



# FLAYING THE IMAGE: SKIN AND FLESH IN JUSEPE DE RIBERA'S MARTYRDOMS OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW

**Bogdan Cornea**

## **Abstract**

*Jusepe de Ribera painted the martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew more than any artist of the seventeenth century – more than a dozen works are documented, with six paintings still in existence. While these works have habitually been interpreted as images of extreme violence due to the gruesomeness of the subject, I argue here that they confront viewers with visual paradoxes by refusing to align or to make coherent the relationship between their subject and their technique. I argue that Ribera's Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew (1634, National Gallery of Art, Washington) and Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew (1644, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona) work the potentiality of canvas and oils as flesh or skin in divergent ways, thereby dislodging the possibility of interpreting narrative, temporality and violence in simple alignment or identity. In so doing, Ribera's paintings of flaying produce new relations between figures and surfaces that are capable of effecting new forms of violence.*

**Keywords:** Jusepe de Ribera, skin, violence, time, impasto, folds

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## **Biographical note**

Bogdan Cornea is an art historian and writer currently based in Amsterdam. Bogdan studied Art and Literature at the University of Leiden before completing his PhD at the University of York in 2015. His doctoral thesis focused on Jusepe de Ribera's images of flaying. With the aid of a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship from the University of York, Bogdan is currently developing his thesis into a monograph on corporeality and violence in seventeenth-century art.

## FLAYING THE IMAGE: SKIN AND FLESH IN JUSEPE DE RIBERA'S MARTYRDOMS OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW

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Mutilated bodies, faces twisted with pain, flayings and ruthless martyrdoms are the subjects that occupy much of Jusepe de Ribera's oeuvre. His name has become synonymous over the centuries with a terrifying art of victims and executioners. Known to his contemporaries and early writers as *Lo Spagnoletto* and *Lo Spagnolo* ('the Little Spaniard', 'the Spaniard'), Ribera's reputation was

fanned in the nineteenth century by the Romantics; Lord Byron writing that: 'Spagnoletto tainted / His brush with all the blood of all the sainted' (*Don Juan*, xiii. 71). Most scholarship even today tends to interpret Ribera's violent images as the product of either his supposedly tormented life – as constructed by his eighteenth-century biographer Bernardo de' Dominici – his Spanish origin or/and the purportedly violent nature of Neapolitan society (Felton and Jordan, 1982, pp.35–6; Whitefield and Martineau, 1983, p.22). Ribera was born in 1591 at Xàtiva near Valencia in Spain and travelled to Rome in 1611, where he is documented as having joined the Academy of Saint Luke. In 1616, he moved permanently to Naples where he became one of the leading figures of the art world, having acquired fame during his lifetime for delighting in subject of horror, as de' Dominici states in the artist's biography.

