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# The Role of Personality In Moving Encounters with Sacred Art

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In Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, the material world is understood to contain access points to the transcendent. An icon may move the awestruck believer to emotional engagement and reflection on moral and religious themes. Personality dispositions potentiating the experience of being moved in religious aesthetic contexts have not been thoroughly studied. The present article describes the development and testing of a cross-sectional study into potential belief and personality-related predictors of being moved by sacred art in a lab environment evocative of a holy site. Ninety (90) Christians in Canada and Greece completed personality measures and viewed and rated thematically matched Latin and Byzantine icons. Findings suggest impacts of attachment, imaginativeness, and traditional vs. mystical dispositions in resonance with sacred art, and point to a secure, mystically oriented perceiver. Those who tended towards structured religious lives also presented with a personality profile favouring logical problem-solving. The paradigm applied the social psychological tradition of an evocative lab situation and use of psychometric tests to pressing questions in aesthetics and transpersonal psychology. This study offers a replicable methodology, inviting further empirical inquiry into the experiential texture of being moved and predictive relationships among individual differences at play in moving encounters.

**Keywords:** *attachment, empirical aesthetics, imagination, personality, psychology of religion, personality, transpersonal psychology*

[...] My looking ripens things,  
And they come towards me,  
to meet and be met.

No thing is too small for me to cherish  
And paint in gold, as if it were an icon  
That could bless us,  
Though I'll not know who else among us  
Will feel this blessing.

(Rilke's *Book of hours* [partial second and omitted third stanzas of "Da neigt sich die Stunde und rührt mich an..."]. Barrows & Macy (Trans.), 2005.

**B**ranches of Christian mysticism teach that elements of the material ("created") world offer means of attaining closeness to the Divine (Catholic Church, 2012). Core to Ignatian theology, for example, is to see God in all things in an Aristotelian manner whereby perceptible matter is an expression (symbol) of the Sacred. In Roman Catholic meditative practices, prayer tends to be an affectively charged experience in which the subject feels with and for the person of Christ (e.g., the Way of the Cross) and prays with and for intercession from saints. Indeed, there are traditions that bypass material objects to engage more directly in cultivating closeness to the One (Meister Eckhart, 1995). Roman

Catholic religious paintings are simultaneously material access points to the Divine, symbolically communicating metaphysical and moral precepts, as well as emotional social scenes (Lang et al., 2020). This social-symbolic confluence is also evident in Eastern Orthodox icons (spiritual reality is incarnate), though realism is discouraged as the route of empathy (the humanism and “fleshiness” of Catholic visual culture) is believed to distract from the transcendent rather than stoke mystical contact with the figure portrayed.

In written discourse about icons that *moved* them, awestruck religious subjects described having been moved to emotional-moral engagement, as evidenced through such themes as the sense of “being judged” and called to “responsibility” (Lang et al., 2020). In another study, Orthodox Christians in Greece completed questionnaires in response to the same sacred art stimuli used in Lang et al. (2020) to screen for possible predictors of reported experiences of awe (Stamatopoulou et al., 2019). Experiences of awe among Christians in Greece have been found to share moderate-strong positive associations with a spiritual/mystical disposition, and correlated moderately with religiosity, conventionality, and the desire to be liked (Stamatopoulou et al., 2019). A regression with stepwise input of variables found that the “moved” factor was the strongest predictor of awe (Stamatopoulou et al., 2019). Awe and the experience of being moved share phenomenological similarities, though being moved may be individuated from the former as an aesthetically powerful experience with requisite personal associative contexts (Konečni, 2005). Another investigation including a subsample of the same Canadians and Greeks examined the roles of diversity-related variables, including sex, age, cultural and religious identities, baseline mood state, as well as artistic theme, in experiences of sacred artworks (Stamatopoulou et al., 2022). A correlational study with Coptic Christians (Boulis et al., 2023) postulated roles of attachment security and imaginativeness in participants’ relationships to icons. Yet, personality dispositions potentiating the experience of being moved in religious aesthetic contexts have not been thoroughly studied.

Attachment behaviours are widely understood as basic, inherited potentialities that are shaped by experiences across the lifespan (Main, 1990; Simpson & Belsky, 2008). Pioneers of research in religion and attachment proposed that the relationship a devotee has with the Divine can be viewed itself as a unique attachment bond (Kirkpatrick, 1998). These early studies documented that secure attachment was associated with a positive view of the sacred in Western traditions as well as higher religiosity. Conversely, insecure (particularly avoidant) attachment has been found to be associated with lower levels of religiosity (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 2005). The extent to which attachment is implicated in experiences of cultural-religious artefacts, such as icons, has not been widely explored in empirical social science.

