

ANNUAL REPORT

*Report for the year ended
31 August 2017*



Methodist Modern
Art Collection

www.methodist.org.uk/artcollection



Photos: Martin Cox

For the first three months of 2017, the whole Collection was on show at the historic Beaney House of Art and Knowledge, the central museum, library and art gallery of the city of Canterbury; this through the sponsorship provided by Kent College, the local Methodist day and boarding school.

The photograph above, taken at the Canterbury Opening, shows Revd. the Lord Leslie Griffiths of Burry Port, Jo Jones (Head of Museums and Galleries, Canterbury), Dr. David Lamper (Exec. Headmaster of Kent College) and the chaplain, the Revd. Dr Paul Glass.

WHAT IS THE METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION?

The Methodist Modern Art Collection comprises paintings, limited edition prints and reliefs. In the early 1960s John Morel Gibbs, a Methodist layman and art collector – realising that many Non-conformists had little appreciation of the insights that contemporary artists could bring to the Christian story – decided to create a collection of prime examples of such work that could be toured around the country. This he did, with the help of Methodist minister, the Revd. Douglas Wollen. The works they acquired became the core of the present Collection – described as “the best denominational collection of modern art outside the Vatican”. The Collection includes leading names from the British art world of the last 100 years, such as Edward Burra, Elisabeth Frink, Patrick Heron and Graham Sutherland.

In more recent years the Collection has acquired works by artists from the world church, including Jyoti Sahi from India, Sadao Watanabe from Japan and John Muafangejo from Namibia. Still expanding, works by artists such as Craigie Aitchison, Peter Howson, Susie Hamilton, Clive Hicks-Jenkins and Maggi Hambling have been acquired, and today it comprises 50 paintings, prints, drawings, relief and mosaic works. The Collection is valued as a key resource for mission and evangelism, whether on a denominational or an ecumenical basis.

The Collection, in whole or in part, is available as a touring exhibition, and has travelled widely, to town and city galleries, cathedrals, churches and schools, showing at four to six venues a year. When not on tour, the Collection is stored under the care of a custodian at the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University.

The Methodist Church is the fourth largest Christian Church in Britain, after the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, and the Church of Scotland. It has more than 6,000 churches and a total membership of approximately 200,000 people. There are Methodist churches in nearly every country in the world and global membership numbers some 60 million.

— Cover

Maggi Hambling (b.1945) *Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006*. © TMCP; The Collection professionally displayed at the Beaney House of Art and Knowledge, Canterbury; Three girls viewing *The Empty Tomb* by Richard Bavin. Photo: Haywards Heath Methodist Church

EXHIBITIONS OF THE COLLECTION THIS YEAR

Bath Abbey: Fully Alive

Between October 6 and 30 2016 the Collection was exhibited in Bath Abbey, a building which attracts half a million visitors a year. Working closely with Committee member Bob Williams, the curator, Abbey Missioner, Revd. Stephen Girling used 32 of the works to help create a vision of the Abbey as a people and a place 'fully alive', seeking to follow the life and teachings of Jesus. Mr Girling says 'Working with a very supportive team, I was able to curate the artwork thematically and station the paintings, drawings and prints around the Abbey and its small chapels'.

With carefully worded labels, deliberately stripped of religious jargon and detail about the artists, the works were hung on boards positioned to create immersive spaces. In the opening section of the exhibition, visitors were introduced to pictures exploring the compassion of Jesus, with Edward Burra's *The pool of Bethesda* taking centre stage. Subsequent paintings explored how Jesus lived in

complete dependence upon his heavenly Father, how he practised non-violence and how he made his life a sacrifice for the redemption of the world. The climax of this section was a 'triptych' centred on Craigie Aitchison's *Pink Crucifixion*. A further section of five paintings, beginning with Jyoti Sahi's *Dalit Madonna* introduced visitors to the nature of Jesus as the holy Son of God, the life-giver. In the sanctuary, with its vast altar set beneath the towering East Window was a triptych of paintings exploring the Last Supper, centred on *The Elements of Holy Communion* by Jacques Iselin. These encouraged the visitor to consider how, through taking Communion, we are nourished by the life of Christ. The final picture from the Collection, *Untitled – Pentecost* by John Brokenshire, was sited in the small, intimate and prayerful Birde chantry chapel. The painting resonated with the colours and forms of the stonework, candle and cross, creating a beautiful space for a quiet and prayerful encounter with the Spirit of God.



