Art and Christianity 98

The quarterly members' journal of Art & Christianity (A+C) ISSN 1746-6229 Summer 2019

Nathan Coley *And We Are Everywhere*, 2018
Photo: Peter Westrup

Review feature

Ruskin today

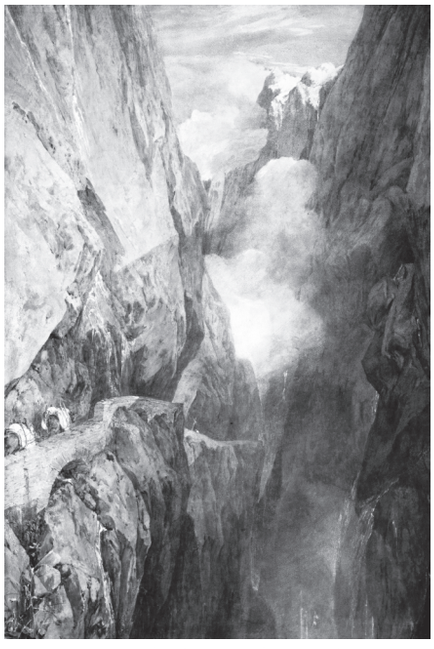
Francis O'Gorman takes stock of the current attention being paid to John Ruskin in this the bicentenary of his birth

8 February 2019 was the 200th birthday of the 19th-century art and social critic John Ruskin (1819-1900). His bicentenary is being celebrated by, and his legacy assessed with, events in the UK, US, Japan, and in European cities including Paris and Venice.

Ruskin's energy was prodigious. Convinced that all forms of knowledge were deeply related because they all related to a divinely ordered world, Ruskin wrote on a huge number of topics. All, he thought, were interconnected evidence of God's intentions in creating the Earth for humanity's instruction and delight. Best known for his writing on Gothic architecture and landscape painting, especially JMW Turner, Ruskin's many other topics included botany and ornithology, engraving, economics, modern political life, heraldry, crystallography, music, and Ancient Greek religion. He is, in turn, a writer impossible to sum up, easy to misunderstand, and always more than what one can say of him.

A large number of bicentenary exhibitions are endeavouring this year to present one part of Ruskin's achievement or another. A notable line of interest is Ruskin's contribution to what we now call environmental issues. Ruskin's lectures and notes gathered untidily together as 'The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century' (1884) explained his view that the polluted atmospheres of Europe were reminders of human irresponsibility as well as material indications of God's displeasure. The lectures are eccentric – Ruskin was, after all, now mentally ill. But contemporary priorities have found 'The Storm-Cloud' prescient, an indication of Ruskin as a pioneer of the environmentally aware modern. The only thing that contemporary presentations indicate was odd about Ruskin's proto-environmentalism is that he thought God was involved.

Ruskin was, of course, a profoundly religious thinker. He turned away in the late 1850s from his early Evangelicalism and, in the 1860s, went through a conflicted and painful period of uncertainty. But his sense of the world as benignly ordered only rarely left him, at least in public, despite how much he struggled throughout his life to explain evil and the defeat of noble purposes. In the 1870s and 1880s, his faith was stronger than immediately after the 'unconversion' crisis but more eclectic and generous. Certainly, he looked back on his earlier self as narrow-minded. But the changing centrality of the divine to Ruskin's life rarely suits contemporary curators as it rarely suits contemporary scholars. Ruskin's *Modern Painters* (1843-60) argues many things about European landscape art. But its central purpose is to prove Turner the greatest Christian landscape artist in European history. Turner's truthfulness to the natural world, which the painter's first critics had failed to see, Ruskin said in *Modern Painter*s I, was not 'degraded' by what is merely called 'the imagination' but involved exceptional fidelity: Turner, Ruskin went on, 'paints more of nature than any man who ever lived'. And this act of seeing was in its essence an act of theological interpretation and reverent attention. None of the current exhibitions on Ruskin and Turner allows the viewer much, or in some cases any, awareness of this.



J M W Turner, *The Passage of Mount St. Gothard, taken from the centre of the Teufels Broch (Devil's Bridge), Switzerland*, exhibited 1804, © Abbot Hall Art Gallery

Take, for instance, the 'Ruskin, Turner, and the Storm Cloud' exhibition in the York Art Gallery, which runs until 23 June. In terms of artefacts, this show has much to admire. Turner's large *Apollo and Daphne* (Tate Britain, 1837) is there, for instance, though this was an odd choice as Ruskin thought it, like nearly all the pictures Turner prepared for the Royal Academy, 'injured by excessive quantity' and, here, 'painfully divided into two lateral masses'. The picture has nothing to do with the storm cloud either but, Ruskin thought, of the meeting of land and water (this is not noted in the exhibition panel). There are also eye-catching examples of John Inchbold's work and lovely examples of Ruskin's own watercolours and drawings. The John Pipers, part of what the exhibition plausibly narrated as Ruskin's legacy, are enthralling.

But the explanatory panels at York are not only innocent of Ruskin's view of the central Turner oil painting on display. They ignore Ruskin's Christian interpretations of Turner altogether. Not a word is said about primary exegetical purpose of *Modern Painters* just as elsewhere one panel implies that the mental illness of Rose La Touche, the young woman whom Ruskin had one day hoped to marry, was evidenced by the seriousness with which she took Christianity. And the Alps, though crucial to the exhibition, are almost never described with any-

John Ruskin *Study of Rocks and Ferns, Crossmount, Perthshire*, 1843

thing of Ruskin's understanding of them as God's blessings and guidance to humanity. There as, alas, something of a mixture of the ignorant and the crass about this.

The contemporary effort to insist on Ruskin's 'relevance' by reading him primarily for modern and, therefore, non-Christian issues is, in some ways, understandable. All great writers survive – at least for many readers – if they can be related to the priorities of changing generations rather than to the writer's. Think, most obviously, of the successive re-readings of Shakespeare on-stage – currently almost completely dominated by identity politics – to see how important a sense of (imagined) relevance is, and has been, to multiple audiences. This is inevitable. And, certainly, re-reading by the light of the modern can on occasions be revelatory. Contemporary concerns about empire and national identity have, for example, exposed much of the political work of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96) in its own day, which was almost invisible to readers even thirty years ago. Modern priorities, in this case, have made clearer what a historical writer was doing in his own time.

But on many occasions the misunderstandings caused by the pursuit of relevance are serious. Ahistorical readings can obfuscate. They often transform texts rather than inform readers about them. And the contemporary secularisation of Ruskin – which is probably irreversible – certainly leaves us with a very odd version of his life and work.

To take an example different from Turner. Much current interest in Ruskin concentrates on his so-called 'interdisciplinarity' – at present a priority in higher education. And this concentration affirms Ruskin as model for to-day of how we should think 'across boundaries'. Ruskin's so-called interdisciplinarity was, for instance, the topic of the (interesting) conference on Ruskin and scientific environments held in the Oxford Natural History Museum on 8 February this year, Ruskin's birthday. Yet the emphasis on interdisciplinarity almost never admits (and this wasn't admitted in the Oxford conference) that Ruskin wrote on a great plurality of topics not because he was a forerunner of the interdisciplinary modern but because he accepted, for the most part, that all forms of knowledge revealed facets of the same truths. All of what we now call disciplines, he thought, were essentially really the same. And those truths included the supreme fact that the world was made by God and that humanity's responsibility was to understand what meanings God intended in and through it.

Of course, nothing about these truths was, for Ruskin, a simple certainty – how could it be? God's intentions, as Ruskin expresses the matter most clearly in *Modern Painters* IV (1856), were often to be comprehensible only as mysterious. Ruskin was never unaware of what he could not make into sense; never free for much of his life from the idea that he might have misjudged the extent to which the world was ordered or underestimated the extent to which it was cursed. On a number of bleak occasions, especially in the 1860s and 1870s, Ruskin wondered if God had purposes at all.

