and emerging sacred symbols points to the urgency of creating spaces for dialogue and learning that promote harmonious coexistence and respect for the plurality of beliefs (Dos Santos et al, 2024).



On the other hand, Jean-Pierre Vernant, in *From the Double to the Image of Myth and Thought among the Greeks* (1990) and *Figuration and Image* (1992), offers an analysis of the role of images in ancient Greek culture, especially in relation to myth and religion. Vernant (1990, 1992) argues that, for the Greeks, images were not simple representations of the divine, but instruments of thought and reflection. Mythological figures and images of gods in ancient cultures not only represented a supernatural entity or force, but were intrinsically linked to the structuring of human thinking about the world. For the Greeks, images of gods and heroes not only expressed beliefs, but were also means of organizing reality, helping to structure social and political understanding.

In his work, Vernant (1990, 1992) also discusses how Greek images were not isolated from social practice, but were immersed in rituals and myths that gave meaning to everyday life. The relationship between myth, thought, and image is central to understanding how religious art worked in Ancient Greece. Images, such as temples and sculptures of gods, were not merely objects of veneration, but representations that helped structure the religious experience and social life of the Greeks. Organizing the collective perception of the divine, connecting individuals to the mythological and spiritual world.

The relationship between art and religion in ancient Greece, as Vernant (1990) points out, was dynamic and interactive, and images played a practical role as mediators between human beings and divinities. This dynamic is particularly interesting as it contrasts with the modern view of religious art, which tends to be more passive or contemplative. However, the idea that religious art has an active function, whether in Ancient Greece or in contemporary societies, finds parallels with Gell's (1998) view of the agency of art.

Both thinkers, Gell (1998) and Vernant (1990), suggest that religious art has a structuring function in the broadest sense. If, for Gell (1998), art is a means of distributing the divine presence through the "agency" of sacred objects, for Vernant (1990), images have the power to organize reality and thought. Although their approaches are different, both recognize the role of religious art as an active element in the mediation of social and spiritual relations. These images are not only passive, but act as mediators and channels of communication that form the meeting point between human beings and the divine.

THE ROLE OF SACRED IMAGES IN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF PRACTICING RELIGIONS OF AFRICAN AND CATHOLIC ORIGINS

In order to understand the influence of images on beliefs and religiosity, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten subjects who agreed to participate voluntarily. Understanding that practitioners of the Catholic and African religions have a



strong relationship with sacred images, similar questions were raised about the role of sacred images in the traditions of their religions and their influence on their belief. From here, the results and analyses of the speeches of Catholics and practitioners of religions of African origin are presented, citing the similarities and differences in the answers.

When asked about the role of sacred images in their religious tradition and how these images influence the beliefs of the faithful, most Catholic respondents cite that images are a way of communicating with the sacred, they are a bridge with the divine, with the sacred, that sacred images play a significant role in the Catholic religious tradition, serving as instruments of devotion and catechesis. They are not venerated in themselves, but rather as visual representations of sacred figures that help the faithful direct their prayers and deepen their faith.

The practitioners of African-based religions corroborate this idea, although they use different vocabulary, as they speak of the images as a representation of a divine energy, they believe that the image reinforces the belief in the Saints and Guides, and in a way materializes them, in addition to functioning as a point of strength within the houses/religious centers. They are points of worship, receptacles of offerings and work as lightning rods to absorb and transform negative energies. Proving that humans often need something material to help in this connection with this sacred energy and also works as a symbology.

Regarding the function of religious images in the life of each one and their personal or collective meaning, some excerpts from the reports of the interviewees considered essential for understanding the theme studied are quoted below:

"I have a strong connection with the images, it has to do not only with religion, but with my cultural background. I speak with the images I have on an altar at home, I thank you, I ask for some grace"

"Strengthen my faith, bring me closer to the sacred"

"Sacred images have a personal value, helping the Catholic Christian in his life, prayer and spiritual elevation. However, it also has a great collective value"

"They represent the meaning of their existence (the entities) one day on earth"

"It has a lot of meaning for our family, in addition to protecting us from possible negative energies from outside that may try to affect us, it also balances our own energy, so I would say that the image has a collective meaning."

