

Ground Zero and Stations of the Cross ART TALK Edward Goldman, host KCRW, Los Angeles

TUE MAR 13, 2007

Listen to/Watch entire show:

A couple of weeks ago a friend of mine called to let me know about a rather unusual exhibition I shouldn't miss. It is a little bit off the beaten path, she warned, but you're an adventurous man, aren't you Edward? It was a challenge I simply had to take. Driving to the San Gabriel Valley turned out to be not such a big deal -- actually it's not far from Pasadena and San Marino. The unusual thing about this conceptual art exhibition was that it was mounted neither in a museum nor a commercial gallery, but in an Episcopal church, of all places.

Built in 1874, the Church of Our Saviour and its meticulously maintained grounds is everything that Hollywood location scouts could wish for: picturesque, idyllic, thoroughly steeped in the past. I'm sure that Cary Grant, playing an angel in *The Bishop's Wife*, the movie which won the Oscar for Best Picture in 1948* -- and Loretta Young, in its title role -- would feel perfectly at home in this small charming place. Though I'm not sure what their reaction would be to the decidedly contemporary art installations strewn about the grounds, including the cemetery and even invading the church sanctuary itself...

All together, there are fourteen of these sculptural installations, all done by New York-based artist and Episcopal priest Thomas Faulkner. The title of this exhibition, accordingly, is [Walking the Way of the Cross](#), in reference to the Stations of the Cross, which I had the chance to see last summer in Jerusalem's Old City. To be completely honest, I was more moved and challenged by this contemporary artistic interpretation of the Biblical story than by my dutiful walk along the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem.

The first station -- *Jesus Is Condemned to Death* -- is conceived by Reverend Faulkner as the small stage of a Greek tragedy, with its Chorus repeatedly whispering frightening words, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him, Crucify Him." The sound appears to come from a dozen salvaged flickering TV sets, sending out the hateful words in a cacophony of twenty different languages. In the center is a white pulpit with several badly scorched corporals -- the white cloths used in Communion. It couldn't be more ominous. Not being a religious person myself, I got the message of betrayal and violence and could only guess at the reaction of parishioners confronted so directly by the artist.

The Reverend Faulkner's art is informed not only by the tragedy of Jesus; immediately following the September 11 attacks, he became head chaplain of the temporary morgue at Ground Zero. The article on the Episcopal Church website says that his first call came at 2am and was a "request to bless the remains of a fireman whose body was pulled from the carnage. Blessing human remains and conducting memorial services" consumed the next eight months of his life.

I don't know how many of you can be persuaded to experience this unusual exhibition first-hand. I wish I had a video camera to convey the daring quality of this project. Going to a museum of contemporary art, one is expected to be challenged and confronted by the artists. But in the tradition-bound precincts of a church, such confrontation is an extremely rare occasion. A few Stations of the Cross are placed prominently inside the church. There is nothing pretty about them. Assembled from very mundane objects, they have a disturbing air about them. They make you think about how vulnerable our lives are. This exhibition definitely delivers a very eloquent sermon about the power of contemporary art and shows courage of conviction that for me, personally, is deeply impressive.

[Walking the Way of the Cross 14 Installations by Thomas Faulkner](#) On display at the Church of Our Savior through April 7

[Contemporary view of Passion](#) First seen at Convention, Stations of the Cross tours country by Frederick Quinn and Jerry Hames