NEWSLETTER

FRIENDS OF THE METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION

NO. 32 – AUTUMN 2024
£1.50 WHERE SOLD

Methodist Modern Art Collection

New acquisition for the Collection
Reports from Welwyn Garden City, Eastbourne and 3Gen
Launch of the Collection on Art UK website
David Maddock in Focus

NO. 32 – AUTUMN 2024

EDITORIAL

We have so much to talk about in this issue as the Collection continues to reach new audiences both in person and online. Some, as you can see from the front cover, are very young! The Collection also continues to expand with the acquisition of a beautiful new artwork from contemporary stained-glass artist George Walsh. I hope you enjoy reading about all this, and don't miss the exciting news for Friends on page 14.

Katharine Farnham-Dear

Management Committee Members
Prof. Ann Sumner (Chair), Katharine Farnham-Dear, Emily Fuggle, the Revd. Catherine Hutton, the Revd. Graham Kent, David Maddock (Secretary, Friends Group), David McEvoy (co-opted), Corinne Miller (Vice-Chair), Peter Shears, the Revd. Adam Stevenson. In attendance: Jo Hibbard (Director of Engagement), Liz Millard (Collection Administrator), Olivia Threlkeld (Heritage & Collections Officer).

Patrons of the Friends of the Methodist Modern Art Collection
The President of Conference, the Revd. Helen Cameron, The Very Revd. Nick Bury, Phil Allison of Cultureshock Media, Lord Leslie Griffiths of Bury Port

Liz Millard
Administrator
Phone: 020 7467 5214
email: artcollection@methodistchurch.org.uk
www.methodist.org.uk/artcollection

David Maddock
Secretary to the Friends of the Collection
30 Kingsmead Road,
Knighton
Leicester LE2 3YB
Phone: 07800 981262
email: friendsofmmac@gmail.com

Katharine Farnham-Dear
Newsletter Editor
Phone: 07908 843589
email: KatharineFD@aol.com

Produced by Cultureshock Media
Art Director: Alfonso Iacurci
www.cultureshockmedia.co.uk

Front Cover: Pre-schoolers from the Jenny Wren Nursery visit the *New Vision* exhibition at Emmanuel Church, Eastbourne. (Photo: Prof. Ann Sumner)

THE LAUNCH OF THE COLLECTION ON ART UK

In June the Methodist Modern Art Collection became available on the Art UK website. Art UK is a cultural education charity and provides an online home for the UK's public art collections. It is a free digital resource giving quick and easy access to artworks from over 3,400 British collections and institutions. 5.3 million users visit the site each year to view any of the 300,000 works at any time and from any place. Each artwork has a photo and basic details of the title and artist.

Interpretation on Art UK takes one of two forms: 'Curations' or 'Stories'. 'Curations', which can be created by anyone with an interest in the artworks, are online exhibitions and primarily visual. 'Stories', which may require greater editorial guidance and input, are essays and reflections which use images. 'Stories' are between 800 and 1,700 words long.

The launch of the Collection on Art UK coincided with the first day of Methodist Conference 2024 in Leeds. Ann Sumner and I were present on our stand at Conference to introduce delegates to Art UK and to talk about the Collection.

To mark the launch, the Management Committee invited Professor Ben Quash (Professor of Christianity and the Arts at King's College, London) to curate a selection of our works. This proved very popular. Between June and September 2024 Ben's 'Story', posted under the title *Hand to Hand*, received 464 views. Ben encourages us to look closely at the hands of Christ in eight different works from the Collection, including *Pietà* by Elisabeth Frink and *The Deposition* by Graham Sutherland. His reflection invites us to spend time studying the ways in which artists explore differing aspects of Christ's nature through the ways in which they present his hands. Do visit the site and read it for yourself.

Having the Collection on Art UK brings it to a wider digital audience and raises awareness of its value as resource for spiritual reflection and conversation. It also makes it accessible to academics and researchers, and we have already had enquiries as a result. Undoubtedly, it offers a way of reaching new audiences and enabling them to engage with issues of faith and belief through their encounters with the artworks in the Collection.

Readers of the Newsletter are invited to explore the way in which the Collection is being displayed on Art UK by visiting the site at https://artuk.org/visit/venues/methodist-modern-art-collection-7923

If you are interested in using Art UK for a 'Curation' of your own featuring works from the Collection, you can find instructions on the Art UK website at https://artuk.org/for-collections/curations-and-content. You can create and publish your 'Curation' without needing any form of permission or authorisation. If you would like to write a longer piece and submit a 'Story', then you can find guidelines on the same webpage. If you are interested in creating a 'Story' or a 'Curation', please contact me via artcollection@methodistchurch.org.uk; I will be happy to advise you how best to use this highly accessible new resource.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts about this new and innovative approach to sharing the Collection online.

Peter Shears
Management Committee Member

A View from the Chair

Professor Ann Sumner

Two major exhibitions of the Collection are reported in this Newsletter, and I hope that you managed to see some of our greatest treasures at either *Deepening the Mystery* at Welwyn Garden City or *New Vision* at Christchurch, Eastbourne – or perhaps you visited both! The Welwyn exhibition was seen by c.2,000 visitors and Eastbourne welcomed c.1,500. Both had been long in the planning and experienced delays, so we were delighted to see them come to fruition so dynamically. There were broad and engaging programmes of events at both venues. These included a workshop at Eastbourne encouraging 'slow looking', a first for us we believe.