But Ruskin's broadest, and durable, conviction was more generally in the existence of a divine plan. Here is the intellectual and spiritual core of all that Ruskin did and said. To omit in exhibitions, conferences, and books the theological foundation of this serious-minded writer, who took so little in life easily, is to send readers, listeners, and viewers away with a picture of someone other than Ruskin.

And it is not, it should be said, only in terms of religion that the modern-day Ruskin is different from the historical.

A good example of another transformation is the concentration on Ruskin at the beginning of the 20th Century and up to the present as, supposedly, a proto-socialist. This is transformation indeed. Ruskin's frustration with the ignoble working of capitalism in *Unto this Last* (1860) allegedly supports this case. But Ruskin was a High Tory – a violent one of the old school, he said – and *Unto This Last* wants capitalism to work better not to be replaced. With his deep belief in authority, his unwavering suspicion of democracy (he never voted because he didn't believe in ballots), and his certainty that the owners of private property were custodians of things of value not oppressors of those who owned nothing, Ruskin is the most unlikely socialist. But modern priorities have, again, changed that. Contemporary liberal intellectuals, curators, and academics can, alas, no more deal with a Christian Ruskin than with a Tory one.

As the bicentenary year is proving, Ruskin has become a peculiarly visible case study in how a writer's achievement can be celebrated generations later only on the basis of redaction.

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See www.ruskin200.com for further details of the bicentenary.

Feature

Blessed are the meek

At the beginning of a six-year process to discern what happens on a piece of land belonging to Lund Cathedral in southern Sweden, Jonatan Habib Engqvist makes an initial appraisal of the project – called Råängen which translates as 'raw meadow' – curated by Jes Fernie and with temporary installations by the British artist Nathan Coley

The Landmark

It is said that globalisation and an increased exchange between countries has made us more alike no matter where we live on Earth. And it may be true that we are becoming more similar to each other in the way we dress, our gestures and means of communication. But does that mean that we know each other on a more fundamental level? Could it even be that these similarities in fact make the discovery of inequality and difference more difficult? Does travel and the homogenisation of appearances through popular culture, digitally rendered architecture, multinational food suppliers and clothing companies, mean that we think in similar ways? Are we everywhere?

In countless exhibitions, seminars and public discourse that engages with the architecture of our time (as well as the speculative architectures of our future), these similarities are rarely dealt with as a point of departure. Instead, it is more often a one-off jewel, an extravagant construction and a city's architectural pride that is celebrated. This involves a focus on landmark buildings, outstanding high-rises, experimental living units or spectacular cultural, public or political institutions such as opera houses, museums, theatres and governmental buildings. These are, in other words, buildings that distinguish a place from other places and simultaneously communicate a set of values (democracy, innovation, culture). But in their claim to site specificity, those same constructions are in fact exempt from their surrounding environment. This is something that is startlingly apparent if you venture outside the urban centre to the more unceremonious parts of a city,

Nathan Coley *And We Are Everywhere*, 2018
Photo: Peter Westrup

Lund Cathedral from the north-west
Per Bagge, 1899
Historical Museum at Lund University.

such as informal suburbs or temporary housing solutions. If one moves between Rio's favela, Los Angeles sprawl and villas in a city's generic periphery which indeed is the everyday of most individuals alive today, non-identity would instead seem to be a common denominator making it practically impossible to single out a particular building.

So, we can agree that the substantial escalation of urbanisation on a global scale is not taking place in iconic, statement buildings made using 21st century materials and technical know-how, but rather, the informal, temporary, makeshift architecture of refugees, immigrants, squatters and people living on the breadline that are increasingly prevalent around the world. And this is something that is likely to continue well into the future. The rural, or 'ruban', architecture of temporary structures made from found materials with extreme functionality is a probable future of housing seldom addressed in the discourse of city planning and speculation about how we will live in years to come. As such, Nathan Coley's sculpture is plausibly just as representative a visualisation of a church from the future as the desktop product of a renowned architect might be. This non-landmark landmark thus brings us to some crucial points to be considered when thinking about our common future.

The Silence

And We Are Everywhere, 2018 is a replica of a church that was demolished in the informal squatted home of migrants in Calais, referred to in derogatory terms as the 'Jungle'. Or rather, it is a replica of the exterior of a church. The interior of the Calais church with its inviting carpeted floors, white textiles and makeshift, brightly-coloured poster icons cannot be accessed in Nathan Coley's version. Instead, the content is left to our imagination and we are confronted with the shell of a meticulously executed film-set-like replica. Desperation in the architectural language of the draughtsman or creators perhaps, yet a form of architecture found everywhere.

In a conversation with Coley he tells me that it wasn't until the two sticks were patched together and placed on top of the black and blue construction that people in the surrounding area understood that there was something out of the ordinary going on in the field. Up until then, it simply looked like some kind of temporary storage space or agricultural structure. It is in this moment where architecture becomes sculpture – a moment where the composition becomes a temporary artwork, which comes from, and refers to, the prevailing temporary architecture of our time.

Yet the most striking difference between this sculpture and an informal settlement like the church in Calais, is not the cross – it is the absence of bodies, and the sounds and smells surrounding it. In an article from France, I read about the 'original' building:

> The Jungle camp sprawls out from under the motorway flanked by two chemical plants pumping out noxious- looking clouds. The makeshift structure of wood and

> tarpaulin is a short walk from the motorway bridge. In the distance, riot police could be seen in vans; lights flashing at the entrances to the site with the razor wire perimeter fence that encircles the camp [...] No one knew whether the church would be demolished. The greatest concern for the refugees was to safeguard this sacred space – a symbol of resilience and hope. It was on this Sunday, the chosen day to celebrate Christmas, that I stood beside displaced young girls from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan – as they sang together in thanksgiving and prayed solemnly.[1]

Needless to say, a warm summer afternoon in southern Sweden, with a light breeze, buzzing insects, and the odd vehicle passing by, is an entirely different context. Yet it is precisely the absence of all that which makes these places what they are, or were, that comes to mind when considering what it is that defines the constructions that this sculpture refers to. Not only on the level of sensorial discrepancy, but in the very function as a place of hope and worship.

The Cathedral

Coley seems to point out that as a place of reverence, a church is an entity that connects us to other places, where we can strive towards being where nothing happens, and be everywhere. *And We Are Everywhere*. Is it a threat? A promise? A fact? This depends on who 'we' refers to. Whether the sign speaks to me as 'us' or 'them'. The artwork is a commission for a specific situation. It is about time, ownership, land and land use. Does the 'we' refer to the church, which has owned this plot of land long enough for the question of ownership to be forgotten, or at least to become abstract in the local imaginary? Until recently, when it became clear that it was to be used for something other than farming.

Coley often plays with statements sourced from popular culture. As in *Heaven Is A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens*[2], where a line from a pop song takes on profound meaning when placed in front of a church. But this new work for Brunnshög is slightly different: AND (we are everywhere) is a subordinate clause. In other words, it is not a statement, rather an addition to a statement. In an interview Coley points out that the phrase 'we are everywhere' 'has been appropriated and used throughout social and political history as a slogan for very early gay pride marches; it's been used by far-right organisations in Eastern Europe ... "We are everywhere" as a slogan for political change; it's currently being used by the right to bear arms movement in America – so there's a whole mixture of appropriations of the phrase "we are everywhere" ... I think AND we are everywhere pushes it into a slightly different context. It feels as if it is from a larger paragraph, a larger discussion'.[3]

So, what comes before the AND? Is Coley asking for the sculpture to be appropriated? The most obvious interpretation of his statement would be to look more closely at the sculpture itself, together with the hand- painted sign on the invitation card replicating the well-documented and mediated signage made by protestors or people with few resources, questioning eviction, pleading for equality and more humane treatment from and around the camp in Calais.

