

EASTER AT THE MUSEUM

by Debi Olsthoorn



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Easter at the Museum

Classic Easter paintings come to life

Debi Olsthoorn

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MS. TELFORTE

Businesslike, self-assured, overconfident

GUARD

Helpful, believer

MARY

In Tintoretto painting (monologue)

DISCIPLE

In Mantegna painting (monologue)

JESUS' MOTHER MARY

In Schmalz painting (monologue)

MAN

On road to Emmaus in Caravaggio painting (monologue)

PRODUCTION NOTES

Script alone: 20 minutes

Script with music: Approximately 45 minutes

Overview

As the security guard escorts an insurance agent around the museum, various paintings come to life, giving us an insight to different parts of the Easter story. Using a theatrical scrim and video projector, the audience first sees the artwork, then, on cue, the lighting changes to reveal the actors behind the scrim who tell their story. Many of the actors have monologues, making rehearsal scheduling very easy.

Props

Briefcase, cell phone, clipboard with papers, and pen, all for Ms. Telforte.

Costumes

Business dress for Ms. Telforte, the insurance agent. Security Guard costume for Guard. (Any solid blue shirt with a crest sewn onto the sleeve.) The characters for each painting need to be dressed as closely as possible to the artwork. For example, Mary in the Tintoretto painting wears a red long skirt with a blue blouse, the Disciple may wear a brown robe or a red and blue robe, the Jesus' Mother Mary in the Schmalz painting wears an all-white robe, and the Man wears a tan and brown robe, or a burgundy robe with a yarmulke. The choir, if you are including them in your performance, should dress all in black.

Stage Setup

All scenes are set in the museum, so make it as realistic as you can. Use museum-like set pieces (e.g., crowd control rope barriers, paintings hung on wall or easel, busts, sculptures, benches). Risers or other designated area for your choir, if you are using one. Use stage lights to focus the audience's

attention. You will need a large scrim (purchased from theatrical store) framed to look like a painting. (The frame may be inexpensively created from Fome-Cor or light wood and painted artistically.) Video projector is hung or on the floor in front of scrim at proper distance to project the full image, looking like a painting within the frame. Inside the scrim should be totally black (walls, floor, ceiling covered with black material). Actors must be able to discreetly enter the scrim area without the audience seeing them. Obtain highest possible digital copies of the following paintings to be projected onto the scrim:



Tintoretto
Cristo en Casa de Marta y Maria



Mantegna
The Agony in the Garden



Schmalz
Return from Calvary



Caravaggio
Supper at Emmaus

Other Creative Art (Optional)

Highlight one of the other art forms from your group. Someone may read an original poem, present an interpretive dance, create a live drawing/painting, perform an instrumental piece, or display some photography.

6
Scene 1

Welcome to the Museum

MS. TELFORTE: (*Bustling in*) Hello? Anyone here? Hello!

GUARD: (*Enters stage from other side.*) Yes, hello. Can I help you?

MS. TELFORTE: I sure hope so. May I speak to the museum curator?

GUARD: I'm sorry, but we're just about to close. It's 5:30, and everyone from the office staff has left.

MS. TELFORTE: And who are you?

GUARD: I'm the night watchman. I was just about to lock up.

MS. TELFORTE: Well, I guess you'll have to do. I'm Ms. Telforte from the National Office of Associated Museum Insurance Agencies.

GUARD: Ah ... a government agent?

MS. TELFORTE: It's come to the attention of the government that many of our museums are not properly insured, so I have been given the job of visiting all the museums and verifying that their insurance policies are up to date and accurate.

GUARD: As I said, I'm just about to lock up. Could you come back next week? Say on Tuesday, (*Says to the audience*) which is my day off? (*Back to MS. TELFORTE*) It's the Easter weekend, after all.

MS. TELFORTE: No one observes Easter anymore; it's just a few days of vacation at most. This is the perfect time to get some paperwork done while no one is here. (*Opening her files*) Now I have your insurance policy right here, and —

GUARD: Well, actually, that's not true ...

MS. TELFORTE: (*Taken aback*) Excuse me?

