

NEWSLETTER

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Methodist **Modern**
Art Collection

FRIENDS OF THE METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION



A reflection on the Rouault Aquatints held in the Collection
Lord Richard Harries in Focus
A Tribute to our recently retired Custodian, Peter Forsaith
The work of Clive Hicks-Jenkins

EDITORIAL

I am delighted, in this Spring edition, to be able to include a feature by our recently retired Custodian of the Methodist Modern Art Collection, Dr Peter Forsaith. He reflects on his lengthy period of tenure over the Collection while housed at its Oxford Brookes University, Westminster Campus 'home base', on Harcourt Hill. Peter always ensured the safe despatch of the requested works to, and return from, exhibition venues across the length and breadth of the British Isles. Similarly, this Newsletter provides us with a timely opportunity to acknowledge Peter's indefatigable input into ensuring the safe keeping of the works. I am indebted to our former Chair, John Gibbs, for providing an accompanying tribute.

In similar vein, we would very much want to acknowledge the fact that John himself is finally standing down from the Management Committee of the Collection – although, very appropriately, a Gibbs presence remains on board as represented by his niece, Rebecca. In our Spring 2019 Newsletter, The Revd Gareth Powell paid a fulsome tribute to John's long service as Chair of our Committee.

Appropriately, John has kindly agreed to our inclusion of some of his retirement reflections, here on Page 3.

I am also enormously grateful to Lord Richard Harries of Pentregarth for agreeing to place himself firmly 'In Focus' for this edition of the Newsletter. You will find his contribution a particularly interesting read. Likewise, it is in this edition a pleasure to be able to bring some insight into the work of Clive Hicks-Jenkins, an artist who enjoys a close association with the Collection.

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BBC 4: BRITAIN'S LOST MASTERPIECES...

This has been a very watchable series, presented by the always erudite Dr Bendor Grosvenor, art historian and broadcaster. The programme set about delving into whether or not the Sandro Botticelli painting – *Virgin and Child with Pomegranate* held in the Collection of National Museum Wales/ Amgueddfa Cymru (location - the National Museum Cardiff), should carry the credit 'from the studio of', or was it by the hand of the master himself? The exhaustive research pattern, adopted in this intriguing series, saw Grosvenor's research team travel to Gregynog in West Wales, sometime home of the Davies Sisters, Gwendoline and Margaret, art collectors of some note back in the early 20th Century.

Those connected with our Methodist Modern Art Collection were delighted to see that our Chair, Professor Ann Sumner, featured in the footage shot at Gregynog. Ann has, since her own days spent in the employ of the National Museum of Wales, long been an authority on how it was that the sisters became such avid art collectors; essentially as a result of inheriting £50 million each from their devoutly Calvinistic Methodist grandfather, David Davies. They purchased Gregynog Hall in 1920, both as their home and somewhere to display what became a burgeoning collection. It was Gwendoline who originally bought the Botticelli, finally donating it to the Cardiff Museum in 1952, one of 260 works that, between them, they gave to the National Museum, completely transforming its art collection in character, quality and range.

As with the various works in focus in this BBC 4 series, the viewer was subjected to something of a roller coaster of a history of 'authentication superseded by doubt'. Painted in Florence in the later Medici era, the quality of the paintwork in the face of both the Madonna and the Christ Child are superb, but the same cannot be said about much of the rest of the painting, particularly the visible areas of hands and feet. Taking on board the views of such luminaries as the mildly gullible Bernard Berenson, back in the early 20th century and, very recently, Laurence Kanter, chief curator of Yale University Art Gallery, current informed opinion comes down in support of believing that the 'important bits' are very probably by Botticelli's own hand with 'studio artists' responsible for completing the painting.

Whatever the truth of it, the hours spent by Simon Gillespie on cleaning and restoring this painting have transformed its appearance. It now certainly looks stunning in its new incarnation and I very much look forward to seeing it prominently displayed on the walls of National Museum Cardiff.

The Editor

Front Cover: *Christ writes in the Dust: The Woman caught in Adultery* 2011. Acrylic on panel. From the Methodist Modern Art Collection

Devotions at the Management Committee Meeting

Having guided the fortunes of the Methodist Modern Art Collection over more than two decades, John Gibbs stood down as Chair late in 2018 when he handed over the reins to Ann Sumner. He continued to sit on the Management Committee for a further 12 months, and finally stepped aside late in 2019. Attending his last Committee Meeting held, very appropriately at Methodist Church House, John delivered the opening devotions prior to the business of the day. I felt our readers might like to read a transcript of what he had to offer to those present on this occasion – Ed.

14 NOVEMBER 2019

Through my involvement with the Methodist Modern Art Collection over the years, I have been privileged to read much, hear much and observe much about ways in which people have responded to works from the Collection and have given their own expressions of revelation as to its power in communicating the essential Christian message.

I think of devotions led by members of the Management Committee around a table such as this – I recall a particularly memorable one delivered by Graham Kent on Sutherland's *The Deposition*. I think too of thought-provoking critiques in the press: such as David Haslam's comments on Jyoti Sahi's *Dalit Madonna* and the link between the circumstances of the birth of Jesus and the condition of the 'Untouchables' in India.

And I think of many of the descriptions and interpretations in our published Guides to the Collection: in its current edition entitled 'Seeing the Spiritual'.