Attachment has theoretical implications at two levels in aesthetically powerful experiences with Christian iconography: (a) a relationship to spiritual figures (e.g., Christ) may be analogous to an attachment relationship to a close other, and (b) the experience of visual artworks depicting persons and social scenes may evoke projections that are coloured by one’s global attachment tendency. Personal identification with social or relational content has been found to be common in reflections on sacred artwork appraised as having moved participants, with some cultural-religious variability (Lang et al., 2020).

In addition to attachment, imaginativeness ought also to be explored for its implications in both art perception and religiosity. Creative imagination implicates expressive and instrumental processes, trait openness, past and future mindedness, and conventionality (Feng et al., 2017). *Expressive imagination* is defined as a disposition towards narrative, metaphor, and self-reflection, while *instrumental imagination* refers to a tendency to generate original solutions to functional problems. The expressive disposition possesses qualitative similarities to the tendency to perceive sacredness in life (Doehring et al., 2009). Significant predictors of the latter construct include intrinsic religiosity (appraisal that one’s religion is a framework for their life), mystical or spiritual disposition, and community

service attitude. More traditional measures of creativity (e.g., originality—a facet of instrumental imagination) have been found to predict aesthetic preference (Twomey et al., 1998). An empirical study of aesthetically powerful experiences with sacred art ought to represent both expressive and instrumental creative dispositions as potential predictors.

### Study

The purpose of this cross-sectional study was to test predictive roles of belief and dispositional differences in reports of being moved by Latin and Byzantine icons in a multid denominational Christian sample.

### Method

We examined the extent to which reported experiences of being moved by Christian artworks are associated with individual differences in religiosity, spirituality, attachment security, and imaginativeness. Questionnaires were selected for their hypothesized relationships to being moved by icons in an environment evocative of a holy site. Factor scores understood to reflect latent structures were derived from personality measures. These were to be included in a correlation matrix and multiple hierarchical regression with intercorrelations examined as a part of that process.

To be moved by icon stimuli was identified as the dependent variable for the regression. The “moved” factor included self-reports that one was moved by the art as well as statistically constellated items: the art-object is personally meaningful, beautiful, powerful, and prompting of emotional engagement and moral reflections. Based on results of the earlier Greek study (Stamatopoulou et al., 2019), it was hypothesized that being moved in response to sacred art stimuli would be associated with higher spirituality and religiosity scores. The found association between awe and the desire to be liked would suggest that an insecure attachment tendency predicts aesthetically powerful experiences of awe and being moved, though self-reported desire to be liked alone is not necessarily a marker of this trait. Indeed, a positive association between attachment security and religiosity in a sample of Egyptian diaspora in Canada (Boulis et al., 2023) supports a hypothesis that *greater* security would

predict higher moved scores, mediated by religiosity. Some relationship with attachment security-insecurity was therefore anticipated. The inclusion of imaginativeness is more exploratory as there is limited evidence of the roles of these variables in awe or being moved. In light of the literature (Doehring et al., 2009), expressive imagination was hypothesized to be positively associated with religiosity and spirituality in the correlation matrix. Reported feelings of elation and perception of emotional symbolism in response to the artworks were also included in correlations as an exploratory probe for predictors of alternative ways of making meaning of icons.

### Participants

A voluntary response sampling procedure with quotas was used to select participants for a lab-based study. Eligible participants were self-identifying Christian adults located in Canada and Greece with competence in the local language (English or Greek). Potential participants reporting non-Christian religious denominations and major visual impairments were excluded. No specific *N* was targeted due to the exploratory nature of the research, but relative equal Canadian and Greek sample sizes were sought.

### Recruitment

Following institutional ethics approval, the study was advertised at the University of Toronto Scarborough in Canada and the University of Crete in Greece via internal research bulletins, posters, and social media posts. Participant recruitment took place in 2016 and 2017.

### Procedures

Participants were scheduled to have face-to-face meetings with a researcher in a lab office and receive a briefing form to provide written informed consent to participate. Consenting participants would complete demographic and psychometric questionnaires, and in an adjacent dark room evocative of a holy site, view a series of 18 large, individually projected images of paintings depicting Biblical themes, and provide responses to 10 rating scales for each stimulus. Those who were students would receive a small grade bonus, and others, financial compensation of Can\$10.00 or equivalent. The study was designed by three researchers based in Canada and Greece. Two RA's supported data

collection in Canada and Greece, two translators were involved, and the student researcher conducted data analyses.