GUARD: Many people still remember Easter. In fact, we have a lot of artwork right here in my — I mean, our — museum on the subject of Easter.

MS. TELFORTE: You're kidding me, right? (*Looking around*) I don't see any Easter bunnies. No chocolate eggs.

GUARD: No, but there are lots of paintings telling the real

1 story of Easter.

2 MS. TELFORTE: I'm not really interested in the actual
3 artwork, sir — just whether or not it's insured.

4 GUARD: My name is Guy. You don't have to call me sir.

5 MS. TELFORTE: All right ... Guy. Let's face it — museums
6 are where we put all the old stuff. Sure, some of the
7 paintings and sculptures are nice enough, but it is their
8 monetary value that is important to us. The artists are
9 usually long dead and gone before their work becomes
10 valuable. Except for a few eccentric art critics, old
11 paintings don't have anything to say that would be
12 relevant to us today.

13 GUARD: If that were true, then why would thousands of
14 people around the world visit museums every day? And
15 if no one thought the art was relevant, why would we
16 need insurance?

17 MS. TELFORTE: Ahhhh, well, ummmm ...

18 GUARD: Listen — I'm not trying to be difficult, but some of
19 these paintings have plenty to say. I walk around here
20 every night and see the same paintings and sculptures.
21 Yet somehow each time I see them, I notice something
22 else, another detail.

23 MS. TELFORTE: And you are who? Some kind of expert?

24 GUARD: No. As I said, I'm the night watchman.

25 MS. TELFORTE: The night watchman. (*Sarcastically*)
26 Excellent. Lecturing me on the value of classical art.

27 GUARD: I'm just saying —

28 MS. TELFORTE: Look, I'm here; you're here. What do you
29 say we just do this and I'll be on my way. Everyone will
30 be happy. OK?

31 GUARD: And by everyone, you mean *you*?

32 MS. TELFORTE: (*Almost begging now*) Please! This is the last
33 museum on my list.

34 GUARD: (*Resigned and with a sigh*) Sure. Why not? I'll be
35 walking around alone all evening anyway. Might as
36 well have some company.

37 MS. TELFORTE: OK, that's more like it. (*GUARD gives her a*
38 *look.*) I mean, thank you. I really do appreciate this.

3 GUARD: That's right. We're quite a small place compared to
4 other museums, but we've focused our collection
5 purposefully on Christ's life here on earth.

6 MS. TELFORTE: That's kind of limiting, isn't it?

7 GUARD: Not at all. There are so many stories to tell about
8 Jesus. So many miracles, teachings, and conversations.
9 And the stories often tell us more about ourselves than
10 we want to admit.

11

12 SONG: About the life of Jesus. Suggestion:

13 Choir — “Who Is This Man?” by Mark Condon.

14 Choir — “I’ve Just Been with Jesus” by Tony Wood, Joel Lindsey.
15 Arranged by Russell Maudlin.

16 Solo — “Happy Day” by Ben Cantelon and Tim Hughes, copyright ©
17 2006 Thankyou Music (administered by EMI Christian Music
18 Publishing).

19

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21 **Scene 2**

22 Tintoretto — *Cristo en Casa de Marta y Maria*

23

24 MS. TELFORTE: I can't believe I'm taking art lessons from a
25 night watchman.

26 GUARD: Pardon me?

27 MS. TELFORTE: Ahhhh, nothing. Just talking to myself.
28 Let's start with this Tintoretto painting.

29 GUARD: The Tintoretto. Ah, yes — *Cristo en Casa de Marta y*
30 *Maria* — Jesus visiting with Mary and Martha. It's one
31 of my favorites.

32 **MS. TELFORTE:** (*Reading a list of facts from her file*) **Tintoretto.**
33 **Lived in the 1500s. Last great painter of the Italian**
34 **Renaissance. His father was a professional dyer who**
35 **experimented with mixing colors.** (*Looking up and talking*
36 *to GUARD*) **This isn't even one of Tintoretto's better**
37 **works. His *Paradise* painting, for example, is the**
38 **largest painting ever painted on canvas — eighty-one**

1 feet long! Now *that's* a painting worth insuring. This
 2 (*Waves a dismissive hand at it*) is some minor project he
 3 did in his spare time. I can check this one off quickly.
 4 (*Turns to go.*)

5 GUARD: Hold on. You've hardly looked at it!

6 MS. TELFORTE: (*Big sigh, looks at the painting, tilts head to one*
 7 *side.*) Busy household. Must be a party or something. Is
 8 that Jesus? Both he and the woman in black seem to be
 9 talking to this other woman seated in the corner.