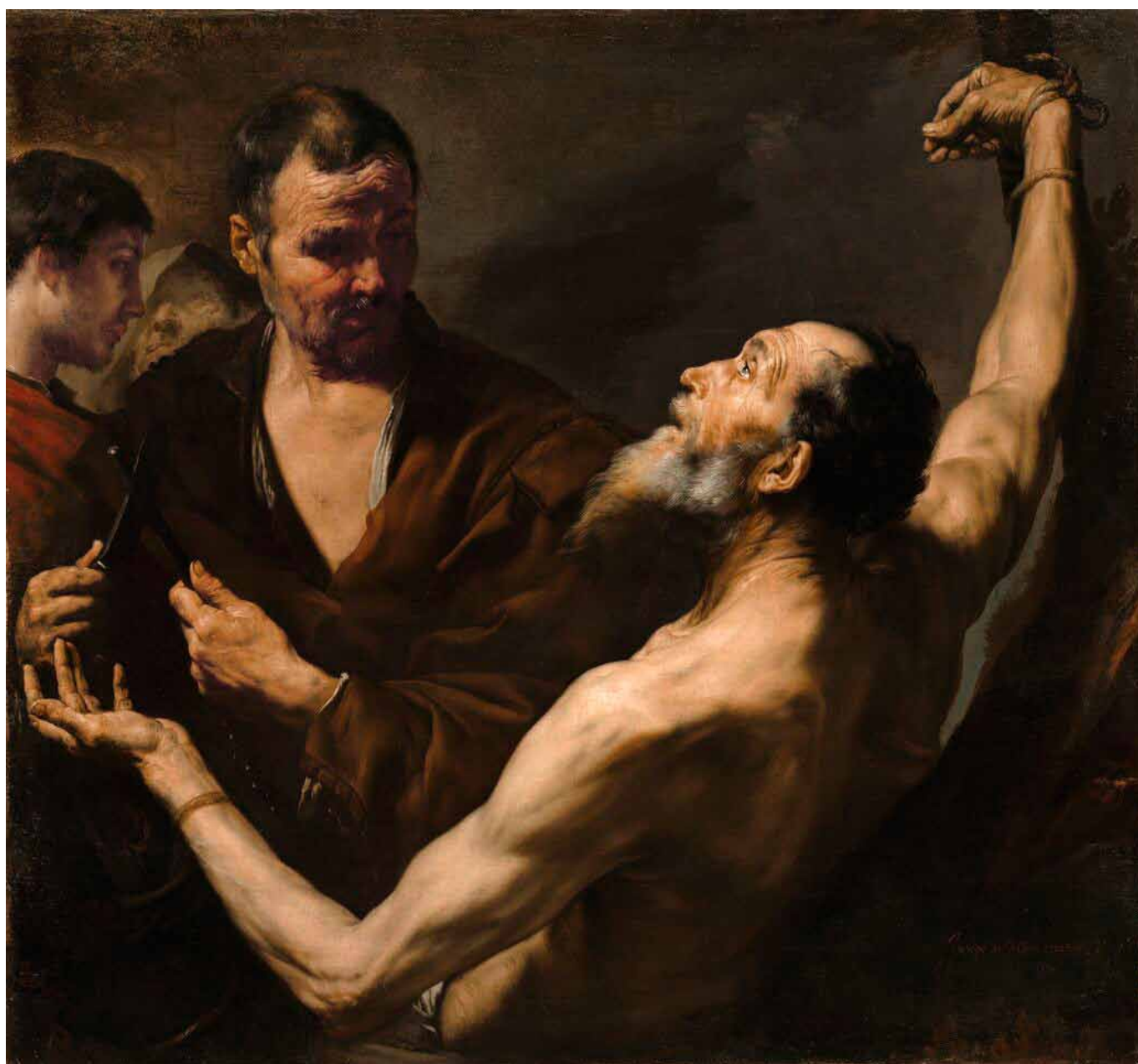


Figure 6.1: Jusepe de Ribera, *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, 1634. Oil on canvas, 104 x 113cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington. (Image credit: Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)



This essay argues that the violence that pervades Ribera's paintings of flaying stems from the friction of what may be termed 'displacement' that is at work between subject and technique. This can be observed in Ribera's handling of pictorial surfaces in relation to corporeal surfaces: how the texture and consistency of the canvas and paint staged as open flesh and ruptured

skin displaces the painting's temporality and narrative. Ribera offers a particularly prolonged and visceral engagement with these issues in his *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* (Fig. 6.1) (1634, National Gallery of Art, Washington) and *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* (Fig. 6.2) (1644, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona). In this essay, I show how the extreme

