

<i>Project Title</i>	"Litany of Loreto"
<i>Image Title</i>	"Rosa Mystica – Mystical Rose"
<i>Medium</i>	Iris giclee print on Arches Cold Press
<i>Size example</i>	"Rosa Mystica" 30" x 30" unframed
<i>Artist</i>	Lisa A. Johnston
<i>Style</i>	Montage Photography
<i>Synopsis</i>	This image is part of a series currently in progress and is a visual study on the names given to Mary the mother of Jesus in the "Litany of Loreto", a solemn litany of titles sung or prayed in honour of the Virgin Mary. The imagery is concerned with examining these <i>titles</i> through contemporary photographic technique which is supplied heavily with the vigorous usage of religious and poetic literary symbolism and iconography.

*Particular Image Background
And Reference Notes*

This particular image *Rosa Mystica* or *Mystical Rose* is a visual interpretation of this title and theme.

As reference points for understanding the imagery the following quotations are invited:



St. Bernard of Clairvaux describes Mary under the title of Mystical Rose: *"Eve was a thorn, wounding, bringing death to all; in Mary we see a rose, soothing everybody's hurts, giving the destiny of salvation back to all. Mary was a rose, white for maidenhood, red for love; white in body, red in soul; white in her seeking after virtue, red in treading down vice; white in cleansing her affections, red in mortifying her flesh; white in her love of God, red in compassion for her neighbor"*

Further research of the symbolism of the *mystical rose* we may quote from the Bible's **Canticles 2:2**. *As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.* The lily flower is the flower associated with purity and virginity which has become replaced with the queen of all flowers, the rose.

From the 4th Century poet Sedulius: *As the delightful and very gentle rose springs forth from a thorny bush without injuring the mother that it hides with delightful charm, so Mary, from the race of the guilty Eve, could as the second virgin wash away, with the coming sacred light, the fault of the first virgin.* (Sedulius, Carmen paschale II)

The poet Dante uses the rose as a literary symbol: *"Why doth my face so much enamour thee, That to the garden fair thou turnest not, Which under the rays of Christ is blossoming? There is the Rose in which the Word Divine Became incarnate; there the lilies are By whose perfume the good way was discovered."* (Dante Alighieri: *The Divine Comedy, Paradiso XXIII*)

St. Therese of Lisieux, Carmelite Nun and Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church writes in her poetry:

*Thou art the Rose of Sharon long foretold,
Still in Thy glorious bud, Thou heavenly Child!
Thy dearest Mother's arms, so pure and white,
Form for Thee now a royal cradle-throne;*
(Therese Martin: *The Dew Divine. Feb. 2, 1893*)

The *Litany of Loreto* invokes Mary, the Mystical Rose and Queen of the Most Holy Rosary - exemplar of interior mystical flowering.

Visual Symbols

Contained within this image are many symbolisms including: (from top to bottom):

- **Thorn** – Thorns of the rose bush represent the sin of Eve bringing death to the world. The thorns are also wrapped as in a circular crown representative of the sorrowful crown worn by the Savior. It is the crown woven with the sin of Eve and of all time and is transformed into a king's headpiece of honor and glory by the Redeemer of Man.
- **White Rose** – Mary is the rose of purity. White for Mary's virginal purity and virtue which brings salvation into the world by the fruit of her womb. The rose is the antithesis of the thorny stem, its beautiful maturation and perfection of the flowers accomplishment. As the delightful and very gentle rose springs forth from a thorny bush without injuring the mother that it hides with delightful charm, so Mary, from the race of the guilty Eve, could as the second virgin wash away, with the coming sacred light, the fault of the first virgin. The Rose as the queen of flowers is a privileged symbol for Mary, Queen of heaven and earth. The white rose is used as a symbol of spiritual rebirth and perpetual virginity.
- **Red Rose Petals** – Red represents the ardent love with which the heart of Mary was always inflamed towards God. The red signifies the mortification of her flesh and her compassion for the world. Red also symbolizes the blood of the cross which she was to stand under.
- **Three Petals Three Roses** - Symbols of the Holy Trinity. Also, the humble supplication of heart and soul Mary gives separately to each person of the blessed Trinity.
- **Atrina rigida** – Fan shaped shells. This creature produces a valuable pearl which is considered the "soul" of the creature. The pearl is symbolic of the kingdom of heaven and the pearl is used as a symbol of the word of God. Jesus would be the "pearl" of his mother's womb. We may consider the quote from Mathew 13:45. *Again the kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant seeking good pearls. (Iterum simile est regnum caelorum homini negotiatori quaerenti bonas margaritas).*