10 GUARD: These two sisters, Mary and Martha, had opened
 11 their home to Jesus. Martha was all about serving the
 12 meal while Mary sat near to Jesus, taking in everything
 13 he taught.

14 MS. TELFORTE: I have a sister like that. Lazy. Never helps
 15 out. (*Light switches inside scrim. MARY comes to life.*)

16 MARY: Jesus was passing through our village that day, and
 17 my sister Martha invited him to our home for a meal. I
 18 was excited because I had heard he was a great teacher
 19 who explained the things of God in a way everyone
 20 could understand. But I had never actually heard him
 21 myself, because women were never allowed into any of
 22 the teaching sessions. But that day Jesus would be in
 23 our house, so I would be able to hear his lesson! I knew
 24 Martha needed help in the kitchen, but I couldn't resist
 25 sneaking into the room where Jesus was teaching. No
 26 one seemed to notice me at first. Jesus did see me there,
 27 but he didn't rebuke me or ask me to leave. So I moved
 28 a little closer until I was finally sitting right at his feet.
 29 I found what he said so fascinating that I must have lost
 30 track of the time. Suddenly, there was my sister,
 31 nagging me to come and help her in the kitchen. So in
 32 one ear I heard Martha pointing out that I wasn't in my
 33 proper place and complaining about unwashed
 34 vegetables, but in my other ear I heard Jesus
 35 commending me for my devotion and encouraging me
 36 to seek after the ways of the Lord. In those days
 37 everyone was wondering about Jesus and asking each
 38 other, "Who is this man?" To me, Jesus was a teacher, a

liberator; someone concerned with individuals — even
a plain, ordinary woman like me. (*Light switches back and
we once again see the painting.*)

SONG: A number about Jesus' ministry. Suggestions:

Solo — “I am Free” by Jon Egan, copyright © 2004 Vertical Worship
Songs (Administered by EMI Christian Music Publishing).

Choir — “This Man from Galilee” by Mark Condon, copyright © 2002
Bridge Building Music, Inc. (Administered by Brentwood
Benson Music Publishing, Inc., 741 Cool Springs Blvd.,
Franklin, TN 37067.)

Scene 3

Mantegna — *The Agony in the Garden*

MS. TELFORTE: (*Grudgingly*) OK, I'll admit there might have
been more to it than I saw at first.

GUARD: Glad you agree. Which is next on your list?

MS. TELFORTE: One called *The Agony in the Garden*.
Sounds morbid.

GUARD: In reality, it's a very colorful painting by Mantegna.
It's that one hanging right here.

MS. TELFORTE: (*Reading off facts from a file, bored*) Andrea
Mantegna. Lived in the 1400s. It's painted on wood with
what looks like tempera paint. This is one of four panels
from a “predella,” which apparently is part of the altar
in a church. (*Looking at the painting*) That's a really
desolate “garden.”

GUARD: I think it reflects the barrenness of Jesus feeling all
alone. But there's so much happening in this painting.
We see Jesus alone, praying, and several disciples
sleeping. In the distance there's a crowd approaching —
most likely Judas, I guess. There's that somber-looking
bird with its foreboding of death, and those angels
ready to come to Jesus' rescue, should he decide to call
upon them. Yet in the sky on the right, there's the
dawning of a new day, new hope. Almost makes you

1 want to wake up those disciples, doesn't it? (*Light*
2 *changes. DISCIPLE stands up after the light comes on.*)

