

George gittoes essay sample

[Art & Culture](#), [Painting](#)



Painter, photographer and filmmaker, George Gittoes is an eyewitness to the worlds contact zones. Visiting the battle and killing fields of Rwanda, Iraq, Bosnia, Afghanistan- Gittoes produces poignant, rare images of the aftermath of terror, shock and death on the edge of human experience. His painting ‘ The Preacher’, winner of the Blake Prize for Religious Art in 1995, was completed following his visit to Rwanda in 1995 with the Australian peacekeeping forces. In his own words:

“ The Preacher is probably the most famous painting I’ve done. It’s in art books all over the world, it’s been published many times – it’s even on the cover of some African Bibles. The Preacher has become a symbol of faith in Africa.” It was during the Kibeho massacre in Rwanda. When a lot of people are being killed, and people know that they’re going to die, they do things which take away their dignity. For example, they dig a hole and cover themselves with dirt and try to hide. The morning before I found the preacher I went to the latrines – they’re just big holes in the ground with wood over them. I looked in one of these holes and there was a women looking up at me. She’d escaped the massacre by hiding down in this pit. She had a baby on her back and three children around her. We got them out... While the massacre was going on people were rushing in herds this way and that way trying to get away from the killers. But I suddenly came to an area where everything was still and calm.

There was this preacher sitting on a bag of wheat and he created this sense of calm just by reading the Bible. He was reading in French the Sermon on the Mount. It was incredible the sense of peace and beauty in that group; you could see people holding their hands in prayer. Now, whether you

believe in the Spirit or not, what he did was give the people their dignity back. Every time there was a spot where the Rwandan Patriotic Army soldiers weren't, I'd try to sneak some kids out to safety. The preacher had two little orphans who'd sidled up to him. He'd noticed a little window where the soldiers weren't, so he said to me " Get them out now", and I did. When I came back everyone there had been killed - but I never found the preacher. I've been haunted by him since... I hope that he survived." George Gittoes.