But as I reflected over what I would say today, two testimonies came strongly to mind. Firstly, I thought of an insight in the video made for us in 2017 by Tim Marlow*, then Artistic Director of the Royal Academy, now head of London's Design Museum.

Referring to Elisabeth Frink's drawing *Pieta*, he says: 'She chooses to crop in on the lifeless figure of Christ and we see him slumped, as if up against a rock. It is a work of powerful contradiction. The lifeless body is viscerally rendered, emerging from a miasma of marks and then obliterated again before our eyes. The weight of the body is almost sculptural and, although the Virgin is not visible, the image seems cradled by a force beyond the picture frame. The miracle of this image for me is that it manages to be softly evoking in compassion and pity but, simultaneously, it is defiant, suggesting a monumental sacrifice of extreme strength'.

And then there is the poem about the Rouault aquatint *Obéissant jusqu'à la mort et à la mort de la croix*, written by Selwyn Veater who, with his wife Shirley, was a steward when the Collection was in Brighton back in 2001... and I will use this as a meditation and a concluding prayer.

John Newton Gibbs

* Tim Marlow's video is well worth viewing at vimeo.com/230893022

(Selwyn Veater's poem appears on Page 5)



REFLECTION ON ROUAULT'S OBÉISSANT JUSQU'À LA MORT ET À LA MORT DE LA CROIX (OBEDIENT TO THE POINT OF DEATH, EVEN DEATH ON A CROSS)

We have, from time to time, featured what we might call poetic meditations that focus on a specific work within the Collection.

Some nine years ago Glenys Hughes was moved to compose a fine poem around Craigie Aitchison's *Pink Crucifixion* (See Newsletter No.11/ Spring 2014). She was at the time a Methodist local preacher (lay reader) in training and had first seen the Collection at a number of Welsh border venues, including Abergavenny Methodist Church. Another contributor, in this mode, has been David Subacchi (See Newsletter No.13/ Spring 2015) with his more general look, in verse, at the works within the Collection: 'Art for Art's Sake'. David was again a contributor to Newsletter No.18/ Autumn 2017 with a focus on Roy de Maistre's *Noli me tangere*. I am delighted to offer another three-verse poem by David, on *Obedient unto Death*.

The two Rouault aquatints, from the Collection, seen hanging in Salisbury Cathedral in October 2013: *Love one another*, on the left and *Obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*, on the right. From the Methodist Modern Art Collection

'OBEDIENT UNTO DEATH' BY DAVID SUBACCHI (GEORGES ROUAULT 1871- 1958)

According to the catalogue
 You were better known
 For painting clowns
 And prostitutes
 He too mixed with the same people
 The hopeless cases
 Was criticised
 Took no notice
 And you were a perfectionist
 Always reworking
 Not satisfied
 With second best
 He also was a man driven
 Never diverted
 Fully focussed
 On his mission
 You captured his crucifixion
 In dark Aquatint
 Within a frame
 Of simple wood
 Now he hangs in a gallery
 His eyes moving all
 Who attend this
 Exhibition.

Also, we offer another poetic meditation dating back even further to when the Collection was showing in Brighton, in 2001. A doubly significant occasion as the World Methodist Conference was, at the time, taking place in the City. Its author Selwyn Veater, was very much involved in the promotion of the Brighton exhibition and, as a result, felt moved to compose his piece 'Walking past a Rouault painting'.

'WALKING PAST A ROUAULT PAINTING' BY SELWYN VEATER

You see it's black and white, at first, that's all;
 almost stroll on, but something not quite right
 harnesses you back to look again.
 And gradually your eyes accustom
 to the dimness of things left out,
 begin to see how everything's subjected
 to a single theme.
 No crown of thorns,
 no 'INRI' death notice, or spear-thrust in the side.
 No hands or feet nailed to a cross. Colour distracts,
 so colour goes. The face
 expressionless. Every calculated detail
 induces the old communion phrase,
 "The body of Christ."
 Now you can see how unnatural
 the body is, even for a death. Split up
 by thick black lines, the oddly angled head
 is isolated from the neck 's white turret;
 that black surround marks off a shoulder
 from its arm, the chest two separate sections
 Why paint it so disjointed, dislocated
 almost? The torso, half a dozen parts,
 recalls his echo, irresistibly;
 "This is my body, broken for you."

There is a little anecdote, worth repeating, that neatly cements a relationship between Aitchison's and Rouault's approach to the same subject. It seems that Aitchison's many subsequent paintings of the manner of Christ's death was in fact a reaction to a comment made by a tutor of his, at the Slade School of Fine Art, in the early 1950s, concerning Craigie's copy of a George Rouault *Crucifixion*: 'This is far too serious a subject for you'. His response to this withering rebuke was a determination to make it his core subject for the rest of his working life!

The Editor

Lord Richard Harries of Pentregarth In Focus



It was during vacations at Cambridge that I first became interested in art. During the long summers a friend borrowed his mother's old Austin A40 car and, together with myself and two other friends, we toured around the continent, devouring galleries, churches and museums. We did not even take a tent but slept on the ground facing the sky and stars or in cheap B and B's.

