

# Stories of Change: Hope, Faith and Love

Methodist Modern Art Collection Art Trail  
Saturday 4 September – Sunday 3 October 2021

**UNIQUE MOMENTS OF HEALING AND CONTEMPLATION**



The **Methodist Church** 

Methodist Modern  
 Art Collection

 COVENTRY  
CATHEDRAL

 centralhall  
The Methodist Church of Coventry Central Hall

 2021  
COVENTRY CITY OF CULTURE

#HopeFaithLove [methodist.org.uk/cityofculture](https://methodist.org.uk/cityofculture)

# History of the Collection

**This unique Collection was the inspired initiative of a Methodist layman, Dr John Morel Gibbs (1912-1996), from a Penarth shipping family. Gibbs was Vice-President of the Methodist Conference in 1959, and by the 1960s concluded that contemporary religious art could contribute to the life of the Church.**

## 1960s: collecting artworks illustrating the Gospels

Working with Penarth's local Methodist minister, the Revd Douglas Wollen (1909-1998) who was also an art critic, they acquired for the Methodist Church outstanding British 20th-century art. From the Collection's foundation in 1962, acquisitions reflected innovative approaches; some early works have a Welsh flavour; others looked beyond Europe, for example FN Souza, an Indian artist of international fame.

The 1960s were a time of energy and optimism with swift acquisitions of paintings, followed by a touring exhibition *The Church and the Artist* 1963-1965. Over 100,000 people saw the Collection at 30 venues. The exhibition was enthusiastically received, but virtually ignored by the art press. Even with a BBC television programme in 1964, overall reception was muted compared with the impact made by the opening of Coventry Cathedral.

## 1970s onwards: reuniting and relaunching the Collection

From the early 1970s, several Methodist schools held the Collection before paintings were reunited at Southlands Teacher Training College in the late 1970s. In the 1990s, after conservation, the Collection relaunched with an exhibition at Turner House, Penarth. It then resumed a national touring schedule.

With the 1990's revival of British art of the mid-20th century, the Methodist Church set up new management for the Collection chaired by John Newton Gibbs, son of the original founder. More works by women and international artists have been acquired since 2000, and the Collection is still growing.

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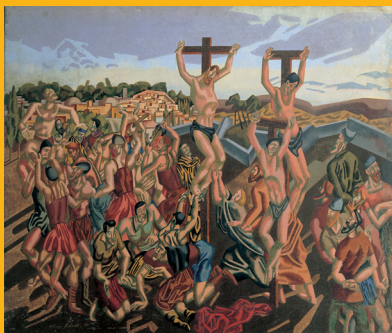
- **Follow this innovative Art Trail across Coventry and beyond to see five churches' interrelated exhibitions**
- **Explore the range of artworks within their host communities**
- **Discover local responses to the art, alongside each community's unique story of change**
- **Engage with newly restored paintings, taking this opportunity for reflection and recovery especially since Covid**

One of the Methodist Church's greatest treasures: the Methodist Modern Art Collection of Christian art has particular strengths in British 20th-century Modern artists, and reflects religious themes by international artists.

## Outstanding works

On display are 35 works, including by Edward Burra, Elisabeth Frink, Patrick Heron, Ceri Richards (below right), Graham Sutherland and William Roberts (below). Since its foundation in the 1960s, this Collection has grown to include more examples by women, such as Maggi Hambling, and international artists, such as John Muafangejo, Jyoti Sahi and Sadao Watanabe.

Like John Wesley, the most prominent founder of Methodism who travelled around the country preaching, the Collection is not rooted in one place. Conceived as a travelling collection, it tours chapels, churches, cathedrals, museums and galleries – where it inspires worship, entuses mission and amazes visitors.



***The Crucifixion*** William Roberts

# Follow the Methodist Modern Art Collection Art Trail

**The story of how the unique Methodist Modern Art Collection came together has never been told in one exhibition. Today's Art Trail tells this story – offering parallels and comparisons with local history to contribute to Coventry as the UK's City of Culture 2021.**

Follow the trail in any order. Or go from the Cathedral, to Methodist Central Hall and onwards to Earlsdon Methodist Church, Balsall Common Methodist Church and the ancient St Mary and All Saints Church, Fillongley.

As you engage with the artworks in each location, take time to reflect and allow them to offer you unique moments of healing. You could even create your own new dialogue by contemplating the paintings' presentation of the gospel story or your personal experiences during the pandemic.

This Art Trail marks the relaunch of the Collection after two years of conservation and re-framing to preserve the works and ensure their display for years to come.



**The Supper at Emmaus** Ceri Richards

# Hope, Faith and Love

**Through its Stories of Change: Hope, Faith and Love, this Art Trail presents themes integral to Coventry's history, and our world today.**

## Post-war response

The Methodist Modern Art Collection's engagement with post-war British religious art was very strong throughout the early 1960s.

In tandem with Sir Basil Spence's commissioning of contemporary art for the Church of England's Coventry Cathedral, many of the Methodist Collection's artists either were war artists or were impacted by the two World Wars. They found solace in representing Christian themes in the post-war recovery years.

The Collection is the Methodist Church's response to a revival of religious painting in post-war Britain.

## Post-Covid period

Our current life with and after Covid has parallels with the post-war years of recovery and rebuilding, for which Coventry is so well known.

This Art Trail provides space for healing and contemplation, prayer and reflection.