### **Materials**

A Google Forms survey containing 214 items was developed in English and translated into Greek. Two bilingual judges checked the translations. Data sources (reported exhaustively in Appendix) included the following.

#### **Demographics**

Open-ended inquiries into age, sex, country, languages, and religious denominations, were included.

#### **Personal Beliefs and Practices (PBP)**

Ten (10) Likert-type items inquired into religious beliefs, practices, and spiritual experiences in daily life with seven response options (1 = “never” to 7 = “very often”). Five items were derived from the *Centrality of Religiosity Scale* (CRS), based on Huber and Huber’s (2012) five-dimensional model of religiosity. This model incorporates: (a) *Intellect* or self-reported confidence in their knowledge about their religious tradition; (b) *Ideology* or degree of belief in theological precepts; (c) *Public practice*, or community membership and participation; (d) *Private practice*, namely personal prayer or meditation; and (e) *Religious experiences* or reports of mystical contact with God. Included in the novel five items were tendencies towards general mystical “oneness” or numinous experiences that may not be linked to tenets of organized religion (Freud, 1930/1989; Goldie, 2008). Two of these were based on the interreligious version of the CRS (Huber & Huber, 2012). One item was constructed to assess endorsement of synchronicity (Jung, 1964/1968). The PBP also assessed for the self-reported propensity to grasp hidden meanings in scripture as well as the application of lessons from religious texts to solve everyday problems.

#### **Attachment Patterns in Social Relationships (APSR)**

Eight items developed with reference to Bowlby’s (1988) taxonomy of adult attachment styles were included (Stamatopoulou et al., 2019). These Likert-type agreement questions (ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”) inquired into experiences in close relationships across the lifespan that may be implicated in current attitudes

towards intimacy. Primary (parents/guardians) and global attachment anxiety and avoidance were considered in rational item construction.

#### **Imagination Measure (IM)**

The short form of this measure developed by Feng and colleagues (2017) aimed to capture instrumental vs. expressive imaginative dispositions on 10 Likert-type items with response options ranging from 1 = “not me” to 7 = “absolutely.”

#### **Perceptual Experiences of Sacred Artworks (Art Perception)**

Nine paintings from the “Western” canon (Gothic, Northern Renaissance, and Renaissance paintings) and a matched sample of nine “Eastern” Byzantine icons were to be shown one at a time to each individual participant on a projector screen in a darkened room. Each pair of stimuli (Western and Eastern) were matched on religious themes, wherein eight paintings are more readily interpretable as negative themes, including the deposition of the body of Christ from the cross, for example, while 10 depicted positive themes, such as the resurrection. Figure 1 presents an exemplar pair. These stimuli were chosen as they provide a balanced sample space of culturally relevant aesthetic traditions and emotional themes for the present study of personality factors.

One to two researchers were present in the lab room to operate the computer controlling the display. Each art-object was presented as a short video clip to the single participant in the following manner: (a) Full static image (5 seconds); (b) Subtly “zoomed” such that elements of the at times detailed paintings were visible (20 seconds); and (c) Full static image presented again while the participant responded to 10 rating scale items (2 minutes). Stimuli were presented in two configurations to control for order effects.

A total of 180 rated responses were asked of participants. Perceptual evaluation items inquired into aesthetic judgments (e.g., “beauty”) and experiences of engagement with the art-object (e.g., feelings of “empowerment,” “vulnerability,” “pain,” or “bliss”). Likert-type items were crafted with reference to Otto’s construct of the numinous (1923/1958). Semantic differentials informed by Osgood’s three-factor theory of

emotion (as cited in Russell & Mehrabian, 1977) and degrees of identification vs. distancing from art-objects (Cupchik & Gignac, 2007) were included. Ideas contingent on personal and culture-bound meanings, such as the personal significance of the icon, or the feeling of “being judged” in response to it, were also assessed. Participants made judgments on the locus (source) of emotion, that is, whether the subject reported feeling emotional responses stirring within them as a result of viewing the icon (“owning” the emotion) as opposed to judging the art-object to be expressive in itself (to not “own” the projected emotion; Cupchik & Wroblewski-Raya, 1998).

### Treatment of Data

Sociodemographic data were reported descriptively and subject to binary recoding when appropriate (e.g., 0 = M and 1 = F). Dimension reduction was planned to derive factor structures of the Personal Beliefs and Practices, Attachment Patterns in Social Relationships, Imagination Measure, and Art Perception items. Principal components analysis (PCA) was the selected technique, reducing

the dataset to linear combinations (components) assumed to reflect constructs. Component scores were to be inputted into a matrix of Pearson product-moment correlations as well as a hierarchical multiple regression to isolate factors that predict being moved, based on the conceptual model.

