

God's Handiwork

FOR 20 YEARS,
THE PAGEANT OF
OUR LORD HAS
BROUGHT GREAT
ART TO LIFE.

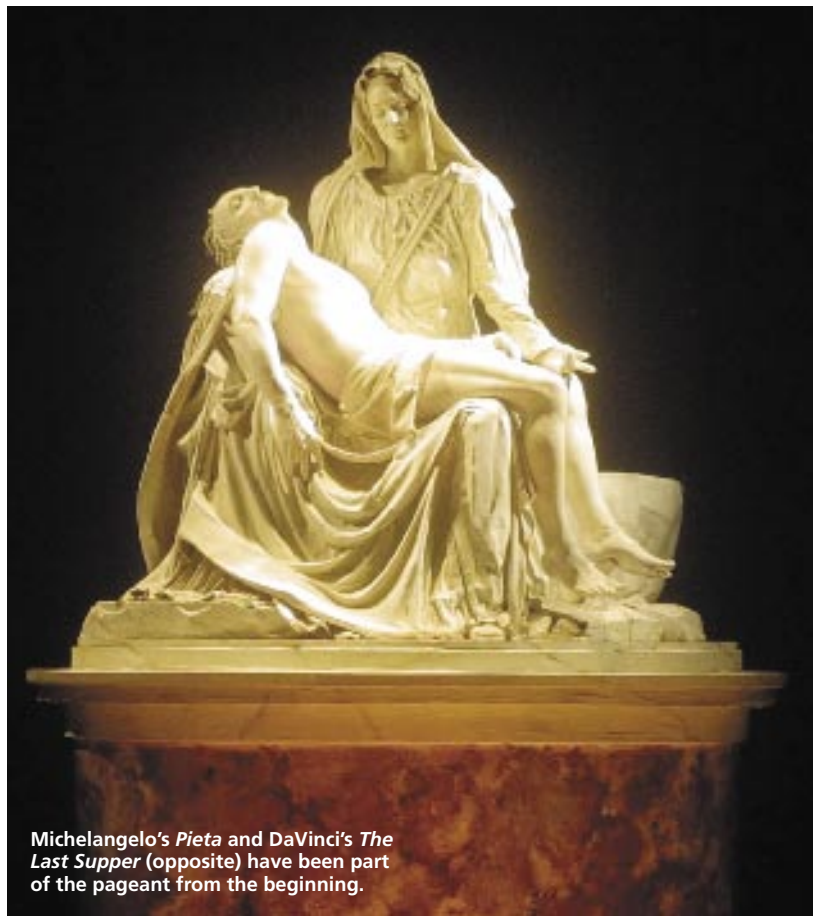
Over the past twenty years, some of the world's legendary pieces of art, including Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* and Michelangelo's *Pieta*, have made their way to Rolling Hills Covenant Church in the suburbs of Los Angeles for the Pageant of Our Lord.

BRIAN PETERSON

Inspired by the world-famous Pageant of the Masters in Laguna Beach, California, and the Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany, the Pageant of Our Lord (www.pageantofourlord.com)—using live models posing motionless to bring to life classical works of Christian art—celebrates the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter. More than 150,000 people have experienced the wonder of the Easter message through the pageant.

Rolling Hills Covenant Church will present this year's pageant from March 11 to 25. Under the art direction of local artist Brad Hicks, the 2005 pageant will include sixteen sacred masterpieces, including a new piece, *Doubting Thomas*, a sixteenth-century sculpture by Andrea Del Verrocchio.

"This is my way to serve the Lord," says Hicks. "The pageant is a beautiful way to show God's love for humanity, and to share with oth-



Michelangelo's *Pieta* and DaVinci's *The Last Supper* (opposite) have been part of the pageant from the beginning.

ers the salvation we have in Christ."

"God's Faithfulness" is the theme for the twentieth anniversary show. Karen Forest is the pageant's drama director. Her husband, Guy, wrote an original script that will be accompanied by music performed by a sixty-voice choir and a full orchestra. More than 300 local volunteers will be used to assemble the artwork, paint the models, participate in the drama, and



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perform the musical score.