I had originally started a career in the army but during that four year period the Christian faith gradually took hold of me, "*The drawing of this love and the voice of this calling*" as the author of 'The Cloud of Unknowing' put it - a line later filched by T.S. Eliot. That gradual process did indeed erupt in a volcanic calling which precipitated me out of the army. I had a place at Cambridge, paid for by the army, to read Mechanical Sciences but went up instead as a civilian, with no money, to read Theology, which I relished. There I was taught and tutored by some wonderful people to whom I am ever grateful. Since then I have had the privilege of a very fulfilling ministry as a parish priest, theological lecturer, Dean of Kings and Bishop of Oxford. Together with this I have been able to broadcast

regularly and write too many books. On my retirement from full time ministry (though I still minister most Sundays) I was made a cross bench Life Peer and I remain active in the House of Lords on human rights issues.

My twin, inter-related passions have been first, to set forth the sublime vision of life which the Christian faith gives us, whilst facing up to serious questions posed by modern scepticism. Secondly, with the inter-face of Christian faith and wider culture: literature, the arts, ethics, politics and Judaism.

My first love was literature. When my tutor at school went on his duty round at night to check that we were working he invariably found me in bed reading a novel. Equally predictably he remarked, "My boy, why aren't you working?" Indeed, one of my books, 'Haunted by Christ: modern novelists and the struggle for faith', came from that not working. Novels led to poetry, and I suppose 'Four Quartets' sets out my faith more than any other work. Then, in the visual age in which we live, I found myself drawn more and more to explore the visual, especially art on Christian themes. In addition to visiting European cities I had the huge bonus of lecturing on Swan Hellenic cruises for some 25 years, and this gave me the opportunity to prepare for and see art in countries around the Mediterranean. This in turn led to some books, the most significant of which is I suppose 'The Image of Christ in Modern Art' (Ashgate, 2013), in which I have a section on Norman Adams.

I met my wife Jo, at Cambridge, where she was reading Medicine. We have two children and four grandchildren. The seven-year old girl has all the talent for art that her mother has, and I expect great things from her. For her and my three wonderful grandsons in their twenties I have written 'Seeing God in Art: The Christian Faith in Thirty Images' (SPCK, 2020). Each image has a 900 word commentary in which an essential aspect of the faith is set out, whilst at the same time facing the hard questions posed by so many today.

Lord Harries' Choice



Norman Adams, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*, 1991. Watercolour over pencil on paper. From the Methodist Modern Art Collection

Norman Adams (1927-2005) was born into a working-class family that had no religion. When he saw religious paintings in his grandparents' home they struck him as gloomy. For him both art and religion were about vibrant life. He agreed with Ruskin that colour was even more important than form, but although he rejected any literalistic understanding, he said that his work was always based on an idea. He looked to nature for inspiration, again not in any literalistic sense, but to enlarge and inspire his imagination. This need was met when he bought a house in Yorkshire but also lived for some of the time on a remote island in the Outer Hebrides. Yet he knew he had to be near urban centres to make a living, and he held many prestigious positions, including being Keeper at the Royal Academy.

I first came across his work when my wife and I saw his *Stations of the Cross* at the Royal Academy, some decades ago now. Consisting of a series of heads of Christ, as is *Behold the Man* in the Methodist Collection, but much starker and darker, they blew our minds. This set of Stations is now in the small Roman Catholic church of St Mary's, Mulberry Street, Manchester. The spiritual element was always present in Adams' painting but this became more pronounced later in life when he developed Parkinson's Disease and as a result switched from working with oil to watercolour.

Christ's entry into Jerusalem, shown here, was painted in 1991. Its immediate impact is of a blaze of colour, which

was so important to Adams, especially here bright colours of yellow, orange and gold. The dominant note is one of carnival, with bunting and flags of different countries flying. Jesus sits upright on the donkey with a proper pride, as the people in the streets acclaim him. We see the procession through a window, rather as people in the City of London might look through a window in their office to see the Lord Mayor's procession. This highlights the scene. Although the colour conveys a feeling of joy, the dark figures towards the bottom right indicate that this is no Pollyanna world. Their sinister, sombre presence reminds us of the darkness of life, which was always an element in work by Norman Adams. Congratulations to the Methodist Modern Art Collection for having the foresight to specially commission this work.

As his foregoing text readily confirms, Lord Harries still leads a remarkably busy life, not only in the House of Peers, but as a lecturer, broadcaster, a still active churchman and author. His latest publication, as of this March, promises to be an enlightening read, confirming once again an enormous depth of knowledge of the world of art, both classical and contemporary. His 2013 book, 'The Image of Christ in Modern Art' was generous in its referencing of the Methodist Modern Art Collection. It was certainly no coincidence that, within its pages, we see him giving coverage, in both text and selected images, to no fewer than 18 of our own Collection artists. - Ed



PETER FORSAITH REFLECTS ON TWO DECADES AS CUSTODIAN OF THE COLLECTION

'Minding the gap'

I was on the working party set up to consider the future of the Methodist Church's collection of modern pictures, then at Chester House, Muswell Hill, which was being vacated. It was decided to make it available for exhibitions in churches, schools, colleges, and galleries. But it needed a base, a home. I suggested to colleagues at Westminster College, Oxford (as it then was – the college merged with Oxford Brookes University in 2000) that we submit a proposal, which was accepted. The upshot was that from 1998 it was based in Oxford.

