

NEWSLETTER

NO.27 – SPRING 2022
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Methodist Modern
Art Collection

FRIENDS OF THE METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION



For All People - Exhibition at Bewdley Museum

In Focus - Vice-President of Methodist Conference and Patron Barbara Easton

Faith as Art - Art Workshops at Thirsk Methodist Church

EDITORIAL

As we go to press, the twice postponed exhibition of 20 pictures from the Collection at Bewdley Museum, *For All People*, is just about to start, alongside a very interesting programme of lectures, storytelling, an art workshop, church services and even walks. After two previous postponements for force majeure, we are thrilled that this is now able to go ahead. You can find all the details on pages 6 and 7.

On page 4 our Patron, Vice-President of Methodist Conference Barbara Easton, encourages us to find something in the Collection which helps us to a place of deep reflection where, as Scripture says, 'God's Spirit speaks to your spirit'.

One of the wonderful things about working with the Collection is watching it speak to people, to provoke thought and inspire the creation of new works. In this Newsletter we feature poems produced in response to last year's *Stories of Change: Hope, Faith and Love Art Trail* at Coventry and report on a series of workshops at Thirsk Methodist Church called *Faith as Art* themed around works from the Collection.



Art Collection Management Committee Members

Prof. Ann Sumner (Chair), Sarah Allard, Ian Baker (Secretary, Friends Group), Katharine Farnham-Dear, Rebecca Gibbs, Revd Catherine Hutton, Revd Graham Kent, Corinne Miller (Acting Chair), Verity Smith, Simon Sorokos, and Jo Hibbard, Director of Engagement (in attendance).

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NEW APPOINTMENT TO THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE - REVD CATHERINE HUTTON



Catherine has joined the committee as a Methodist Presbyterian. Having read English Literature and Language at Hull University, and completing her Local Preacher Studies, she was the Lay Worker in the North Shields and Whitley Bay Methodist Circuit. Next, she trained for ministry at the Queen's Foundation in Birmingham then took a probationer's appointment in Manchester.

Catherine's second appointment to Great Aston on the North Yorkshire moors, involved developing a multi-generational church where no one was left out, using every available opportunity to engage local disciples and the wider community with the Good News. A hands-on approach to learning about God often involved group-art activities, especially on Good Friday and the seasonal celebrations. She has found herself constantly innovating for the Gospel, as the message never changes but the way we interact with and learn from it is key to our growth of faith and the service we offer in response.

Moving from North Yorkshire to East Anglia as Superintendent of the Norwich Circuit, Catherine adapted her love of writing and of developing small group materials. Supporting a multicultural circuit staff through the 2020 lockdown highlighted the importance of appropriate iconography and relevant visual stimulation for our wellbeing in life and faith. Now as lead minister for Epsom and Cheam Methodist Churches in the London District, she is seeking to reimagine church and fellowship in the pandemic era.

Her manse walls are covered with many types of art of varying quality and all loved as each tells the story of a time or person. There are beautiful paintings by northern artists, bought in galleries or craft fairs, photos of people and places she loves and hand-me-downs from family and friends.

Catherine first encountered the Methodist Modern Art Collection when it visited Leyburn. Its range and scope of size and style impressed her. She is looking forward to working with the committee and sharing the vision for the future of the Collection, especially how to use it to help communities engage with both art and faith.

Catherine is married to Gavin. They have two sons and a chihuahua. They all share a love of superhero movies, camping and the North East Coast. Catherine is alone in her love of a sparkly manicure and a good lipstick.

Front Cover: Revd Denise Williamson and co-facilitator Simon Williamson and some participants at the *Faith as Art* workshops at Thirsk Methodist Church with some of the work they produced in response to the Collection (Photo: the Editor)

A view from the Chair (from Corinne Miller)

As I write our Chair, Ann Sumner, is undergoing hip replacement surgery. We wish her a speedy recovery and hope that she will soon be free from pain. So it falls to me, as interim Deputy Chair, to provide an introduction to the first Newsletter of 2022.

The Management Committee has been extremely busy following the Art Trail, *Stories of Change: Hope, Faith and Love* in Coventry, which was the highlight of 2021 and reached over 12,000 visitors; a magnificent achievement considering the pandemic restrictions faced by venues.

We have had time to reflect and share our thinking with partners from the Coventry and Nuneaton Circuit in an inspiring, open and affirmative meeting at the beginning of the year. All agreed that the Art Trail had strengthened local partnerships and built the confidence of partners to work again with the Methodist Modern Art Collection. It was moving to learn how working with the paintings had deepened individual faith and embedded the use of artworks in worship. An unexpected legacy has been that Emilie Lauren Jones, the poet in residence at Central Hall, has become the first Poet Laureate of Coventry and her poems (reproduced on pages 8 and 9), based on works in the Collection, will now reach new audiences.

Later in the summer I was delighted to be involved in hanging a selection of paintings at 3Generate 2021 at the NEC in Birmingham attended by 750 young people. The installation itself provided discussion points for the technicians and volunteers and I overheard the following comment from someone thinking about the meaning of the enigmatic painting by Maggi Hambling (see page 5), 'I suppose it depends whether you want the figure to be walking towards you or away from you'... a profound nugget of wisdom from a disparate group!