During the pageant's twenty years, more than forty works of art have been created. *The Last Supper* and *Pieta* have been part of the show every year. Others recreated works of art have included the *Well of Moses* a fourteenth-century sculpture featuring six Old Testament prophets by Claus Sluter; a seventeenth-century relief of *The Sacrifice of Isaac*; *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* by Jan Vermeer; *The Baptism of Christ*, reproduced from a statuary group in the Sala dei Misteri, and *Daniel in the Lion's Den*, a black and white etching by Doré.

"Performing in the pageant changed my life," said one of the models from the recreation of a piece called *The Crucifixion* in 2003. "I was going through marital and business difficulties at the time, felt the whole world was on my shoulders, and I was looking for answers," he said. "The turning point was the first dress rehearsal. As I climbed up the painting and positioned myself, and the lights and the music began, I was actually there watching Jesus be crucified. I felt forgiveness in my heart. God's only Son died for me, and he forgave me. I finally had peace in my life, and that's because I cast all those burdens on God and learned to forgive."

The musical score features pieces from composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, Handel, and Tchaikovsky. Some of the music in the twentieth-anniversary pageant include "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," "Intermezzo" from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, "Gabriel's Oboe," "Theme from Schindler's List," "Ave Maria," and "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

David Halverson, worship pastor at Rolling Hills, serves as producer and musical director for the pageant, which he says is a year-round project.

"I have visited art museums in many countries of the world searching for art that would fit the theme of the pageant and that would be feasible to recreate in life-size dimensions," he says. "It is difficult to find art—sculpture,



The *Well of Moses* is a fourteenth-century sculpture by Claus Sluter.

Brian Peterson is director of communications at Rolling Hills (California) Covenant Church.



Body paint transforms a child into a sculpture.

equally between classical paintings and sculptures. One or two new pieces are created each year.

A small army of artists is used to apply body paint, specially formulated for the show, to the models. It's like applying paint to a canvas. Highlighting and shading are key elements to create the illusion necessary to enmesh a person into a work of art.

When the makeup is finished, the models are positioned in a set that has been crafted to duplicate every aspect of the classic work of art. That can cause complications requiring ingenious solutions: when designing a recreation of "The Wise Men"—an heirloom Fabergé-style egg by Aline Becker of Springfield, Missouri—back in 1993, Harper realized that using adult actors would make the piece twenty-five feet high; too high for the eighteen-foot sanctuary ceiling. He instead recruited junior-high boys as actors, making the piece only seventeen feet high.

Safety is very important in all the art recreation. Footrests, handrails, safety belts, and harnesses are used to ensure that the models, who often are placed in demanding positions for lengths of time, can perform without distractions.

The Pageant of Our Lord is a monumental undertaking each year, and is revered for good reason. Not only has it provided tremendous entertainment and exposed a variety of cultures to art, it also has struck a spiritual cord in the hearts of everyone who sees it. □

paintings, ceramics—that is done in a style and has the dimensions that our pageant can use."

The idea for the pageant originated with Halverson and Stephanie MacKay in 1985. Rassie Harper, a retired local firefighter with no formal art training, served as the artistic director during the presentation's first seventeen years. As artistic director, Harper was known for his inventiveness, turning cardboard, cloth, pieces of linoleum, bicycle seats, and wire into works of art.

Nancy Calkins penned the original script that featured just six works of art and played to a total of 3,000 people during five performances in 1985.

The pageant has been acclaimed locally and internationally in newspapers and on television. People who have at-

tended the presentation or participated in it have described it as "breathtaking," "exhilarating," "glorious," "amazing," "incredible," "inspiring," "moving," and "awesome."

"I remember playing Mary in *Pieta* for the first time," says a former pageant model. "Rehearsal, makeup, lights led to a concentrated study of the pose and finally time for the presentation to begin. I was excited and ready to stand motionless for the minutes it took the orchestra to play. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed with emotion. How had Mary, the mother of Jesus, felt holding her crucified son in her arms? Tears flowed down my cheeks, sadness overcame me, and the marbled makeup ran down my face."

A typical performance is divided

For more information about the Pageant of Our Lord, contact Rolling Hills Covenant Church at (310) 521-2520 or log onto <http://www.pageantofourlord.com>.