Let us return to the sculpture. We meet an architectural structure that doesn't have an entrance. It looks like a place of worship but it is not. It is a (profane) sculpture. The first intervention on the church's land is, in other words, neither a building nor a church. It is an artwork. Yet it is a work that undeniably speaks of its own relationship to the Cathedral of Lund, which is both a building and a church. The sculpture is in a material sense the opposite of a stone cathedral. Yet is this not the tabernacle – the tent – the most holy place? According to the gospel of John, God becomes flesh and made his dwelling among us.

As the institution of the church becomes a patron of the arts once again it moves from an institution of religion toward one of culture and thereby addresses questions that impact us all. The result is visual and spatial experiences that can have a deep and lasting effect on audiences. Using Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's words we might call Coley's sculpture a profane space on holy ground. The work will remain on site for ten months. Long enough for it to become 'normalised' or 'invisible' for the passer-by – until, perhaps, it becomes something else. Until somewhere else's vernacular has become Brunnshög's vernacular: until it is anywhere, or everywhere. When it no longer intrudes, the stranger is no longer estranged.

The Neighbours

The neighbours are also thinking about the future. Just across the asphalt road we find a gigantic turntable-shaped building called MAX IV surrounded by vast grassland that has been sculpted by Norwegian architects Snöhetta. Landscaped with GPS-equipped bulldozers in order to reduce potential vibrations caused by this next-generation synchrotron radiation facility – MAX IV proclaims that it 'makes the invisible visible'. The scale of this project and its ambitions dwarf the plot of land housing Coley's sculpture in terms of magnitude. Furthermore, MAX IV is the driving force behind the planned 'science village' in the area and perhaps the phrase 'and we are everywhere' can also be understood in relation to the scientific colony next door and their attempts to manifest abstract theoretical physics and quantum mechanics into measurable entities. The term quantum mechanics, coined by Max Born in 1924, deals with the study of particles at the atomic and subatomic levels. My task here is not to explain the phenomena or the health of Schrödinger's cat. The point is simply that though this theory can provide accurate predictions of phenomena at subatomic scales, there is no tangible understanding of why it works, what it really means or what implications it has for our understanding of the world. Yet the central mystery at the heart of quantum mechanics is that something can also be another thing at the same time. It is indeed an AND that provides the theoretical structure that can, and aims, to develop real world predictions and provides the basis for the experiments taking place at MAX IV.

In a text that explores the architecture of MAX IV and the CERN complex in Switzerland Monica Sand and Christina Pech write that in the same way that architecture adopts 'scientific methods in the artistic process, science also depends on the spaces provided by architecture, material and representation for its implementation'. This reminds us that the interconnection of belief systems, science and architecture, is never a one-way operation but can be understood as a mutual relationship. In their analyses of the circular form of the spaceship-like building, the authors write that MAX IV is 'a visible architectural brand for urban development on a so-called scientific basis with a design language that borders on popular science fiction. The circle here represents the powerful time-

less symbol that connects the past to the future; a clear form of an underlying assumption of the world as a whole and a symbol of mathematics – if no longer divine origin, its timeless claim to truth.'[4] In other words, the architectural assertions of this building complex – with its metal-clad façade, circular form and adjoining experimental terraformations – is just as symbolically laden as any textbook example of ecclesiastical architecture.

The Future

Like their scientific neighbours, Lund Cathedral wants to develop the land that they own in Brunnshög in a manner that reflects their values. On the one hand, they wish to sell land and build on it as a form of investment; on the other, they wish to do so in a manner that is based on the fundamental values of the church. Perhaps this is a paradox, just like Schrödinger's cat? The commission of an artwork by Nathan Coley is a vessel, a tool – a first physical manifestation on site in order to investigate the potential of a specific plot of land for future speculation. As such, the project is, according to the Bishop of Lund, Johan Tyrberg, about 'making thoughts, questions and reflections visible – that lead to new thoughts, questions and reflections. This is about creating new ideas for the future.'[5]

We don't know what this site will look like in ten years, let alone 350 years. All we know is that it will look very different. With the driest summer on record in Skåne in 2018, a whole set of new associations regarding the idea of what Lund might be like in the future is brought forward with more urgency. Building houses should be a long-term commitment. To construct homes is to condition the thoughts and self- perception of generations to come. As the future inhabitants of Brunnshög go about their daily business they will exist in the built yet abstract spatial and discursive framework surrounding Brunnshög, based on the values of the Church. However inclusive these standards are, the first inhabitants will no doubt become pioneers of a kind, establishing a way of life that may work for some people and not others.

Nathan Coley's commission responds to the Cathedral's invitation to create an artwork that engages with this relatively small but hugely significant plot of land on the outskirts of Lund, by the offering of a gift. It is an offering that requires the Cathedral to deal with the notion of gift economy. The question posed by this sculpture/gift is how one moves from the symbolic to the real. Coley reminds us that there are over sixty million refugees in the world today – and that with the massive loss of habitat currently taking place due to the disappearance of arable property, land grabbing, climate change, extreme inequality, war and poverty – the movement of large groups of people will only increase in the future.[6] We cannot talk about the future of architecture – and therefore the future of Brunnshög – without talking about these movements. The question posed by *And We Are Everywhere* to the church is how this will be reflected through a habitat constructed on their fundamental values.

Jonatan Habib Engqvist is an independent curator based in Stockholm and a member of the Råängen Advisory Board

1. http://westminsterworld.com/eritrean-church-calais-jungle/
2. *Heaven Is A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens*, Nathan Coley (2010) was installed adjacent to Lund Cathedral in 2017 as part of the Råängen programme of commissions.
3. Nathan Coley, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meUIj4BWO3Q&t=5s
4. https://www.planering.org/plan-blog/2018/6/22/vetenskapens-moderna-landskap
5. Johan Tyrberg https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meUIj4BWO3Q&t=5s
6. Saskia Sassen, *A Massive Loss of Habitat – New Drivers for Migration*, Columbia University, 2016 http://saskiasassen.com/PDFs/publications/SS%20Massive%20Loss%20Habitat.pdf

VISUAL COMMUNION

THE ART, ARCHITECTURE AND CRAFT OF THE EUCHARIST

SYMPOSIUM 4 Altars: Texture and tradition
Winchester Cathedral, 18 May 2019, 10.30am – 4.30pm

Chaired by Canon Roly Riem, this symposium will explore the variety and meaning of altars, their shape, material and ornamentation. There will be a focus on commissioning and making new altars for both Anglican and Roman Catholic churches and on the role and design of vestments and altar frontals. Speakers include Luke Hughes, Gianni Notarianni OSA, Julian Stair, Sophie Hacker, George Guiver CR, Nicholas Mynheer, Catherine Ogle and Ayla Lepine. A tour of the Cathedral's sanctuary and chapels will further illustrate both the tradition and contemporary reimagining of altar design and dressing.

FINAL CONFERENCE with keynote lecture by Rowan Williams
The Wallace Collection, London, 29 November 2019, 2-8pm

This final event will draw together the diversity of visual culture explored in the four preceding symposia and showcase the outstanding body of artistic endeavour that has been shaped by this central Christian tradition.
Lectures include Bridget Heal on art and the Eucharist in the German Reformation and Deborah Lewer on contemporary images for the reredos. A panel chaired by Ben Quash will discuss 'Art and Sacrament: making and doing'; panellists include Lida Kindersley, Gill Hedley and Tina Beattie. The proceedings will be followed by a drinks reception.

A tour of St John the Baptish Church, Holland Road W14, together with a Eucharist, will take place on 26 November.

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Exhibition review

Magdalene Odundo: The Journey of Things

Hepworth Wakefield
16 February – 2 June 2019

Magdalene Odundo: The Journey of Things, installation view © Lewis Ronald

'Objects hold the knowledge of our history.' Magdalene Odundo, one of the world's most important artists working in ceramics, draws constant inspiration from other times and cultures. This major retrospective exhibition, 'The Journey of Things', assembles more than 50 of Odundo's works alongside a wonderfully eclectic selection of objects chosen by the artist to illustrate the rich range of making that has informed her work.