Would anyone be interested in using it, though? Initially a few churches and schools, for which the works were bubble-wrapped and tied into a hired van or (once at least) wedged between the seats of a sports centre minibus. It has come a long way since then, actually and figuratively! As its Custodian from late 2000 till recently I have seen, and helped to instigate, a progressive raising of standards. Now the whole Collection (currently over 50 works) has

conservation level framing and glazing as well as purpose-made travel cases or frames to protect it in transit or in store. Works have had conservation treatment when needed. Professional art transport is insisted upon. Documentation has grown, so there is now a plethora of paperwork for all aspects. And appreciation of its value (aesthetically and spiritually against financially) has grown.

But, paramount, the Collection has had around 100 exhibitions over those years, not only in mainland Britain but Ireland (Northern and Republic), Jersey and the Isle of Man, and has been seen by hundreds of thousands of people. The demand has surpassed the committee's hopes. And in such contrasting places: churches and cathedrals, galleries great and small... An auction house exhibition space in Yorkshire; Greenbelt Festival, where thousands saw it in a makeshift setting. Plus the loan of individual works: at Olympia in an art and antique fair special display, another for a book

launch. It has been a tremendous experience and a huge privilege to be part of that, with some personal highlight moments. To choose just one: an idyllic midsummer evening in 2010 when, after the opening of a showcase exhibition in London, I walked with Stanley Spencer's daughter back to the Tube...

But the critical question must be – in all this has it achieved its goal, of speaking to people of that life beyond life, of 'seeing the spiritual'? That is, after all, its key purpose as a church collection. Has it met its mission? Let me start with myself. I don't like modern art. Nor do I like the posy pretentious artificiality of exhibitions and galleries, I find them posturing and false. Art for me is something to live with and by, to give meaning and beauty to the things of everyday. So, I start on the back foot, plus in 20 years I have become familiar with these pictures to the point of immunity. I have put them into and out of their cases, lifted them on and off lorries. I have probably come to know them better than anyone. But yet there is always something fresh, something intangible, about them which has consistently spoken to me.

If that's my personal experience, how about others? This 'x-factor' is something which has come through exhibition reports and feedback over the years. They bear testimony to that in different ways and contrasting settings. A single example: at one exhibition, a comment was made that the writer would not normally go to an exhibition of religious art. Yet their experience had been that these pictures had stirred long neglected depths within.

And there is another way in which the Collection has had an impact, although hardly one envisaged at the

Peter, speaking at the Opening of the 2012 exhibition of the Collection, at Westminster Central Hall, London

outset and maybe only noted informally. Planning, arranging and holding an exhibition is a challenging task with potential for stress and conflict. Many exhibitions have involved partnerships between different denominations, galleries and/or other organisations, sometimes between those who have hardly worked together before, or even where there have been strained relations. Yet I have seen the Collection become a catalyst for reconciliations and fresh starts: it has made a positive difference.

An issue which I, and many associated with the Collection or its exhibitions, have encountered is the credibility gap. I have done a lot of 'minding the gap'. If Methodists ask why the church owns a valuable art collection, people outside Methodism can be simply incredulous that such a notably philistine denomination has one and, moreover, such an outstanding one. One gallery which had had to be persuaded to stage an exhibition, but after unpacking the works the gallery director phoned me: we had no idea, he said, of the calibre of this Collection, it's amazing! But they had had all the information, the books, and yet... One quote often bandied around, from the late Revd Tom Devonshire Jones (an enormously supportive Patron of our

Friends organization) called it the 'best denominational collection of modern religious art in Europe outside the Vatican'. Part of that lies in its quality, but also that while it is varied it is closely themed: the works 'depict aspects of the Christian narrative', criteria wider than straightforwardly biblical but nonetheless theologically coherent.

In contrast to this growth, in the 20 years of the Collection's current activity, the Methodist Church has lost around half its membership. I am one of that statistic. If I thought that by leaving institutional Christendom, I was saying goodbye to God and all that stuff, going to some lush oasis of unbelief, how mistaken I was. In place of the stale, closeted atmosphere of church I found that a fresh wind from open horizons blew upon my face; a heightened and exhilarating sense of those things which are beyond. I was free to discover and be discovered by that cosmic 'One' which both infinitely energises all that subsists, yet is its spacious stillness, experienced as utterly unremitting and irresistible love.

In this the Collection was pivotal. It drew me into discourses of life and humanity, of cosmos and infinity. Isn't this what it is about? Historically the Wesleys and their preachers seemed

more concerned about people's religious condition than counting numbers. I would like to think they would recognise the purposes of this Collection.

Two years ago I suggested a review of the Collection's activity: what was in mind was a look at how it had achieved its mission – had people 'seen the spiritual' – and how might it be done better? An impact review, posing core questions about the effect of all those exhibitions, besides which other matters are surely tangential. The Collection is at a crunch. Change is in the air. I hope it continues to stir people to senses of things which are beyond; of those infinite realities which words hardly capture but which art can touch. If it does that, it has a place not only in but well beyond Methodism. If not, might it not as well be dumped in a convenient skip?

Peter S Forsaith

We are most certainly indebted to Peter for his years of commitment to the Collection. His vast experience is much missed in that, while we continue to search for a permanent, new home for the Collection, a new Custodian has yet to be appointed. - Ed

PETER FORSAITH - A TRIBUTE

Peter Forsaith would be the first person to say that, when it comes to art, his first love is not for works created in the last 100 years (the period that is covered by the Methodist Modern Art Collection). Rather he would incline to the art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a period in which he has a great expertise. Here he has achieved a very considerable reputation – witness, for example, his important 2017 book 'Image, Identity and John Wesley: A Study in Portraiture' and his journal articles 'James Smetham: Wesleyan Pre-Raphaelite' and 'Preachers, prints and portraits: Methodists and image in Georgian Britain'.

