

*INRI*, by Martinus Sumbaji

art selection and comment by [John Kohan](#) in the [March 24, 2021](#) issue



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Beaches and scrap piles on his home island of Bali provide Martinus Sumbaji with the materials he needs to make weathered wood “faith boxes” like this portrait of Christ in his Passion. The Indonesian Roman Catholic artist knows from commercial work in animation and digital vector design that imagery with sacred content needs

to be accessible to the larger non-Christian culture in which he lives. He uses symbols like the cross, the lamb, and the grape cluster, universally recognized as religious emblems in our age of globalization. His paint-dripping, stencil-like image of Jesus as the Man of Sorrows owes much to the street art of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Banksy. He turns the Latin initialism of the title, taken from the sign above the cross in centuries of religious art, into a modern corporate logo.

The medium is very much the message in this lost-but-now-found-object piece, where a crumpled soda can becomes a chalice and barbwire spirals off into a painted strand of the crown of thorns. Says Sumbaji: "I found a piece of wood with many nail scars and thought of the suffering of Christ as I made this box. Like him, it had been used and abused and thrown away." What is despised and rejected can be repurposed through art.