Crucifixes Before Telephone Poles

Three crucifixes stand in the foreground at a viewpoint, in front of a short concrete wall less than half the crucifixes' height, but tall enough to keep a child from tripping and accidentally falling over the edge. Behind the wall, we see the city, a sea of towers and telephone poles. And beyond the city, we have a mountain range that stretches the entire length of the canvas.

The peak of the mountain, at all points, all across the canvas, is white: covered in snow. It looks like a cloud, elongated, stretched from one side of the canvas to the other. It competes with the line at which the city meets the mountains, a second horizon, if not the first. Its whiteness draws the eye as a sharp contrast between the gray distant mountain and the deep blue, cloudless sky. The eye then follows this line across the canvas, from right to left, over the city, to the crucifixes on the ledge.

The three crucifixes are all colorful and different. Painted Jesus appears in three different outfits: beige loincloth; purple loincloth; blue robe. His arms are depicted in three different positions: nailed to the cross; down at his sides; palms up, elbows bent, as if checking for rain. And the decor behind him depicts different symbols: blood and skulls; the sea and the fiery sky; abstract geometric patterns that evoke an uncertain spiritual energy. Three different crucifixes, and the implications of this are clear: there are an infinite number of ways to depict this historic event. Infinite interpretations. Three implies infinity.

Beyond the wall, telephone poles stand out amidst the sea of towers. They shouldn't, we know that no telephone pole is taller than a tower, but they do. So we look closer, and we realize that the telephone poles are actually in front of the sea of towers. Perhaps they are right at the base of

the mountain from which we are looking out (opposite the majestic snow-capped mountain in the distance). Their design is simple and familiar; they are each a cross. A tall wooden beam, with a shorter, horizontal beam towards the top.

Telephone poles bearing the design of the crucifix.

Among the towers in the great expanse below, a few stand out as taller than others. Each resembling a crucifix, or telephone pole, without arms. But each faded, gray, very much a part of the background. The telephone poles are in much greater detail.

An art critic who cuts no corners might consider the children's game Telephone. You know the game. A row or circle of children, the first child thinks of a word and whispers it to the next child. The next child whispers the word he's heard to the next child, and so on down the line, until the last child, who says the word, except that by now, that word has changed, been mutated as it had been passed along, from child to child. "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11, English Standard Version) becomes "Give us today the food we need." (New International Version). Crucifixes become telephone poles, become pillars that raise up and hold together the fabric of our modern world.

And but, Christ almighty, those mountains! Those beautiful mountains! Without those mountains, would we even be looking in this direction right now? No. Without those mountains, this is just another city, and these are just your average crosses.