### Results

Ninety-three (93) adults provided response data. Three identified as Muslim and were excluded, since the paradigm was tailored for Christian contexts. Data included in analysis were provided by 90 participants ( $n = 42$  in Canada,  $n = 48$  in Greece). These were Catholic [(Roman)  $n = 22$  in Canada, (Greek)  $n = 1$  in Greece], Eastern or Coptic Orthodox ( $n = 11$  in Canada,  $n = 47$  in Greece), and Protestant or other Christians ( $n = 9$  in Canada). Participants were mostly young adults ( $M = 23.7$  years;  $SD = 9.0$ ; range 18-55 years). There were 26 identified men and 64 women.

### Principal Components Analysis (PCA)

PCA with varimax rotation was performed on responses to the various questionnaires, as follows.



**Figure 1.** Stylistically different, thematically matched pair. Left: Detail of Christ the King (“Almighty”), Ghent Altarpiece (c. 1432), Van Eyck, Netherlands/Belgium. Right: Detail of Christ Pantocrator, Daphni Monastery (11th century), Daphni, Greece. (public domain images)

### **Personal Beliefs and Practices (PBP)**

In the first analysis, two components with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were derived, accounting for 62.14% of the variance. Item 7 (“How often do you feel that God or something divine has intervened in your life?”) and item 9 (“How often do you reflect on hidden meanings underlying religious scripture?”) were removed due to cross-loading. In the second analysis, two components with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were derived, accounting for 64.23% of the variance.

Component 1, *Religiosity*, accounted for 51.68% of the variance. The items with loadings  $\geq .50$  were: “I think about religious issues often” (.84), “I pray or meditate often” (.81), “I take part in religious services regularly” (.81), “I have the feeling that I have been touched by a spiritual power” (.72), “I think that specific events in religious scripture are lessons to guide my decisions” (.61), and “I believe that God or something divine exists” (.60).

Component 2, *Spirituality*, accounted for 12.55% of the variance. The items with loadings  $\geq .50$  were: “I often felt that I am one with all” (.80) and “I often see meaning in coincidences” (.78).

### **Attachment Patterns in Social Relationships (APSR)**

In the first analysis, there were three components with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, explaining 58.94% of the variance. Item 6 (“I find it difficult to trust that people are really there for me”) was removed due to cross-loading. In the second analysis, three components were derived with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, accounting for 61.96% of the variance. Component 3 was also removed because only item 4 (“It is important other people like me”) loaded on this factor. In the final analysis, two components emerged with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, explaining 54.42% of the variance.

Component 1, *Insecure Attachment*, accounted for 34.65% of the variance. The items with loadings  $\geq .50$  were: “My parents/guardians often prioritize themselves” (.80), “My parents/guardians did not let me explore and take risks when I was growing up” (-.66), and “People are indifferent to my life” (.60).

Component 2, *Secure Attachment*, accounted for 19.77% of the variance. The items with loadings  $\geq .50$  were: “Opening up to others

when something bothers me is helpful” (.82), “When I was a child, my mother/caregiver gave me love and support when I needed it” (.71), and “Life in my childhood home was predictable” (-.54).

### **Imagination Measure (IM)**

In the first analysis, four components emerged with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, explaining 65.13% of the variance. Item 9 [“Sometimes I become so immersed in a fictional world (i.e., novel, movie, videogame) that it feels as if I were there”] was eliminated due to cross-loading. In the second analysis, four components were derived with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, accounting for 67.05% of the variance. Component 3 was removed because only item 7 (“I am not worried about being wrong when I imagine solutions to problems”) loaded on to this factor. The removal of Component 3 from the analysis produced three components with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, explaining 58.95% of the variance. Item 6 (“Sometimes I act, role play or pretend to be someone else for fun”) was subsequently removed due to cross-loading. In the third analysis, two components emerged, accounting for 46.03% of the variance. Since item 3 (“I often have vivid and interesting dreams in colour”) and item 5 (“Following traditions and conventions is very important to me”) had loadings under .50, they were also dropped. Finally, two components were produced with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, explaining 62.23% of the variance.

Component 1, *Instrumental Imagination*, accounted for 37.91% of the variance. The items with loadings  $\geq .50$  were: “From a young age, I have been interested in figuring out how things work” (.75), “I like to discern patterns or structures in things or events” (.73), and “I easily pick up on connections between things, even if they are not explicitly explained/demonstrated to me” (.62).