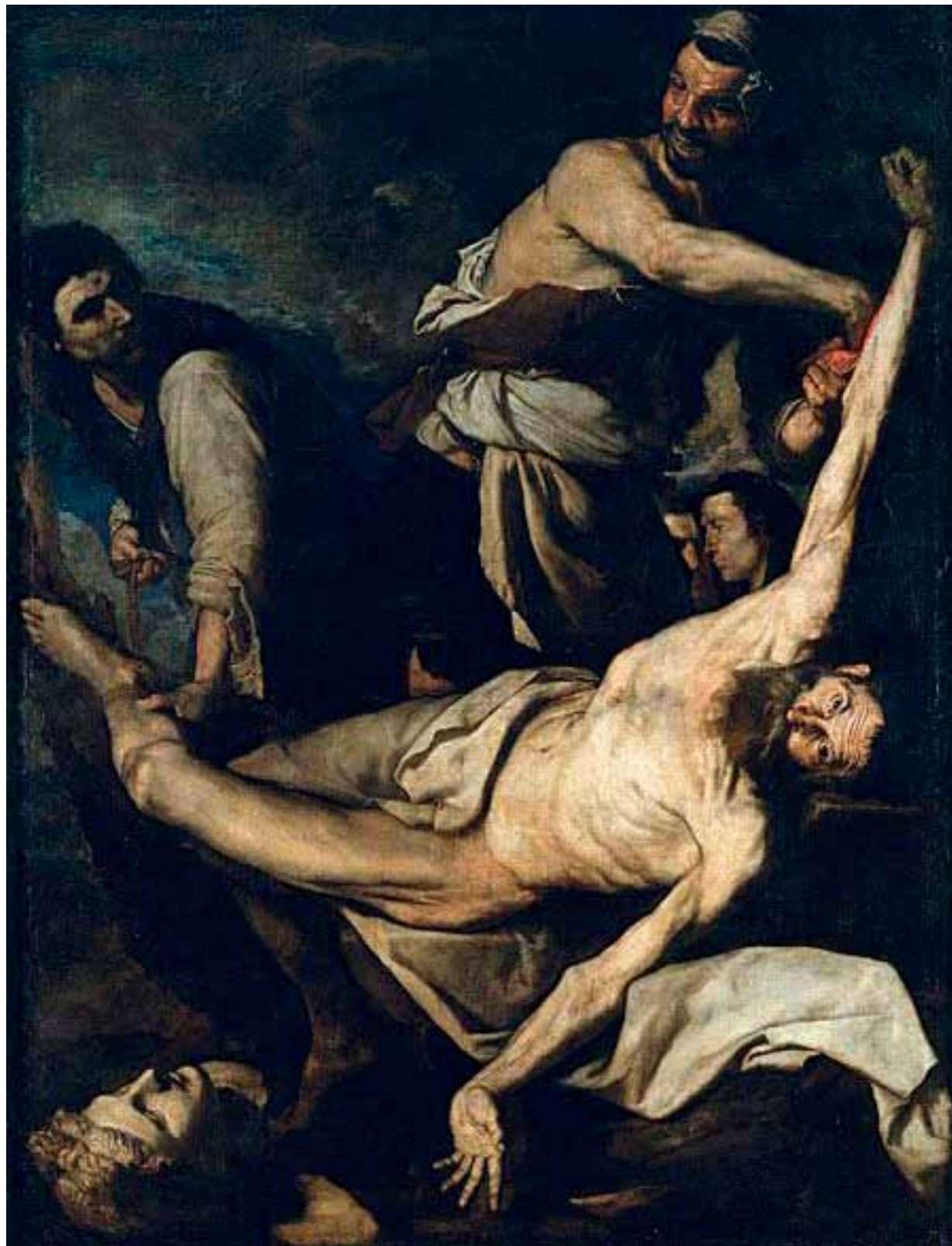


Figure 6.2: Jusepe de Ribera, *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, 1644. Oil on Canvas, 153 x 202cm, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona. (Image credit: © Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2017) / Photo: Jordi Calveras)

violence of Ribera's two versions of the *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* emerges from their visual paradox of never aligning or making coherent the relationship between the flaying of the saint's body and the treatment of the canvas and paint as flesh and skin. The dislocation between subject and technique produces a shift or rupture in the coherency between time and narrative, identity and materiality.

Art historians have failed to address the displacement at work between subject and technique in Ribera's art, dealing with questions of style, attribution and biography, or attempting to place the artist's work within the Neapolitan artistic milieu.<sup>1</sup> Nicola Spinosa, for instance, accounts for the violence of Ribera's painting, especially his scenes of martyrdom, in terms of a general violence of 'man against man' that supposedly gives visual form to the conflict between spirit and matter, nature and history, and dream and reality (1992, pp.22–4). More recently, Javier Portus explains Ribera's images of violence by attributing them to the artist's interest in depicting emotions in order to convey fervent religious feelings of devotion, piety, cruelty and pain (2011, p.92).

Some scholars have interpreted Ribera's paintings of violence by appealing to philosophical and literary ideas circulating in Naples in the early years of the seventeenth century. Thus Juan Luis González García (2000, pp.214–25) interprets Ribera's chiaroscuro as 'reflecting' the rising popularity in the early seventeenth century of Aristotle's *Poetics*, with its emphasis on tragedy, and Longinus' *On the Sublime*. To Harald Hendrix, the aesthetic of extreme violence permeating early seventeenth-century Neapolitan painting is a response to the dissemination of Giambattista Marino's poetical concept of *meraviglia*, deemed to produce emotions of 'shock', 'wonder' and 'astonishment' (2003, pp.68–91). These studies attempt to explain Ribera's paintings by appealing to literary and philosophical concepts; an approach that risks turning artworks into mere reflections or illustrations of patrons or literati.

Few scholars have specifically addressed the depiction of flesh and skin in Ribera's work. Portus argues that the wrinkles, the aged skin, the ragged attire and even the earthy range of colours belong to a 'theory of realism' that reflects a codified vocabulary dating back to antiquity, and which emerged as an alternative to conventions that supposedly governed painting since the renaissance (2011, p.40). This interpretation of Ribera's art is partly informed by Itay Sapir's useful study of Ribera's engagement with skin and surfaces in relation to the hierarchy of the senses (2014–5, pp.29–39). According to Sapir, Ribera's paintings of the martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew create a play between the corporeal, tactile experience of the

saint's suffering and his deficient visual perception when looking into the light shining from above – a tension that challenges sight and privileges touch (pp.37–8). Thus, existing scholarship on Ribera does not address the problematic of disjunction at work within his paintings, because their various paradigms focus on providing a coherent stylistic narrative, or assume continuity between paintings and literary or social context in order to account for the paintings' extreme violence. When scholars acknowledge Ribera's painting techniques – heavy impasto, exposing canvas threads and chiaroscuro – they do not set it into a correlative relationship with the subject matter, nor are they concerned with its effect within the process of interpretation.

Ribera's paintings however articulate a relationship between subject and technique that is fraught with tensions, frictions and contradictions. This can be observed by comparing Ribera's *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* (Fig. 6.2) (1644) with the *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* (Fig. 6.1) (1634). In the 1644 *Martyrdom* (Fig. 6.2) the violence of the subject – conveyed through the explicit act of flaying and the daunting gaze of the saint – is heightened by the impasto, as well as the ruptures and cuts that appear on the painting's surface as a result of the painting's process of aging. What is more, the restrained intensity of the subject in the *Martyrdom* of 1634 (Fig. 6.1), showing a moment just before the flaying when the executioner stops and stares at the saint with a look that betrays a touch of empathy, is rendered with broad, rough and coarse impasto, especially on the figures of the saint and executioner.

In both paintings, the texture of the canvas, as well as the consistency and layering of paint exceed their roles as mere materials that convey the complexity of a narrative moment by becoming active elements in the violence and drama of the subject depicted. The relationship between corporeal and pictorial surfaces becomes essential as these paintings stage the canvas and paint either as flesh or skin. This dynamic echoes and reinforces the flaying of the saint. It also dislodges the assumed coherency between the meaning produced by materials and the subject they depict. In Ribera's paintings, the violence of the ruptures on the pictorial surface influences the interpretation of the subject's temporality, which, I argue, creates a heightened sense of violence.