Simultaneously, he has been a committed supporter of the Methodist Modern Art Collection since before the dawn of the new millennium. Through most of that time he has held the position at Oxford Brookes University as Research Fellow in what is now the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History. At the same time he has been the Custodian of the Collection while also having responsibility for other Methodist art collections, various archive holdings and the Wesley Historical Society library.

He has so often gone far beyond the call of duty – I had the opportunity of reflecting on all this with Peter, in

November 2018, over coffee in the little cafe of the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin, on the day after the opening of the exhibition 'Faith and the Artist' sponsored by the Methodist Church in Ireland. I was really very touched when he said how pleased he was to have had the privilege of working so closely with the works in the Modern Art Collection over such a significant period of time. As someone who has worked with Peter throughout this period, I can only say that we *also* have been privileged. Thank you so much Peter!

Dr John Gibbs

A FURTHER UPDATE ON OUR CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

I am pleased to be able to share with you news of further progress made by Ruth Bubb's dedicated team, at her studio in Oxfordshire.

I can report that key works that have been subject to conservation/restoration work since the end of September 2019 are - *Storm over the Lake* and *The Five Thousand* (Eularia Clarke), *Cain and Abel* and *The Raising of Lazarus* (John Reilly), *Noli me tangere* (Roy de Maistre), *Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006* (Maggi Hambling), *The Washing of the Feet* (Ghislaine Howard) and Graham Sutherland's *The Deposition*.

The following five works are currently with Ruth Bubb and should be completed by early March, 2020: *Christ Writes in the Dust: The Woman Caught in Adultery* (Clive Hicks-Jenkins), *Nativity Polyptych* (Francis Hoyland), *The Elements of the Holy Communion* (Jacques Iselin), *The Ascension* (Peter Rogers) and Jyoti Sahi's *Dalit Madonna*.

In similar vein, two works are currently with Louise Vaile, whose expertise is in conservation of watercolours: *Christ Enters Jerusalem* (Sadao Watanabe) and Theyre Lee-Elliott's *Crucified tree form - the Agony*. These works are also in line for re-framing.

Specific to this on-going work Ruth has very kindly provided a brief insight into the sort of challenging problem that she has had to contend with and also proffered some insight into the solutions her team had to come up with...

- Eularia Clarke's *The Five Thousand* and its pendant *Storm over the Lake* were particularly challenging to treat because the paint layers were thin, delicate and sensitive to all the solvents, including water and white spirit, that we use to dissolve conservation materials such as adhesives. The painting was cleaned by applying an aqueous gel derived from a Japanese seaweed through tissue paper, to avoid wetting the surface directly.
- With Graham Sutherland's *The Deposition*, as one of the most valuable paintings in the Collection, any apparent changes of condition are a cause for concern. This underlines the importance of repeated examination and condition-checking before and after loans. The cracking in the paint and ground layers that we were asked to investigate happily proved to be stable and did not require any treatment at this time. The painting was re-framed for added protection.
- The frame of Maggi Hambling's popular work, *Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006* has been modified to accommodate glazing and a backboard without substantially changing its appearance. The painting was re-fitted to conservation standards after surface cleaning to remove the dust.
- Jacques Iselin's *The Elements of the Holy Communion* and Jyoti Sahi's *Dalit Madonna* have both required

more major intervention to enable them to withstand the structural stresses of handling and exhibition in variable conditions. The paintings will be removed from their existing auxiliary supports and re-stretched on new wooden stretchers with expandable corner joints. This will enable the canvas tension to be maintained in future and provide adequate support for the paint layers. In some parts of the Iselin, paint has been applied exceptionally thickly in high relief. Many of these projecting parts have been damaged and broken. The new frame will be deeper than usual to house the thickness of the impasto and provide a rigid protective casing around the painting.

I am indebted to Ruth Bubb and her studio colleagues for much of the factual background here. I am also delighted to confirm that, as a result of this on-going programme of conservation, a number of these works will be on display at the forthcoming 'For All People' show at the Bewdley Museum.

The Editor



'HOPE AND RECONCILIATION REPRESENTED IN THE METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION'

*Victoria Methodist Church, Bristol
12 October 2019*

Over what proved to be an absorbing afternoon, we were treated to a double bill of illustrated talk, followed by a guided private view of the impressive 167th Annual Open Exhibition at the Royal West of England Academy next door.

Though, as a Friend of the Collection, I have been familiar with the works for a good many years, it was fascinating to learn more about the artists referenced in Professor Ann Sumner's talk, living, as they were in the shadow of the two great wars. I was able to tie this up with my own love of poetry and the challenge of those creative people, poets and artists trying to come to terms with the horror and suffering.

Initially, we were given a brief history of how the Collection came to be. John Angel Gibbs was killed in action and it was his son, John Morel Gibbs, the 1959 Vice-President of Conference, brought up in the shadow of that suffering to become a

child psychologist, and electing to be a conscientious objector, who proved pivotal. His friendship with Reverend Douglas Wollen led to the purchase of contemporary religious art to be enjoyed by the wider world.