Born in Kenya in 1950, she came to the UK in 1971, initially following a career in commercial art until she eventually found ceramics. A chance meeting with Michael Cardew in St Ives led to her travelling to Abuja in Nigeria and studying under Ladi Kwali, the revered ceramicist who appears on Nigeria's paper currency. Here she learned the traditional *Gbari* method of hand-building which is the foundation of her practice along with the use of *terra sigillata*, the ancient technique of suspending clay in water to seal the form and burnishing it with stones and polishing tools. These 'low-tech' practices became her hallmark resulting in delicately refined forms and subtle colouration, at times resembling the infinite variety of a cloudscape. Her choice of techniques was not only aesthetic but also practical as she thought she would return to Africa to work and knew electricity would be very expensive.

Farshid Moussavi's exhibition design creates a seamless, flowing series of spaces where the plinths, or 'terrains' as Moussavi calls them, take on the surface qualities of David Chipperfield's poured concrete floors. The overall effect is of a natural landscape, like a river course that meanders, offering multiple viewpoints, populated on its banks and islands by Odundo's vivid pots and the dazzling diversity of objects that have inspired her, drawn from around the world and spanning 3,000 years of human creativity.

The metaphor of journey, of physical movement through the world, also speaks to the particular properties of clay pots: they are a dynamic art form that can survive millennia; whether as objects to be handled and used, or in simply the viewing and engaging with them, pots insist on movement. In the central gallery of the exhibition is a breath-taking display of Odundo's standalone works: her pots take their space in a bold, spare arrangement that can be viewed in the round, unmediated by the usual museum glass case. Elsewhere her work is juxtaposed with historical forms of ancient Egypt, Cycladic, pre-Columbian and African art, with sculpture, painting, contemporary textile and Elizabethan dress, each exploring a fascinating complementarity and dialogue.

Relationships to the human body – especially the female form – are powerfully played out in the exhibition: included are a Henry Moore reclining nude, a Rodin dancer and an early study drawing by Picasso of a female nude for *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* inspired by a Congolese carved figure shown to him by Matisse. Odundo's pots have strong female identities – cinched waists, swollen bellies, long elegant necks and flared ruff-like rims. Odundo studied Elizabethan ruffs and corsets while a museum educator at Kensington Palace, and as a great admirer of Ghanaian *Kente* weaving she is intensely aware of the sacred function of Asante cloth. The fluidity, delicacy and poise of Odundo's pots are made explicit in the juxtaposition with Edgar Degas' sculpture of the *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*. As a student at the Royal College of Art, Odundo would sketch rehearsals at the Royal Ballet School. In 2004 she commented, 'I was attracted to something that is almost a kind of electricity in how pliable the body can be. Thus with plastic, malleable clay… while it is capable of being shaped to capture that mesmerising, hypnotic achievement, the fired pot ends up in a motionless state. That is what I try to capture.'

Odundo remembers the importance of the pots she would be given as a child to fetch water and the physical discipline required to balance a pot on your head, and get the vessel home intact and full. The twin ideas of containment and movement are very powerful concerns in Odundo's work. So too is the healing nature of pots for their use in funerary rites: they have the capacity to remember, even embody, someone who has died, forging a link between the living and the dead. A series of tall columnar pots are included in the section on 'Spiritual Vessels'; these are the largest pots she has ever made and relate to bereavement. In the Kenyan tradition of *Kigango*, if a person had been generous in life, a tall, elaborately carved wooden post abstractly representing their qualities would be erected in their honour so as to appease their spirit. It was these abstract or stylised qualities that most interested European artists like Picasso or Gaudier-Brzeska.

Her pots have great beauty but also great complexity, as Odundo says 'the extreme edge is the first contact the viewer has of the work', and 'The rims of my pots take hours to get right and

perfect'. Sharply angled rims, or spines of spikes conjuring up a sense of danger and pain, co-exist with softer, sensuous forms. Although unseen, the interiors of her pots are highly worked and are, for Odundo, as important as the outer surfaces. She sees the vessel as a body, with an inner and outer integrity she relates to wholeness and healing: the inside of a pot is refined to represent clarity and calmness of the soul. That which is known about the pot but not seen, constitutes its secret and invisible power.

Sibylla Gbadamosi Wood is a writer on ceramics

Book reviews

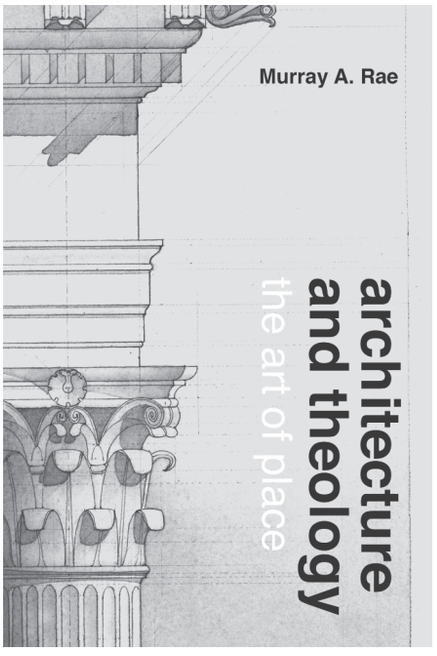
Architecture and theology: the art of place by Murray A Rae

Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017
ISBN 978 1481307635, 305pp, h/b, £48

In this book Murray Rae displays considerable erudition and achieves a real integration of thinking in the fields of architecture and theology. In the early chapters the architectural reflection is anchored in Vitruvius Pollio's classical discussion of architectural thought, and Rae repeatedly returns to Vitruvius's governing principles of order, proportion, symmetry, and economy. What strongly emerges is the sense of the confluence of both architectural and natural forms in the fashioning of the places in which we dwell. The theological grounding here is the doctrine of creation that speaks not only of the giving of form to inchoate matter, but also of its *telos*, that is, its final coherence and completion. Rae proceeds by drawing an analogy between the perception of order and the role of law in the ordering of human society, and this is explicated further by an extensive excursus on the function of Jewish *torah*, which he rightly characterises as being directions for the actual living of lives in ways that are humane and compassionate. All this confirms the basic premise that how individual human beings live is inextricably bound up with the buildings in which they live.

It has long been argued that the landscape is invariably the combination of the activity of settled human communities and natural factors, including geology, and for this reason, buildings of all kinds are not so much intrusions into the landscape as integrated parts of it. And as argued here buildings in both urban and rural environments should be more than functional. We build homes, workshops, markets, malls, and places of worship, and their very design and construction not only speaks about the nature of the activities they are built for, but, through their volume, the materials used in their construction, and their decoration speak of the intrinsic values that we attach to these multifarious activities. In the case of church buildings, for instance, we may recall the protagonist in Peter Carey's novel *Oscar and Lucinda*. He opined that a church building was not solely a shelter for worshippers, but in some sense celebrated God. There are some buildings, in other words, where form exceeds function, and this view is amplified by Rae in his stringent critique of the thought of Le Corbusier, the 20th-century doyen of functionalism in one chapter, and in his positive appraisal of Gaudi's design and the building of La Sagrada Familia in another. It takes time to build well, and a good building, Rae suggests is often like a palimpsest that combines an openness to the future while retaining traces of the past.

Rae takes an expansive view and reminds readers that from the time of the nomadic Abraham who marked the landscape by erecting altars as he journeyed through the terrain, to the building of public Christian churches in the time of the emperor Constantine, sacraments of stone have been in the landscape, marking and claiming those places as being part of God's world. The nuanced argument here inexorably leads to the conclusion that in the final analysis, no place is ever a god-forsaken place. In relation to the urban environment, the point is amply treated by Rae's discussion of how the pagan city of Rome was gradually transformed into a holy city for pilgrims by the adoption and adaptation of classical buildings. Here was reordering on a massive scale. But what is possible when any semblance of good order is cruelly violated, and the built environment is reduced to rubble? Rae recalls Theodor Adorno's warning that nothing meaningful could be said after the holocaust, and then argues that even if nothing can be said in the face of such unspeakable evil, something may indeed be shown.