### **The matter of flesh and skin**

The manipulation of canvas and paint as flesh or skin was considered problematic in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century art-historical discourse since

there was no fixed identity ascribed to either material. Rather, canvas and paint were variously understood as flesh or skin (Pericolo, 2011, pp.446–9; Bohde, 2003; Bohde, 2002). Two sixteenth-century texts address this issue. Giovan Paolo Armenini writes in *De' veri precetti della pittura* published in 1582:

And then comes the skin, which covers everything, and which Nature created soft and delicate, strewn with a beautiful and alluring variety of tints; as a covering, the skin renders the body's whole composition pleasant, graceful, and marvellous; [the execution of] this part is difficult by all means, but especially so in the representation of those nudes demanding much artifice, which therefore causes knowledgeable scholars to insist ordinarily on an excess upon whatever lies underneath it, which they believe to be accomplished and, always keeping this in mind they hardly tolerate [adding] the ultimate finish of the skin, as if they were displeased to employ [here] their knowledge, which they [instead] strive to express outside [in representing whatever lies underneath the skin] with such hardship.

(Armenini in Pericolo, 2011, p.488)<sup>2</sup>

Armenini argues that painters should not pay excessive attention to anatomical precision of human figures, conveyed through under-drawings of the human body, as demanded by the art critics of the time. Instead, they should attend to the surface of the figures by covering them with soft and delicate skin in a variety of tints, thus making them look more pleasant and less artificial. Armenini's text goes on to suggest that the surface of the painting is to be interpreted as skin when he mentions that the art critics 'hardly tolerate the ultimate finish of the skin' that covers the under-drawings of the paintings.

Raffaello Borghini in *Il Riposo* (1584) also argues that the surface of paint can be interpreted as skin:

The good painter must put aside the canvas for many days until the applied colours are dry; then, one must consider it attentively, and amend what needs to be emended, giving it its ultimate skin of finest colour, diluted in little oil, so that they will be always beautiful and lively (alive).

(Borghini in Pericolo, 2011, p.449)<sup>3</sup>

For Borghini, the thin layers of paint appear as the figure's ultimate skin – the place where they acquire a sense of life and movement. However, Borghini does not assign a fixed identity to paint as skin and canvas

as flesh. Rather he sees skin as colour and life.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, elsewhere the writer interprets the supporting surface – in this case the wall of a fresco – also as skin:

One must apply this mixture on the wall with a large brush, spreading it with a heated towel in order to cover all the holes of the plaster layer, thereby making a uniform and smooth skin over the entire wall.

(Borghini in Pericolo, 2011, pp.448–9)<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, skin and flesh have no simple relation to either canvas or paint in the sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century. Lodovico Dolce points this out in his *Dialogo della Pittura* (1557):

So he who practices a detailed elaboration of the muscles is really aiming at giving an organized picture of the bone structure, and this is commendable; often, however, he succeeds in making the human figure look flayed or desiccated or ugly. He who works in the delicate manner, on the other hand, gives an indication of the bones where he needs to do so; but he covers them with sweet flesh and charges (fills) the nude figure with grace.

(Dolce in Roskill, 2000, pp.142–3)<sup>6</sup>

Dolce – echoing Armenini's advice – suggests that painters should not be unduly concerned with anatomical knowledge and drawings, since it risks making the figure look dry and lifeless. Instead, they should concern themselves with the surface of the figures, covering them with sweet flesh – 'ricopre dolcemente di carne' – in order to give them grace. Remarkable in Dolce's account is the use of the term *carne*, which is usually translated as flesh, though here it stands for both flesh and skin.

The interchangeable understanding of canvas and paint as either flesh or skin allows for the dislocation between technique and subject in Ribera's paintings of the martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew to emerge more sharply. Thus, in the 1644 *Martyrdom* (Fig. 6.2) the ruptured paint can be interpreted as skin and the visible texture of canvas as exposed flesh, while in the *Martyrdom* of 1634 (Fig. 6.1) the loose brushstrokes of the impasto appear as sections of open flesh and the canvas underneath as submerged skin.

### Turning flesh

In Ribera's Washington *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* (Fig. 6.1) the open brushstrokes of the impasto are staged as sections of opened flesh, but the canvas underneath as submerged skin. The impasto appears to be more rough and open especially on Bartholomew's



hands and face – as the most expressive parts of the body – thus relating the articulacy of the human body with the pictorial technique. Significant is the use of the impasto on the saint's hands when considered in relation to their arrangement. The right hand (Fig. 6.3), positioned deep within the picture, has the thumb touching the forefinger, while the left hand (Fig. 6.4), situated close to the viewer, is open. The distinct visibility of the brushstrokes and the thickness of the paint are staged in this painting as open flesh. This suggests that the body of the saint is turned inside out by the impasto as Ribera's impasto dislocates time from the subject's narrative sequence by opening Bartholomew's body to expose his flesh before the knife of the executioner actually touched the skin.

The complex relationship between impasto and violence in Ribera's art was noted by the biographer Bernardo de' Dominici in his *Vite dei Pittori, Scultori, ed Architetti Napolitani* (1742):

And so [Ribera] return to his earlier studies, and began to paint with bold innate power and tremendous (*tremendo*) impasto so dense and full of colour, that can reasonably be said that in this respect he superseded Caravaggio himself.