Bath Abbey Poster.
Photo: Bob Williams



Works on display in the North Aisle.
Photo: Bob Williams

‘Was the curation a success? Stephen Girling suggests that conversations and visitor-book entries indicate that people were touched and challenged in very different ways. A Malaysian visitor wrote : ‘Although I am not a Christian, this exhibition gave me an eye-opening experience on this beautiful and historically rich religion’.

During the exhibition there was a series of lunchtime and evening talks on associated themes; the topics ranging widely. Speakers included one artist represented in the Collection (Mark Cazalet) and two members of the MMAC Committee (Bob Williams and Sarah Middleton). There was also a father and son combination: Methodist minister Revd. Ray Lansley speaking on the Eularia Clarke’s *Storm over the Lake* and his son, artist and

teacher Andrew Lansley talking about ‘Seeking the creative spirit in landscape and abstraction’.

Stewards for the exhibition were provided from the Abbey congregation supported by volunteers from other Anglican parishes and from Methodist churches in the area. The creation of the stewarding teams proved to be ‘both a blessing and a source of much rich experience.’ There was also a link with nearby Kingswood school where the Collection, then comprising many fewer works, was housed for a period in the 1960s. Four works, not in the main exhibition, were shown in the school chapel for a short period and on one morning Professor Ann Sumner spoke to a whole school assembly about the Collection and its purposes.



Hanging the Patrick Heron painting.
Photo: Bob Williams



Three students viewing *The Dalit Madonna*. Photo: Martin Cox

Canterbury: Picturing Faith

From January 14 to April 23 2017 the Collection was hung in its entirety at the 'Beaney House of Art and Knowledge'. This is a busy library, museum, gallery and tourist information hub in the centre of Canterbury, a city that has been the focus of pilgrimage for centuries and which receives large numbers of visitors from around the world. Sponsorship enabling the Collection to come to such a key venue was provided by Kent College, the local Methodist day and boarding school.

Several members of the College staff were very much involved with this venture, including the Chaplain, Revd. Dr Paul Glass and the Special Projects Manager, Mr Simon Sorokos. Paul Glass comments that 'from the beginning of the negotiations, staff members at The Beaney showed themselves to be fully committed to a partnership which would bring the Collection to a professionally-run gallery'. The works were hung in the beautifully-lit 'temporary exhibition' room where, over a three months period, 'Picturing Faith' was

visited by 11,400 people, many coming from considerable distances. Visitors included a number of school parties and the Art Department of Kent College developed a work sheet which was used by a number of children from local schools. Publicity was very good: with one of the most striking features being the placing of banners in the streets around the gallery; these featuring Elisabeth Frink's *Pieta*.

The exhibition was opened at a special event attended by a number of local dignitaries. Lord Griffiths of Burry Port and Jo Jones, the Head of Museums and Galleries in Canterbury, were the guests of honour. Immediate comment included expressions of approval on how well the exhibition had been hung and on the strength of having the whole Collection together in a single space.

The Beaney further showed its commitment to the project by paying for the services of a professional artist who worked with Year 10 pupils from two schools in the area - Canterbury Academy and Kent

College - to develop a second exhibition based on the responses of young people to the themes raised by 'Picturing Faith'. This ground-breaking piece of co-operation between the independent and state sectors resulted in a second exhibition called 'All Faiths and None' which was very well received and had its own separate opening attended by the Lord Mayor of Canterbury.

In addition, there were three lectures aimed at different constituencies and held at different venues around the city. The well-known art critic Richard Cork spoke about the Modern Art Collection as a whole at Kent College, Dr. Peter Forsaith talked about Wesley's view of art at St. Peter's Methodist Church and Canon Christopher Irvine (Canon Librarian) Canterbury talked about the work of Ceri Richards at the Cathedral. It is *The Supper at Emmaus* by Richards that is one of the Collection's most iconic works.