The new year sees the Management Committee working hard to maintain the Collection in addition to supporting exhibitions. A team will work in the stores this March to replace some of the older travelling cases with the new bespoke cases. The priority will be the cases for works for the much postponed, and therefore long awaited, exhibition in Bewdley (see pages 6 and 7). This is an exciting partnership between local churches and will benefit from being presented to a wider public at a venue in the heart of this picturesque town. I do hope that you will have an opportunity to visit. We are just keeping our fingers crossed as floods hit the area once again and we hold all those affected in our thoughts.

We have recently heard from the Trustees of the Sister Gwen Appleton Trust that our application for funding has been successful. The key theme for the coming year will be mission and outreach ensuring that the Collection is seen and

used by as many people as possible. To this end we will be working on two projects over the coming months.

The first is a series of mounted reproductions. This suggestion came from Thirsk Methodist Church, following the strong community focused *Faith as Art* workshops in November 2021 (see pages 12 and 13).

The second project will deliver two curated packages suitable for smaller venues and first time borrowers, who may not have the resources or confidence to develop larger exhibitions.

The Trustees have also agreed to pay for new, more substantial frames for two popular prints by Namibian artist, John Muafangejo, to cope with the rigours of touring. We are truly grateful for this offer of funding which will help us achieve our aspiration to exhibit works more widely.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the Management Committee and in the Connexional Team for all their hard work over the past year and also for supporting me in the interim role. I would especially like to acknowledge the contribution of those retiring from the committee, Lucy Newman Cleeve and Revd Ruth Gee.

Lucy, the Curator of the Faith Museum at The Auckland Project, has been instrumental in advising the committee on collection care and development and created the policy document which gives us a clear framework for acquisitions going forward. She brought us an extensive knowledge of contemporary religious art and, despite standing down, she has continued to keep the Collection in her thoughts, advising us of potential acquisitions.

Revd Ruth Gee represented the Methodist Council on the committee and we thank her for her enthusiasm and her insights in to the wider context of the Methodist Church. Her sound advice has been greatly appreciated. The Shadow Methodist Council have proposed Revd Catherine Hutton (see page 2) as Ruth's replacement. She attended her first meeting at the end of 2021 and we look forward to working with her.

Finally, 2022 is the sixtieth anniversary of the Methodist Modern Art Collection and we are planning a series of long term loans to celebrate and place the Collection into the heart of communities with whom we have worked in the past.

On behalf of the Management Committee, I would like to thank Friends for their support and I hope that over the coming year, I will have a chance to meet some of you at our events across the UK.

Barbara Easton

In focus

I am a huge fan of the Methodist Modern Art Collection and absolutely delighted to have accepted the invitation to act as Patron for this year of presidency. It's been usual for the President to take this role but Sonia Hicks, in a spirit of the equality of the presidency, very graciously said, 'You really love this, don't you?' and she was right; I do.

Like many Methodists, I think, I was originally surprised to learn that the Methodist Church in Britain actually has an art collection! And rather proud to learn it is of international importance. So it falls to us – the British Methodists, supported by the Friends of the Collection - to be wise custodians of one of the world's great spiritual treasures. And one not locked away in a museum, but one which, a bit like Michael Edmonds' *The Cross Over the City*, brings the things of God to the people, taking faith outside the 'faith-space'.

Although many churches found a lively new expression during the pandemic, increasingly the church is not where the people are, and the church's language and formulae are no longer familiar or intelligible to people. We need to find new ways, like Paul at the Aeropagus, to speak our unchanging truths in a way that our changing world understands and which speaks to the deepest questions and longings of the human heart. Art is one way. Through the Collection, the Methodist Church recognises the importance of encouraging art as a place to express and talk about faith.

I believe the Collection can help people to a place of deep reflection where, as Scripture says, 'God's spirit speaks to your spirit'. The best service I ever took was when I used the Collection to focus worship one Passion Sunday. I asked four people from the congregation to choose a picture and talk for a couple of minutes about how it resonated with their understanding of Christ's passion or told the story of their own suffering. A couple of them I expected to be good at this, and they were. But I took a punt on one young woman who'd never spoken to the whole congregation before. She began by saying that she'd done what I asked, and flicked through the pictures and didn't like any of them. Not the start I was hoping for! But then she showed Ralph Beyer's *The Son of Man is come* and began to talk about the effect it had on her. She'd had a period of very bad health, and been in hospital, and she talked about how hard it had been and how, at her darkest moment, she felt Jesus lift her onto his shoulders and carry her. That's powerful

in itself. But the thing is, it didn't quite happen like that because for about 30 long seconds, maybe a minute, this very chic, trendy, young woman stood in the pulpit and cried silently. And something happened in the whole congregation – you could have heard a pin drop. Not just because 60/70 people were deeply moved and their hearts ached for her. It was as if this church full of people were suddenly united, unembarrassed, in their own shared human experience of pain and grace, expressed through grief and stimulated by art. It was a rare moment. The psalmist says 'deep calls unto deep' - we can let these pictures call deeply to us.

When I spoke at the launch of the Coventry Art Trail last year, I tried to encourage the host churches to use the Collection as a catalyst for conversations about faith: 'The paintings are out there; I urge you to put your faith out there with them. If evangelism is like one beggar telling another where to find bread – guys, you have the keys to the bakery here.'

