



Curator's Statement

In this strange, unsettling, and painful year, time has often felt like an accordion, extending and compressing again and again; fast, slow, and now fast once more as we suddenly mark a year of pandemic time. *Stations of the Cross*, like so many other exhibitions, festivals, and other cultural institutions, has had to adapt in fundamental ways.

In previous years, the central experience of *Stations of the Cross* involved walking through host cities, inviting visitors to experience the incidental insights and revelations that come from navigating urban spaces in search of sacred experiences. This year, as we continue to keep distant from one another out of self-protection and lovingkindness towards our neighbors—especially the most vulnerable—such processions are not possible. Indeed, one might consider refraining from touch as its own act of Lenten devotion, a fast from the nourishing company of friends and loved ones for the sake of a greater good.

With proximity inadvisable, we imagined an exhibition which dwells on distance, and the latitudinous connections made possible by technology. This year's Stations take viewers on a virtual journey through Russia, Pakistan, South Korea, the Netherlands, and various regions in between. A sojourn that would take years on foot, or days by airplane, collapses into less than an hour for visitors who listen to the recordings by artists in this year's project. You might even feel a touch of jetlag as you find yourself transported between disparate locations, contexts, and cultures on this virtual journey. We encourage you to pause and reflect along the way as you follow these Stations, and to pray if that is part of your practice.

Each station in this journey responds to a monument or memorial, reflecting a tumultuous year in which fresh memorials sprung up to grieve the dead and historic monuments to prejudice were toppled and dismantled. We invited artists to keep these connotations in mind, but ultimately we left the terms 'monument' and 'memorial' open to interpretation, for artists to construct as they saw fit. Some, like Todd Forsgren, turned familiar images, like the Washington Monument, on their head—evoking the disorienting, disturbing politics of the past four years, and especially the recent insurrection at the nation's capital. G. Roland Biermann photographed the Millennium Wheel in London, a tourist attraction that now sits sedentary as a stone, lit by an eerie blue light in honor of National Health Service workers. Others chose sites which are legible as memorials only to an intimate circle, who know the tragedy which transpired there. This is the case for Antonio McAfee's work, which honors his cousin, murdered at a Baltimore metro stop. Another artist, S. Billie Mandle, reminds us that the natural world can, within moments, turn into a

graveyard, as she reveals in a photograph taken in the aftermath of devastating wildfires in her home state of California.

There is no single memorial which can effectively capture the myriad traumas of the past year, from the staggering toll of the pandemic to bleak examples of systemic racism and climate crises of biblical proportion. While these challenges have intersected this past year, often with devastating effect, *Stations of the Cross* does not attempt to summarize them, or generalize the agonizing impact they have had on specific communities, families, and individuals. Instead, this project invites viewers to bear witness to this troubling season through the intimate reflections of individual artists, who find in the Passion a lens to interpret the present.

A note of sorrow vibrates through many of these images. Not only is that fitting for the events of this year, it is a crucial part of the tradition, and effectiveness, of the Stations as a liturgical practice. The events which the Stations commemorate are painful, and they test—one might even say train—the empathy of those who engage them in a succession of prayers. They insist that viewers pause in the uncertainty and pain that commences with Jesus' condemnation and ends with his crucifixion and entombment. They defer the relief and celebration of resurrection to Easter, recognizing that the good news of that day is made sweeter by remaining, for a time at least, in the grief that precedes it.

While the work of mourning is serious, it can also be replenishing. It is work that we can, and must, do together, however atomized and detached our circumstances at present. Moreover, while the celebration of resurrection is unabashedly Christian, as it should be, the *via dolorosa* offers a path that can be instructive across multiple faiths, and none. Christians may travel its route in anticipation of salvation, but that is not the only possible destination. The Stations of the Cross invite an empathy that knows no theological copyright and requires no passport. It demands, quite simply, the capacity to behold—to truly see—the suffering of the Other in our midst. And, at least for the moment, that may be miracle enough.

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