"They manifest divine/ancestral presence and intervention in our lives."



"I interpret it as a symbology, something that helps my connection to the sacred. For me they have a personal meaning, but it can also be shared with people who profess the same faith"

It is observed that the objects bring representativeness to a religious community, confirm the faith of a people and help in the identification of other members according to the empirical research carried out. Its symbology represents divine intervention. According to what was researched in the studies of Latour (2008), images have a symbolic force that can be transformative, whether for worship and worship, or for the construction of collective identities and the organization of social realities.

Religious images do exert a strong influence on the beliefs and behavior of individuals through various psychological and social mechanisms. For Catholics it is a way of glorifying God and the saints, of materializing faith in an object considered sacred, being leaders when they are in prayer. They represent the divine. Practitioners of Catholicism explain that they function as visual symbols that evoke feelings of devotion, comfort, and spiritual connection. Seeing a sacred image can elicit an emotional response, reinforcing faith and encouraging religious practices such as prayers, meditation, and participation in rituals.

Research participants add that from an educational point of view, images serve as tools for catechesis, helping to convey religious stories and values, especially in contexts where access to reading or sacred texts may be limited. They simplify and make complex concepts tangible, helping believers to internalize religious narratives and teachings in a more accessible way. This is in line with what Vernant (1990; 1992) affirms in relation to images having the power to organize reality and thought.

In addition, the constant presence of religious images in places of worship and in homes influences behavior by reminding believers to live according to the principles of their faith. Images of saints, for example, are often seen as examples of virtues to be imitated, such as charity, humility, and courage. This power of evocation can also create a sense of community and collective identity, uniting individuals around common symbols and practices. On this issue of artifacts, Gell (1998) introduces the idea that they are not merely decorative or aesthetic, but have the role of playing an active figure in people's social and spiritual lives.

The interviewees who practice African-based Religions understand that in their faith the contact with Saints and Entities occurs through incorporation, but it is not something that happens every day. And just as they behave respectfully during incorporations, they also behave in front of images. Others explain that praying, offering and praying in



tabernacles are concrete ways to transform feelings, thoughts, behaviors and also transform undesirable external effects. They point out that it is easier to have something tangible that refers to your faith than something that is only in the mind.

The rituals of adoration of images appear both in the Catholic religion and in those of African origins as something somewhat reprehensible, but they all end up doing it. Most participants understand that the images are just symbology, but admit that they involve them in their faith rituals. Below are some important points from the statements of the research participants that confirm this controversy between not being able to worship images and performing rituals where worship ends up occurring in moments of manifestation of faith.

"For those who were raised praying, asking and giving thanks through images, going to a temple without images is strange. It seems that something is missing"

"The images bring us closer to the saints, as if we could speak to them through them, I talk to them in my prayers"

"In the Catholic Church, images are objects that by themselves have no power and cannot be worshipped, but that excite human faith. Traditionally, we celebrate the lives of these men and women (Saints) with processions, where with the floats decorated with flowers, we walk along the public roads, in a prophetic sign that we are walking towards heaven, under the intercession of these people"

"... There are those who consider themselves more devout because they have exuberant images, but these people actually do not understand much about the message of Umbanda and should not be used as an example of the majority"

"I position myself in front of the image of a specific Orisha, light a candle, say a prayer or sing a song of praise to him. The image helps me to direct myself to that energy that it represents"

Another important point mentioned by the Catholic and Umbanda interviewees is in relation to the religious syncretism that emerged in Brazil and that involves exactly the images of Catholic saints that have come to have representation for the rituals of Umbanda. They comment that the issue of idolatry and the use of Catholic images in Afro-Brazilian religions is a complex issue that reflects the historical and cultural interaction between Christianity and African religious traditions brought to the Americas.