And this Rae movingly illustrates in the final chapter where he relates how Ground Zero developed in New York following 9/11, and in Libeskind's design for the Jewish Museum in Berlin, with its architectural voids suggesting chambers for the silent cries of the millions of victims who perished in the concentration camps.

Here is a book that repays attention. It ranges widely, and in the end it left me with the appealing thought that architecture could well be an art form that articulates both our need for redemption as well as our need to perceive that we dwell in an ordered cosmos.

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The Visionary Art of William Blake by Naomi Billingsley

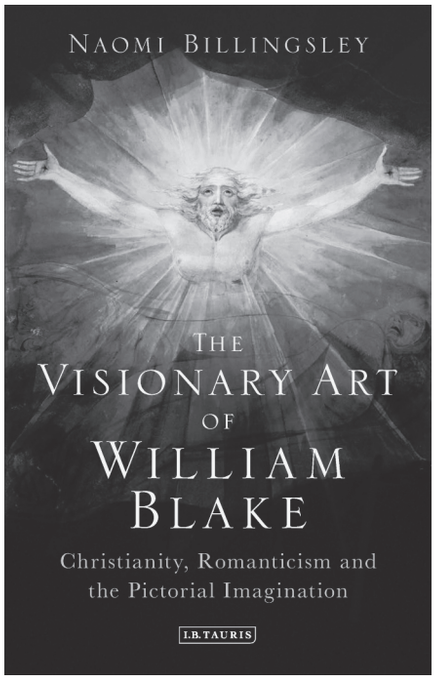
London, Bloomsbury: 2018
ISBN 978 1784539832, h/b, 272pp, £69

Reading Naomi Billingsley's *The Visionary Art of William Blake* was a welcome opportunity to engage holistically with Blake's many images of Christ from the 1790s until the 1820s, as well as his 'conceptual universe' and the development of his theological thinking. This is a timely exploration of Blake's 'theology of art' (though Blake himself would have rejected the notion of being any sort of theologian since he despised organised religion and the abstractions usually connected with theology).

Christopher Rowland, in his *Blake and the Bible* of 2010 reinvigorated the notion of Blake as a highly unconventional yet committed Christian and biblical interpreter. Although Blake was almost certainly influenced by both the Swedenborgians and visionary Lutheranism, he was not persuaded by either, ultimately preferring his own theological universe. The idea of Blake as a biblical interpreter had been largely rejected by Blake scholarship throughout the 20th Century, which has tended to prioritise Blake's periods of religious scepticism in the early 1780s and towards the end of his life, as characterized by his (unpublished) *Everlasting Gospel* c.1818, his conversations with Crabb Robinson in 1825-6, as well as his more 'secular' poetry.

As Rowland and Billingsley both deftly demonstrate, this is to ignore his many biblical illustrations, in which his sophisticated theological insights often reach their fullest expression (see, for example, Blake's *Illustrations to the Book of Job*, c.1826). Nor should one forget that Christ appears at the climactic moments of *Jerusalem*, which Blake considered to be his masterpiece, not least in crucified form before *Albion* in Plate 76. Billingsley considers this to be the turning point of the poem and the moment at which Blake's version of 'true Christianity' is revealed. Of further significance is the fact that the frontispiece to *Jerusalem* begins with a Greek inscription in Blake's own hand meaning 'only Christ', a phrase that also appears at key moments within the New Testament and signifies that the only way to salvation is through belief in Christ.

Because Blake regards Christ as synonymous with 'Imagination', Billingsley argues that all worthwhile activity is art and therefore a participation in 'the activity of Christ the Imagination' (p. 8). She suggests that Blake went further than his contemporaries in asserting that the viewer of his images should be a 'participant rather than an observer' and a 'partner in pursuit of visionary perception' (pp. 11-12). His images exist to 'regenerate the field of perception' and like those who encountered Christ, the viewer should undergo a transformation or conversion as a result of their encounter with them, 'whereby artist and viewer coexist as members of the Divine Body' (p. 191). Blake's 'theory of art' reaches its zenith in his unconventional images of the Last Judgment and an accompanying text in which he reveals that he sees his art 'as an apocalyptic process by



which error is expunged and truth revealed' (p. 165).

Throughout, Billingsley is at her most interesting when she takes an image and explores it in depth. Billingsley argues persuasively that Blake focuses as much artistic attention on the response of others to Christ, as he does on Christ himself. Thus in *The Nativity*, for example, Billingsley draws our attention not only to the strange and tiny 'leaping Christ', who represents 'illuminating energy' but also to the reactions of the other figures in the scene. Mary and Joseph seem exhausted and disengaged with the Christ-child, while Elizabeth reaches out for him enthusiastically. Elizabeth is presented as the disciple (in the broadest sense of the word) who must be emulated and Mary and Joseph are the inadequate exemplars. This reflects Blake's ambiguity towards Mary (he later rejected the virgin birth, for example) and his interest in John the Baptist (and by implication Elizabeth also) but also a trend within Blake's images of the historical Jesus to portray him as something of a cypher who served to illuminate those in his presence (p. 87). As Blake writes in the Laocoön aphorisms of c.1826-7, 'Jesus and his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists', a conviction that is exemplified not only in this image but in a great many of the images that Billingsley explores.

Billingsley is also adept at weaving pertinent details from Blake's complex biography, as well as his artistic context into her chronologically unfolding chapters. She also provides a helpful guide to Blake's often esoteric terminology in the Introduction. This gives the book a broad appeal beyond the expected Blake scholars and enthusiasts.

There are a few niggles, such as the notion that the angel appearing to Zecharias is an 'unusual theme' in art (p. 69). Additionally, the title itself is positively misleading. As is clear from even a cursory look at the contents, this is a book *specifically* about Blake's images of Christ, a worthy project in its own right. However the title and the subtitle ('Christianity, Romanticism and the Pictorial Imagination') suggest something much broader. Perhaps the publishers were reticent to proceed with a more accurate but explicitly Christological title, for fear of alienating readers. The conclusion is somewhat underdeveloped, given that this is such a dense study, and I would argue that not enough consideration is given to the undeniable fluctuations in Blake's theological thinking throughout his life. However, these reservations notwithstanding, this is a very welcome contribution to our understanding of Blake and specifically his visualisations of Christ, his theology of art and his viewer-response aesthetic.

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Interview

A world to come

The rural church of All Saints and St Andrew's, Kingston near Cambridge is the site for our current curating project and the remit here relates to a rural context. In partnership with nearby Wysing Arts Centre, Bettina Furnée, one of their studio artists, was selected to respond to the church's historic wall paintings. Here, she discusses the project's themes and developments with A+C's Project Curator, Laura Purseglove.

