

Jesus not forced upon us: reflections on two pieces of Christian art.

1.) Carving by Mother Maribel

In St Mary Magdalene's Chapel, St Mary's Convent, Wantage, Oxfordshire, are fifteen Stations of the Cross, carved by Mother Maribel over 27 years.

Photographs of each Station are on the Convent website:

<https://csmv.co.uk/prayers-and-meditations/pray-the-stations-of-the-cross/>

The website description of the below carving is:

“The Eleventh Station: Jesus is nailed to the Cross

In this panel John, the Mother of Jesus and the Holy Women are all present and suffering the impact of this terrible moment. Tradition says that the Mother of Jesus was shielded in some way during this hammering and in the carving she shelters behind the sensitive young Apostle and is supported by one of the Holy Women. The cross is being raised as the feet are nailed.”



Not only is Mary (second from the right) turning away from the horrible impact, we as the viewer do not see Jesus fully either. Yet, our mental vision of what is happening has at least as much impact as if we saw direct.

2.) Painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme

In the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, is the painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme, "Consummatum est, Jerusalem" (Jerusalem: It is finished), 1867.



In the bottom right we see the shadow of Jesus crucified, in between the crosses of the two thieves. Those who have carried out the crucifixion are walking back down the hill, their job done.

The museum website states that not showing Jesus full-on was a break from art tradition:

“the shadows of the three crosses thrown by the light of a stormy sky was such a startling break with the traditional representation of the theme that Gérôme's painting attracted some of the harshest criticism of his career.”

<https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/artworks/jerusalem-25601>

In the Bible, St Paul describes how on earth we only have a partial picture, but in heaven we will be fully present with Jesus:

“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face”
(1 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 12. New Revised Standard Version).

In these two pieces of art, Jesus is not forced upon us. Faith is not the same as sight:

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”
(Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 1. New Revised Standard Version).

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