3 DISCIPLE: I don't know if it was the stress of the previous
4 week or depression from the news that Jesus had to
5 suffer and die, but I just couldn't stay awake. I had
6 every good intention of praying with Jesus, but before
7 I knew it, he had to shake me awake. It was obvious
8 Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow. He was sweating,
9 and he told us he needed us to pray with him. I had
10 never seen him like that before. Why, just the previous
11 week a huge crowd had welcomed him into Jerusalem
12 like a celebrity! When he cleared the temple of the
13 vendors, he was like a super-hero. We thought how
14 great it would be if he were to become the King of Israel
15 and free us from the Romans. But that evening we saw
16 him differently. Not overturning tables in anger, but
17 washing our feet with humility, telling us to serve each
18 other. I was replaying in my mind what he had said at
19 supper about one of us betraying him, but then I must
20 have fallen asleep. Again. I got back up on my knees and
21 continued to pray. I thought of the many miracles he
22 had performed while I was with him, and all the people
23 he had helped. I prayed that God's will would be
24 accomplished this night, but between the soft night
25 breeze and the quiet cooing of the night owls ... well, I
26 was soon asleep once again. Not only would I betray
27 him three times later that evening, I wasn't even able to
28 pray with him at the very time he was in such mental
29 agony. I saw who Jesus was that night: a loving Son
30 who obeyed his Father, even if it meant suffering and
31 death. (*He lies back down into his position before the light*
32 *switches back and the painting appears once again.*)

SONG: A number about praying in the garden or the events leading to Crucifixion. Suggestions:
 Choir — “Via Dolorosa” by Billy Sprague and Niles Borup. CCLI #12853.
 Ensemble — “The Greatest Love” by Bernie Herms, Claire Cloninger, Kara Williamson, and Jan Williamson. CCLI #3444579.

Scene 4

Schmalz — *Return from Calvary*

MS. TELFORTE: (*Talking into her cell phone*) Hello? Oh, hi, Anna. Yeah, I’m not finished yet ... Well, I’m still here at this last museum ... I know it’s taken longer than I thought ... No, not a problem, it’s just so interesting that — (*Correcting herself*) I mean, there’s just so much more work here than I first thought. Could we put dinner off for a little longer? Thanks. Call you soon. (*Ends call and says to GUARD*) Sorry about that. I’m supposed to meet my girlfriend for dinner.

GUARD: As I said, you could come back on Tuesday.

MS. TELFORTE: Yeah, when you’re not here, I got it. Let’s just continue, shall we? (*Looking at her file*) So apparently last month you acquired a painting by Herbert Gustave Schmalz called *Return from Calvary*?

GUARD: (*Indicates painting.*) Yes, right here. The friends of Jesus are leaving Golgotha’s hill after the Crucifixion. The apostle John and Mary Magdalene are supporting Mary, the mother of Jesus.

MS. TELFORTE: I don’t know anything about this artist, Schmalz.

GUARD: He was a British painter who died in 1935. He traveled to Jerusalem and made many sketches and paintings of his travels. He’s not a very well known artist, and apparently this is his most famous work.

MS. TELFORTE: Again, I ask: how do you know all this? You’re only the security man.

1 GUARD: I read the museum brochure.

2 MS. TELFORTE: Oh.

3 GUARD: But every shift I have to walk through these rooms
4 and make sure everything is in proper condition, so I
5 see the same paintings night after night. After a while
6 you start to notice the details. To me, this artist has
7 certainly captured the emotion of these women; so
8 devastated. The other two women at the top of the
9 stairs are looking back at those three crosses on that far
10 hill. But look at the sky. Again, there's a brighter day
11 coming. (*Painting disappears and we see JESUS' MOTHER*
12 *MARY inside the scrim.*)

13 JESUS' MOTHER MARY: It was such a terrible day. They
14 had crucified my son — our Lord — and we were
15 overwhelmed by our grief. The horror of all that blood
16 and the pain he suffered was etched into our eyes, and
17 no amount of tears could wash it away. Over the
18 previous three years we had prepared so many meals
19 for Jesus. We had looked after his needs. Yet on that
20 dark day, there was nothing we could do for him. The
21 teachers of the law did not understand who he was.
22 They only saw him as a threat to their authority. The
23 Sadducees were concerned for their positions and the
24 privileges they received from Rome. But I saw Jesus
25 differently. As he was dying on the cross, he was
26 worried about who should look after me when he was
27 gone. He was also uneasy about John, the youngest
28 disciple, not having someone older to look out for him.
29 I saw who Jesus was that dark afternoon when he
30 asked us to look after each other: a loving Lord who
31 cared deeply for us all. (*JESUS' MOTHER MARY moves*
32 *back into position before the light switches back and the*
33 *painting appears once again.*)

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1 SONG: A number about what the cross means to us.