Haywards Heath: Walking on Water

Between June 22 and July 16 2017, 47 works from the Collection were exhibited in the Methodist and the United Reformed Churches in Haywards Heath, West Sussex. Nicola Sheldon, the local coordinator, commented that setting out to stage a major exhibition of world-class artworks in this relatively small community (population c 23,000) was an audacious proposition. It was clear that it would be a unique event for the town and it was hoped that, for the two churches, it would provide opportunities



The opening at Haywards Heath – curator Judith Blocker, Nathaniel Hepburn, Sarah Middleton, representing the Collection and Nicola Sheldon. Photo: Christina Chelmick

for outreach. The very popular Maggi Hambling painting *Walking on Water* was used to promote the venture.

Working with Committee member Sarah Middleton, was a planning group of eight. In addition, a professional curator, Judith Blocker, was appointed. It was her aim to allow visitors to enjoy the paintings without being distracted by too many words: works were therefore hung with only basic descriptive labels beside them. However, she also wrote a one-page 'Looking Guide' for each work which offered information and interpretation. These were also available on the church website and thus accessible by smartphone or from two tablet computers (one at each church).

The exhibition was opened by Nathaniel Hepburn (the then Director of the nearby Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft), and this event was attended by 130 people including local clergy and local councillors. 2,676 visitors viewed the exhibition during the 25 days of its run.

* It is felt that rather than reducing interest in 'A Guide to the Methodist Art Collection' these 'Looking Guides' increased it: 145 copies being sold.

EXHIBITIONS OF THE COLLECTION THIS YEAR

They were well supported by more than 70 volunteers who acted as guides to the venues and provided refreshments.

The layout of the two exhibitions (designed by Judith Blocker well before the works arrived) proved very effective with full advantage being taken of the long, uncluttered sight-lines made possible by the open spaces of the two churches. However, care was taken to retain enough chairs to enable people to sit and contemplate! Many visitors commented on the strong visual impact on entry to the URC made by the two large paintings - Edward Burra's *The pool of Bethesda* and Clive Hicks-Jenkins' *Christ writes in the Dust*.

The one local school that managed a visit, with 30 Year Two children, had a wonderful time. Led by Bethan Hobbs, a local freelance art teacher, and assisted by their own teachers, they focused on two works – *The Dalit Madonna* and *The Elements of the Holy Communion* - which provided a good basis for collage work. Our experience echoes that of other organisers in the recent past and underlines the lack of flexibility that schools have today.

In addition to the exhibition itself, there was a substantial programme of events, including a number of concerts and workshops, together with talks on Collection artists John Muafangejo and Edward Burra. Mark Cazalet was well received when conducting a tour entitled 'Sacramental Imagination'. Special services



Three girls viewing *The Empty Tomb* by Richard Bavin. Photo: Haywards Heath Methodist Church

were held at both churches each Sunday over the course of the exhibition.

The organisers were able to conclude that they had drawn in many people who had not previously visited either of the churches and it appeared that they were much impressed both in terms of the impact of the exhibition and the hospitality shown. There was also the stimulus of working on a large project with another church and of working with the many volunteers, some of whom had no church link[†].

Other events involving works from the Collection

Throughout August one of our most remarkable paintings *The crucifixion* by F. N. Souza, was on show in St Paul's Cathedral as a component of the UK India Year of Culture; this marking the 70th anniversary of India's independence. St Paul's Chancellor Canon Mark Oakley, who is responsible for the Cathedral's Visual Arts Programme, said: "We are delighted that in this year when the UK and India are celebrating a major bilateral year of cultural exchange, St Paul's has the privilege of exhibiting the raw energy

[†] It is with much sadness that we have to record the untimely death, in April 2018, of Nicola Sheldon, who was so integral to the success of the 'Walking on Water' exhibition in Haywards Heath.

of Souza's *The crucifixion* of 1962. Refuting what he called the 'blond operatic Christs' found in the churches of his childhood in Goa, Souza brings us back to the horror of Christ's public execution and invites us to interrogate the pains and cost of love and how this love might, indeed, reflect the divine. We are hugely grateful to the Trustees of the Methodist Modern Art Collection for their generosity in loaning the painting for display."