## Local communities

Highlighted in the Art Trail are responses from the local communities hosting the Collection, including their focus on world art acquired more recently and city-centre mission in multi-cultural Britain.

# 1 Coventry Cathedral

© Garry Jones



Coventry Cathedral is one of the most important post-war public buildings in Britain, with outstanding artworks commissioned

from, amongst others, Graham Sutherland, Ralph Beyer and Elisabeth Frink. Works by these artists are also in the Collection, purchased by John Gibbs and the Revd Douglas Wollen as the Methodist response to a resurgence in post-war religious painting.



The large-scale **Pietà** drawing by Elisabeth Frink (also creator of the bronze eagle on the lectern), was one of the first works acquired for the Collection;

while Ralph Beyer's drawing is a study for one of the **Tablets of the Word**, integral to the Cathedral. Graham Sutherland's **The Deposition** (above) is displayed beside his famous **Christ in Glory** tapestry in the Lady Chapel.

## 2 Methodist Central Hall, Coventry



Built in the 1930s, Coventry Central Hall functions as a vibrant city-centre church embedded in its community and fully engaged with the City of

Culture 2021. Methodist Central Halls were built in many British cities, designed for local people to gather in worship and social activities.



The 11 works displayed here spoke particularly to church members. Artists in residence are also exhibiting in response to the Collection. Its most recently acquired work, Bavin's ***The Empty Tomb***, offers Hope at

this time of national mourning, loss and remembering, while ***The Cross over the City*** by Michael Edmonds (above) captures members' feelings about the mission of the Church here in Coventry.

### 3 Earlsdon Methodist Church



Methodism has been active in Earlsdon since the 1870s, with members initially worshipping in an old ribbon factory in Cromwell

Street. This current building opened as a Wesleyan chapel in 1923. The church's active membership embraced the Art Trail celebrating Coventry's City of Culture with key artworks from the Collection.



Some artworks are early acquisitions; other paintings were added as the Collection grew and matured.

These include Ceri

Richards' superb ***The Supper at Emmaus*** (overleaf) and Eularia Clarke's ***The Five Thousand*** (both acquired in the 1960s). Norman Adam's ***Entry into Jerusalem*** (above) is from the 1990s and Jyoti Sahi's ***Dalit Madonna*** (front) was acquired in 2002, which a member at Earlsdon commented speaks of the love of God today.



## 4 Balsall Common Methodist Church



The members at Balsall Common have been inspired by the seven works on loan in their distinctive 1930s church. They seek to develop their strong and valued community presence in the village with the key works displayed, such as Maggi Hambling's **Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006** (below), on which they based their Lent Bible study.



Notably, some works selected by members have a particular resonance with their wider community's anger and grief at the loss of land and trees to the HS2 railway excavations. People's roots in rural life, recognition of trees' environmental benefits and the broader climate emergency played a part in their Art Trail selections.

## 5 St Mary and All Saints Church, Fillongley



This church is a successful example of a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) between Anglican and Methodist churches for over

40 years. The building dates back to the 12th century and is Grade II listed. The 13th-century west tower houses eight bells and there are examples of 14th-century stained glass.



Five key works are displayed in this historic building, reflecting how the Collection formed, including

three 1960s acquisitions by Eularia Clarke and Francis Hoyland. Two more recent acquisitions are **Crucifix and Candles: Night 1950**, a key work by Patrick Heron, and **Ecce Homo** (above) by Susie Hamilton.



This map is not to scale.  
For an accurate map go to  
**[covnunmethodist.org.uk](http://covnunmethodist.org.uk)**

# Art Trail information

## Venues

### **Coventry Cathedral**

1 Hill Top, Coventry CV1 5AB  
[coventrycathedral.org.uk](http://coventrycathedral.org.uk)

### **Coventry Central Hall**

Warwick Lane,  
Coventry CV1 2HA  
[centralhall.info](http://centralhall.info)

### **Cathedral and Central Hall opening hours**

Please check directly for  
different opening times, and  
for special events.

### **Earlsdon Methodist Church**

Albany Road, Earlsdon,  
Coventry CV5 6NF  
[earlsdonmethodist.org.uk](http://earlsdonmethodist.org.uk)

### **Balsall Common Methodist Church**

228 Station Road, Balsall  
Common, Coventry CV7 7EE  
[covnunmethodist.org.uk](http://covnunmethodist.org.uk)

### **St Mary and All Saints Church, Fillongley**

Church Lane, Fillongley,  
Coventry CV7 8EW  
[fillongleychurch.wordpress.com](http://fillongleychurch.wordpress.com)

### **Local church opening hours**

Fridays and Saturdays  
11am-4pm  
Sundays 1pm-4pm  
Other times by arrangement  
and for special events.

### **[methodist.org.uk/ cityofculture](http://methodist.org.uk/cityofculture)**

Art Trail organised by the  
Coventry and Nuneaton  
Methodist Circuit  
[covnunmethodist.org.uk](http://covnunmethodist.org.uk)

Methodist Modern Art  
Collection  
[methodist.org.uk/  
artcollection](http://methodist.org.uk/artcollection)

City of Culture  
[coventry2021.co.uk](http://coventry2021.co.uk)

With grateful thanks to  
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and talent in developing this  
Art Trail.

Written by Professor  
Ann Sumner, Chair MMAC  
Management Committee,  
© Trustees for Methodist  
Church Purposes (TMCP),  
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Front: **Dalit Madonna** Jyoti Sahi  
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