(de' Dominici, 1742, p.3)<sup>7</sup>

De' Dominici associated Ribera's thick and coarse application of paint, his impasto, with a powerful sense of violence by describing it as *tremendo*. In Italian the term *impastare* means 'to slur', 'to make a dough' or 'to mix', while the verb *impastare* translates variously as 'to blur', 'to mould' or 'paste'. Impasto describes a manner of handling materials where the artist, at certain point in the process of creation, gives up the tools of his profession to work with his bare hands. This allows viewers to trace the artist's workmanship and in so doing making them aware of the power of his creative touch.

Ribera's impasto takes on sculptural qualities reminiscent of Michelangelo's *non-finito*.<sup>8</sup> Literally meaning 'unfinished' or 'not finished', the *non-finito* refers to the technique where the artist intentionally leaves certain areas or the entirety of a work in an unpolished rough state. This method emphasises the unevenness of the surface, while suggesting an unfinished process of viewing and interpretation that allows the artwork to continue in the viewer's imagination in decidedly unfixed ways; indeed, the *non-finito* also suggests 'infinity' (as 'never finished'). The *non-finito* was predominantly associated with Michelangelo's sculptures – and thus closely related to the master's

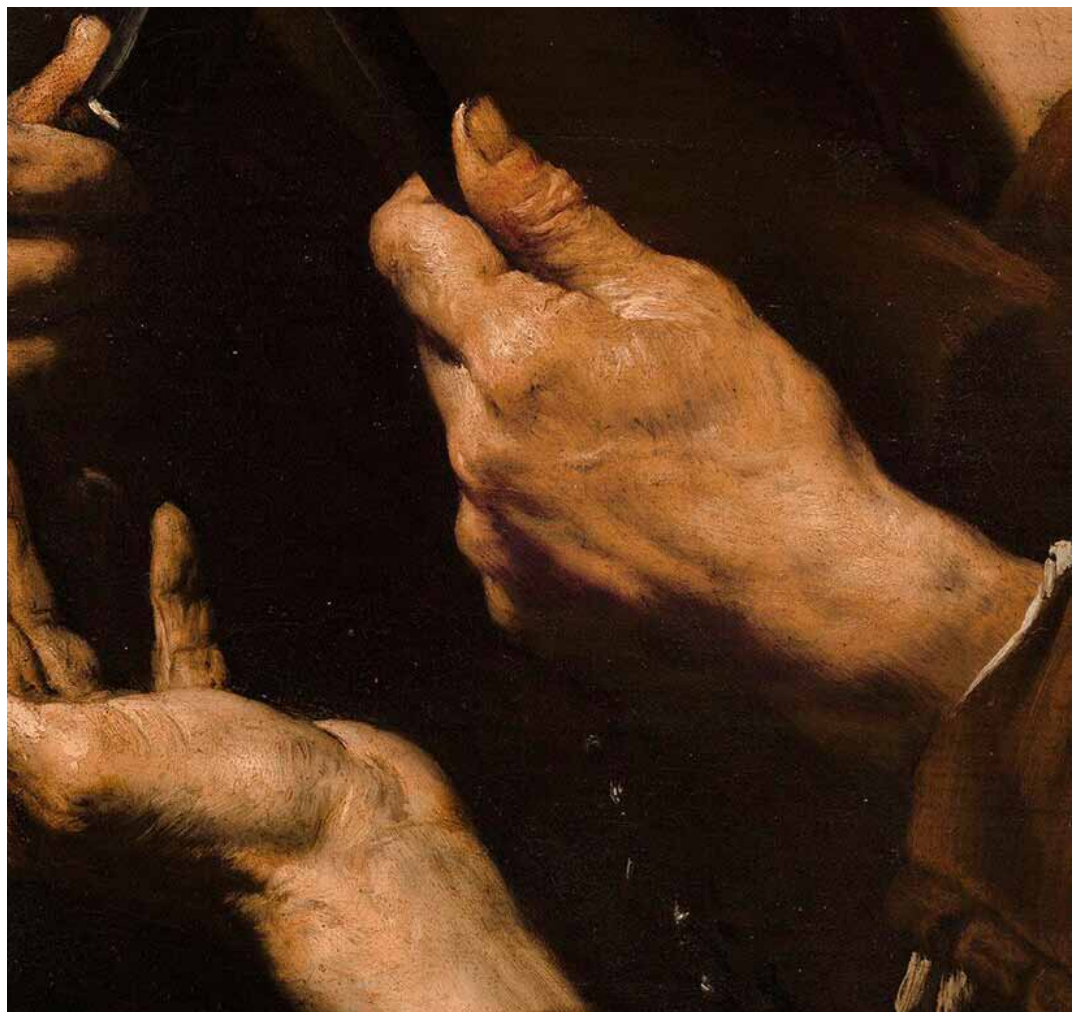


Figure 6.3: Jusepe de Ribera, detail of *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, 1634. National Gallery of Art, Washington. (Image credit: Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

*terribilità* and *furore*. Michelangelo's method of pulling out or extracting bodies from a base mass through his 'divine' touch can be fruitfully contrasted with Ribera's *tremendo impasto*. The adjective *tremendo* – English: *tremendous* – means awful, terrifying, fearsome and unbearable. It suggests a state or moment of extreme tension and intensity, an inspiring awe or dread. Thus de' Dominici's use of the word *tremendo* to describe Ribera's impasto can be seen as a reference to the way the technique in which a certain painting is executed can sense of violence – a terrifying intensity that threatens the integrity of the subject.

