

**Masterpiece of Art Memorial to Fallen Soldiers**

REREDOS IN ST. JOHN'S CHURCH

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Though the Italians, the Greeks, and the Egyptians have the reputation for the most outstanding productions of art, the standard which has been reached in Australia at the present day would come as a complete surprise to those who have not observed the work of some of our Australian artists.

The Mosaic opus sectile reredos which is now being constructed in St. John's Church of England, Launceston, as a memorial to soldiers fallen in the Great War from that parish is an excellent specimen of present-day art in this country. The whole of the work is being carried out by Messrs. Brooks Robinson and Co., Melbourne, and stands as a glowing tribute to Australian art and industry. Measuring 8ft. 6in. in length by 3ft. in breadth, the work, which is a representation of Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting "The Last Supper," is striking in its beauty both in colour and expression. The picture is constructed with glass tiles, imported from England, which were cut by Mr. F. G. Anderson, under the direction of Mr. Wheldon, of Brooks Robinson's. The tiles, which are similar to those used in Westminster Abbey, are set in on a cement back-ground in a cavity in the bricks, where they will remain as long as the building lasts. Set in the middle of the semi-circular wall of the chancel, and directly above the altar, the picture is appropriately placed, and forms a most striking additional adornment to the already handsome interior of the building.

The natural glitter of the material adds beauty to the sheen of the painting, which is magnificently done, the subdued colour tones harmonising to form a picture of rare beauty. No less than 15 tints are used, and of these the rich blue forming the background to the picture is particularly pleasing to the eye.

The original was an oil fresco painted on the end wall of the Madonna del Gracie, Milan, an old monastery, and has been described by Richter as "the most perfect composition in the history of painting of all ages." The verdict of the world is that "The Last Supper" in its original state must have been the greatest picture ever painted, excelling Michael Angelo's "Last Judgment." In no other picture in the world was such grandeur of design united with such intellectual power and spiritual loveliness. Together with Raphael's Sistine Madonna and Angelo's "Last Judgment," it has become one of the household gods of the civilised world.

In ancient mosaic art the characters were worked in very small pieces, but in this production each face is a separate piece of material, and therefore far more distinct. Each individual is a study in itself, and in every figure there is a perfect study of physiognomy and emotion.

The central figure in the well-known picture is of course that of Christ. The intellectual elevation, the fineness of nature, the benign God-like dignity, suffused with the profoundest sorrow in this divine head, reach the highest pinnacle of art. Next to Christ is St. John in his disconsolate attitude as he raises himself to reply to Peter and leans his clasped hands upon the table. Almost feminine sweetness of countenance is expressed in this character. Peter leaning from behind is all fire and energy. Judas is shown guiltily starting back; St. Andrew, with his long grey beard, lifts up his hands, expressing the wonder of a simple-hearted old man; St. James (minor), resembling the Saviour in his mild features, lays his hand on Peter with questioning surprise. Bartholomew, at the extreme end of the table, has arisen perturbed from his seat; he leans forward with a look of eager attention. On the left of the Saviour is St. James (major), who has also a resemblance to Christ. His arms are outstretched; he shrinks back, repelling the thought of treachery with horror. St. Thomas is behind St. James, rather young, with a short beard. His attitude is threatening. Philip, young, with a beautiful head, protests his love, his truth. Matthew, as one who belongs to a more educated class than the rest, turns to Jude and points to the Saviour as if about to repeat His words. Simon and Jude sit together. Jude expresses consternation; Simon with his hands out-stretched, a painful anxiety.

The painting is burnt on to the tiles by Brooks Robinson and Co.'s artist, Mr. V. Brum. It was the same company who painted the beautiful designs on the windows of St. John's Church. It is estimated that the cost of the reredos will be approximately £400. Later, when the money is forthcoming, the whole of the semi-circular wall parallel with the reredos will be filled in with Mosaic work, but in the meantime curtains designed in Mosaic will be hung round on both sides.

It is considered that this memorial is the finest piece of work of its kind in Australasia, and it is all of Australian manufacture.

Several other details have yet to be completed in the interior of the church, the new portion of which is said to excel in artistic beauty and design any church in Melbourne, except the Cathedral. As soon as the names can be procured, it is intended to erect a large tablet in Mosaic architecture and inscribe thereon the personnel of those soldiers connected with St. John's Church who fell in the great war.