



The Crucifixion—depicted by contemporary Chinese artist He Qi (above) and by the Catholic Reformation artist Giovanni Stradano (cover art)—remains the powerful focal point of Christian artistic reflection on suffering.

He Qi, THE CRUCIFIXION, 1999. Colored ink on paper. Used by permission of the artist.

Transcending Cultures

BY HEIDI J. HORNIK

Working in Mainland China, He Qi (pronounced ho-chee) combines Chinese painting techniques with western modernism. His composition in *The Crucifixion*, which is influenced by classic modernist pieces like Picasso's *Three Musicians*, is flat and relies on color to convey perspective. As Jesus suffers on the cross, he is surrounded by a nude woman, a wounded man, a mother and child, a prisoner, and a man supported by a friend. The Holy Spirit, in the iconography of a dove, hovers over this assemblage of suffering people, who call to mind the parable of judgment in Matthew 25:34-36. Two crosses refer to the thieves who were crucified beside Jesus. "I did the painting based on my three visits to southwest China, the mountain area, which is very poor," He Qi has said in an interview. "I found sometimes people did something wrong—even committed a crime—due to their poverty. Some of them became thieves, became robbers, and became prostitutes. I think Jesus had a special concern about the poor and their living right during his life on Earth."[†]

Giovanni Stradano (1523-1605), a Flemish artist who moved to Florence to study Italian art and culture, followed the style of Mannerism taught by Giorgio Vasari. The renovation of SS. Annunziata, which included his painting *Crucifixion*, was part of a city-wide project to modernize chapels and reemphasize the teaching of Biblical stories through art. Stradano captures the moment when Jesus says to the repentant thief, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Symbolic elements pervade the image, including Christ as the New Adam, Mary as the New Eve, the Cross as the tree of life, and the dog in chains as the defeated Satan. Among its Mannerist features are elongated proportions, contorted body positions, and use of bright yellow and orange colors in the fabrics.

Both artists interpret a narrative of Jesus' suffering to their respective contemporary audiences. He Qi develops a non-European artistic idiom for sharing Christian faith in Mainland China. Stradano teaches forgiveness to a Catholic Church that has watched as its vision of a Christian European culture was torn apart by Protestants.

NOTE

[†] Interview with Douglas LeBlanc in *Christianity Today* (January 7, 2002), 67-68. For more information on the artist He Qi, please see www.heqiarts.com.