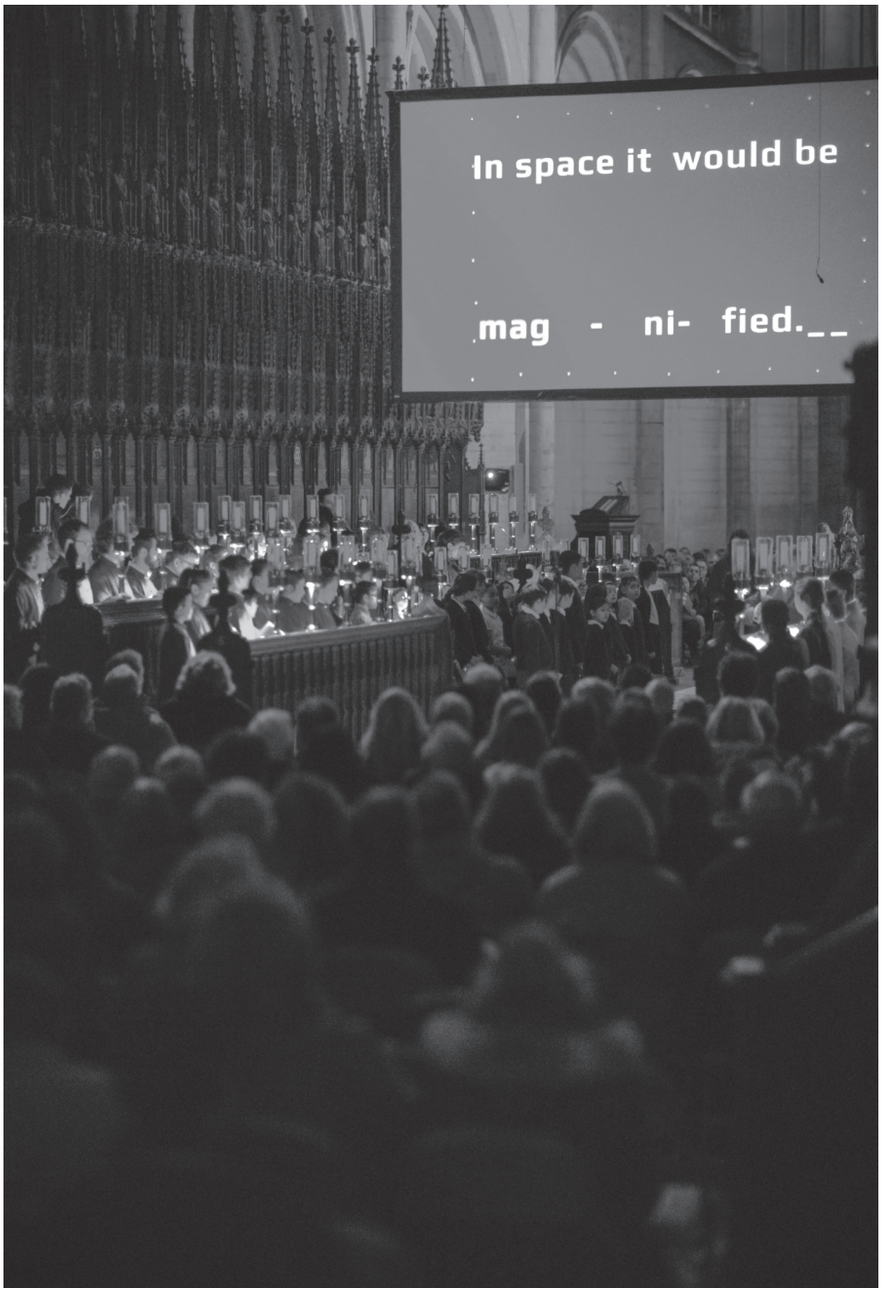
Laura Purseglove: *What was your initial response to the project?*
Bettina Furnée: I was intrigued to hear about this little church with medieval wall paintings located right behind the [Wysing Art Centre] studios, as I hadn't been to Kingston church before. Torrie Smith, Kingston Clerk of Works, and you came to visit the studios, and were clearly excited about the project. We went with three shortlisted Wysing studio artists on a site visit and got an expert tour of the building by Torrie Smith. I do love to visit churches whenever I can; I love them as spaces, though I'm not a believer. That this didn't seem to be a requirement was clear from the beginning. I had just completed a big project at Peterborough Cathedral, so I had no concerns about working in a church.

The brief called for a new project which focused on the church's historic wall paintings, so I began by researching what these meant. I became interested in the depiction of the Wheel of the Seven Acts of Corporal Mercy, which is set against (mostly lost) depictions of the Seven Deadly Sins, which would have been counterbalanced by the Seven Acts. There are also depictions of the Psychomachia, an influential poem by Pudentius (5th c. AD) concerning an allegorical battle between good and evil, which names seven virtues that oppose the seven deadly sins.

I am interested in the way religion can reconcile contradictions. There are certain ideas in Christianity, for example accounts of miracles, which are hard to believe rationally, yet people adhere to them for an emotional reason. Most people are able to hold contradictory emotional and rational beliefs simultaneously, however, and that's intriguing. In my proposal, I was interested in bringing contradictory elements together in one piece. I began looking more closely at interpretations of the wall paintings, and although it quickly became complicated when mapping out some of the Christian terminology, I thought I could do something just with the text, which is an approach I take quite often.

I then came up with the idea of creating seven ficticious animal characters by blending the contrasting vices and virtues. I combined traditional animal symbolism for the vices with the text of the opposing virtues. I was interested in creating a single spectrum where opposing characteristics might perhaps be held safely together, in this way.

Bettina Furnée *Even You Song*, 2017



LP: *How did your ideas develop?*
BF: I wanted to mount the animal symbols and texts onto cloth, and initially I thought about banners, as there are banners in the church. Lotte Juul Petersen, Project Curator at Wysing Art Centre, first asked whether these textiles might be worn, and then at the presentation interview it was suggested by the clergy: 'could we wear them?', and so the idea of creating vestments developed. I acquainted myself with the different types of church vestments, and I liked the chasuble because it's simple and I needed something quite plain; not too many folds, pleats and complications. I want the seven chasubles to have a made-to-measure feel, some slightly longer or slightly shorter, with different finishings for the neck.

The neon text piece began as a title. I felt it would be good to bring the piece together in a sentence. I can't say where I came across 'the world to come' initially, but I liked the fact that it refers to heaven on earth; not the afterlife, although it has that ring to it. This then developed into 'a world to come', in order to avoid the suggestion that the future is in any way preordained.

LP: *Was working text into the installation important to you?*
BF: Text is my material in a very basic sense, so I wanted to include it. I like the slippage between 'a world to come' and 'a word to come', and I'm playing with the idea of making the 'l' flash on and off to draw attention to the textual.

I've always loved language and come from a household where language was the big thing, not the visual arts. We always played with words. My Dad was an etymologist. So lettering and text has always been a way I like to think about the world, it feels very much part of me.

Text is always ambiguous; it's very liquid, and it's about how you take it. You only need to give it a slightly different context or slant and it says something different.