I started out as a school teacher and wound my way to Headship, with many challenges on the way. At one point I taught GCSE RE to 16 year olds who hadn't really studied RE before. This involved throwing life's 'hard questions' at them. And one girl responded, 'Wow! I'd never thought about any of this stuff before'. I found that very striking – 11 years in school and she'd never been challenged or resourced to think deeply about life and its big questions. The Collection can address this. For many years I have volunteered at our children's and youth assembly, 3Generate, and when I was there as VicePresident last year I was delighted to see works from the Collection on display. I hope this can be repeated in the future.

As Patron, I joined the Management Committee at their annual Away Day last Autumn and met the dedicated volunteers who, with the help of the Connexional Team, seek to care for and curate the Collection. What Methodists have to offer to the diversity of God's Church (like Charles Wesley) is our willingness to move outside established forms of worship to reach people's hearts. It's in our Methodist DNA. The Committee have lots of exciting things planned for the next couple of years and I wish them every blessing with those.

Barbara Easton

Barbara Easton's Choice

Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006 by Maggi Hambling



Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006 by Maggi Hambling © TMCP.

Genetically, I probably have salt water for blood. I love the sea but I am also rather afraid of it – as I stand on a cross channel ferry and look over the side I am struck by how deep and dark and uncontrollable it all is. I think that Maggi Hambling captures that within this painting, and adds to it a good measure of turmoil. For me it is eloquently disturbing, and the foreground of the picture conjures the same dread I feel looking down when I am on the sea in real life. The picture is dominated, though, not by the vastness of the ocean, but by the improbably small white figure towards the back of the picture. Is it approaching or leading away? Whichever – what matters to me is that, although the figure is small, its light is the real power in the picture and dominates the turbulent sea. It is light, and not darkness, which wins the day.

I have always rather liked this picture, in a general sort of way. However it came to have a deeper meaning during a particularly difficult period in my life. A whole load of my worst fears came real at the same time and I found myself in a dark and tumultuous place. This was complicated by my belief that, however horrid the place in which I found myself, I had got there by listening to God's call on my life. This picture told my story, depicting a place of terrible, swirling depths yet reminding me that the light of God holds the upper hand. The storm was powerful but I was not going to go under; I didn't

know how all would be well, but I would be saved. I have used this picture in many a pastoral conversation since.

Faith is a great mystery, sometimes difficult to argue through the tools of language and rationality, often better expressed through story, poetry and art. As the Iona hymn says, 'We cannot measure how you heal, or answer every sufferer's prayer' - what cannot be calculated can still be inexplicably experienced. This picture tells my story.

Many years ago I heard another story on the radio that I believe was by Tolstoy but have never been able to track down. It was about the visit of a group of missionaries to a far distant part of Russia where Christianity had never been preached. The missionaries made quite an impression in the village but they were also aware of a deep spirituality in the community that was present before ever they arrived. Eventually, the time came for them to leave. On the last morning, as they readied their boat for departure, the village Holy Man came towards them, walking across the lake. They were astonished as he clambered aboard and asked them to remind him of the words of that prayer they had taught him, the one that begins, 'Our Father...'. 'Never mind that!' they exclaimed, 'Tell us how you do that walking on water...'

Barbara Easton

FOR ALL PEOPLE – BEWDLEY EXHIBITION



John Muafangejo's *Israel, Jews, Christians, Heathen, Our God for all People*, the inspiration for the name of the exhibition © TMCP.

Saturday 26 March to Sunday 24 April 2022

As I thought how to introduce the calendar of events for this exhibition and the general information about it on the back cover, the following two Bible verses came to mind:

'Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history.

Be alert, be present. I'm about to do something brand-new.

*It's bursting out! Don't you see it?'
(Isaiah 43 v 18,19 The Message)*

'Forget about what's happened; don't keep going over old history' – that is perhaps easier to say than do for the Bewdley Churches Together team under the leadership of Jim Ineson with the experience of two Covid-19 related postponements in 2020 and 2021. However, I hope I am permitted to express collective thanks for their faithful resilience, the support of their local churches and sponsors, help of staff at Bewdley Museum and from the Methodist Church Connexional Team, and the encouragement of colleagues on the Management Committee.

The second verse pleads enthusiastically to look forward and here are some reasons:

- Twenty works from the Collection and currently the only exhibition planned for this year.
- Four differing talks: Hilary Baker (no relation to me!), a local artist and educator with a studio in the Bewdley Museum complex, helping to decode modern art; Sarah Middleton, focusing on how some of the pictures from the Collection relate to current issues; Simon Airey, an experienced storyteller, offering his own story from

one work in the Collection and then leading a workshop to help others to follow in his footsteps; Mike Dornie, a member of Bewdley Methodist Church, exploring in music and words the way Jesus 'painted pictures' for his listeners and how he is still doing so in our lives today.

- Six faith denominations working together in an ecumenical partnership offering various services on Good Friday and a space for quiet reflection on Thursdays.
- Support from a number of local sponsors recognising the wider community benefit and in partnership with Bewdley Museum with the adjacent Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Gardens.
- Situated in an attractive town with walks along a lovely stretch of the River Severn and, for heritage railway enthusiasts, the popular Severn Valley Railway services start in April with Bewdley station on the opposite side of the river.