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The owner of the Collection is the Methodist Council but responsibility for its care and development is devolved to the Management Committee (previously known as the Curatorial Trustees). The Committee normally meets three times a year – at Methodist Church House in London, at Oxford Brookes University and, for a two-day residential meeting, at a venue which varies from year to year.

It was considered in the past that the specialised nature of the work made it inappropriate for a fixed term for appointment to be set. Both John Gibbs and Graham Kent have been involved since the original 'Curatorial Trustee' body was created in 1998. The other members have served between 7 and 12 years. During this last year, steps have been taken, in consultation with the Connexional team, to refresh what is now known as the Management Committee of the Methodist Modern Art Collection. The outcome of this process will become evident in 2017/18.



His Excellency Mr.Y.K. Sinha with Souza's *The crucifixion* in St. Paul's Cathedral. Photo: Ann Sumner

THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The aims of the Management Committee are to care for, develop and promote the Collection, in order to encourage people to enter into conversations about God in Christ in the contemporary world and to offer material that can bring new dimensions to study, worship and spiritual life. The vision statement is: 'The Methodist Modern Art Collection - Seeing the Spiritual'.

During the year Jo Hibbard (Director of Engagement), joined the Committee as a representative of the Connexional team at Methodist Church House.

The Committee members as of 31 August 2017 were: Dr John Gibbs (Chairman and Treasurer), the Revd. Graham Kent (Secretary), Bob Williams (Secretary, Friends Group), Paul Bayley, Meryl Doney, Jo Hibbard, Sarah Middleton and Professor Ann Sumner, together with Collection Custodian Dr Peter Forsaith (Research Fellow, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History).

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE DURING THE YEAR

Financial position

The Methodist Church provides a budget to cover expenses such as the cost of Management Committee meetings and the initial visit to possible exhibition venues. The Church also pays the insurance premium.

Funds required for the work of the part-time administrator, for the care and conservation of the Collection and for the production of new interpretative material etc. come from the income generated from the loan fees, sale of publications and so on. This income is held in a special fund at Methodist Church House and a statement of the account is presented at the end of this report.

Monies obtained or donated specifically for the acquisition of new works are held in the same fund but monitored separately. No works were purchased during the year.

Links with the Methodist Connexional Team

In addition to the presence on the Committee of Jo Hibbard, we have close links with Martin Ashford, Head of the Mission and Advocacy team and with the Revd. Gareth Powell, Secretary of the Methodist Conference. We are indebted to members of the Finance Team for their assistance with our financial affairs.

Administrative support

For a number of years, we have had a contract with the Enfield Circuit of the Methodist Church whereby the circuit administrator, Mary Roseweir, has spent an average of four hours a week working

on behalf of the Collection. As part of this work, Mary has organised the committee meetings and written the minutes. She retired in August 2017 and new arrangements have been made for the year beginning Sept 1 2017. Over the years, Mary developed a very considerable knowledge of the nature and purpose of the Collection, and of the work of the Management Committee. Her friendly response to enquiries and her willing helpfulness have been very much appreciated by Committee members and exhibition organisers alike.

Exhibiting the Collection

Committee members play a vital role, both collectively and individually, by helping local exhibition organisers with advice on planning, and by giving guidance on the suitability of facilities, opportunities for outreach etc. One of the key documents is the Guidance for Borrowers. During the year this was extensively revised under the leadership of Meryl Doney (It is available on the website at methodist.org.uk/our-faith/reflecting-on-faith/the-methodist-modern-art-collection/borrow-the-collection/).

A Home for the Collection

The Collection acquired its present base in 1998 when it was placed on loan at the Methodist Church-owned Westminster College, Harcourt Hill, Oxford, where storage and 'custodial' services were provided. An archive of the Collection was also established. At the College, the Collection comprised one of a number

of Methodist collections held in what is now known as the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History.