Other contemporaneous writers emphasised the relationship between violence and technique in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian painting. The Bolognese essayist and historian Virgilio Malvezzi, for instance, made a similar observation about Titian's technique in his commentary on Plutarch's *Life of Coriolanus*, titled *Considerationi con occasione d'alcuni luoghi delle vite d'Alcibiade e di Coriolano* (1648). While discussing Titian's change of style, from his earliest smooth finish to the late opened brushstrokes named by Vasari *pittura di macchia*, Malvezzi observed:

Titian, perhaps the most famous of painters, and certainly among the most famous, painted

at times with so many and such diligent brushstrokes that it almost seemed as if he wished to make each and every hair countable; and at times he was content to rough in his paintings with few and very rough strokes. The intelligent observer of such diverse styles will recognize in the one the charm of the feminine, in the other robust masculinity. The former will be given passing praise; the latter will hold one fast in admiring contemplation: one will feel oneself gently attracted by the delicate, violently seized upon by the crude.

(Malvezzi in Sohm, 1995, p.797)<sup>9</sup>

Malvezzi associated Titian's rough strokes of the impasto with a sense of violence and cruelty – an abductive violence. Giovanni Battista Armenini (in Posner, 1993, p.595), in his *De veri precetti della pittura* (1586), advised viewers not to engage too closely with Tintoretto's paintings because: 'his sketches as finished works are so rough that his impetuous and fierce brushstrokes may be seen.'<sup>10</sup> To Armenini *fierezza* – which in English can be translated as *fierce* – again draws attention to the apparent savage and violent nature of the impasto, as something extremely ruthless



Figure 6.4: Jusepe de Ribera, *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, 1634. National Gallery of Art, Washington. (Image credit: Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)

and terrible. At this point it can be argued that the works themselves acquire a certain violence that may put the viewer in danger.

Similarly, Antonio Palomino was attentive to the relation between corporeal and pictorial surfaces in Ribera's work and their potential to produce violence. In *El Museo pictórico y escala óptica* (1724) he writes:

[Ribera] did not delight in painting sweet and pious things, but to express horrendous and rough things: which are the bodies of old man, dried, wrinkled and consumed with skinny and haggard face; all done with natural accuracy, as a passionate painter, with force and elegant handling: as it is made visible by the *Martyrdom* of Saint Bartholomew, where he is being flayed and the internal anatomy of his arm exposed.

(Palomino in Spinosa, 2003, p.410)<sup>11</sup>

Palomino connects the violence of Ribera's paintings with the forceful and yet elegant impasto technique. He draws particular attention to worn, dried, creased skin of old men's bodies rendered through open brushstrokes on rough canvas. For Palomino, the textures of these surfaces are horrendous and rough; they bear the excessive violence of the paintings – especially in depiction of Saint Bartholomew's martyrdom.

The violence produced by the impasto in Ribera's paintings is closely related to the paintings' strong sense of corporeality. De' Dominici, in his *Vitae*, points towards the impasto as a source of movement that has the potential to turn and set into motion the surface of the painting. De' Dominici remarks:

Is it truly a wonder to see how, with his dense impasto so full of colour, he would not only turn [girare] the muscles of the human body, but every small part of the bones and of the hands and feet, always being finished with an unattainable degree of diligence and mastery.

(de' Dominici, 1742, p.115)<sup>12</sup>

De' Dominici use of the verb *girare*, meaning: 'turning' or 'revolving', can be interpreted as moving the figures. This movement suggests an interpretation of the painting in living corporeal terms – as whole bodies – since de' Dominici is careful to point out that Ribera's figures are not only furnished with skin, but also with flesh, muscles, veins and bones. Moreover, there is a paradox in de' Dominici's texts since the impasto that gives figures life and carnality is also exercising a terrifying violence on their internal structure, bringing their flesh to the surface. Thus, Ribera's technique of impasto can be interpreted as endowing figures with

physicality that becomes violent as the brushstrokes are so rough that the figures get turned inside out, it ruptures their skin and bring to the surface their flesh.

In Ribera's *Martyrdom* (1634) certain areas of the saint's body – especially the neck, face and hands (Figs. 6.3, 6.4 and 6.5) – are staged as open flesh. Variation in the texture and thickness of the impasto creates narrative foci that disrupt the temporality of the painting. Skin is already torn away from the body to display pulsating living flesh, while the executioner is still sharpening his knife. Impasto therefore has the potential to disrupt the sequential moments of the narrative by making visible simultaneously the moment before the flaying and what is yet to come.

The opening of the body through the impasto is countered by the saint's compositional arrangement in a movement that introduces a paradoxical tension between the painting's technique and subject. Bartholomew's body is shown turning away from the viewer in an ambivalent move of interiority. While Bartholomew's body dominates the foreground, his hands, fastened tightly to the tree now barely visible, form a diagonal starting from the upper right corner of the painting leading down to the lower left. This dramatic axis sharpens the saint's pose by forcing his torso to turn away from the viewer. The viewer is confronted with a body caught in a semi-profiled angle, an inwards facing figure, with his arms opened not towards the viewer in a move of exposition, but turned towards his executioner and the internal space of the picture.