One interviewee comments that *"This resulted in a religious syncretism, in which Catholic saints were associated with orishas and deities of Afro-Brazilian religions, such as Candomblé and Umbanda. For example, St. George is often associated with Ogun, the*



orisha of war and technology, and Our Lady of Aparecida is related to Oshun, the goddess of fresh waters and fertility."

In the official Catholic perspective, the veneration of images is not considered idolatry, as the Church teaches that images are a means of honoring the saints and the sacred events they represent, and not objects of worship in themselves. However, the relationship between Catholic images and Afro-Brazilian religions highlights the diversity of interpretations and the cultural richness that arises from the interaction between different religious traditions. This raises discussions about identity, syncretism, and the way religious images can take on multiple meanings in diverse contexts, challenging theological and cultural boundaries.

One of the interviewees, a representative of African-based religions, reports that

"Umbanda came through syncretism in Brazil and uses images of Catholic Saints, some people who follow the line of Umbanda crossed with Candomblé defend the use of the image of the Yoruba Orishas, alleging the lack of need to maintain the use of these Catholic Saints in current times. However, even though I am devoted to the Orixás, I believe that religions have traditions and that umbanda has been what it has been for decades and people should have the freedom to follow what they believe."

Asked about the main religious symbols in their daily lives, the interviewees mentioned:

Catholics:

"The image of Christ on the cross, of Our Lady, and of the Saints"

"The rosary, images of Our Lady, of Jesus Christ, of the holy family".

"Jesus Crucified"

Religions of African Origin:

"The crossed out stitches".

"Images, paintings, clothes, settlements and bowls, ways of pleasing the entities..."

"Images of orishas or entities, candles, white clothes, atabaque, orixá tools."

It is understood that it is not so much about emotional or symbolic involvement, but about materiality lived and practiced for a process of continuous transformations. In relation to art and religion in the cultural sense and as a form of divine communication, the participants of the research demonstrated a great appreciation of art in its cultural sense and at the same time in the divine sense. Catholics explained that art has always been highly valued by practitioners of religion and that historically many artists of enormous value



were Catholics. Let us see below some excerpts from the speeches of three Catholic participants on this topic:

Art has always been very important to Catholics. Sacred art is an artistic manifestation. Several painters and sculptors became famous for this type of art, such as: Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, in Brazil O Aleijadinho... lots and lots of them. So, yes, art is a communication with the Divine in the Catholic religion. Sacred art represents our culture, which was brought by the colonizers, and which we can observe in the churches of the Baroque period, mainly. It is part of our history and our culture. Sacred art brings us closer to the sacred, to the divine. In Catholic culture, art is often understood as a manifestation of beauty that reflects the glory of God. Great masters such as Michelangelo and Raphael have created works that transcend time, touching the human spirit and provoking admiration that refers to the divine. The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, with its stunning scenes of Creation and the Last Judgment, is an example of how art can be seen as a form of divine communication, elevating the minds of the faithful as they contemplate the mysteries of faith.

In the cultural and religious tradition, especially in contexts such as Catholicism and Christian-based religions, art has historically played a vital role in the expression and transmission of the faith. The relationship between art and religion runs deep, with art often seen as a means of divine communication, a bridge between the earthly and the transcendent. Works of art, such as paintings, sculptures, and stained glass windows in churches, not only beautify places of worship but serve as pedagogical tools that convey biblical stories, spiritual values, and examples of virtue. Religious actions are manifestations that constitute through a ritual that is very much found around a myth, and materialized through ritualistic actions. The rites, in general, are manifested through art, especially the different elements that are interconnected to the art of a symbolic language (Lima, 2024).