Component 2, *Expressive Imagination*, explained 24.32% of the variance. The items with loadings  $\geq .50$  were: “I like to take seemingly unrelated elements (characters, objects, ideas) and put them together in a story” (.90) and “As a child, I created imaginary worlds involving myself or others” (.77).

### **Perceptual Experiences of Sacred Artworks (Art Perception)**

PCA with varimax rotation was performed on the mean responses to 18 sacred artwork stimuli.

Three components emerged with Eigenvalues greater than 1.00, accounting for 71.56% of the variance. These were: (1) Moved, (2) Elated, and (3) Emotional Symbolism.

Component 1, *Moved*, explained 47.45% of the variance. Items with loadings .50 or greater were: “I am deeply moved by this painting” (.92), “The image is personally meaningful to me” (.88), “I feel engaged in this painting” (.87), “This painting is powerful” (.85), “The painting is beautiful” (.74), and “The painting awakens the feeling of being judged” (.59).

Component 2, *Elated*, explained 12.38% of the variance. Items with loadings .50 or greater were: “The painting makes me feel empowered” (.91) and “The emotional tone of the painting is bliss” (.78).

Component 3, *Perceived Emotional Symbolism*, explained 11.74% of the variance. Items with loadings .50 or greater were: “The painting itself is emotional” (.90) and “Transcendent meanings (symbols or themes that represent elements of Christian belief)” (.60).

### Correlations

The most robust association with the DV, Moved (Art Perception), was a positive correlation with Spirituality,  $r(89) = 0.38, p < .001$ . Moved scores were also positively correlated with endorsement of Secure Attachment,  $r(89) = 0.19, p = .03$ . That is, participants who reported mystical experiences and attitudes in daily life, and presented with a secure attachment tendency, were more likely to report being moved in response to sacred art. Also offering preliminary evidence for a *secure, mystically oriented* perceiver, Emotional Symbolism and Religiosity scores were negatively correlated,  $r(89) = -.37, p < .001$ , and Emotional Symbolism and Secure Attachment shared a positive association,  $r(89) = .35, p < .001$ . Participants who more strongly reported perceiving emotional intensity

and symbolic meanings in the artworks endorsed items indicating secure attachment and tended to be less identified with organized religion and structured practice. More accurate representation of predictors of being moved required input into a regression model controlling for other variables.

### Regression Model

In a hierarchical multiple regression, factor scores were entered as IVs into a model of predictors of Moved (Art Perception) in three blocks informed by the literature: (a) Religiosity and Spirituality (PBP), (b) Insecure and Secure Attachment (APSR), and (c) Instrumental and Expressive Imagination (IM). Elated and Emotional Symbolism (Art Perception) were excluded from the regression as scores reflected different factors and did not correlate with Moved (Art Perception). These alternative responses to stimuli were, however, included in the correlation matrix to evaluate potential relationships to the IVs for consideration in future studies.

The appropriateness of a regression model had to be determined through assumption checks. Principally, linearity between the DV and IVs was assumed after inspection of a scatterplot of residuals vs. predicted values (Figure 2). Violation of this assumption would be indicated by patterns such as an “arch” shaped distribution, which would suggest

