

November 14, 2011 6:54 pm

# Nativity for the modern metropolis

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Film director Martha Fiennes has created a self-generating digital video

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**M**ary and Joseph's traditional Nativity stable has been swapped for a disused petrol station and abandoned church in the latest work from film director Martha Fiennes, which is being shown in London in the run up to Christmas.

Housed in a pavilion on Covent Garden's west piazza, "The Nativity" is a self-generating digital video Nativity scene in which 13 characters wander across a mutating set with infinite variations.

"I wanted to explore the idea of image. When you edit, you play God and you commit to an order of images but what if you add another dimension?" says Fiennes.

Working together with the Moving Picture Company, the post-production house behind visual effects in film series such as *Harry Potter* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Fiennes has created a digital painting that has been coded to show the

13 characters randomly against an array of diverging backdrops.

Joseph may find himself in a *Bladerunner*-esque dystopian environment being followed by Mary Magdalene in a provocative red dress. Equally, he could find himself in front of a Renaissance church next to Mary cradling the baby Jesus.

There are plenty of places for the three wise men to gather – outside petrol stations, in front of slums or in the Alps – and there is a large dog that wanders around following everybody.

No two sequences are ever the same as a computer will randomly pick which backdrop and characters to bring together. The technology is similar to that used in video games.

“I thought about the most painted painting, a highly representational image with a story behind it that everybody could identify with,” says Fiennes.

“The computer makes its own decision about what to show. This generates a sense of compulsion, enchantment, expectation and it is magical. There is universality in this.”

She bought a Franciscan monk along to see the installation which he thought was so good that he was convinced “the Vatican would buy it”.

The film will be shown in Covent Garden, London, until January 5.

**Printed from:** <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/cee792d0-0ee0-11e1-b83c-00144feabdc0.html>

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