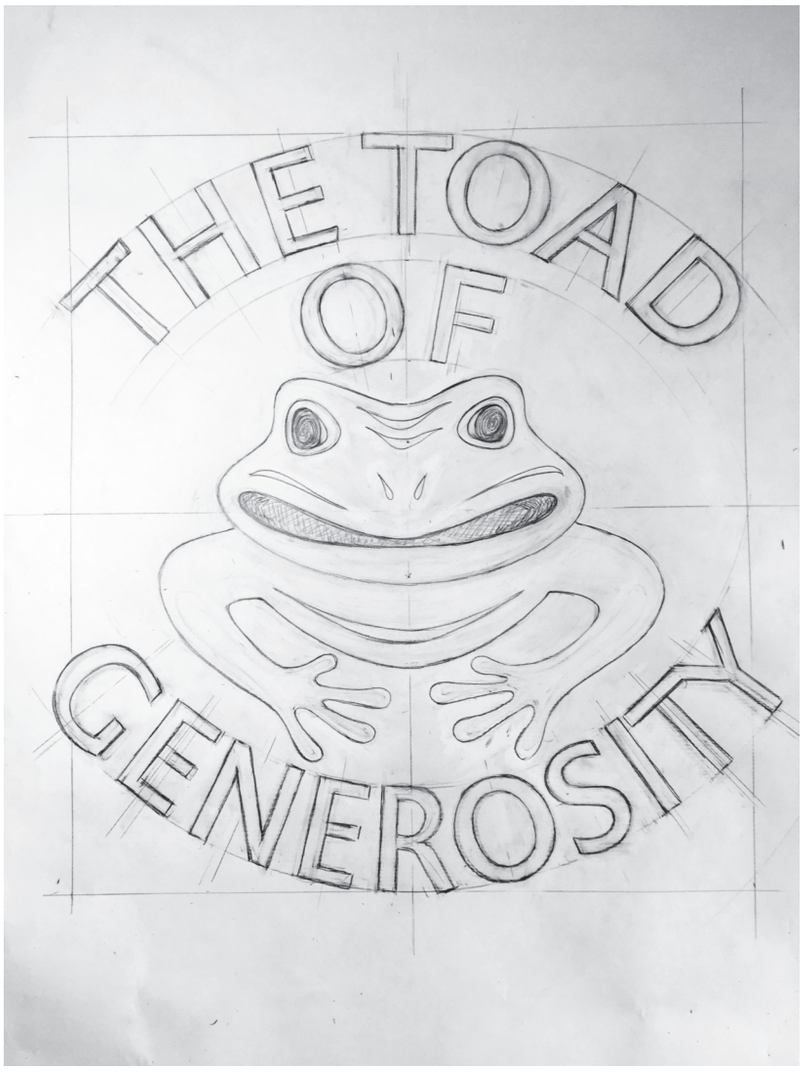
I began my career at David Kindersley's letter cutting workshop in Cambridge, beginning with an internship at 18 when I also started a degree in art history. I fell in love with letter cutting, but that world was very male-dominated and traditional. I went on to do my MA in Public Art to broaden my horizons, but the text element has always stayed with me. Kindersley was a pupil of Eric Gill, so was steeped in the tradition of direct stone carving and good lettering. I still do the odd memorial, and use some of the traditional techniques to create my work, alongside digital media.

LP: *How does it feel to respond to a history which seems so different?*
BF: Having studied Art History, going back through the ages wasn't difficult. It felt comfortable. History is very tangible in Kingston Church; there is graffiti scratched on the walls made by the children who took school lessons; there is the spooky thing of the ground being so high because of all the graves, and the earth never being cleared; it's all very material. It makes you think: they were just people, like us.

LP: *Does your work maintain strong connections to the present?*
BF: It's there in the traditional use of animal symbolism in church carving. Animals get loaded with a lot of negative connotations as they don't have a voice or language we recognise. When times get tough there is always a temptation to engage in scapegoating, and that relates to the time we are in. With Brexit, it feels so personal! I'm Dutch and I feel personally insecure; I'm a different beast perhaps, as different labels have been attached.

LP: *How would you like people to respond?*
BF: I hope with an open mind and a sense of enquiry. The neon piece reflects an aspiration to see things differently in future, [to see beyond differences], and accept that human motivations or characteristics play out across a broad spectrum, [as opposed to a more limited, binary scale]. It's also light hearted, it's got a bit of fun in it. Though underneath it all I am really serious about it.

Bettina Furnée's installation at All Saints and St Andrew's opens to the public on 12 July (see p. 4) and runs to 1 October. Further information can be found on the Curating page of our website.



Bettina Furnée, preparatory drawing for chasuble works at Kingston , 2019

Something true and vital

Frank Roper's art and his collaborations with the architect George Pace have left a distinctive mark on the churches of South Wales, from where Jan Gould celebrates his life and work

South Wales in the first half of the 20th Century was not known for outstanding, modern church architecture or art. It was a deeply church-going area but most of the religious buildings were either medieval, or were erected in the 19th or early 20th Century. Anglican 19th-century churches tended to be Gothic, while Free Church buildings were eclectic, sometimes classical, and sometimes Gothic. There was little innovation. When new council estates were built, such as the Ely estate in Cardiff, churches too were built to meet the needs of the new population, but they tended to be traditional in style, as were the stained glass and sculptures within. My own Church of the Resurrection, in Ely, Cardiff, is a magnificent building in the Byzantine style, built in 1934. It is modelled on the Community of the Resurrection chapel in Mirfield, and built in brick. Its latest restoration, supported by grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund and other donors in 2018-19, enabled us to replace the church roof, redecorate internally, and to pay particular attention to the work of Frank Roper.

Church art and architecture in South Wales changed dramatically in the 1940s, when Glyn Simon, who was Dean of Llandaff Cathedral, and later became Archbishop of Wales, began the restoration of the cathedral, which had been blitzed in the Second World War. After the sudden death of the cathedral architect, Sir Charles Nicholson, Simon chose a young George Pace, who was beginning to establish his reputation as an ecclesiastical architect, well-versed in Gothic architecture and the Arts and Crafts movement, as well as that of Fr Couturier's *Art Sacré* and the works of Le Corbusier. In that spirit, Pace looked to leading artists of the time to work with him. Some like Stanley Spencer walked away from being involved, but Jacob Epstein and John Piper produced magnificent works for Llandaff Cathedral and when Pace met the young sculptor Frank Roper, who had been a pupil of Henry Moore, they created a partnership that lasted for decades. As well as the work in Llandaff Cathedral, there are examples of Pace and Roper's collaborations all over South Wales, and indeed across England. The devastation of the Second World War gave both men the chance to restore, rebuild but also reshape church architecture and art in South Wales. The Church of the Resurrection was untouched by the war, but a major earlier redecoration in 1969 saw Roper create an altar and screen in a memorial chapel, two sets of candlesticks, a crucifix, and an illuminated cross above the high altar.

Pace was born in 1915, Roper in 1914 and they met in the 1940s. Throughout the 50s and 60s they worked together until Pace died in 1975 after a long illness aged 59. Roper lived on until 2000. He came from Haworth, Yorkshire, where his grandfather had a stone carving business, and studied under Henry Moore at the Royal College of Art. Roper progressed to teach at various colleges of art and in 1947 he came to Cardiff to be Vice Principal of the College of Art just two years before Pace was appointed cathedral architect at Llandaff. Pace said, clearly, he did not want Llandaff Cathedral to be a museum so 'I am gradually bringing together contemporary works' and when the cathedral was finished in 1960, Pace said he could not express strongly enough his debt to the artists who had made it possible.[1]

With enormous skill in modelling and casting, and with great awareness of medieval Welsh culture, Roper created a set of flowers dedicated to Mary in the middle ages, including *Gwniadur*

Frank Roper, Welsh Flowers reredos for Lady Chapel, Llandaff Cathedral, 1964

Mair (Foxglove or Mary's Thimble), and *Lustug Fair* (Sea Thrift or Mary's Pillow). These are beautiful, delicate pieces and in his obituary in *The Guardian* Peter Wakelin remarks that 'Roper's bronze panels of Welsh flowers mounted on the medieval reredos of the Lady Chapel (1964) are one of his most touching works.'[2] Roper's art was not usually as delicate, despite its intricacy and subtlety, and Wakelin (later Secretary of the Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Wales and Director of Collections & Research at The National Museum of Wales) wrote: 'His figure sculptures are expressively distorted, showing deep sympathy with medieval art, as well as admiration for Henry Moore. His wall-mounted Stations of the Cross, at St Martin's in Cardiff (1959), are emotionally charged, the modelling recalling Grünewald's agony rather than more beatific passion.' Roper replied to his critics: 'Many people have declared that my realism has inspired and excited them. But others have criticised my approach. For instance, some people have complained that I have made Christ's figure too emaciated, with elongated limbs and gaunt joints. But I feel that only in this way could I convey my idea of his emotional and physical suffering.' His Stations of the Cross at St Saviour's, Cardiff evoked similar criticism: some parishioners are quoted as saying that they were 'coarse, weird and ugly' and 'much too modern and strange'. Roper said at the time: 'We have come through a shocking period of art – full of sentimental naturalism. We have to break back into profound realism. We have to show this awful journey to the Cross as something true and vital'.[3]

Pace saw that Roper needed to express something of the agony and pain of the suffering of the 20th Century. Writing of his work at Llandaff, he referred to Pace's suggestion, 'that I should seek inspiration by putting my head into a thorn bush, a painful operation intended to prevent my formalising, or inflicting my conventions on the subject'.[4] On an outside wall, over the front entrance of Pace's Chapel of St Michael's Theological College, Llandaff (1959), added almost 20 years after the chapel was designed, there is an emaciated 'anti-Christ' about to be despatched by St Michael's risen sword. The anti-Christ is an old, haggard man, with claws and wings, a very powerful, almost frightening, work by Roper.

