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You go up a ramp amid the steady stream of mums, dads, grandparents and kids, into the vast white hall where *Heritage 2013* is set out. The impact is breathtaking, though for me the work was also deeply moving. Here at GOMA, the Gallery of Modern Art, on Brisbane's Southbank, Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang offers three huge installations together comprising his exhibition "Falling Back to Earth." Each in its own way represents the fragility and yet the resilience of life. *Heritage 2013* is the one that bowled me over, however, with its many sacred resonances. First of all, it may help you to look at some pictures on the website:

[http://www.gagoma.qld.gov.au/exhibitions/current/cai\\_guo-qiang](http://www.gagoma.qld.gov.au/exhibitions/current/cai_guo-qiang)

*Heritage 2013* represents the gathering of all creation around a single waterhole. On a beach of white sand, surrounding the blue water and reflected in its surface, stand 99 animal figures—one short of a hundred, in a nod to imperfection and incompleteness. The scales are intentionally a bit off—I found myself thinking, for instance, that if the African elephant had been full-size it would have dominated the exhibition. Anyway, each figure is a lifelike construction covered in hide. There are Australian animals (kangaroos, wombats, a water buffalo) and African ones (lions, giraffe, chimps); there is a polar bear and there are pandas, tigers and jaguars; and we find animals both large and small, including exposed-looking little deer and baby goats amid the hulking predators. The whole world is present, in all its diversity, yet every creature is portrayed with its tongue out, straining towards the water. All are different yet all are as one.

As you circulate meditatively around the installation, or sit on the side benches to look and ponder, you pick up snippets of conversation. I was struck by one little boy insisting to his mother that it didn't make sense. I was that kid once—clever, but a bit stupid. I also overheard a retiree talking to his wife about how many man-hours all this would have taken, and wondering if it was worth it. What price Cai's painstaking evocation of our shared creatureliness, our joint dependence on a dwindling resource, our collective exposure to increasing environmental threat, but also our common reliance on God's mercy and on God's future? Despite that boy's artless attempt to bring a disquieting scene under mental control, and his practical elder's lack of imagination, most onlookers seemed to appreciate that *Heritage 2013* represented more than an unlikely congregation of mutually ambivalent or even hostile species, or else just a clever exercise in moulding and stitching.

I found myself thinking biblical thoughts. I thought of Noah's ark, since many of the creatures were in pairs and all the species were together. One supposes that the threat outside made it necessary for creatures on Noah's ark to get along. Likewise, thirst and the threat of limited resources—represented by that narrow waterhole—overcame fear and hostility as herbivores and carnivores rubbed shoulders in their overpowering need.

I also found myself thinking of water symbolism in the Bible: “ho, you who thirst, come to the waters”, and the water of life flowing from the temple. There is also symbolism of the end times to be found in this work. Isaiah’s vision of lamb lying down with lion came to mind, and also an image from Revelation 22 of the river of life flowing through the heavenly city. For me, the saints of God around the glassy sea of Revelation was also evoked, with the many creatures’ reflections in the clear water.

My wife found it saddening and confronting; “look how little we’ve left them” was her wholly appropriate reaction. I took her point, certainly, and with it a sense that for all the power and even danger of these creatures, they were forced together by the basic mechanics of survival thanks to our continuing destruction of their habitats.

But there was hope and beauty in it, too. Life is all of a piece, united in need but also in our joint belonging to planet earth. Yet life also belongs to God, whose beauty and richness is reflected in life’s varied wonders and terrors. All eyes look to God who gives them their food in due season, too, as the psalmist reminds us.

So here in *Heritage 2013* is an image of the created order at worship, peaceful and arrestingly focussed. And here is an image of all things held in being by the grace of God, now and for eternity—heaven, of course, is best understood not as our escape from earth but, rather, as the eventual fulfilment of this fragile creation in the fullness of God’s new creation. In the meantime, however, to love and honour that creation is one concrete way to express our faith in the new creation.

In light of all this I feel moved to pray. Won’t you join me...

*Living God, you raised Jesus from the dead as the pioneer of a new creation in which all living things will find their proper end. Raise us, we pray, from the folly of our sins, and raise the creatures of earth from the evils we inflict upon them. May we thirst together for the water of life, and may we who are baptised bring the water of life to others. And we thank you for sacred art, whether or not it is ‘religious’—for art that reveals your hand, and your heart. AMEN.*

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