Bartholomew's pose appears in its full eccentricity when considered alongside Ribera's 1644 *Martyrdom* (Fig. 6.2) where the saint is shown in a reclining pose with his arms outstretched and a fixed gaze upon the viewers that engages them directly. The main difference between the two depictions of Saint Bartholomew lies in the figure's physical reference to his own corporeality. While in the *Barcelona Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, the saint is vigorously presenting himself to the viewers, seeking their attention and reaction, in the *Washington Martyrdom* the saint seems caught in a paradoxical move where the impasto opens his body towards the viewers while the compositional arrangement of his figure suggests a movement of turning away. Bartholomew's body is staged in a state of intermediacy, as both an opening and a closure, a figure simultaneously positioned in two temporalities, before and after the act of flaying.

### Folding skin

Ribera's *Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew* (Fig. 6.2) (1644) shows the body of Saint Bartholomew's in a movement of folding starting from his upper body and



curving downwards to his feet. Bartholomew's torso, chest, and open hands give the impression of a body stretched and widened so as to resemble a canvas on a stretch bar. The saint's lower body, from his hips down, is engaged in a twisted movement of folding and turning, that echoes that of the white cloth that falls to the ground in sumptuous folds.

The relationship between Bartholomew's body and the white cloth extends beyond their compositional arrangement, to engage also the saint's skin. Thus, on his pelvis, the folds created by the cloth underneath the saint are continued in the folds of his skin and

on his hip; the folds of the canvas are continued in the creases of his skin (Fig. 6.6). The body of the saint seems therefore not only folded onto himself, but also folded in a shared entanglement with the white cloth, and indeed even in to the stretching and unfolding of the painting's canvas.

The fold as theorised by Gilles Deleuze resists typical accounts of subjectivity that assume a simple interiority and exteriority, or surface and depth. Deleuze observes:

The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds



Figure 6.5: Jusepe de Ribera, detail of *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, 1634. National Gallery of Art, Washington. (Image credit: Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington)



Figure 6.6: Jusepe de Ribera, detail of *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, 1644. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona. (Image credit: © Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona (2017) / Photo: Jordi Calveras)



and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside.

(Deleuze, 2006, p.80)

Bartholomew's body is staged as a complex surface devoid of a meaningful interior. The relationship between skin and textile – the texture of the canvas, of the white cloth, of paint and of skin – fold the materials upon each other in a corporeal movement that shows the inside of saint's body to be the outside. Bartholomew's body becomes therefore a complex

layering of surfaces. Titian's depiction of Marsyas in his *The Flaying of Marsyas* (Fig. 6.7) (1570–6, National Museum, Kroměříž) does something similar. Marsyas is tied to the tree with red bows – bows which could not possibly support his weight – thus implying a body devoid of physicality, transforming it into a painterly experiment concerned with skin and its relation to paint (Bohde, 2003, p.46). In Ribera's painting, the relation between skin and cloth stages the saint's body as a folding surface.

The folds of cloth and folds formed by Bartholomew's skin are set in a relationship that



Figure 6.7: Titian, *Flaying of Marsyas*, c. 1570–6. Oil on canvas, 212 x 207 cm, National Museum, Kroměříž. (Image credit: Courtesy of the Archbishopric of Olomouc)

dislocates time from narrative and folds the viewers in a temporal relation with the painting that creates new forms of violence. This can be observed on the torso of Saint Bartholomew and the white cloth covering his groin that are staged as rough surfaces, ruptured and peeled (Fig. 6.6). During the slow process of drying, the crust of the solidifying paint was broken or cracked by rough textured threads of the canvas. Moreover, the process of aging, and later cleanings and restorations allowed for the weave of the canvas to emerge through the surface of paint.<sup>13</sup> This results in a texture that physically changes Bartholomew's appearance from a smooth and articulate exterior to one that is rough and broken. This material process appears today as an act of violence – a brutal rupture that inadvertently alters the surface of the saint's body.

The folds of cloth and skin engage viewers in a material and temporal relation of anachronism with the surface of the painting. For Deleuze the baroque is a particular 'operative function, a trait. It endlessly produces folds' (Deleuze, 2006, p.3). Moreover, Mieke Bal, commenting on Deleuze's folds, points out that 'the fold insists on surface and materiality, a materialism that promotes a realistic visual rhetoric in its wake. The materialism of the fold entails the involvement of the subject within the material experience, thus turning surface into skin in a relation that I call "correlativist"' (2011, p. 191). Thus, the surface of the cloth and skin – damaged and worn by time and later interventions – fold viewers in a material and temporal relationship that extends beyond the subject's time and narrative.