My thanks to Committee Members Corinne Miller, Katharine Farnham-Dear and Graham Kent for their work with Paul Gateshill and the team to support Welwyn's exhibition. I would also like to pay tribute to Pat Latham who curated the Eastbourne exhibition with unique flair and dedication (see p.8), supported by the Revd. Paul Tabraham, Alan Reid and the team. Huge thanks go to Heritage & Collections Officer Olivia Threlkeld who supported both the Welwyn and Eastbourne exhibitions.

At Eastbourne our Lead Contact on the Committee was Sarah Allard, supported by Emily Fuggle and me. Sadly, for personal reasons and work commitments, Sarah had to stand down just before Eastbourne launched. I would like to thank her for her three years of dedicated service. Not only did she work with the Eastbourne team from the outset, visiting first when the church was still under construction, but she played a key role on the CCCD Working Group updating our Guidance for Borrowers in particular. We first worked with Sarah at Leicester in 2017, then she joined the Committee in 2021 bringing a wealth of experience and enthusiasm, so we are sad to see her leave but hope to keep in touch. Nominated new members of the Committee will be announced in the Spring Newsletter.

Our exhibitions engage in many ways and particularly by recruiting and training volunteer stewards who play such a key role. It was so encouraging to hear from one steward at Welwyn: "My lasting memory will be one of unity and oneness that seemed to flow as we gathered in an ordinary place to enjoy artworks that inspired awe and wonder in so many different ways for so many different people". Our front cover reminds me that when working with the team in Eastbourne installing the exhibition there, a key highlight was seeing the Jenny Wren Nursery group engaging so enthusiastically with our works on our first pre-school visit (see p.11).

The final exhibition of the year was at 3Gen in Birmingham which was again a great success, particularly on the Sunday when many young people created their own personal responses (see p.12).

It has been a busy time for some of us on the Committee planning exhibitions for next year. We are excited to be lending to Kirby Stephen Methodist Church in Cumbria over Easter 2025, developing a small, curated package exhibition with them entitled *Revelation!* which includes our two Roy de Maistres and the Ceri Richards. We hope to tour this to other venues too. I have specifically been working on the Bradford 2025 programming and have enjoyed the enthusiastic response of the organising committee, supported by the District. Works will be shown across the area throughout September (see back page). More details about this exciting art trail in our Spring Newsletter.

It is encouraging in this Newsletter to announce that we have acquired a key new work George Walsh's *Preaching* (see p.14). My thanks to Neil Payne and the Organising Committee of the 2018 Dublin exhibition for their generosity in presenting us with our first work by an Irish artist.

Meanwhile I have been particularly busy pursuing our new home and hope to be able to update you on these negotiations in the Spring. I have also been working with Katharine Farnham-Dear on the Annual Report which you should receive at the end of the year. Once again, my thanks go to all our hard working voluntary Committee members, and to Liz Millard, Jo Hibbard and Olivia Threlkeld on the Connexional Team who do so much to support our activities. And finally thank you, all our Friends, for supporting the Collection with your membership.

David Maddock

In Focus

I first came across the Methodist Modern Art Collection in 2019 when the *Wondering Soul* exhibition opened in Leicester. It was Norman Adams' watercolour, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*, that first caught my eye. Displayed in a shadowy corner of the Cathedral near to St George's Chapel, its colours still seemed to glow luminously. Then there was Jacques Iselin's painting, *The Elements of the Holy Communion* (shown on the front cover), suspended above the communion table and Maggi Hambling's *Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006*.

Having studied Fine Art in Bristol from 1980-83 and submitted a thesis – or Personal Study as we called it - on four themes within Christian art, I wondered why I had not come across the Collection at that time or, indeed, since then.

My introduction to the Christian perspective had been informed by Hans Rookmaaker's excellent book, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, Francis Schaeffer's writings on art, and a little curiously perhaps, C.S. Lewis's essay, *Good Work and Good Works*. The real impetus for my Personal Study, however, came from *Prophecy and Vision*, a multi-sited exhibition hosted by The Arnolfini gallery, the City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, and the University of Bristol Vandyck Gallery. It was, I remember, an outstanding compilation of contemporary art, craft and architectural design that featured works by such well-known figures as Anthony Green, Alan Caiger-Smith, John Piper, and Laurence Whistler as well as Elisabeth Frink, Craigie Aitchison, and Norman Adams who are, of course, represented in the Methodist Modern Art Collection.

Did these two projects reflect a common interest? The curators of *Prophecy and Vision*, Peter Burman and Father Kenneth Nugent, certainly noted indifference to the creative arts in Church life as had Dr John Morel Gibbs two decades earlier when he had embarked on the acquisition of works for the Collection. Indifference or neglect there may have been, but I think there is also a theological tension where the creative arts are concerned.

In his contribution to the *Prophecy and Vision* exhibition catalogue, *Art and the Church: a Theologian's Viewpoint*, the Right Revd. John Tinsley, Bishop of Bristol, highlighted two theological traditions that shape our view of the arts: the one – to pare down Bishop John's argument - is a life-affirming 'incarnational' tendency that fosters the visual arts, and the other is its 'spiritual' antithesis that favours the immaterial arts of music and literature.

