News



A Nativity scene containing characters with cloth faces, by Belgian artist Victoria-Maria Geyer, is displayed in a white tent in Brussels, Monday, Dec. 1, 2025. (AP/Sylvain Plazy)

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Belgian authorities are mystified over a brazen theft over the weekend from a Christmas Nativity scene of an icon of infant Jesus Christ that had been widely scorned online.

Snatched from his crib on the Grand Place in historic old Brussels between late Friday night or early Saturday morning, this specific version of infant Jesus is part of a nativity scene which has been at the center of a maelstrom on social media because the faces of the characters lack eyes, noses and mouths.

Artist Victoria-Maria Geyer crafted the nativity figure out of cloth in hopes the faithful from Japan to Namibia would see themselves in the soft fabrics lacking any identifying features, so that "every Catholic, regardless of their background or origins can identify themselves" in the biblical story of the birth of Christ, she said.

Georges-Louis Bouchez, the head of the center-right MR party, which is part of Belgium's ruling coalition, said a post on X that Geyers' cloth Christ "in no way represent the spirit of Christmas." He compared the figures to what he called "zombie-like" people found at train stations.

Last year more than 4 million people visited the Christmas market in the center of Brussels' historic old city to sip mulled wine and hot chocolate and shop at 238 vendors of toys, clothes and ornaments.

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The center of the square is an enormous Christmas tree looming over a simple white tent holding the manger scene with the figures made by Geyer, a self-professed devout Catholic.

Her work was selected by both the local Catholic church and the City of Brussels in an annual tradition, said Delphine Romanus, deputy director of Brussels Major Events, which manages the manger and market.

Early reports that the infant Jesus had been beheaded are false, but Romanus said that in the past other baby Jesus figurines have been broken or stolen.

An initial deluge of negative comments on social media has turned positive, Geyer said.

Authorities have already replaced the baby Jesus in the crib. Organizers and security say they will keep a closer eye on the manger, but they have not taken any additional precautions.

Staring at the new baby Jesus, Brussels resident Francis De Laveleye shook his head and said that arguments of artistic merit should never descend into such a sordid affair.

"What is intolerable is that people attack the work of an artist to damage it and to turn it into a kind of stupid little controversy that ridicules Brussels."