What does all this say? *'Be alert'* - note down the dates and details in your diaries, *'be present'* - do make a visit and tell many others to do so, *'I'm about to do something brand-new'* – most works have recently been conserved, *'it is bursting out'* - it will be open for a month including over Easter, *'Don't you see it?'* - be there to see and hear how 20 works from the Collection and the associated programme do their visual talking. Good news indeed!

Ian Baker



CALENDAR OF EVENTS



Eularia Clarke: The Five Thousand (1962) © TMCP.

Sunday Evening Lenten Programme: Reflections For All People

Bewdley Churches Together will hold joint services at 6.30 pm on Sunday evenings throughout Lent featuring a reflection on a painting chosen from the Collection by one of their Ministers.

Thursday Quiet Space

11.00 am – 3.00 pm

Friends Meeting House

Each Thursday in April (7, 14, 21) this historic building will offer all a welcoming and peaceful space and environment for quiet thought and reflection.

Saturday 26 March - For All People exhibition opens

11.00 am - Bewdley Museum, Wyre Forest Gallery.

Sunday 27 March – A child could have done that!

11.00 am - Baptist Church

An interactive one hour talk by local artist and educator Hilary Baker that decodes modern art.

Wednesday 30 March - How the Methodist Modern Art Collection speaks to current issues of the day

7.00 pm - Methodist Church

A talk by Sarah Middleton, a freelance Arts Manager and a Methodist Local Preacher.

Saturday 2 April – Every picture tells a story

11.00 am - 12.30 pm - Baptist Church

A storytelling performance given by Simon Airey based on one of the pictures from the Collection.

Saturday 2 April -

Storytelling workshop

1.00 pm - 3.00 pm - Baptist Church

Develop the art of storytelling in an interactive workshop run by Simon Airey. Limited places available - sign up during the morning session.

Wednesday 6 April – Jesus the painter: What's the story?

2.30 pm - Methodist Church

In words and music, Methodist Local Preacher Mike Dernie FRSA leads an interactive exploration of the way Jesus 'painted pictures' for his listeners and how he is still painting on the canvas of our lives.

Friday 15 April (Good Friday)

Together in the Garden

2.00 pm – Queen Elizabeth II

Jubilee Gardens

Bewdley Churches Together welcome all to an outdoor service reflecting on the events of Good Friday.

There is a Green Hill...

3.00 pm - meet at St Anne's Church

A guided walk to the foot of the cross at Bewdley's own Golgotha where a short service will be held.

Sunday 24 April - For All People exhibition closes

3.00 pm - Bewdley Museum, Wyre Forest Gallery.

For all details see forallpeoplebewdley.com

POEMS INSPIRED BY COVENTRY ART TRAIL

We mentioned in the last Newsletter that Coventry's Methodist Central Hall had appointed a poet in residence during Coventry's year as UK City of Culture. Here is the four part poem that poet, Emilie Lauren Jones, wrote in response to works in the Collection



Richard Bavin's *The Empty Tomb* © TMCP



John Brokenshire's
Untitled - Pentecost © TMCP

A Trail of Light

Emilie Lauren Jones

What He Left Behind

After Richard Bavin's *The Empty Tomb*

Hope is a half moon
lighting sallow steps.

He folded their stinging words,
their sneering mouths,
into a neat pile

and discarded them
in the once-dark corner
of an empty tomb.

Words and Wonders

After John Brokenshire's *Untitled - Pentecost*

What if Words don't sit silently on pages?
If bonfires spit out light,
and dove's wings strike the sky,
and stars shout across galaxies;
then why do we whisper about words and wonders,
instead, we should splash them across canvases
with the fierceness of a snowy owl.



Michael Edmonds' *The Cross over the City* © TMCP

Ghislaine Howard's *The Washing of the Feet* © TMCP



The Washing of Feet
After Ghislaine Howard's
The Washing of the Feet

The brushstrokes of the sea painted
a layer of sand across our bodies.
Set against a green/blue horizon,
she dipped the faded edges
of a beach towel
into the plastic bucket of salt water,
rubbed us clean, patted us dry,
completed this ritual
with the unrolling of socks and
tying of laces.

Places I've Seen Crosses
After Michael Edmonds' *The Cross over the City*

at the A46 intersection
during rush hour;
dug into the sand below Paignton Pier;
in the clanking of dropped chopsticks;
in the static crackle of a TV set;
on the lock of the nightclub's toilet door;
in the roof of an
Elizabethan schoolhouse;
staring out of a plane window, praying
to land safely;
in the unfinished game of dominos on
my Nan's table.
in between mismatched containers
on a cargo ship;

smashed onto the screen of a
dropped iPhone;
between waves in the wreckage of a
failed journey;
pointing from a compass as
the fog closes in;
on purple petals by a motorway layby;
after the flames joined two charred nails;
glued to the back panel of the rental car;
gaffer taped and centre stage;
in the little rivers that run
across the palm of your hand.