That having been said, I think that the Methodist Church's remit for the Collection which is to serve the ongoing work among young people, ecumenical interaction, outreach to diverse audiences, and promotion of Methodist heritage, represents an enlightened re-engagement with the visual arts: and one that proves relevant to our own secular times. The ambiguity of modern art is conceived as a strength. As an inarticulate means of communication – based on imagery rather than words – these works embrace the unsayable, the half-understood, the mysterious, and in doing so, prompt a response from the viewer.

David Maddock's Choice

It may seem perverse to alight upon one of only two works in the Collection that are abstract; especially in these days when the proliferation of artificial intelligence heightens our awareness of all things human. The work to which I refer is Dennis Hawkins' *Pentecost*, an oil paint-on-wood relief that is devoid of figurative representation; surprisingly so, given its title. Yet it is not without recognisable content. On close inspection, the misshapen wooden panel that comprises the greater part of this relief turns out to be a battered desktop, scratched, indented, and inscribed by generations of pupils.

Hawkins acquired a couple of old school desks when the classroom furnishings at Repton College, where he taught, were being replaced. Having established a successful practice as a printmaker, and having then experienced a setback when the American market for his work declined, he had begun to experiment with abstract reliefs and construction in the manner of Ben Nicholson and other members of Unit 1, the pre-war abstract art group. He made numerous versions of *Pentecost* at this time as well as a great many renditions of the *Burning Bush*, another biblical image that brings fiery flame into correspondence with material entities, or rather, in the case of *Pentecost*, Christ's followers. In neither story does the flame consume. It is a sign of God's presence: it signals transformation.

The idea of transformation is embodied in Hawkins' piece. Indeed, it is all too easy to see this simple relief for what it literally is; discarded scraps of wood embellished with paint. The title, however, prompts interpretation. We become aware that Hawkins was trying to say something. Our imagination gets to work. Up-cycled bits and pieces may be seen as related forms while daubs of paint signify as light. The work invites empathy.

Take its scale for starters. The 80 cm span falls easily within the breadth of an arm. We imagine Hawkins absorbed in the creative process as he made it, unconsciously repositioning the piece on the table, or on the wall, as he physically 'worked' its surfaces. Then, there is the gestural quality of the brush strokes that correspond to the movement of an arm, and the white and ochre brush marks comprising the disc of light near the centre of the work. Gesture conveys feeling. The contrast of warm and cool tonalities, like the thin veil of blue / grey paint washed over the warm tone of the pine panel to right of centre, or that flaking strip of sky blue over the bottom central panel beneath the light disk, appeal as colour does to one's emotion.

Technically, *Pentecost* is simple, but in the absence of showiness, we may feel compelled to linger and to contemplate the simple configuration of forms. Normal patterns of thought are suspended. We sense the significance of transformation in the way those simple materials have been used. To use an expression that is familiar to some, we see the spiritual.

Pentecost by Dennis Hawkins
© TMCP. David Maddock's choice from the Collection

Reports of Exhibitions and Events

WELWYN GARDEN CITY EXHIBITION: DEEPENING THE MYSTERY

From the moment we opened on 1 March the Focolare Centre at Welwyn Garden City welcomed nearly 2,000 visitors to enjoy the 26 paintings and savour home-made cakes and refreshments in our pop-up community cafe. It was a massive endeavour requiring a rota of 47 local volunteers to act as stewards and to welcome the visitors. These volunteers came mainly from the local churches and represented at least five Christian denominations. It was a truly ecumenical affair. In many ways, it was worth putting on the exhibition just to work closely with these new friends. I was impressed by their generosity and fidelity to the cause – so keen and enthusiastic.

Before the exhibition we had developed a Lent course which focused on one painting each week during Lent. It was devised by an Anglican and Roman Catholic priest and was beautifully presented with music, art, a passage from scripture and open questions to encourage dialogue. This was published to all the churches with members encouraged to visit Lent groups at churches other than their own. One group reported that the participants had grown from 12 at the beginning of the course to 19 by the end. Normally, it is the other way round. One member shared that she felt she had grown more spiritually during those six weeks than the previous ten years!

The exhibition was accompanied by various activities – school visits and workshops, an evening lecture by Graham Kent about his experience of working with the Collection for 20+ years, a moment of reflection. We also held an evening of poetry and music in the midst of the paintings. We invited Jim Deeds and David Campton from Belfast to share their poetry with us, interspersed with music. This was yet another demonstration of ecumenism as David is a Methodist minister and Jim is Roman Catholic. Their friendship and poetry spoke volumes. The evening was a profound moment demonstrating the power of the arts to convey the deepest insights and truths relating to the mysteries of the Easter story.

Many people were amazed that the Methodist Church owned the Collection and were able to learn more about Methodism through the literature available and through Graham Kent's evening lecture. It was an excellent advert for the Methodist Church and its vision.

On the last day of the exhibition, we held a service of thanksgiving to gather together the fruits of the last six weeks. Led by an Anglican and Roman Catholic priest and accompanied by music, it also contained reflections by three of the stewards. One steward from the Baptist Church shared how she used to compile an action list of things to do. Her experience of watching over the paintings had led her to create a list of 'things to be' instead!

During the exhibition I held four workshops for school children, aged between six and eleven years old. It was moving to see how these young children interacted with the paintings. Children see things differently than adults and I learnt more from them than they did from me! During one of the sessions, we were looking at Maggi Hambling's *Good Friday: Walking on the Water, 2006*. It portrays a turbulent sea and a mysterious figure walking on the water. One of the teaching assistants told me: 'This painting really speaks to me. I have been going through a really tricky patch recently. This painting is telling me not to sink beneath the waves of my own problems, but to stay above the waves.' I was moved that this lady was confiding something so personal to someone she had met just 45 minutes earlier.