It was quite fascinating to hear Ann Sumner quote some of the remarkably competitive purchase prices for some of the works, even allowing for over half a century of inflation! Elisabeth Frink's untraditional, early Pieta was acquired for just £36.00 in 1962 and Ceri Richards' very colourful and atmospheric painting of the *Supper at Emmaus*, bought for £52.50!

A focus on a series of Crucifixion paintings followed. First, the two Rouault aquatints, from 'Miserere' (Mercy) and 'Guerre' (War), two books of the artist's prints. Lee-Elliott's *Crucified tree form*, agony personified among the strands of barbed wire, bringing the viewer straight into the battlefield. Another much valued

and very different painting of the Crucifixion is that by William Roberts, bought for £250.00. Roberts painted it just after the end of his time as a war artist. It was bought by Augustus John, remaining in his personal Collection for some 40 years. Wanting to push out the boundaries of interpretation in a different way, Ann Sumner made reference to the Harry Stammers' Memorial Window in her local church at Ben Rhydding: *The Sower Went Forth to Sow*. This featured on the Ilkley Art Trail 2017 where a significant link was made with these artists, touched as they were and shaped by war experiences. Stammers, a master craftsman in stained glass, has work (many of them memorials to the fallen in war) installed in some 180 locations across the UK, including the cathedrals in Canterbury, Salisbury, Lincoln and York and, incidentally, also just across the city here in Bristol, at St. Mary, Redcliffe.

The afternoon concluded with the speaker's invitation for reflections and comments from the floor, eliciting a stimulating response. I would like to finish, if I may, with some words of a poem by Siegfried Sassoon which speak to me of these powerful images of Crucifixion, 'The Prince of Wounds'-

"Have we the strength to strive alone
Who can no longer worship Christ?
Is He a God of wood and stone,
While those who served him writhe
and moan,
On warfare's altar sacrificed?"
We need to answer that question
for ourselves.

Rachel Newton

The Harry Stammers Memorial Window in Ben Rhydding Methodist Church, *The Sower Went Forth to Sow*. Photo: Ann Sumner



CLIVE HICKS-JENKINS: HIS RELIGIOUS PAINTINGS

Clive Hicks-Jenkins was born in 1951 in Newport, South Wales. He was schooled locally until switching to vocational studies for the stage at the Italia Conti School in London. Though he majored in dance, on leaving he became an actor and puppeteer with Cardiff's Caricature Theatre. By the 1970s and 1980s he'd firmly established himself as a choreographer, director and stage designer, creating productions for among others the Vienna Festival, London's Almeida Theatre, Theatr Clwyd in North Wales and the Cardiff New Theatre, where he was Associate Director. By the 1990s Clive's focus had radically changed from the stage to the

easel and he was becoming known as a 'narrative painter'. Though he claimed at the time that he was done with theatre, in recent years he has found ways to combine his past experiences with his current practices, undertaking the occasional return to his performative roots by creating animated films for orchestral performances internationally, and directing and designing a music theatre production with a libretto by Simon Armitage, *Hansel & Gretel: a Nightmare in Eight Scenes*. This premiered at the Cheltenham Musical Festival and then toured throughout 2018. He has also strongly established himself as a book

illustrator known for his collaborations with poets.

His paintings are represented in all the main public collections in Wales, and elsewhere in the UK, notably at Pallant House, Chichester. He has exhibited extensively throughout his native Wales and also enjoyed solo exhibitions at the Kilvert Gallery, Hay-on-Wye, Christ Church Picture Gallery in Oxford, the Jersey Arts Centre and Anthony Hepworth Fine Art in Bath (now re-located to London). His most recent show was at his favoured Martin Tinney Gallery in Cardiff with an exhibition entitled 'Grand Tour: Artworks commissioned from Clive Hicks-Jenkins by English Heritage'. Clive was English Heritage's selected artist for 2019, producing a considerable body of work on the Myths, Legends and Folklore of England.

Clive is a Royal Cambrian Academician, an Honorary Fellow of Aberystwyth University School of Art and holds an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Southampton Solent. He lives just outside Aberystwyth.

Described by Simon Callow as 'one of the most individual and complete artists of our time', with Clive, we are keenly aware that sense of place plays an important role in his paintings. This particularly so with locations in Wales that perhaps have a special resonance for him, possibly serving to strengthen the view that he has been much influenced by British mid-twentieth century Neo-romanticism.

He has become known for thematic series of works that explore the meanings of stories from various sources. Of particular interest here is Clive's work inspired by various key biblical stories.

A sequence of works entitled *The Temptations of Solitude* examined present-day traumas and injustices through the lives of the desert fathers of



The Virgin of the Goldfinches, 2009. Llandaff Cathedral. Acrylic on board. Photo: Peter Wakelin

Christ writes in the Dust, The Woman caught in Adultery, 2011. Acrylic on panel. From the Methodist Modern Art Collection

Egypt. Again, there has been a sequence of paintings based on stories of saints and animals, such as *Elijah and the raven*, 2007, *The Congregation of Birds (St. Francis)*, 2009, and a series of paintings of *Hervé and the wolf* and, again, *St Kevin and the blackbird*. Among his finest works within this genre is certainly his Annunciation scene, *The Virgin of the Goldfinches*, 2009, presented in 2010 to Llandaff Cathedral by the Contemporary Art Society for Wales. There are a number of explanations regarding the significance of the inclusion of the image of goldfinches in this work and of course, historically, by the likes of Raphael and