Viewers are therefore confronted with a complex temporal relationship where the materiality of the surface dislocates the relation between the subject's time and narrative. The ruptures and breaks that enact violence on the saint's skin in turn produce a horrifying endless temporality where time is dislocated from narrative. At this point, the matter of the surface becomes horrible. This is not a violence that will end soon with the saint's demise, but will continue to be enacted forever on the painting's surface. For Ribera's painting confronts viewers with the figure of a saint that stares back at them coldly, offering no sign of comfort since the heavenly bliss that presumably awaits him in the afterlife remains an eternity away.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For questions of attribution and style, see: Spinosa (2003) and Papi (2007; 2012). Indeed, there is a growing interest in Ribera's early years, between his arrival in Italy and settling in Naples, evidenced by the 2011 itinerary exhibition *Il giovane Ribera* and *El Joven Ribera* in Naples and Madrid; see Spinosa (2011). For studies that contextualise Ribera's art in Naples, see Felton and Jordan (1982), Cassani (1984) and Whitfield and Martineau (1983). For a study that considers Ribera's art in relation to Naples and Spain, see Perez Sanchez and Spinosa (1992).

<sup>2</sup> 'Di poi vien la pelle, che cuo- pre ogni cosa, la quale la natura ha fatto molle e delicata, sparsa di belle e vaghe varietà dei colori; la qual coperta fa che tutto il componimento del corpo riesca piacevole, vago e meraviglioso; la qual parte è difficile in tutte le maniere, ma e molto più ne gl'ignudi molto artificio, il che ne cagiona la troppo impressioni che gli studiosi si sogliono pigliare delle parti di sotto, le quali essi trovano esser terminate e così, tenedo in mente tuttavia, fan che mal pastiscono poi quest'ultimo compimento della pelle, come che siano quasi costretti a dover mostrare quella intelligenza di loro così spiacevole, che con tanta fatica si sforzano voler esprimere fouri, dove che molti se ne lavano poi finalmente, tardi accorgendosi quella dover essere maniera più conveniente ed atta per i sommi principi che per le private persone, alle quali essi più spesso servono e dove, con più riputazione e men fatica, fanno i fatti loro.' The author's translation.

<sup>3</sup> 'Il buon pittore (...) dee metter da canto il quadro per molti giorni, tantoche i colori dati siano secchi; poi lo rivegga diligentemente, e racconci quello che gli pare da racconciare, e gli dia l'ultima pelle si colori finissimi e temperate con poco olio, che d'ital maniera saranno sempre vaghi e vivi.'

<sup>4</sup> On colour and corporeality, see Lehmann (2008). The author's translation.

<sup>5</sup> 'E questa mistura con un pennel grosso si metta sopra il muro e si vada distendendo con una cazzuola infocata che rituretutti i buchi dell'arricciato e fara una pelle unita e liscia per il muro.' The author's translation.

<sup>6</sup> 'Chi adunque va ricercando minutamente i muscoli, cerca ben di mostrar l'ossature a luoghi: ilche è lodevole; ma spesso volte fa l'huomo scorticato, o secco, o brutto da vedere: ma chi fa il delicate, accenna gliossi, ove bisogna, ma gli ricopre dolcemente di carne, e riempie il nudo di gratia.' The author's translation.

<sup>7</sup> 'Torno dunque a'primieri studi, e si diede col naturale avanti a dipingere di forza con tremendo impasto di color tanto denso, che ragionevolmente puo dirsi che egli in questa parte superasse il Caravaggio stesso.' The author's translation.

<sup>8</sup> The bibliography on Michelangelo's *non-finito* is extensive. For a recent study, see Gilbert (2003).

<sup>9</sup> 'Titiano forse il più famoso Pittore, e senza forse fra più famosi, tal'hora dipinte con tante, e così diligenti pennellate, che parve quasi volesse far numerabili i capelli: e tal' hora si contento grossamente le pitture di pocchi, e rozzissimi colpi figurare. Spettatore intelligente da così diversa maniera nell'una riconosca il vago della femina, nell'altra il robusto



maschile; Quella passara con lode, in questa si fermara con ammirazione; sentirassi dalla delicata soavemente inclinare, dalla rozza violentemente rapire.'

<sup>10</sup> 'Costui ha fatto più volte senza i desengli opera molto important, lasciando le bezze per finite, e tanto a fatica sgrossate, che si veggono i colpi del pennelo fatto dall'impeto, e dalla fierrezza di lui, ue percio sovo poi da essere tropo considerate a minuto.' The author's translation.

<sup>11</sup> 'No se deleitaba tanto Ribera en pintar cosas dulces, y devotas, como en expressar cosas horrendas, y asperas: quales son los cuerpos de los ancianos, secos, arrugados y consumidos,- con el rostro enjuto, y malicento; todo hecho puntualmente por el natural, con extremado primor, fuerza, y elegante manejo: como lo manifiesta el San Bartolomé en el Martirio, quitándole la piel, y descubierta la anathomia interior del brazo: el célebre Tcio, a quien el Buitre lesaca las entrañas, por caítego de su insolente atrevimiento: los totmentos de Sisifo, de Tántalo, y de Ixion, expressando (especialmente en este) con tal extremo el dolor, atado á la rueda, donde era continuamente herido, y despedazado.' The author's translation.

<sup>12</sup> 'Fa veramente maraviglia il veder come col suo impasto così denso di colore egli facesse girare non solamente i muscoli del corpo umano, ma eziando le parti minute dell'ossa delle mani e de' piedi, i quali si veggono finiti con diligenza e maestria inarrivabile.' The author's translation.

<sup>13</sup> Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Informe Intern de Prestec, No. 141L131-34/2015. The conservation report details the various interventions on the canvas, from older degradation of the layers of paint to the most recent processes of restoration.

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