I choose a navy flannel from the drawer
dab it into the dish of warm water
(the same one she used to cook our
shepherd's pie in)
rub her clean, pat her dry
then cream the cracks between her toes,
and swaddle them in fluffy slippers
before asking if she'd like a sip of tea
or the lamp switching on.

TIE A BLUE RIBBON

‘true blue’ FAITH in Coventry



Sarah Middleton outside Coventry Cathedral (Photo: Hilary Fielder)

As a stranger to the streets of Coventry, I was reliant on the blue ribbons of the FAITH project to lead me from the city centre to Swanswell Park. Theatre designer Tom Piper, famed for his poppy memorial at the Tower of London, *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*, had used the ribbons to create an evocative visual representation of the existing ties and connections between the different faith groups in Coventry. It was Friday 10 September, and I had been invited to a gathering of Faith and Community Leaders to share supper and conversation. The Royal Shakespeare Company had teamed up with the Coventry City of Culture Trust to curate FAITH, and this was the prologue.

Tables were set beside illuminated trees reflecting in the Swanswell Pool. A tapestry of coloured streamers provided a beautiful canopy. I found myself seated next to a Sikh primary school teacher and soon enjoying a vegan meal.

Postcards were handed to us including discussion questions: ‘What does faith mean to you in tough times?’ and ‘How do we honour each other’s complexity and ensure we all belong?’ *The Dalit Madonna*, which featured on our Methodist Modern Art Collection’s *Stories of Change: Hope, Faith and Love* Art Trail leaflets, proved to be a rich source of interest on our table.

Indeed the whole evening was welcome preparation for the planned focus of my Coventry visit, to use works from the Collection to facilitate a session ‘Responding creatively to God’s call’ with the Birmingham Methodist District Synod. This was at Coventry’s Methodist Central Hall, one of the many places of worship participating in FAITH’s Open House Saturday. Synod members mingled - in the lunch break - with visitors who had followed the Art Trail to Central Hall or simply been drawn in through its welcoming porch, again festooned with blue ribbons.

Synod reflected on five paintings whose subjects intertwined with the calling of the District: caring for God’s earth and each other, integrating social justice and evangelism. Poet in residence, Emilie Lauren Jones, read her poems inspired by the John Brokenshire and Ghislaine Howard paintings (see pages 8 and 9). District Chair Ian Howarth, summing up the session, affirmed how art can help us perceive things in new ways, and the importance of the imagination in fulfilling our calling. Regional Learning & Development Officer, Kerry Scarlett, led Synod’s closing worship, returning to the images and movingly weaving together insights which had been captured on paper:

Of Brokenshire’s *Untitled - Pentecost*, some had added to the

Pentecost interpretation with “a sign of hope brought to Noah after devastating floods.... angels appearing to ordinary shepherds.... our sense of God’s Spirit with us as the light breaking through our uncertainty, especially during the Covid crisis ... Break through, envelop us, we pray.”

Of Howard’s *The Washing of the Feet*, “we see your tenderness, Lord, your commitment to our care... as we serve others, help us accept the difficult gift of receiving care... to allow ourselves to be blessed, to experience the humility of hospitality as both host and guest.”

That evening, the FAITH event concluded with a ceremony of light in Millennium Square. Jostling in the torchlit procession, I noticed the Transport Museum and neighbouring buildings were floodlit with the same shade of blue as the ribbons which had connected the places of faith throughout the city. ‘Coventry blue’ or ‘true blue’ was the distinctive cloth dyed in the city’s medieval weaving trade, a steadfast colour much sought-after. The dye included water from the River Sherbourne.

Before leaving for home, I walked along the canal towpath. Sure enough, blue ribbons were tied at intervals along the railings. My final stop was the chapel of the George Eliot Hospital in Nuneaton. One of the chaplains told me why the large new sanctuary embroidery was an abstract design, suggesting a shining central light radiating the colours of the rainbow. That’s another story. I didn’t need to ask why streams of blue living water ‘flowed out’ from the light to all who would gather in this sacred space.

Sarah Middleton

REVIEW OF EXHIBITION

at Chester Cathedral which included loans from the Collection

A new exhibition, *Global Images of Christ: Challenging Perceptions* has been on show in Chester Cathedral in September and October 2021. Within a classic setting of medieval (and Victorian!) Western art, and inspired in part by the Black Lives Matter movement, it reminded visitors of the universality of Christ in a variety of ways, from many different ethnic representations to challenging gender assumptions.

It began with a small collection of 17th century Russian icons, followed by a range of contemporary icons, of which the most challenging was perhaps the *Windrush Icon* by Meg Wroe, commissioned by Southwark Cathedral. Based on the Rublev Trinity icon, it portrays three Southwark residents: a man who came to the UK with the Windrush generation, an NHS nurse and a young black woman.

Another series based on the iconic tradition by Silvia Dimitrova shows seven women of the Bible, from Sarah to Priscilla, accompanied by poems by Bishop Graham Kings.

A very different cathedral altarpiece, from St Albans, was Lorna May Wadsworth's *Last Supper*, based on the Leonardo pattern, but with modern, multi-racial figures, including a black Christ. Wadsworth was also represented by three other black representations of Christ, and a homo-erotic *Kiss of Betrayal*.