To conclude, here are some impressions left in the visitor's book: "Extraordinary and unique exhibition – beyond words." "Beautiful. An amazing collection of art. Beautifully curated and displayed. Conducive, not only to the appreciation of the works but also to quiet contemplation. A very moving experience and very welcoming volunteers!" "Fantastic to take in a contemporary collection reflecting faith and its significance." "A beautiful spiritual feast." "Profoundly inspirational." "Wonderful exhibition, brilliant location." "Beautiful and stunning artwork. I'm so pleased we got to see the real thing." "It is thought provoking and a reminder of Christ in all parts of our lives." "Awesome!"

Paul Gateshill

WELWYN GARDEN CITY EVENT: PICTURES, WORDS AND MUSIC

In a purely visual sense there is little doubt that the works in the Collection stir the spiritual in the hearts and souls of many people. Examples abound such as when host exhibition teams catch the vision as pictures begin to be hung on walls; stewards comment on how some visitors stand transfixed in front of certain works; locals express amazement that such high-quality works of art are on view in their area.

Alongside this visual dimension, poetry and storytelling have featured at various exhibitions over the years. David

Subacchi provided a suite of poems for the Wrexham exhibition; the Leicester exhibition inspired schoolchildren and an adult poetry group to write poems producing an excellent compilation in their Response Poems zine; Coventry appointed a Poet Laureate. The visual has been enhanced by the verbal.

At the evening event of the exhibition at the Focolare Centre in Welwyn Garden City on Wednesday 27 March 2024 this combination was once again demonstrated. A selection of the pictures were projected unto a screen and the audience was treated to poetry contributions by the Revd. David Campton, Methodist Minister of Belfast, and Jim Deeds an author, poet, retreat leader and pastoral worker from the same city. Neither of them is a full-time poet but their selections resonated and enriched a selection of the works.

Those who attended were fortunate to witness the use of a third dimension when music was used to accompany some of the pictures. Anna Frazer, a classical cellist, chose solo pieces by Britten and Faure to play as the *Francis Hoyland Nativity Polypytch* and Mark Cazelet's *Fool of God (Christ in the Garden)* were projected on screen. A trio consisting of Paul Gateshill and Lorraine Reade on guitars and Bethany Friery on flute provided offerings for some of the other pictures. Audience participation was gently encouraged with at least two pieces of simple but reflective chorus singing. I have subsequently learnt that the Lent Course organised by Focolare prior to the exhibition featured one work in each session and included selections of classical music.

The combination of the visual, verbal and musical was something special and I think groundbreaking for the Collection. In a conversation afterwards with Anna Frazer, the cellist, she reminded me of the work by Mussorgsky called *Pictures at an Exhibition* and later set to a more modern interpretation by Emerson Lake and Palmer.

We live in a multimedia age and my hope is that those hosting future exhibitions might be encouraged to look at the part music can play in their programmes. A fitting legacy of the Focolare exhibition would be that it served as the catalyst for music being recognised as enhancing the experience for visitors.

Ian Baker

(left) Cellist Anna Frazier at Focolare (right) Paul Gateshill, Lorraine Reade and Bethany Friery play music to accompany the art at Focolare

Prof. Ann Sumner, Chair of the Management Committee, with Monty Gregg, Chair of the London Methodist Luncheon Club and Janet Dawe, Secretary of the London Methodist Luncheon Club.

WELWYN GARDEN CITY EVENT: GRAHAM KENT'S TALK

Another evening event at Focolare was the Revd. Graham Kent's excellent talk focusing on the use of the Collection in mission during the thirty years he has been involved with it. Graham told us some inspiring stories about the Collection's visit to Ballymena in Northern Ireland which helped build bridges between churches of different denominations there - very appropriate for the Focolare Centre of Christian Unity. Friends will have the chance to hear more from Graham shortly at the first of our Friends' Lectures (see p.14)

LONDON EVENT: ANN SUMNER'S LECTURE TO THE LONDON METHODIST LUNCHEON CLUB

Ann Sumner was invited to lecture to the London Methodist Luncheon Club in April by Club Secretary Janet Dawe. The event took place at the Lancaster Hall Hotel and Ann was introduced by Monty Gregg the President of the Club. While some of the audience had seen the Collection at past exhibitions, some had never even heard of it before, and everyone felt very inspired by Ann's words and images of the artworks. Ann told the story of the Collection to a full house and encouraged members of the club to visit the Eastbourne exhibition, which many of them did. If you are involved with an organisation which arranges lectures, please do think about asking one of the Management Committee to come and lecture to you.

EASTBOURNE EXHIBITION: *NEW VISION* – THE CURATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Occasionally in life a wonderful gift – an opportunity - arises that takes you into a new world. Meeting Paul Tabraham and the Emmanuel team and being invited to curate the Methodist Modern Art Collection exhibition held at the newly built church in Eastbourne this year was such a gift. Although I had curated exhibitions previously, the emphasis on modern religious artworks and hanging the works in a newly built church building posed many different challenges and created learning curves along the way.