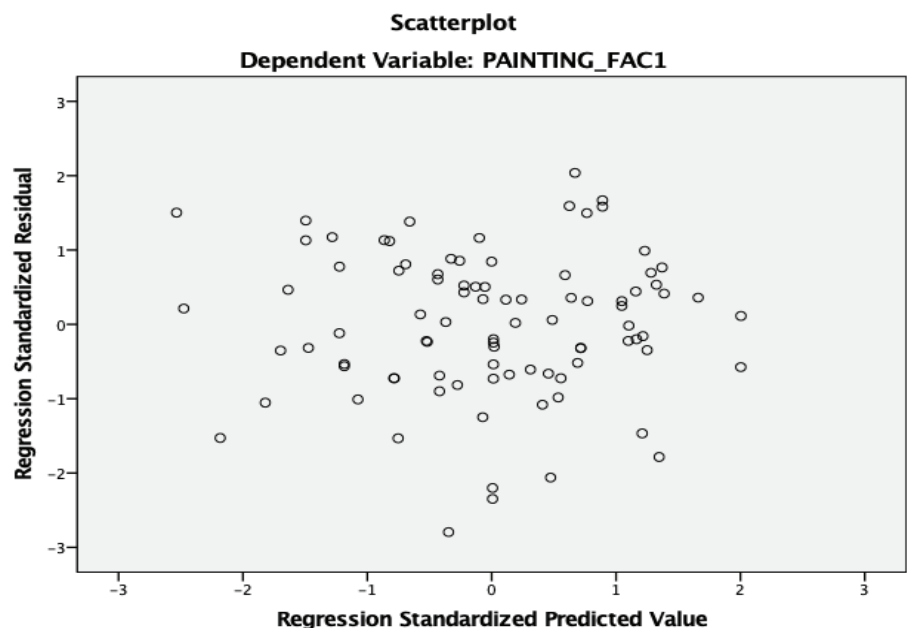


Figure 2. Scatterplot of Residuals (DV: Art-Moved)



curvilinearity. Multivariate normality or normality of the residuals was assumed based on visual inspection of a histogram and P-P plot. The data showed general coherence to the bell curve with a minor left skew (Figure 3). No major deviations were evident in the P-P plot (Figure 4). Homoscedasticity was also assumed after inspection of the scatterplot (Figure 2). The horizontal bands and roughly oval shaped pattern of residuals around Y-axis 0 suggest equality of variances, though there are some points

outside of the shape which may be residual outliers. Acceptable multicollinearity, or correlations among IVs, was assumed based on examination of the matrix of Pearson's product moment correlations (Table 1). Six intercorrelated IVs were found at  $\alpha = .05$ . Two additional significant correlations were found between IVs and Emotional Symbolism (Art Perception).

In a multiple hierarchical regression, Religiosity and Spirituality scores were entered at

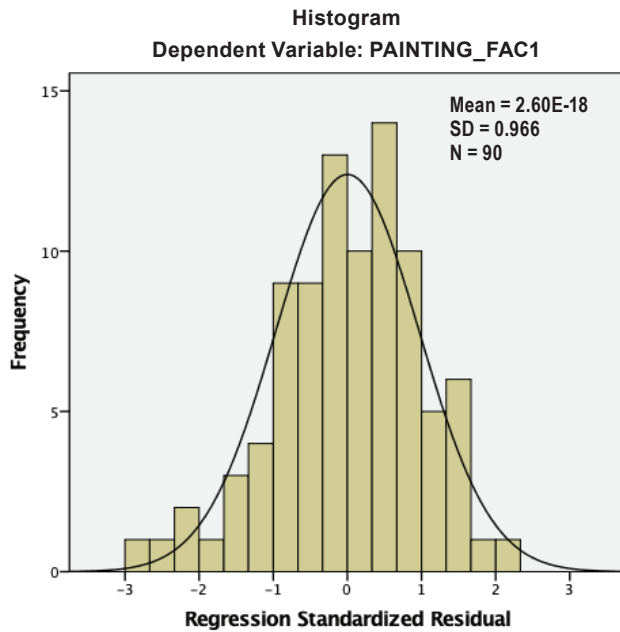


Figure 3. Histogram of Residuals (DV: Art-Moved)

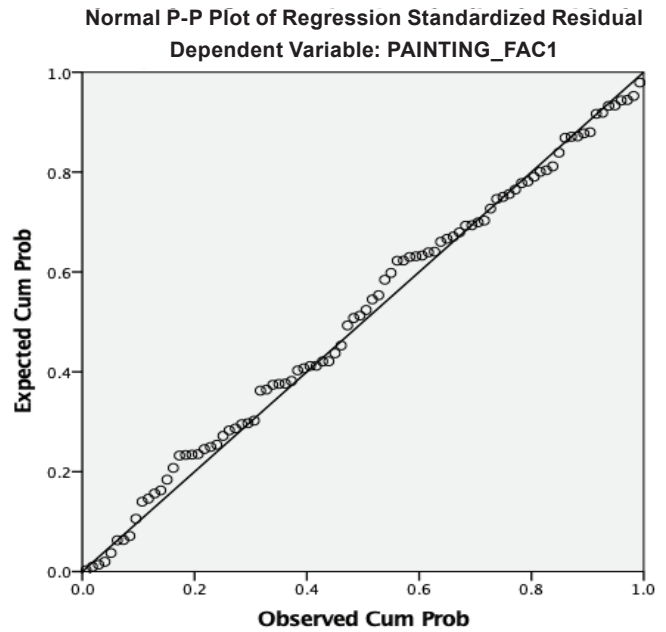


Figure 4. Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals (DV: Art-Moved)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Art-Moved									
2. Art-Elated <sup>a</sup>	<.01								
3. Art-Emotional Symbolism	<.01	<.01							
4. PBP-Religiosity	.04	.10	-.37***						
5. PBP-Spirituality	.38***	.16	-.02	.01					
6. APSR-Insecure Attachment	-.13	.08	-.03	-.06	.02				
7. APSR-Secure Attachment	.19*	.16	.35***	.11	.33**	.01			
8. IM-Instrumental Imagination	.07	-.06	-.13	.24*	.22*	-.19*	.08		
9. IM-Expressive Imagination	-.01	-.02	-.06	-.12	-.05	.14	-.01	.01	

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 90)

Note. Descriptives (M and SD) not reported as regression factor scores with M = 0 were used.