Of course, Christ was not just presented here as black or white, but from a variety of ethnic traditions from all over the world, including Methodist Modern Art Collection's own Roy de Maistre's *The Supper at Emmaus*, where the faces of the three characters are Mediterranean or North African.

As well as two paintings by de Maistre, the Collection was also represented by works by Mark Cazalet (two works), John Muafangejo and Sadao Watanabe, showing how this exhibition, like our own Collection, reflects artists from throughout the world, as well as images of Christ from so many cultures. One of the best known Methodist Modern Art Collection's artist's pictures, Jyoti Sahi's *Dalit Madonna*, was not present (because it was on display as part of the Art Trail in Coventry) but three others of his works were here, and it was good to have the opportunity to see more of his work.

It was encouraging to see how many of the works on show already have a permanent place in cathedrals and churches throughout the country, either as originals or copies, offering visitors and worshippers the chance to reflect on the universality of Christ, and to become more aware of how art offers ways of deepening faith and worship, not just in special exhibitions, valuable though they are, but in regular Christian life.

John Lansley



Mark Cazalet's *Fool of God (Christ in the Garden)* 1993 © TMCP

FAITH AS ART

Workshops at Thirsk Methodist Church

We reported in the last edition of the Newsletter that Thirsk Methodist Church (St James Green) had run a series of five free workshops using digital images of works from the Collection. I was lucky enough to be able to visit over the final weekend when some of the works produced in the workshops were on display, and to talk with some of the participants.

Revd Denise Williamson told me “Traditionally the Methodist Church has used words and hymns to tell the Christian story, but images can sometimes be more powerful and memorable. Modern Art is an accessible medium which can inspire many different interpretations of the same image. We all know the saying, ‘A picture paints a thousand words’. In exploring the images we have been challenged to think about familiar bible stories differently and expand our understanding about God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.”

Working under the title *Faith as Art*, the workshops explored a series of themes and compared and contrasted two works from the Collection for each theme. They explored how the individual artist interpreted the theme, the techniques they used, and then devoted the greater part of each three hour session to the creation of works by those attending, inspired by their studies.

Revd Denise’s husband and co-facilitator on the workshops, Simon Williamson, told me “All the artists, of whatever ability or training have been challenged and stretched and taken risks to try out new media, styles, and concepts. As a group we have learned techniques from one another, rejoiced in the joy of being able to capture in paint what was in our minds, and consoled one another when it all went wrong! Everyone has enjoyed the

creative space and time to engage with God through art.”

In Session 1 the theme was The Presence of the Holy Spirit, and the workshop looked at Nicholas Mynheer’s *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* and Michael Edmonds’ *The Cross over the City*. Unexpected links appeared. One participant explained, “My first impression of Michael Edmonds’ picture was that it reminded me of shipping containers at a port..... very much at the forefront of my prayers was the plight of refugees arriving in the UK and their treatment on arrival”. This is, of course, the plight of the Holy Family in Mynheer’s work.



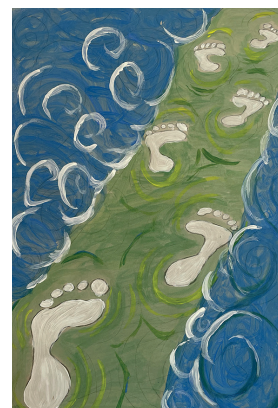
In Session 2 the theme was Still Life, and the workshop looked at Jacques Iselin’s *The Elements of the Holy Communion* and Patrick Heron’s *Crucifix and Candles: Night 1950*.



One of the participants, who loved the Iselin image so much that she bought the poster of it on her phone whilst at the workshop, admitted she would previously have said “Modern Art is not my thing”. Another participant was inspired by her work at the workshop to create a banner which now hangs on the wall of the church (see below).



Session 3 looked at The Supper at Emmaus, comparing and contrasting Roy de Maistre’s *The Supper at Emmaus* and Ceri Richards’ *The Supper at Emmaus*. These images fired the imagination of one participant to paint “A different view from behind where Jesus is sitting, showing the disciples’ surprise as they realise who He is as with His arm raised in blessing they see the hole in his hand created by the nail on the cross”.





All works © the artists. All photos by the Editor

In Session 4 the theme was Walking on Water, looking at Maggi Hambling's *Good Friday: Walking on Water*, 2006 and Peter Howson's *Christ Walking on the Water*. Simon Williamson is an accomplished artist, but for many of the attendees creating art took them 'outside their comfort zone'. As one attendee said, the group "had all got out of the boat" as if to walk on the water, getting involved in something new and challenging. This in turn, he felt, helped him empathise with how other people felt when outside their comfort zones, perhaps in a church setting.

Sometimes participants' ideas changed and grew over time. The participant here said: "I tried several attempts to draw what I wanted, and did grow in confidence in using

chalk pastels. Not happy with my first attempts, I focused on Jesus's feet walking on the surface of the sea. I used acrylics for this picture" (see previous page).

In the final session the theme was The Raising of Lazarus, looking at John Reilly's *The Raising of Lazarus* and Euryl Stevens' *The Raising of Lazarus*. Stevens' picture portrays her father who was killed in World War 2 and this session was held just before Remembrance Sunday. However, although such themes raised serious issues, attendees told me they also had a lot of fun at the sessions. This was the case for the youngest attendee, who was only six years old and really enjoyed joining this workshop. Proud grandparents told me she had identified the swirling circular form around the central figures in John Reilly's *The Raising of Lazarus*, which are echoed in the picture of the event

shown above, as "The Circle of Life" - a wonderful idea!

