

Ron DiCianni's Resurrection

A beloved Christian artist returns to the fore

By Andy Butcher



TOP: DiCianni's work reflecting his perception of The Second Coming of Jesus Christ; **LEFT:** In the studio ready to create; **RIGHT:** Spiritual Warfare is one of the artist's best-known works.

Artist Ron DiCianni recognizes the appropriate subject of the giant mural that has been the focus of his brush for most of the past couple of years—the resurrection of Jesus.

The project is expected to mark something of a rebirth for the man whose name was long synonymous with Christian art, but whose work has been largely absent from Christian stores in recent years.

There have been rumors that he had given up painting or even had died, but “I have never really gone anywhere,” other than relocating a few years ago from his longtime Chicago hometown to Southern California.

There, in a large warehouse, he has been working on the 40-by-12-foot mural commissioned for the forthcoming reopening of the famous Museum of Biblical Art in Dallas, destroyed by a fire in 2005.

DiCianni's depiction of Jesus emerging from the tomb, being greeted by a dozen heroes of the faith, is to be a centerpiece of the new center—and is expected to feature in a variety of inspirational products finding their way to Christian retail stores.



Previous DiCianni work has appeared on a wide range of prints and accessories, from Bible covers and bookmarks to mugs and models, as well as on scores of books. Among his best known pieces are *Spiritual Warfare*, which portrays a father praying at his child's bedside, and *Praying for Peace*, commissioned by the White House, which pictured George W. Bush interceding while flanked by Abraham Lincoln and George Washington.

The Dallas mural, due to be unveiled in the early part of 2010, features DiCianni's signature shimmering style and is based on life-sized models created by Hollywood scene builders. But as with his other works, DiCianni is aiming for proclamation rather than precision.

“I'm not trying to make a documentary



painting, I'm trying to help people recognize the truth and the relevance of the resurrection,” he said. “I want people to see the truth and relevance of Scripture in my work, not necessarily say, ‘Oh, that's how long Jesus' hair was.’ ”

'Touching God's Wounded'

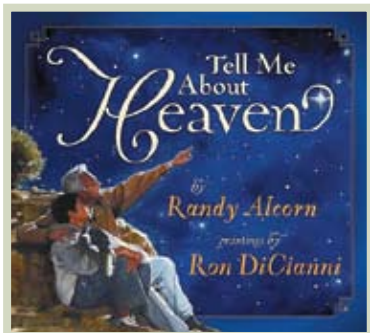
The impact DiCianni is seeking to make is seen by Jeff and Carol Lethin, owners of Promise Land Christian Books in Temecula, Calif., where DiCianni lives. His prints “are by far one of the most powerful tools in our store for touching God's wounded, needy and generally hungry people,” they said.

“Some of the people that come in the store just stand there weeping. Sometimes they just sit down for a



length of time before the prints. You can see that the Holy Spirit is really touching them in a powerful way.”

For DiCianni, the Lethins’ experience is confirmation of his conviction that art can communicate spiritual truths in a powerful way, especially to a generation increasingly disconnected from the written word in general and the Bible in particular.



Though he is known as a man of pictures, he is foremost a man of the Word, starting the day with Scripture reading and devotional study. “God forbid that we traffic in unlivd truth,” he said. “God forbid that I paint for money or to appease an audience or just because that’s what I do. If I could find a better way to bring my neighbors to Christ, I would give art up in a heartbeat.”

DiCianni sees a Jeremiah-like call on his life, telling how he was born only after his mother, who had planned on having an abortion, felt God speak to her moments before the pregnancy was to be terminated and tell her that He had a plan for her unborn child.

Working as a church janitor to help put himself through art school, DiCianni was soon a wildly successful general illustrator—appointed an official artist by the U.S. Olympics Committee, with commissions by several national corporations.

‘Power of Visuals’

It wasn’t until the mid-1980s that DiCianni got the first opportunity to marry his art with his heart. That was when he was asked to illustrate the cover of a book that sought to explore new territory in Christian publishing—a novel about spiritual warfare. His art for Frank Peretti’s *This Present Darkness* and its sequel, *Piercing the Darkness*, captured people’s imaginations.

DiCianni has worked on more than 50 titles through the years, winning several

Gold Medallion awards from the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association.

In addition to book publishers, DiCianni’s work was for many years featured on a wide range of products from suppliers, including DaySpring, Dicksons, Gregg

Gift Co. and Kerusso. More recently DiCianni has brought control of his work under his own Tapestry Productions, founded with his two sons.

While handling most of its own distribution to stores and selling direct to consumers, Tapestry currently licenses some DiCianni work to Time Factory Publishing (calendars) and James Lawrence Co. (bookmarks, magnets and small gift items).

“We know that there are many product categories where customers would like more access to Ron’s work, as they have had in years past,” said Tapestry President and CEO Grant DiCianni. “We’re in the process of creating more strategic and targeted licensing relationships.”

With typical pieces taking a month to complete, DiCianni was initially daunted by the scale of the task of the large resurrection mural. The great Norman Rockwell, whom DiCianni reveres, only ever attempted one major mural during his career, “and I thought, so how dare I attempt it?” DiCianni said.

“Yet, if the Spirit of God says, ‘Go,’ we go. And God has a wonderful sense of humor,” he added. “I am afraid of heights, and yet I have been painting 16-plus feet up in the air.” **IGT**

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