When analyzing the answers of the interviewees of the religions of African origin, it is perceived that there are many points of convergence, despite the differences in spiritual practices. Let's see some of the relevant answers on the theme of art and religion and spiritual communication:

Art and culture are fundamental bases of religions of African origins, we have music where our instruments are read as deities, dance is widely used by entities that come on land, the foods are traditional. It is very common for us to have parties in honor of Them with dancing, music and food of their liking. There is a direct relationship. For example, in the drumming, singing of songs, dances, artisanal production of bead threads, even the cuisine is done in an artistic way, worrying about every visual detail of a saint's food.

For the research subjects who are from the group that declare themselves as Catholics, religious images still have power and relevance in people's beliefs in contemporary society and despite the condemnation of some religions, there are still many people who feel the need for images in their faith. They are linked to cultural aspects, in addition to religious ones. In this way, they understand that sacred art still has a lot of



influence, whether for beauty, curiosity, or even for the belief that still brings people together with regard to this connection between images and the sacred.

According to the thought of the Catholics interviewed, it is concluded that art in the Catholic Church, in its essence, has the function of educating, inspiring and spiritually elevating. It is not just decorative, but a means of leading the faithful to a deeper experience of the sacred. In addition, sacred art continues to evolve and find new expressions in the world, whether through contemporary interpretations in modern churches or through the preservation and restoration of ancient masterpieces. It remains a way to connect past and present generations in a common heritage of faith, beauty, and transcendence.

Within the theme of art and religion and religious communication through art in contemporary times, religious people of African origins presented important considerations, for them, religion follows traditions and their beliefs have grounded bases. They highlighted that in African-based religions, tradition is very important, as it reaffirms them as religious and helps to combat the religious intolerance they suffer to this day. Therefore, everything that is art and culture has its value and everything is divine in their understanding: image, food, music, dance, clothing... among other forms of artistic and cultural expression. They showed concern about the space they have been losing with the growth of evangelical Christianity because it brings with it persecution and prejudice in relation to religious rituals and the images they use through clothes, artifacts and everything else.

Catholics and practitioners of African-based religions present questions that are very close to the research of Gell (1998) and Vernant (1990), as these theorists suggest that religious art has a structuring function in the broadest sense, that art is a means of distributing the divine presence through the "agency" of sacred objects, and that images have the power to organize reality and thought. Both the two authors and the subjects of the empirical research recognize the role of religious art as an active element in the mediation of social and spiritual relations where images are not passive, as they perform the mediation, communication of human beings and the divine.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study aimed to analyze the intersection between art and religion from the anthropological perspective proposed by Alfred Gell (1998), complemented by interviews with practitioners from different religious traditions. The bibliographic investigation allowed us to deepen the critical understanding of the notion of agency attributed to religious images, highlighting how, in the context of the sacred, art transcends



its aesthetic and representational function to constitute itself as an active mediator between the human and the divine.

From the work of Gell (1998), it is understood that religious artifacts operate as extensions of the person and as centers of distributed agency. This conception was enriched by the theoretical contributions of Jean-Pierre Vernant (1990), who problematizes the symbolic function of the image in ancient Greek culture, and Bruno Latour (2008), whose actor-network theory reinforces the idea that non-human objects participate in networks of action and meaning.

On the empirical level, the analysis of the interviews conducted with Catholics and practitioners of African-based religions evidenced the consonance between the lived experience of the subjects and Gell's theoretical assumptions. Participants attributed to religious images an active role in spiritual mediation, describing them as endowed with presence, agency, and the ability to influence their devotional practices and perceptions of the sacred. These reports confirm that images are not perceived only as visual symbols, but as agents with which complex, affective and transformative relationships are established.

Thus, it is concluded that art and religion, from the anthropological perspective adopted here, are intertwined in a dynamic of symbolic power, agency and experience. Religious images reveal themselves as central devices in the construction of spiritual and social worlds, being fundamental for understanding the ways in which individuals experience and update their beliefs. This intersection suggests that the study of religious art demands an approach that considers not only the aesthetic or historical aspects, but also the ways in which such objects act in and on the world, constituting themselves as vital elements in the spiritual and cultural life of the subjects.



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