FEATURE

'The Face: Jesus in Art' to air on PBS in April



CNS photo courtesy Catholic Communication Campaign

A Raphael frescoe featuring the risen Christ from the Vatican's "Sala della Segnatura" is among the artwork presented in "The Face: Jesus in Art," a two-hour program to be released in April on PBS stations nationwide. The multimillion dollar production was funded in part by the Catholic Communication Campaign.

By Gerri Pare Catholic News Service

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NEW YORK — "The Face: Jesus in Art" (EBC) is a remarkable film that tells the story of how art attempts to comprehend and touch the divine in depicting the human Christ.

With major funding from the Catholic Communication Campaign, which also helps support the work of the Office for Film and Broadcasting, the film is never less than visually stunning.

Indeed, the opening special-effects montage, starting with cosmic images that gradually morph into the eyes, then the many faces of Christ, is simply beautiful to behold. This visual morphing technique is judiciously used to capture how Christ was seen in different cultures, centuries and periods of art.

Although there were no known depictions made of Christ during his life on earth – or physical descriptions recorded – artists have been drawn to the Savior as a subject for their art. In fact, Christ's image has appeared in the art of cultures worldwide for nearly two millennia.

The film poses the interesting question whether it is ever proper for an artist to dare to portray God. It then moves chronologically from the earliest depictions in the third century to contemporary artistic renderings from many lands.

The average viewer would not be able to visit many of these works of art, but here, accompanied by a glorious music track including vocals by Andrea Bocelli and informative narration by Mel Gibson, Patricia Neal and Edward Herrmann, among

others, one can experience both great art and spiritual uplift.

The paintings, sculptures, mosaics and frescoes of such masters as El Greco, Rembrandt and Michelangelo are predictably highlighted. However, so are lesser-known and little-seen works such as the extraordinary icons at the remote fourth-century monastery of St. Catherine's at Mt. Sinai. In fact, the face of Jesus on one of these icons became the dominant image of Christ for centuries. The events of Christ's life are reviewed in the section entitled "The Gospel According to Giotto," using the breathtaking frescoes seen in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua.

From the earliest times, representations of Christ sought to reveal the divine, inspire devotion and teach about his life. Interiors of churches were considered "the books of the illiterate." However, in the eighth century, Byzantine images of Christ were destroyed by the Iconoclasts for nearly a century, before it was again acceptable to venerate sacred images.

"The Beautiful Christ" is the section covering Renaissance Italy. In this era, physical beauty was paramount and Christ was depicted as a perfect creation, more beautiful than any human. Familiar as it is, it is still thrilling to see Michelangelo's striking "Last Judgment" so dramatically captured on film.

How the face of Jesus appeared in Asia, Africa and Latin America shows the importance of culture in relating to Christian images. Some may be surprised that at times the Holy Trinity was depicted as three identical faces of Jesus on one head, called the triplet trinities. Although even-



CNS photo courtesy CCC

This is a detail from the promotional artwork for "The Face: Jesus in Art." The work is a mosaic-composite made up of tiny images of Christ. The film examines 2,000 years of artistic renderings of Christ. It will debut in New York March 31.

tually suppressed, even condemned, such images continued to be painted into the 20th century.

Throughout, the narration explores and examines the history of Christ-centered art while fluid camerawork holds the viewer rapt.

As written by James Clifton and directed by Craig MacGowan, the film is an unforgettable tribute to the power of Christ's image to inspire the people of the world.

A splendid blending of words and images with state-of-the-art cinematography, "The Face: Jesus in Art" is cause for cele-

bration and is highly recommended.

The film is being shown in selected theaters and on PBS in April. WXXI in Rochester will telecast the film at 6 p.m. Saturday, April 14, with a repeat showing on April 21.

Due to a few strong images of suffering and the Crucifixion, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. Not rated by the Motion Picture Association of America.

Pare is director of the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

USCC names 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon' best film



CNS photo from Sony Pictures Classics

Zhang Ziyi stars in a scene from the movie "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." The Oscar-winning film also was chosen as the best movie of 2000 by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

NEW YORK (CNS) — "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" not only won best foreign film, best original score, cinematography and art direction Oscars in this year's Academy Awards. It also was picked as the best movie of 2000 by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

While the office annually selects the year's top 10 films, this is the first time it ranked them one through 10. The rankings were announced by the USCC Feb. 7.

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"Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," set in 19th-century Qing Dynasty China, focuses on the quest to recover a warrior's stolen and precious sword.

"The film blends mesmerizing martial arts with stunning special effects into a script brimming with intrigue and suspense," the Office for Film and Broadcasting said. It classified "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rated it PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Rounding out the top 10 were:

- "Traffic," which won Oscars for a screenplay from previously produced or published material and for film editing.
- for film editing 3. "Chicken Run."
- 4. "Butterfly."
- 5. "Billy Elliot."
- 6. "Best in Show."
- 7. "Remember the Titans."
- 8. "Cast Away."9. "The Color of Paradise."
- 10. "East-West."

"With all the talent and money moviemakers have at their disposal, one would hope for more inspiring films that families might enjoy and that might lift the human spirit," said a statement from Coadjutor Bishop Joseph A. Galante of Dallas, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Communications.

"Movies have the power to persuade, and it is incumbent upon movie makers to work for good and for viewers to demand the most of them," he added.