2 Suggestions:

3 Congregational Hymn — “When I Survey” — The hymn itself is in
4 the public domain, but there is a nice arrangement of this song
5 with “Above All” on praisecharts.com.

6 Solo with Choir — “Calvary” by Lari Goss and David Byerley
7 (available at sheetmusicplus.com).

8 Solo — “By His Wounds” by Mac Powell, Mark Hall, Steven Curtis
9 Chapman, and Brian Littrell, copyright © 2007 Praise Hymn.

12 Scene 5

13 Caravaggio — *Supper at Emmaus*

15 MS. TELFORTE: I have to admit, I am finding these
16 paintings to be more engaging than I thought they
17 would be.

18 GUARD: People usually find our museum more interesting
19 than they expected.

20 MS. TELFORTE: (*Looking at her cell phone*) Another text from
21 Anna. I guess I really should get going now.

22 GUARD: But we’re not finished.

23 MS. TELFORTE: (*Looking at her paperwork*) Yes, we are.
24 According to my list, that was the last painting I had to
25 verify.

26 GUARD: The story of Easter doesn’t end with Jesus on the
27 cross.

28 MS. TELFORTE: Oh, I believe he was a good man. He helped
29 a lot of people, and apparently his Sermon on the Mount
30 is a classic. But that was two thousand years ago.
31 Besides, what can I say? The story has a sad ending.

32 GUARD: You can say you’ll text Anna and tell her you have
33 one more painting to see.

34 MS. TELFORTE: Earlier I almost had to bribe you to let me
35 into the museum, and now you won’t let me leave.

36 GUARD: Now that we’ve come this far, I want you to have the
37 full tour,

38 MS. TELFORTE: Listen, I appreciate what you’ve done, but

1 I've gotta go.

2 GUARD: (*Imitating her from Scene 1*) Look — I'm here; you're
3 here. What do you say we just finish this and you'll be
4 on your way? Everyone will be happy. Right?

5 MS. TELFORTE: Grrrr! (*Pulls out cell again, talks out loud what*
6 *she's texting.*) One — more — pic — to — see. Be — there
7 — in — twenty. (*Snaps cell shut in impatience.*) OK, what's
8 the next must-see painting?

9 GUARD: This one. *Supper at Emmaus.*

10 MS. TELFORTE: I'm starving, I'm late for dinner, and you
11 show me a painting call "Supper"?

12 GUARD: It's by Caravaggio, who —

13 MS. TELFORTE: (*Ho-hum attitude, reels off the facts*) I know who
14 Caravaggio is. Born 1571, died 1610. Unique use of light,
15 big influence on Baroque school of art. What's the story
16 here? These two men seem surprised at something.

17 GUARD: They just identified that it's Jesus they've been
18 talking with.

19 MS. TELFORTE: Jesus? (*Looking more closely at the painting*) I
20 don't know if I've ever seen a painting of him without a
21 beard.

22 GUARD: I suppose that was the artist's way of explaining
23 why the men didn't recognize him. (*Painting disappears.*
24 *MAN comes to life.*)

25 MAN: Why didn't I see it before? We had actually been
26 walking and talking with Jesus without recognizing
27 who he was. I suppose it was because we were so intent
28 on our discussion. We were especially confused about
29 what the women had just told us. They said they'd gone
30 to the tomb that morning, but found it empty. They
31 went on to tell us about seeing angels and hearing Jesus
32 tell them he was alive, but we didn't know if we should
33 believe them. Then as we were walking home to
34 Emmaus, this "stranger" caught up to us on the road
35 and joined in the conversation. He ribbed us for being
36 so slow to believe. He started to explain all kinds of
37 things to us, things that we had been wondering about.
38 When we reached our village, we invited him in for



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