Revd Denise said "The conversations about the artworks we showed and faith were wonderful" and at the end of the session "each person, if they wished, talked about their work, sharing stories of faith and encounter." Several attendees told me these conversations were the favourite part, and I gained the impression that genuine bonds had been created between those who had shared the experience.

Revd Denise and Simon are planning to run another series of workshops, based on works from the Collection, and they would encourage other churches or groups to do something similar. For more information, contact simon@spw-design.co.uk.

Katharine Farnham-Dear

ELSEWHERE IN THE ART WORLD

REVISITING THE ANNUNCIATION: THE BLENSDORF SCULPTURE IN SALISBURY CATHEDRAL

Twelve months ago, in the Spring 2021 Newsletter, our northern correspondent, John Lansley, offered us his thoughts on some of the great paintings of The Annunciation. By way of contrast, and in a very different medium, Ernst Blensdorf's *The Annunciation*, fashioned from elm wood and acquired for the Lady Chapel of Salisbury Cathedral back in 1978, makes a further contribution as to how best to depict the story of this pivotal moment in the Gospel Story. This simple but lovely piece also featured in the impressive 'Celebrating 800 Years of Spirit and Endeavour' exhibition, commemorating the laying of the foundation stone of the new cathedral, following its re-location from the original and rather exposed and elevated site at Old Sarum.

Ernst Blensdorf was born in Schleswig, Germany. In the 1920s he began to establish himself as a German Expressionist wood carver. A passionate pacifist, this put him at odds with the rising Nazi regime in Germany and he elected to relocate, initially to Norway in 1933. He was, in June 1940, once again required to take flight, this time to the United Kingdom, on the last vessel to escape Norway ahead of the German invasion. Fellow German artist, Kurt Schwitters, happened to be a fellow passenger.

After an initial obligatory period of internment, on the Isle of Man (again with Schwitters), Blensdorf settled in Somerset in 1941, making his living by carving and teaching from his home in Bruton, where he was introduced to the beauty of Somerset elm which became his favoured carving material. His subject matter was predominantly

figurative, created using free flowing, abstracted forms.

In the story of the Annunciation the angel Gabriel announces the coming birth of Jesus to Mary. Blensdorf's figure, the elm wood polished to reveal its rich warm colour and rather striking, swirling grain has usually been taken to be the angel Gabriel himself, its pose suggesting Gabriel rushing to deliver the news. However, might it be Mary, one hand open to the angel's message, the other turned towards her heart in acceptance?

Blensdorf only received proper recognition of his work after his death in 1976. He became known as 'the Sculptor of Bruton'. Examples of his work can be found at the Bishop's Palace in Wells, The Bruton Museum and King's School Bruton in Somerset.

Bob Williams

'VIA CRUCIS'

Last Spring's Newsletter also featured an article on our talented Friend, Caroline Waterlow, and her *Via Crucis* series. Conveniently placed readers might be interested to know that Caroline has been invited to show the works at St John's Church, Chilcompton, near Wells in Somerset (postcode BA3 4HP). The full set will be on display for two weeks over the Easter period, from Sunday 10 April to Sunday 24 April.

The exhibition will be open daily, from 10.00 am until 4.00 pm - but it is advisable to check locally ahead of your visit. (There is an excellent, conveniently placed café, the Holy Cow (!) next to the church and open until mid afternoon). For further details contact Revd Steve Miles on 07708 661800

Bob Williams



Ernst Blensdorf (1896-1976) *The Annunciation* 1957 at Salisbury Cathedral (Photo: Ash Mills)

BROKEN ANGEL AT COVENTRY CATHEDRAL

reimagining a missing window



As works from the Methodist Modern Art Collection were on display in Coventry last Autumn, final preparations were being made at Coventry Cathedral for the first new artwork under the series title *Broken Angel*. As the advisory curator for *Broken Angel*, I would have been delighted if their presence overlapped, but they didn't quite! I know the Methodist collection well, and was excited to see the rich juxtapositions within the Cathedral: the direct connections or re-connections with works by Sutherland, Frink and Beyer; or the fresh impact of Burra's *Pool at Bethesda*. During the gradual reopening after the pandemic, the Art Trail allowed us to be with works of art in special places, something that was an absence – a memory – for so long.

The *Broken Angel* project is a different kind of response to absence and memory. Its background requires re-telling a story that some may already know:

In January 2020, *The Angel of the Eternal Gospel*, one panel of John Hutton's great West Screen, was shattered beyond repair in an act of vandalism.