A significant event occurred in 2001 when Westminster College merged with Oxford Brookes University (OBU). Care of the collections was safeguarded under a legal agreement between the University and Westminster College Oxford Trust Ltd (WCOT), the latter body representing the Methodist Church. Under the terms of this agreement, OBU provided various services, including storage and custodial care of the Modern Art Collection, in lieu of rent.

A new lease, on fully commercial terms, was signed on July 31 2017, but it is agreed that there will be ‘a continuance, as far as possible, of the current arrangements’ at Harcourt Hill for up to three years. During this period WCOT will reimburse OBU annually for the costs associated with the curatorship and storage of the Collections

on site. This period will allow some time for the question of a long-term home for the Collection to be resolved – whether at OBU itself or elsewhere.

Resources and Publicity

The Committee has a crucial role in the provision and dissemination of information on the works in the Collection. In this respect, ‘A Guide to the Methodist Art Collection’ is a key resource. Fully illustrated, it contains descriptions of all the works as of its 2010 publication date, together with an appropriate Bible passage. During the year a free supplement was produced with the help of Anne Montefiore, Lead Editor/Writer at Methodist Church House. This contains illustrations and descriptions of the seven works acquired since 2010 and fits in a specially-designed flap at the back of the original booklet.



Ann Phillips modelling one of the two striking Art Collection T-shirts designed by Haywards Heath. Photo: Christina Chelmick

An opportunity for publicity within Methodist circles was provided in June when, in its regular 'Questions and Answers' section, the Methodist Recorder carried the query 'Why is there a Methodist Modern Art Collection?' Bob Williams, Committee member and Friends Secretary was granted a whole page for his reply which has been very well received methodist.org.uk/our-faith/reflecting-on-faith/the-methodist-modern-art-collection/mmac-news-and-events/mmac-news-and-events/why-is-there-a-methodist-modern-art-collection-a-response-in-the-methodist-recorder/.

Earlier in the year, the exhibition at the Beaney in Canterbury was reviewed in glowing terms in the international Catholic weekly 'The Tablet'. The author, Laura Gascoigne, pointed out that, inter alia, the MMAC owned *The crucifixion* by

Souza thirty years before the Tate acquired its version. The Tablet article is both authoritative and perceptive and provides additional evidence, if such were to be needed, as to what an extraordinary asset the Collection is to Methodism – and to the wider Church (The first part of this article can be found on line at thetablet.co.uk/arts/11/9513/0/belief-in-the-future).

In terms of both artistic and spiritual significance, the big publicity event of the year was a review of some works in the Collection conducted by Tim Marlow, the Artistic Director of the Royal Academy; this arranged through the good offices of Phil Allison of CultureShock Media. Mr Marlow was filmed by a CSM team while the 'Fully Alive' exhibition was on at Bath Abbey. Describing the Collection as 'the art world's unexpected treasure', he provided a penetrating analysis of a number of the



Curator Stephen Girling interviewed in Bath Abbey. Photo: Bob Williams

works including *The pool of Bethesda* by Edward Burra, *The crucifixion* by William Roberts and *Pieta* by Elisabeth Frink. He further commented, that through its acquisitions, the Collection is now stronger than when he first encountered it twenty years ago. The film can be found at vimeo.com/230893022 together with a companion video, also made for us by Cultureshock Media; this featuring Revd. Stephen Girling reflecting on the meaning and Christian purpose of the exhibition (vimeo.com/200328226). There are now five films about the Collection on the Methodist Church website, each giving a different perspective on its work.

Friends of the Collection

The Secretary to the Friends, Bob Williams, reports: 'We continue to welcome a steady stream of new members to our Friends support group, more often than not this as a direct result of them having seen the Collection at work, or possibly having coming across one of our Newsletters. The Newsletters themselves continue to be well received. They have provided some remarkable detail on the exhibitions at Bath, Canterbury and Haywards Heath and are indicative of an enormous input of energy by the teams involved in putting on these three very successful ventures (as reported elsewhere in this publication).