Initially, because the church building was not completed for the originally planned 2022 Pentecost opening, we were often planning in the dark, viewing the space with hard hats and hi-viz jackets. Although we would have loved to exhibit all the wonderfully varied Collection, we limited our selection to 35 works keeping to the *New Vision* title and theme.Throughout the many zoom meetings and planning we had a constant concern to 'get it right' and Paul, the team and I were often having to think laterally about display boards and layout in the sanctuary space - this was a church and not a gallery. However much we had prepared, having to think - as a curator – 'on the spot' was a sometimes a challenge.

So many great 'add-ons' came about throughout and after the exhibition. The young children visiting the works and helping them to look and talk about the artworks, the great link with visit to the Towner Art Store, the poetry that came from the slow looking workshop, the visit of the artist John Brokenshire, and the talks given and services held throughout the weeks about specific paintings. The exhibition time went by very fast and it was exciting to see and hear the interesting comments by the visitors – many of whom returned a number of times.

Comments in the Visitors Book included: "An inspirational collection in such a peaceful setting. With the background music it transported you into another realm." "A wonderful collection of spiritual art .... using

From L-R : Prof. Ann Sumner - Chair of the Management Committee, Mr. Michael Bedingfield – Deputy Lieutenant of East Sussex, Mr. Paul Davis – Deputy Lieutenant of East Sussex, Ms. Candy Vaughan - Mayor of Eastbourne, Mrs. Pat Latham - Curator of New Vision, the Revd. Paul Tabraham - Minister at Emmanuel Church. (Photo: Ellis Skelton)

different media and styles to create such evocative and thought-provoking emotions." "What an explosion of sensitivity towards the truth of Christ's gift to us on earth. I will have to return to continue my viewing." "Visited with curiosity and was overwhelmed with not only the exhibition but the aura of hospitality and openness of the people and building, fascinating." "Thank you for taking the initiative to bring this collection to Eastbourne. You have done an excellent job with the curation and the guides for each work." "Didn't know what to expect but in every way the exhibition has been massively uplifting." "It is encouraging to see that Christian Art did not finish with the Renaissance but is still flourishing in the last one hundred years. Thank you so much for giving us the opportunity to see this exhibition reflecting the Christian story of good news so powerfully." "What an inspiration. I see something new every visit." "Thank you for a fascinating and moving exhibition... A privilege to see the pictures."

Engaging with all the artworks in the Collection, I was so often reminded about the crucial link between creativity and faith – raising awareness of the story of Jesus and the joy and excitement of looking at paintings. I am sure all visitors to the exhibition responded similarly. Hopefully, this will be the start of many more such uplifting exhibitions.

Patricia Latham, Curator

EASTBOURNE EVENT: *NEW VISION* LAUNCH

The exhibition at Eastbourne kicked off with a well attended, vibrant launch on 18 May at this beautiful new church, with the mayor of Eastbourne and two Deputy Lieutenants present. Both Professor Ann Sumner, and the David Maddock contributed to the speeches. These photographs were taken by an award winning 17-year-old photographer Ellis Skelton who enthusiastically covered the event. The next morning Ann and David returned to attend the joyous Pentecost Sunday service and enjoyed hearing the Revd. Paul Tabraham preach and meeting members of the congregation.

Prof. Ann Sumner and David Hinchcliff, the District Chair of the Methodist Church South East District. (Photo:Ellis Skelton)

Prof. Ann Sumner, Peter Shears and others (L) examine works by Collection artists on a visit to the Towner Gallery's Art Store, led by John O'Reilly (R)

EASTBOURNE EVENT: TOWNER GALLERY ART STORE TOUR

One of the events associated with the Eastbourne exhibition was a specially curated tour of the Towner Gallery's Art Store led by John O'Reilly, a member of the Methodist Church and volunteer at the Towner since 2011. John showed us works by a selection of artists from the Towner's collection whose work featured in the *New Vision* exhibition, sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm. These included Elisabeth Frink, Ceri Richards, Graham Sutherland and Patrick Heron. It was fascinating to see how many of 'our' artists are also represented in the Towner collection (which is known for featuring important 20th century British artists) and to see the wide variety of works John had selected to discuss with us.

EASTBOURNE EVENT: ANN SUMNER'S TALK ON THE STORY OF THE COLLECTION

The same day as the Towner tour, attendees braved the heavy rain showers and were treated to a wide ranging and detailed illustrated talk about the history of the Collection by Professor Ann Sumner. Twenty-six people also joined online. Ann also focused on the original architectural exhibition that accompanied the first touring exhibition of the Collection and its emphasis on new church buildings, fixtures and fittings. This was very appropriate for a talk delivered in the newly built church.

(top) Preparatory sketches by Collection artist Elizabeth Frink for her *Eagle Lectern* at Coventry Cathedral in the Towner Gallery's Art Store

(bottom) Pre-schoolers enjoy looking at the picnickers in Eularia Clarke's *The five thousand* (Photo: Ann Sumner)

EASTBOURNE EVENT: PRE-SCHOOL VISIT

Isobel Rouse, the co-manager of the Jenny Wren Nursery which meets on the upper floor at Emmanuel Church, recorded what we believe to be the first organised encounter between pre-school children and the Collection:

We took the Jenny Wren Children downstairs to have a look at the pictures from the Methodist Modern Art Collection displayed in the church. Pat, the curator, told the children how she had assembled them. She was in charge of the paintings and making sure that the temperature and lighting were correct. We walked around the church in small groups and the children looked at each one, describing what they could see:

"I think Jesus is in this one" "There he is .... on the cross" "There's Mary and Baby Jesus...I was Mary in the Christmas play!" "It was good. I liked all the paintings" "I liked the fish and chip one and I loved the one where Jesus was walking on the water" "I liked the black one with the white on it" "I liked the one with the moon because it's pretty" "I liked the black one with the seagull" "I liked the one of the people eating fish and chips" "This cross looks like train tracks"

Busy workshop in the 'Art Station' at 3Gen

EXHIBITION/EVENT: 3GEN

This year's 3Gen took place at the Birmingham NEC from the 4 to the 6 October. Three pictures from the Collection were chosen by 3Gen Influencers: John Brokenshire's *Untitled - Pentecost,* Nicholas Mynheer's *Rest on the Flight to Egypt,* and Francis Hoyland's *Nativity Polyptych.* The paintings were displayed as a prominent part of the 'Art Station'; a vibrant and creative installation close to the main entrance where the theme of the train station was used to inspire ideas about journeys in general and the concept of 'journeying with God' in particular.

Olivia Threlkeld, Corinne Miller, and I spent the Saturday encouraging visitors to look closely at the three paintings and to express their responses in the form of postcards and drawings. The paintings inspired some powerful responses from the children and young adults who took time to study ways in which the three artworks spoke to them about travel, migration and about what it might mean to be forced to travel because of conflict, violence and religious persecution. The question 'where do you see God in these paintings' drew some deeply personal and insightful responses from our visitors. One girl, seeing Hoyland's *Nativity Polyptych* for the first time and learning that one of the panels showed warfare in the Congo told us that she believed her grandparents had lived through that war. She spent a long time studying the image and then wrote 'it was nice to see representation of the country my family is from in a painting...'. This was one of many comments which demonstrated the impact of the Collection on our visitors. Invited to study the relationship between the baby Jesus and Mary in Mynheer's *Rest on the Flight to Egypt* one visitor wrote that in their view 'the baby is telling the mother it's going to be all right', whereas another thought 'the baby is saying good-bye'. When we asked our visitors to tell us how they thought the three paintings might be connected, their answers showed an awareness of the spiritual significance of the Collection. 'There's a recurring theme of light in the darkness', was one response. 'It seems like in all the paintings there's someone guiding,' was another. As leaders with previous 3Gen experience, Olivia, Corinne and I felt that the choice of three works combined with the theme of 'Journeying with God' led to more missional conversations about God and faith with their young visitors.

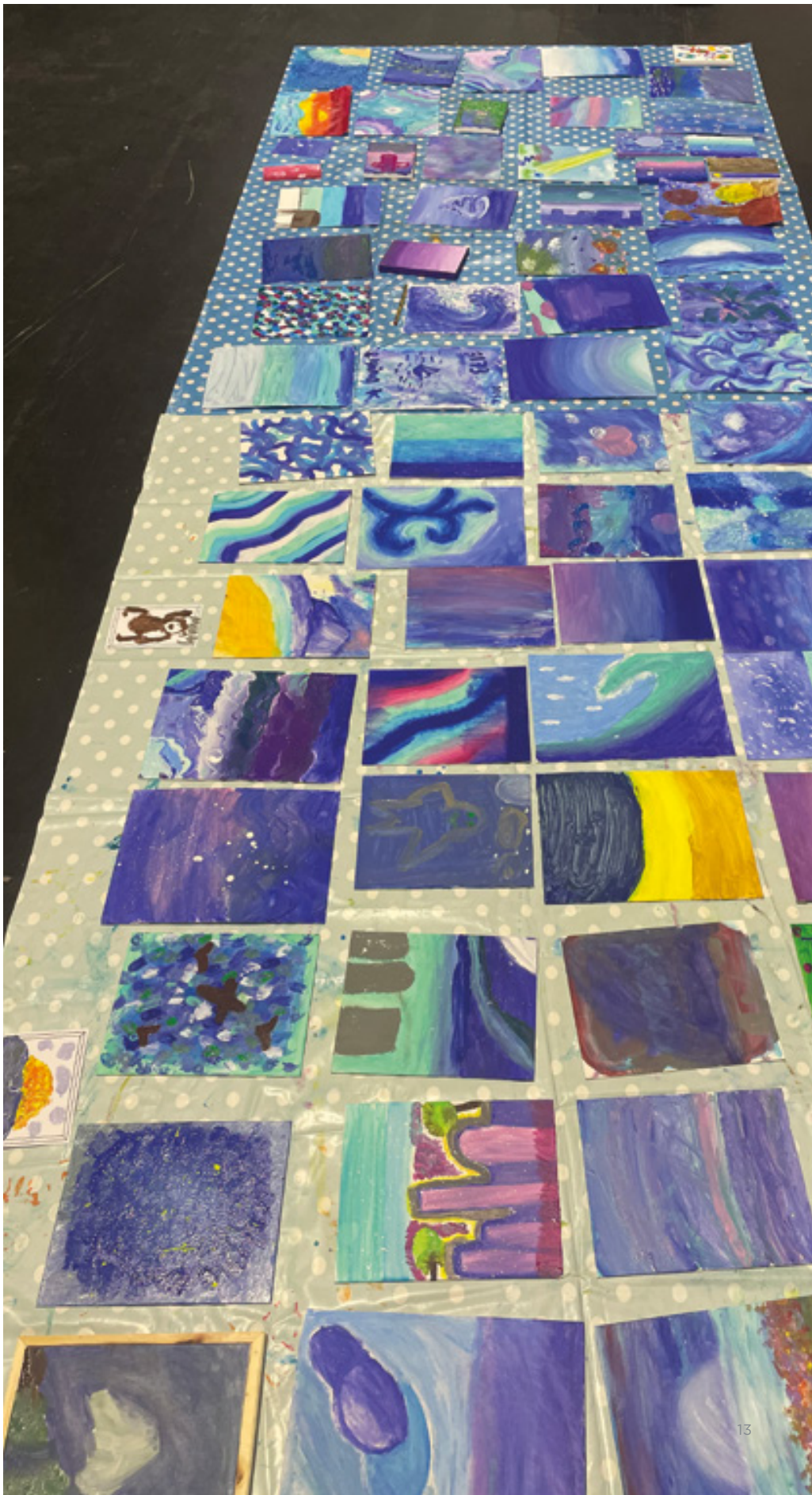
Sunday morning began with me leading a time of prayer and reflection focused on the Brokenshire painting, after which everyone was invited to draw or paint their own response to it. As the pictures show, this inspired some vibrant, thought-provoking and intensely colourful images. It was great to see children, young adults, their parents and leaders absorbed by the imagery and colours of Brokenshire's work. Later