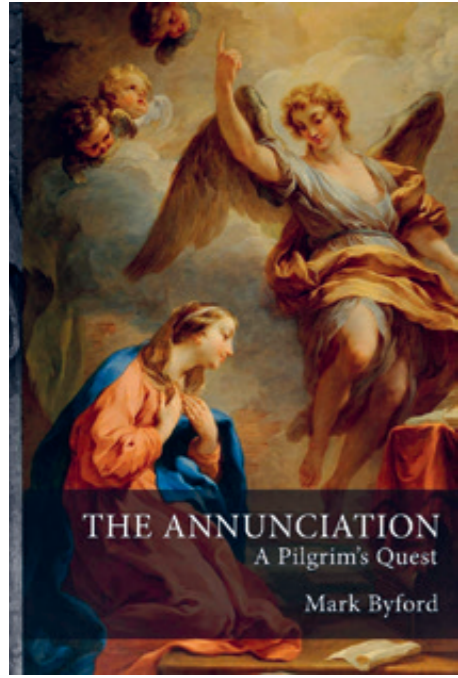
Tiepolo. My favourite emanates from the legend that its red plumage dates from the time of the crucifixion when it flew down over the head of Christ and whilst plucking a thorn from His crown, was splashed with drops of His blood. Another notable work is *The Rapture (Tobias and the Angel)*, 2011. Then, of course, there is Clive's very fine painting of *Christ writes in the Dust*, one of the most popular works within our Methodist Modern Art Collection. Yet another is *The Barbarian brought down by a Lion*, 2003, (with an unlikely but typical Hicks-Jenkins setting of Amlwch Harbour, in Anglesey!) now in the Collection held by MOMA,

Machynlleth. This graphically illustrates the story of the Desert Fathers, early Christian hermits and monks who lived mainly in the Scetes Desert of Egypt in the 3rd century AD, with St Anthony the Great seen as the model for their brand of Christian monasticism, their acknowledged leader.

All in all a prolific and fascinating practitioner. As one of our few extant artists, we are proud to acknowledge his close connection with the Methodist Modern Art Collection.

The Editor

ELSEWHERE IN THE ART WORLD



BOOK REVIEW

The Annunciation – A Pilgrim's Quest by Mark Byford
Winchester University Press, 2018
ISBN 9781906113261

The phrase 'every picture tells a story' comes to mind in more senses than one in this book of 647 pages. It starts with Mark Byford, former Deputy General of the BBC, calling into the National Gallery as he was early for a lunch appointment and viewing François Lemoyne's *The Annunciation*. This 18th century work depicts the Angel Gabriel's encounter with Mary as described in Luke. This rushed viewing had a profound impact upon him as described in his own words - 'the picture is a shining star, leading me down an unknown road to an unidentifiable destination'. It was such that he was unable to clear it from his mind and he went about finding out more about this painting, its intriguing history, and the background to it being on loan from Winchester College.

This curiosity was not the end of the story and it served as the catalyst for a far wider investigation into the topic of the Annunciation taking over three years of his time, visits around the country and further afield, and culminating in writing this book. It involved in him having conversations with many clerics, theologians, historians and artists over the subject of 'the greatest event in human history' as one Roman Catholic bishop described the Annunciation. Think of some well-known figures in public roles and others with specialist interests but lower profiles and it is likely that they feature in a contribution to this book.

He asked similar key questions of each person. What did the Annunciation mean to them? How do they regard it? How do they perceive Mary in the story? Why has the Feast of the Annunciation declined in its observance? What did they think of the Lemoyne picture? Artists from our own collection such as Nicholas Mynheer and Jyoti Sahi feature in his conversations as does one with a Japanese art dealer specialising in the works of Sadao Watanabe.

The outcome of each meeting is recorded fully and, at times, digesting the content of each is quite a challenge. The sheer number of conversations do need to be taken in measured doses giving time for reflection. As a book it must rank as a unique, comprehensive, and valuable resource in capturing the diversity of views and thinking on the Annunciation. It draws on over 100 paintings, sculptures, mosaics and tapestries for illustrations but sadly many are on the small size.

He ends his book with a personal reflection on his own pilgrim's quest acknowledging his childhood upbringing in the faith, his membership of his local Roman Catholic church and a more recent switching to a nearby Anglican church. He describes how as a result of his explorations his own faith and belief have been renewed and deepened. In the context of our Methodist Modern Art Collection it reminds us that each of our pictures can trigger and transform hearts and souls and that this mission potential must remain at the forefront of our plans.

Ian Baker

Mark Byford served as Deputy Director General of the British Broadcasting Corporation and Head of BBC Journalism from 2004–2011. He chaired the BBC Journalism Board and had overall responsibility for the world's largest news organisation and all its radio, television and interactive journalism content across the UK and around the world. He was a member of the BBC Executive Board for thirteen years.

Former Custodian, Peter Forsaith and Sarah Middleton attended the book launch in Winchester in April 2018 and Jyoti Sahi's painting, Dalit Madonna was loaned for the occasion. - Ed

ARTSERVE DEMONSTRATES ITS LINKS WITH THE COLLECTION

We have pleasure in reproducing, with permission, this article which serves to demonstrate the manner in which our remarkable Art Collection can be an effective tool in so many ways.