Rather than make a swift decision over a permanent replacement, the Cathedral decided to offer the opportunity to artists to make new, temporary pieces for the 'empty' space. In the first instance, three new works will be presented in a series over 2021-22. The original will, it is hoped, eventually return to display in a partial restoration. A full-size drawing study, donated by the artist's widow, Marigold Hutton, in 2021 will also be restored for display. The project reflects the Cathedral's work in peace and reconciliation. From a destructive act, a positive creative response brings new ideas and relationships. Movingly, Dean John Witcombe and others in the Cathedral community often express regret that the perpetrators have never been identified, so they cannot be told directly that they are forgiven. The

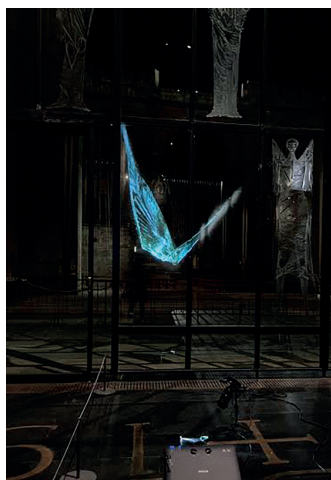
project also maintains the long-standing dialogue between living artists and the life of the Cathedral.

Anne Petters was the first artist in the series. Anne grew up in Dresden, but since 2017 she has been based in the UK. I was first drawn to her work by seeing her extraordinary sculptural images of books whose pages seem to be blowing and fluttering in a breeze. Her paired works *Lichtung – Break* and *Lichtung - White Drift* opened on 6 November and closed on 1 February. *Lichtung - Break*, was a site-specific installation for the 'empty' space in the West Screen, and *Lichtung - White Drift* was a new glass book, located in the Baptistry. 'Lichtung' is a German word that is impossible to translate exactly. Although often translated as 'clearing', its root is 'Licht'. This suggests bringing light to a space - including as a result of a destructive act like making a clearing.

The centre of attention was *Lichtung – Break* which played on the idea of fragility and light. It used a fragment of glass – not from the shattered original – through which a torch beam of light passed. This was observed by a live camera, whose image of the broken glass was projected on to the empty window. Lucy Newman Cleeve's forthcoming article for *Art & Christianity* says: 'The outline of the shape it casts on the West Screen echoes the gesture of the wings of Hutton's original angels. It is not intended to be read as one of the shards from the original window, but rather as a universal symbol of pain and brokenness and for the hope and beauty that can arise from such a place.'

Anne and I discussed her work in a closing event. She talked movingly of light being at the centre of her work, literally and metaphorically. We expressed the hope that this would stand for an open, positive idea, expressing hope in this period of such anxiety and fragility.

Michael Tooby



John Hutton:
*The Angel of the
Eternal Gospel*, now
destroyed (above)

John Hutton at work
on a preparatory
drawing © Coventry
Cathedral (far left)

Lichtung / Break –
photographed as
night fell, January
2021 (Photo: Anne
Petters) (left)

FORTHCOMING TOUR PROGRAMME FOR THE COLLECTION

2022

For All People

Saturday 26 March
to Sunday 24 April 2022
Bewdley, Worcestershire

Wyre Forest Gallery
Bewdley Museum
Load Street
Bewdley
Worcestershire
DY12 2AE

Open Daily – 11.00 am to 3.00 pm
Admission Free

An exhibition of 20 works from the Collection selected to depict scenes from different events in the life of Jesus before focusing on his crucifixion and resurrection. The title of the exhibition is taken from a linocut print by John Muafangejo *Israel, Jews, Christians, Heathen, Our God for all People* (1981).

Local churches are hosting a programme of talks, a workshop and services over the period of the exhibition. Admission is free to these and the venues are all within walking distance of Bewdley Museum. Full details of the programme can be found on pages 6 and 7.

Getting there

By foot – access to Bewdley Museum / Wyre Forest Gallery is from Load Street in the centre of the town or from the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Gardens.

By car – some roads in the centre of Bewdley are narrow and there is a one way system in part. There are a number of car parks all within a short walking distance of Bewdley Museum. Details with postcodes for satnav use are as follows:

Long stay parking - Dog Lane / 152 spaces (DY12 2EF), Gardners Meadow / 51 spaces (DY12 2DG) and Load Street Lower / 51 spaces (DY12 2AW)

Short stay parking - Load Street Upper / 17 spaces + 3 disabled spaces (DY12 2AW)

By train – the nearest mainline railway station is Kidderminster from where there are taxis and bus services to Bewdley

Further information

Website: www.forallpeoplebewdley.com
Email: jim.ineson@gmail.com
Telephone: 01299 405645
Website: www.bewdleymuseum.co.uk

2023

Articles of Faith

Sunday 18 February to Saturday 8 April 2023

Victoria Methodist Church
1A Whiteladies Road
Bristol

BS8 1NU

Contact: Revd Richard Sharples

Email: richard.sharples@methodist.org.uk

Website: www.vic-methodist-bristol.org.uk

New Visions

Sunday 28 May to Sunday 9 July 2023

Emmanuel Ecumenical Church
Upperton Road
Eastbourne
BN21 1LQ

Contact: Rev Paul Tabraham

Email: contact@emmanueleastbourne.org.uk

Telephone: 01323 502003

Website: www.emmanueleastbourne.org.uk



A THOUGHT TO LEAVE YOU WITH

As we approach Easter, a reminder that our online Easter Resource, *Paintings, Poems and Prayers for Holy Week*, first produced in the Lockdown of Spring 2020 then slightly revised, is now available on the Methodist Church website at www.methodist.org.uk/media/21090/3512-mmact-holy-week-content-url.pdf

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