that morning we had a final session of 'Arty Worship' in which a reading from Genesis and further discussion of *Untitled - Pentecost* inspired yet more creativity in the form of drawings and paintings on the theme of 'Creation'.

Over the two days of the event we worked with hundreds of children and young people. There were expressions of interest from Methodist churches all over the UK about possibly borrowing works from the Collection. But perhaps the most important outcome of this year's 3Gen for me was the way it encouraged a new generation to engage with paintings from the Collection in ways which were creative, personal and above all spiritual.

Peter Shears

Pictures by the children and young people at 3Gen in response to works in the Collection



NEWS

FRIENDS' LECTURES

We are excited to announce that David Maddock is organising a series of Friends Lectures about the Collection and artists in it. The first of these will be by the Revd. Graham Kent entitled *Acquiring works for the Methodist Modern Art Collection* and will look back at the acquisitions with which Graham has been involved over his time with the Collection. A recording of this lecture will shortly be available on youtube, and Friends will receive further details about how to access it in an e-bulletin from David. Remember, if you would like to join our Friends and receive invitations to these lectures and other events you can join by filling out the application form on our website or contacting David for further information email: friendsofmmac@gmail.com

NEW ACQUISITION

The moratorium on acquisitions imposed during our Rejuvenation Pause has been lifted and we are delighted to acquire our first stained-glass work, *Preaching* by George Walsh. Our thanks are extended to Neil Payne and all those on the Dublin Organising Committee of the Methodist Modern Art Collection Exhibition, 2018 for their generosity in presenting this work to us. They had been eager to ensure that a work by an Irish artist was represented in the Collection.

I was fortunate to meet George Walsh in his Dublin home to talk about his work. The first thing I noticed was the striking blue of the sitting room so, inevitably, colour was a starting point for our conversation. He spoke of the importance of colour in drawing the viewer into the work; only then, he argued, do they engage with the detail and the subject.

This work has been given the simple title, *Preaching*. It is not a literal interpretation of any New Testament passage but a more personal reflection on faith. The lack of a specific reference allows the viewer space to reflect on a range of ideas including the parable of the sower in the gospels of Matthew and Mark. George says he was taken with the Eucharistic references in a depiction of Christ preaching in a cornfield and the 'legions of people who have gone before'. The agricultural setting of a cornfield suggests that, like a farmer who tends the land, we are custodians of the message and, in our turn, must pass it on.

The composition has a powerful sense of movement with a diagonal streak of vibrant blue separating earth and heaven with the figure of Christ floating out of the corner of the panel. The 'legions' are confined in the darker, lower section, while above the light radiates from the golden sun, both literally and metaphorically, in the open expanse of heaven. Maybe this is night and day, containment of existence and the expanse of nature? I will leave you to ponder on further meanings. Like any great work of art there is plenty of scope to create a personal meaning, as we bring our own lived experience to the panel.

The figures' flowing robes set them apart from the contemporary world and are a conscious historical note. It is hard not see a connection to the Celtic illuminations of the *Book of Kells*. The glass panels illustrating the four orders of architecture which form part of the decorations at Dublin landmark, Bewley's Oriental Café provide a more recent source. Here the Celtic heritage merges with the graphic style of Art Nouveau artists like Aubrey Beardsley in the incidental detail, sinuous lines and the colour, notably the blue colour. Completed in 1928, the panels were designed by Harry Clarke (1889–1931), one of the most notable artists of the early 20th century stained-glass revival in Ireland, and painted by Richard King (1907–1974). George's father worked in the studio of Harry Clarke but stories of this time have been lost because, as George ruefully recalls, 'you never listen to your father'!

George undertook a seven-year apprenticeship with his father, completing workshop tasks such as mixing colours for other artists. During this time, the family moved to Belfast and he attended classes in drawing and the antique at the School of Art, as well as stained-glass taught at this time by Edward Murray Marr (1905-1973). Marr was steeped in the Arts and Crafts tradition. He believed in the primacy of drawing and his students were encouraged to learn perspective and modelling before embarking on

Preaching by George Walsh © TMCP

stained glassmaking. He also believed that, in stained glass, the artist and the maker were indivisible. The discipline of drawing that George acquired at this time continues to be central to his practice.