<sup>a</sup> Art-Elated and 3. Art-Emotional Symbolism were not included in regression.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

step 1, Insecure and Secure Attachment at step 2, and Instrumental and Expressive Imagination scores at step 3.

Results indicated that Religiosity and Spirituality alone accounted for 14.7% of the variance in Moved,  $F(2,87) = 7.51, p = .001$ . Spiritual or mystical disposition was pivotal in predicting reports of being moved. Insecure and Secure Attachment explained an incremental 2.1% change in the variance of Moved scores,  $F(2,85) = 4.31, p = .003$ , meaning that the role of attachment was significant above and beyond variance explained by religious and spiritual dispositions. The addition of Instrumental and Expressive Imagination accounted for relatively little incremental change (0.4%), though analysis revealed a significant overall model of predictors of Moved scores,  $F(2,83) = 2.88, p = .013$ . Each of the three models was significant, but  $\Delta F$  was only significant in step 1 ( $p = .001$ ). Examination of slopes for model 3 revealed that for every 1-unit increase in Spirituality scores, Moved scores increased by 0.38. Partial regression coefficients as well as intercepts and slopes are reported in Table 2.

Regression results suggest that a tendency towards mystical experiences and attitudes (and to a lesser degree, traditional and regulated practice),

Variable	B	SE B <sup>a</sup>	$\beta$
Step 1			
Constant	8.30E16	.098	
PBP-Religiosity	.04	.099	.04
PBP-Spirituality	.38	.099	.38***
Step 2			
Constant	8.16E16	.098	
PBP-Religiosity	.21	.100	.02
PBP-Spirituality	.36	.105	.36**
APSR-Insecure Attachment	-.13	.099	-.13
APSR-Secure Attachment	.07	.106	.07
Step 3			
Constant	8.14E16	.099	
PBP-Religiosity	.04	.104	.04
PBP-Spirituality	.38	.109	.38**
APSR-Insecure Attachment	-.15	.103	-.15
APSR-Secure Attachment	.07	.107	.07
IM-Instrumental Imagination	-.06	.108	-.06
IM-Expressive Imagination	.04	.102	.04

**Table 2. Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Variables Predicting Art-Moved ( $N = 90$ )**

Note.  $R^2 = .15$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .02$  for Step 2;  $\Delta R^2 = .004$  for Step 3.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

predicted higher ratings on items concerning being moved by Christian art stimuli. The less religious and spiritual were rarely so moved. Variance in attachment patterns also played a role. Imaginativeness, whether the more poetic, expressive trait or the pragmatic, instrumental problem-solving trait, were poorer predictors of being moved.

## Discussion

The association between being moved and mystical, spiritual tendencies was consistent with our hypothesis, though the relative minor role of religiosity was contrary. The association with secure attachment is consistent with Boulis et al. (2023) and Stamatopoulou et al. (2019). It must be noted, however, that the 2019 Greek study included only item-level analyses of APSR scores, since responses in the small sample were found to be too divergent for a factor structure to emerge. A core finding of the present study is that *secure, mystically oriented* perceivers were most readily *moved* by religious images. Spirituality and secure attachment also predicted perception of emotional symbolism in artworks, and those with mystical tendencies were generally more securely attached (Table 1).

Traditional religious participants reported being less moved than the mystically inclined and were also disposed to instrumental imagination (Table 1). This suggests that those who tend towards structured religious lives also present with a personality profile favouring logical problem-solving as opposed to poetic, expressive imagination. Indeed, there was no evidence of correlation between the two imagination factors, reinforcing the theorized two divergent constructs. There were also high scorers on the instrumental imagination factor who reported spiritual or mystical tendencies.