This article first appeared in ArtServe magazine Issue 24 (Autumn 2019). To find out more, see <http://www.artserve.org.uk>

Art as a focus for worship

Images from the Methodist Modern Art Collection were the starting point for this workshop, in which participants explored how art can aid or inspire worship.

This absorbing and thought-provoking workshop was led by Sarah Middleton, an ArtServe member who is also a member of the Methodist Modern Art Collection management committee.

In the first part of the session, Sarah introduced us to a few of the artworks in the Collection, using reproductions from an exhibition catalogue and a beautiful and versatile book of 24 postcards which is available from Methodist Publishing. She gave us interesting background information about the life of each of the artists and the circumstances in which they created the works that we were looking at. Sarah also gave us some useful pointers to help us interpret the images for ourselves, which I found very helpful. We were encouraged to discuss within the group what details we saw in the pictures and to suggest what the artist might have been trying to express through them, and I found that sharing and learning from each other's insights in this way was very valuable.

In the later part of the workshop we were given the opportunity to create images of our own that might inspire worship, using such media as paints and watercolour pencils. Several members of the group produced beautiful and quite moving items of artwork during this time. As drawing and painting are not my strong points, however, I contented myself with filling a sheet of paper with a mosaic of brightly coloured shapes intended to express 'celebration'

– an activity I found both reflective and enjoyable.

What did I take away from this workshop? New ideas for using images from the Methodist Modern Art Collection in worship, in small group discussions, or for personal devotion – especially as I had bought a copy of the postcards book a few weeks before the Festival, and I am now seeing new possibilities for how I might use it. And also a resolution that when the current conservation work is complete and the Collection is once again available for exhibition, I really must go and see some of these fascinating artworks for myself.

Janet Tweedale is an ArtServe Trustee

artserve issue twenty four



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The Methodist Modern Art Collection's Management Committee would like to congratulate Artserve on their tenth anniversary, especially for their success in developing and showcasing creativity across the denominations. We would like to thank Artserve for the support they have consistently given us in raising awareness of the Methodist Collection and our exhibitions. It is always a pleasure to read the excellent Artserve magazine.

FORTHCOMING TOUR PROGRAMME FOR THE COLLECTION

2020

21 March - 19 April

'For All People'

Bewdley, Worcestershire
Wyre Forest Gallery, Bewdley
Museum
Load Street, Bewdley, DY12 2AE
Exhibition Opening Times - 11am to 3pm - Admission Free
Contact: Jim Ineson 01299 405645
Email: jim.ineson@gmail.com

Six faith denominations working together as Bewdley Churches Together are hosting an exhibition of 20 pictures from the Collection. Summary details of a selection of the events taking place over the duration of the exhibition are listed below.

Saturday 21 March / 11am / Baptist Church

A Child Could Have Done That! - an interactive talk on decoding modern art led by Hilary Baker

Wednesday 25 March / 7.00pm / Methodist Church

The Story of the Methodist Modern Art Collection led by Sarah Middleton

Saturday 28 March / 11am to 12.30pm / Baptist Church

Every Picture Tells a Story - a story telling performance based on one of the pictures from the Collection given by Simon Airey

1pm to 3pm - Storytelling Workshop

Tuesday 31 March / 2.30pm to 4.00pm / Methodist Church

Jesus the Painter: What's the Story? - an interactive exploration in words and music on how Jesus painted 'pictures' for his listeners and continues to do so in our lives led by Mike Dernie

Thursday 2 April / 10.30am to 3.30pm / Bewdley Museum

Lino print workshop led by Hilary Baker in the Foundry Studio. £35 per person inclusive of materials and refreshments. Booking essential as limited spaces - call or text 07796 092 262

Saturday 4 April / 11am to 3pm / Baptist Church

Poetry, Faith, Art and Resistance - a poetry reading workshop led by Alexander Anderson

Further details including a copy of the full events brochure, locations map, speakers and other information can be found at www.forallpeoplebewdley.com

28 March - 13 April 2020

'Stations on a Journey'

Holy Trinity Church, Blythburgh, Suffolk (IP19 9LL)

An exhibition for Easter: 'Fifteen Stations of the Cross', set against intriguing cityscapes by painter Mark Cazalet.

Exactly twenty years ago, these paintings were shown in Holy Trinity Blythburgh as part of a Suffolk-wide millennium exhibition, 'Stations: the new sacred art'. We are delighted to welcome them back as part of our Easter celebrations.

For further details of supporting events, including a 'Meet the Artist evening' - (28 March) and a meditative painting workshop, led by the artist himself (11 April) - Contact: Meryl Doney
Email: meryldoney@me.com



A THOUGHT TO LEAVE YOU WITH

My only objective is to paint a Christ so moving that those who see him will be converted
- Georges Rouault

We are delighted to enjoy the support of our Honorary Patrons: Revd the Lord Leslie Griffiths of Burry Port; the Revd Dr Barbara Glasson, currently serving as President of Conference; the Very Revd Nick Bury and Mr Phil Allison

John Muafangejo's *Israel, Jews, Christians, Heathen, Our God for all People*, 1981. Linocut on paper. From the Methodist Modern Art Collection

Helen Davis retouching paint losses on Reilly's *The Feeding of the Five Thousand*. Photo: Ruth Bubb

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