In addition to his formal education, George worked in various studios alongside his father. In Belfast he worked in the Clokey Stained Glass Studios. This long-established firm was responsible for many ecclesiastical stained-glass commissions in the early twentieth century. The family eventually left Belfast and went, on the recommendation of an artist friend (these were the days before the internet!), to the USA, where they worked at the Conrad Pickel Studio in Wisconsin. Returning to Ireland his father George S. Walsh set up his own studio in Dublin.

There are now three strands to George's stained-glass work: First, such ecclesiastical commissions as among others, Our Lady of Lourdes Church, Kilcummin, Co. Kerry, Church of the Irish Martyrs, Ballycane, Co. Kildare, Eyeries Church, Beara Peninsula, West Cork, St. Camillus, Killucan, Co. Westmeath, Galway Cathedral, St. Peters Church Chantilly, France, and Newtown Church, Co. Kildareso. Second, commissions for secular buildings including the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh and Dublin. And third, works created outside the commissions and exhibited, for example, at the Royal Hibernian Academy.

Preaching is one of these personally driven works. Inspired by earlier sketches, along with another panel of a cornfield realised at this time, the design was worked up in a series of new sketches to provide the cutting lines for the glass which was then painted before firing.

In this panel George has incorporated some coloured glass from Hartley Wood and Sons which came from his father's studio. The firm established by the Hartley family in the early nineteenth century came to specialise in coloured glass at its Sunderland works. It suffered a number of setbacks and was eventually bought out by Pilkingtons and closed in 1997. This handblown glass provides a textural richness to the panel with its uneven surface in which air bubbles can sometimes be seen. Rather than leading, the glass pieces are bonded with resin. The whole is mounted in a metal frame that makes the panel more portable, so it can be moved to catch the light in any venue.

Preaching was created amid a revival of stained-glass in Ireland. The distinction between craft and art which has characterised much of the UK's attitude to stained- glass is not present in Ireland. Thus, on a visit to Dublin's National Galler, I encountered a display of notable stained-glass makers like Harry Clarke, and Evie Hone of the Glass Tower cooperative founded in 1903.

My visit to Dublin was a revelation. I thank George and Neil for introducing me to the remarkable stained-glass of the Ireland and also to a group of women artists including Norah McGuiness and Mainie Jellett, who brought the new Cubist thinking to Ireland, a story that is only now being told. It is another piece of the art history jigsaw which helped me appreciate the St Cecilia window by Evie Hone at Lanercost Priory on a recent visit.

We hope *Preaching* will prove a popular addition to the Collection. It will be shown for the first time at Ben Rhydding Methodist Church in September 2025 as part of Bradford City of Culture.

Corinne Miller

FORTHCOMING TOURING PROGRAMME FOR THE COLLECTION

Exhibitions next year will include:

Easter 2025
Revelation!
Kirkby Stephen Methodist Church

Contact: Stephen.radford@methodist.org.uk

Autumn 2025
Works from the Collection will be exhibited at a number of venues as part of the celebrations for Bradford City of Culture:

Bradford Cathedral
Ben Rhydding Methodist Church, Ilkley
South Square Centre and
St James's Church, Thornton
Woodhouse Grove School Chapel

Each venue has carefully selected works on a specific theme including women artists, South Asian artists, the environment in peril, and refugees. We also look forward to seeing reproductions of key works in bars and cafes across Bradford city centre.

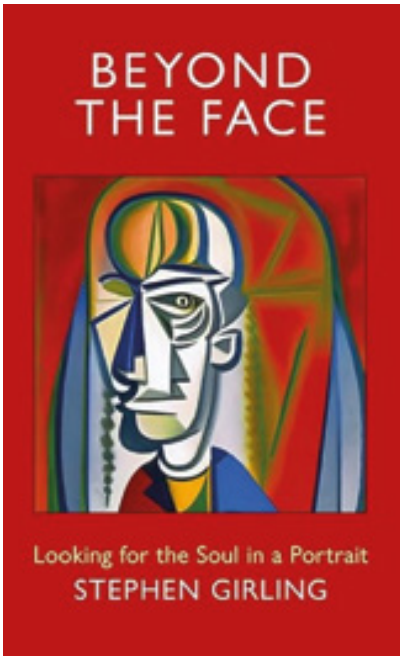
Contact:
verity.smith@touchstone-bradford.org.uk

ELSEWHERE IN THE ART WORLD

Bob Williams writes:

Readers might well be interested in the Revd. Stephen Girling's new book *Beyond the Face.*

The author tells me "The book takes the principles of religious Icons and applies them to everyday portraits. It offers a simple three step method using mindfulness and meditation to help the reader to go 'Beyond the Face' of a portrait to engage with the soul of the subject. It is aimed at readers who would describe themselves as either religious, or spiritual but not religious, and is suitable for people of any faith or no faith (although it is written from a Christian perspective). My aim is to break down barriers that exist between people, around actual or presumed differences."

Stephen was, until last September, Bath Abbey Missioner & Area Dean of Bath, and did wonderful work at Bath Abbey, including masterminding/ curating the Methodist Modern Art Collection's presence there in October 2016. He has now moved to take up a post in the Guildford diocese.

He has a workshop and talk which complement the book.