This research advances understanding of the role of personality differences in being moved in a context evoking a culturally relevant holy site: a silent, darkened room faced with enlarged Christian iconography. It applied the social psychological tradition of an evocative lab situation and use of psychometric tests to pressing questions in aesthetics and transpersonal psychology. The relatively small

sample size renders findings preliminary—as does the fact that the questionnaires were not standard measures with known psychometric properties. This study nevertheless offers a replicable methodology, inviting further empirical inquiry into the experiential texture of being moved and predictive relationships among imaginativeness, traditional religious and mystical dispositions, and global attachment tendencies.

This research provides novel insights into the roles of belief and personality-related variables in moving experiences in religious contexts. Further study is planned and encouraged to branch beyond the Christian context and into other traditions.

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### Note

1. Digital photographs of artworks retrieved from: The Yorck Project (2002) 10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei, distributed by DIRECTMEDIA Publishing GmbH, archived on Wikimedia Commons (public domain).

### Appendix

#### Demographic Questionnaire

*Instructions:* Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. Please complete the following information accurately.

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Country: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Languages Spoken in the Home: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Religious Denomination: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Personal Beliefs and Practices (PBP)

*Instructions:* Please select the response that most accurately describes you and your experiences.

1. How often do you think about religious issues?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often
2. How often do you take part in religious services?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often
3. How often do you have the feeling that you have been touched by a spiritual power?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often
4. To what extent do you believe that God or something divine exists?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often
5. How often do you have the feeling that you are one with all?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often
6. How often do you think about specific events in religious scripture as lessons to guide your decisions?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often
7. How often do you feel that God or something divine has intervened in your life?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often
8. How often do you see meaning in coincidences?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often
9. How often do you reflect on hidden meanings underlying religious scripture?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often
10. How often do you pray or meditate?  
Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very often

#### Experiences in Social Relationships [Attachment Patterns in Social Relationships (APSR)]

*Instructions:* Please read each of the following statements and rate the extent to which you believe they best describe your experiences and feelings about relationships.

1. It helps me to open up to others when something is bothering me.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
2. Other people are indifferent to my life.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
3. As a child, my mother/caregiver gave me love and support when I needed it.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
4. It is important that other people like me.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
5. My parents/guardians let me explore and take risks when I was growing up.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
6. I find it difficult to trust that people are really there for me.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

7. My parents/guardians often prioritize themselves.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
8. Life in my childhood home was unpredictable.  
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

**Describing Myself [Imagination Measure (IM)]**

*Instructions:* Please fill out the following scales to indicate how well the question applies to you. There are no wrong or right answers.

1. I like to take seemingly unrelated elements (characters, objects, ideas) and put them together in a story.  
Not me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely
2. When I was a child, I sometimes created imaginary worlds involving myself or others.  
Not me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely
3. I often have vivid and interesting dreams in colour.  
Not me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely
4. I can quickly pick up on connections between things, even if they are not explicitly explained or demonstrated to me.  
Not me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely
5. Following traditions and conventions is very important to me.  
Not me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely
6. Sometimes I act, role play or pretend to be someone else for fun.  
Not me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely
7. I am not worried about being wrong when I imagine solutions to problems.  
Not me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely
8. From a young age, I have been interested in figuring out how things work, even if it was not necessary to do so.  
Not me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely
9. Sometimes I become so immersed in a fictional world (i.e., novel, movie, videogame) that it feels as if I were there.  
Not me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely
10. I like to discern patterns or structures in things or events.  
Not me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Absolutely

**Painting x (repeated for all 18 icon stimuli) [Perceptual Experiences of Sacred Artworks (Art Perception)]**

*Instructions:* In this section of the experiment, you will be shown a series of religious artworks. For each artwork, you will be asked to respond to a set of rating scales inquiring about your experience of the painting, how it makes you feel, and what it means to you. Do your best to record your responses within two minutes. When you are ready, the experimenter will show you the next image. Select the option that best describes your feelings about the painting.

1. How powerful is this painting?  
Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely powerful
2. What is the emotional tone of the painting?  
Pain 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Bliss
3. Where are your feelings about this painting coming from?  
I feel these emotions within me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  
This is an emotional painting
4. How beautiful is this painting?  
Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely beautiful
5. This painting makes me feel...  
Extremely vulnerable 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely empowered
6. How much does this painting 'move' you?  
Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Deeply moved
7. To what extent does this painting awaken in you the feeling of being judged?  
Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much so
8. How personally meaningful is this image for you?  
Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely meaningful to me
9. What elements of the image stand out to you as the most meaningful?  
Social meanings (expressions, relationships, and experiences that resemble everyday life)  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Transcendent meanings (symbols or themes that represent elements of Christian belief)
10. How engaged or detached do you feel from this painting?  
Extremely detached 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely engaged

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