'I am delighted to announce that Mr Phil Allison has graciously accepted an invitation to become a Patron of the Friends Group. It was back in 2003 that, together with Tim Marlow and Judy Reed, Phil



Sarah Middleton promoting the Friends Group.
Photo: Christina Chelmick

both through the work (provided free) on the design of the Newsletters and the Annual Reports, and in this particular year, through the vital role that they have played in the initiation, filming and editorial work on the two films made at Bath Abbey (see under Resources and Publicity). It is by way of a small gesture of appreciation that we have invited Phil to join our select group of Patrons, the others being the Revd. Loraine Mellor, President of the Methodist Conference and the Very Revd. Nick Bury'.

Ownership of 'Annunciation' by Eric Gill

The work, a little watercolour that measures just 9 by 12 cm, was added to the Collection in 1992. It was welcomed as providing a good 'lead-in' to the rest of the Collection with its 'suggestion of an Old Master treatment of the subject'. In recent times, however, there has been some questioning of the suitability of the Methodist Church owning a work by an artist who sexually abused his daughters; this particularly at a time when the Church is seeking to come to terms with aspects of child abuse within its own organisation. For the Management Committee this matter came into sharp

focus in spring 2017 when it was realised that the Haywards Heath exhibition would, to some extent, coincide with an exhibition at the nearby Ditchling Museum of Arts & Crafts entitled 'Eric Gill: The Body'.

The Committee has considered the matter at length and has decided to retain the work but to place it immediately in the 'Reserve Collection'. This reserve collection is maintained for works which are not normally available for exhibition; perhaps because they are too fragile to travel or because they represent a preliminary sketch for a completed work. In this case we will be using the 'reserve collection' designation to indicate to potential borrowers that they should reflect carefully on whether or not it would be right for them to include the work in their exhibition. The Management Committee will reassess the situation on an annual basis.

Relationships with other bodies

Our contacts with Oxford Brookes University are maintained via our Custodian Peter Forsaith and through meetings with University staff. We also have links with trustees of Westminster College Oxford Trust (WCOT).

Through the interest and expertise of our Committee members we have contacts with many related organizations. These include Art & Christianity and Artserve.

PLANS FOR FUTURE PERIODS

The programme of exhibitions for the year Sept 2017 to August 2018 is an exciting one with major exhibitions in Solihull, Birmingham and in Hull during its European Year of Culture. In the early summer of 2018 there will be an exhibition distributed across a number of churches on the Isle of Man.

The Management Committee will be collaborating with Methodist Publishing over various initiatives. One will see the production of a new booklet of postcards, this containing 24 pictures from the Collection.

As foreshadowed in this report, there will be significant changes in the composition of the Management Committee during the coming year. This will undoubtedly lead on to the development of new ideas and initiatives. We are especially encouraged by the thought that it will involve further discussions with those involved in the leadership of the Methodist Church over the possibility of securing resources to enable the Collection to play its full part in the Mission of the Church.

The search for a long term home for the Collection, where it can be suitably looked after and displayed while not on tour, will certainly continue. Criteria for such a home were established by the Management Committee a few years ago and these will inform the enquiries and discussion.

– John Newton Gibbs (Chairman)

March 2018

METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION

Income and Expenditure Account

INCOME (£)	Year ending 31-Aug 2016	Year ending 31-Aug 2017
Sales of literature, loan fees, grants and donations	4,776.00	5,576.00
Interest	87.59	52.37
Total	4,863.59	5,628.97

EXPENDITURE (£)

Production of interpretative material, Conservation work	6,144.65	10,520.64
Deficit for the Year	(1,281.06)	(4,891.67)
Balance B/Fwd 1 Sept	16,388.18	15,107.12
Balance C/Fwd 31 Aug	15,107.12	10,215.45

For an update on the locations of future exhibitions and for information on borrowing the Collection please visit our website (methodist.org.uk/artcollection or simply search under 'Methodist Modern Art Collection').

Alternatively, contact the administrator at the following address:

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