Yet sometimes Roper's figures could speak of tenderness in the midst of passion. In St Denys' Church, Lisvane, there is a reredos of a gentle Christ, 'flanked by four candle holders as if flambeaux made from Passion nails'[5]; his beautifully tender nativity figures which he made in aluminium for Wells Cathedral are still used every year; and we have been lucky enough to receive an indefinite loan of three more Roper pieces: statues of Mary and Joseph, and a Christ in Majesty, his face shining out in glory. A similar *Majestas* in Christ Church, Roath Park Lake, Cardiff, was described by Peter Leech as 'forceful, projecting.'[6]

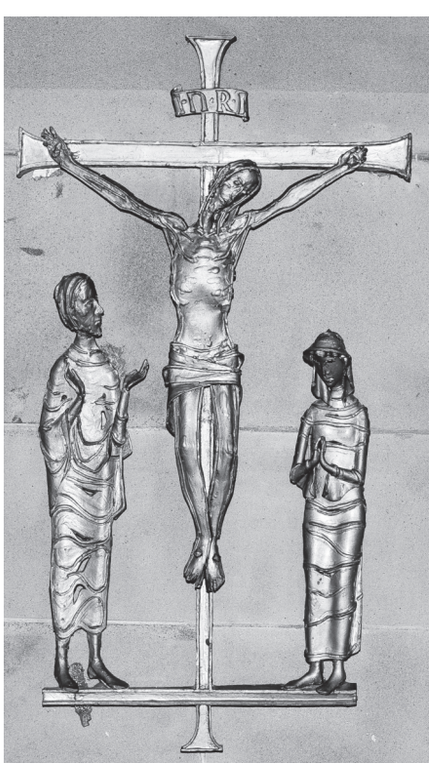
On 24 February this year Bishop June Osborne came to our church to rededicate the building, and to launch a Frank Roper Centre, with a small exhibition about his work. In her sermon, Bishop June spoke movingly about Roper's understanding of faith, relating it to the scriptural passage read during the service of Genesis 28.15-17, where Jacob is afraid of God's presence. 'God promised Jacob "know that I am with you". Jacob had no evidence for what God had promised him and needed to proceed in faith. Faith that God had been there at his beginning and would be there at his end. So many of Frank Roper's pieces, especially the crucifixions which convey faith in the face of suffering and abandonment, tell us the same. That faith matters.'[7] When church congregations came to look at Roper's works after 1960, his sculptures and stained glass spoke powerfully to them about how faith mattered both to the individuals in the Biblical stories and to Christians today. In many ways Roper stood in the medieval tradition which he appreciated so much, a tradition that used stained glass and sculpture as a teaching aid to people who were often illiterate but who were familiar with a Christian narrative.

Roper's significance for South Wales is overwhelming. Wakelin's obituary describes him as 'a man of entrancing contradictions: a modernist whose work absorbed tradition, deeply conservative but a vivid individualist. His working days were hard and hazardous, but, like Magritte, he dressed at all times in collar and tie.'[8] Throughout the churches and cathedrals of South Wales Roper left a set of works that are a witness to the suffering of the modern world, and the tenderness and beauty of Christ. Our hope in creating a Frank Roper Centre within our church, and eventually a website, is to give due attention to this very modest figure, a man of enormous vision and artistic talent.

Jan Gould is Parish Priest of the Church of the Resurrection, Ely, Cardiff

The church is open every Sunday until 4pm for visitors, or by appointment.

1. Peter Pace, *The Architecture of George Pace, Batsford*, 1990, p. 166.
2. Peter Wakelin, 'Frank Roper', December 11, 2000, *The Guardian*.
3. http://atelim.com/st-peters-church-chippenham-the-harvesting-of-light-the-art-an.html
4. Peter Wakelin, *The Guardian*.
5. Peter Leech, *The Religious Art of Frank Roper*, 2003, p. 5
6. Peter Leech, p. 13
7. Bishop June Osborne, sermon at the Church of the Resurrection, Ely, 24 February 2019, reprinted with permission.
8. Peter Wakelin, *The Guardian*.



Frank Roper *Crucifixion for St John the Baptist Cardiff*

Letter from Orkney

Tom Miller uncovers Orkney's cross-fertilisation of art, architecture and landscape

The regenerative spirit of Creation is palpable everywhere in Orkney: deep in the soil, which yields abundant grains and grasses as well as relics of ancient cultures; in the dynamic tides of the surrounding seas, and in the winds that can harrow and hallow in turn. Orkney is a place of abiding spiritual attraction. Likewise, and perhaps consequently, Orkney is rich in the arts and crafts that express the human spirit of creation and discovery, as I have discovered over the past five years.

Orkney has been a cultural crossroads for 5,000 years. Neolithic excavations and standing stones, including the Ring of Brodgar, are evidence of early migrations and the art of building. More recently in the scheme of things, the medieval Orkneyinga Saga tells of Viking adventure; settlement and rule by Norway and Denmark, and exploration west to Greenland and beyond. Before becoming part of Scotland in 1472, Orkney's episcopal authority was from Trondeim. Norway and Orkney maintain bonds of affection that cultivate exchanges of culture and ideas – as well as Norwegian spruces as Christmas gifts to the Cathedral and the people of Orkney.

In addition to strong Nordic bonds, Orkney has had significant global connections for many centuries. Naval fleets from the Napoleonic Wars through to World War II were assembled in the sheltered waters of Scapa Flow, and in the 19th Century Orkney was both provisioner and recruiter for the Hudson Bay Company's ambitious enterprise to settle interior Canada. Throughout its history Orkney has been an important port for trade and travel between Europe and North America.

Given its outsized role in history, it is most fitting then, that, although it has a population of just over 21,000, Orkney boasts a magnificent cathedral, the northernmost in Britain and the only wholly medieval cathedral in Scotland. St Magnus Cathedral, begun in 1137 and originally modelled on Durham Cathedral, is Orkney's treasure house of the arts, contemporary and traditional, as well as its centre of religion and civic engagement. It is also a pilgrim destination and a house of prayer. I often spend time sitting in the nave or the south transept, lost in contemplation of the architecture and mindful of the histories those stones have witnessed.

Built of native red sandstone by builders from Durham, the scale of St Magnus manages to be both intimate and majestic. The narrow centre aisle emphasises the length and height of the nave and choir. At the same time, close-set stocky piers anchor the space, and blind arcading along the side aisles provides a sense of a cloistered surround and a contemplative environment.

After years of neglect, a major restoration and alteration project was undertaken between 1913 and 1930 according to a plan by Edinburgh architect George Mackie Watson. The Cathedral's window scheme of biblical as well as local figures was designed by Glasgow glass designer Oscar Patterson. Small and deep-set in thick outer walls the images appear like portals into a heavenly realm. Of particular significance and importance are the figures of saints Magnus and Rognvald in the north transept. Rognvald, after a trip to the Holy Land, built the Cathedral in honour of his uncle. In the south transept the tracery of a rose window has been fitted with clear glass, a gesture of elegant simplicity.

Along side aisles is an impressive collection of burial stones and memorials. At the East End is the Artists' Corner where local literary figures Eric Linklater, George Mackay Brown and Edwin Muir, among others, are memorialized, along with Stanley Cursiter, Director of the National Gallery of Scotland (1939 - 1948) and The King's, then Queen's Painter and Limner in Scotland from 1948 to 1976. A sculpted figure of John Rae, reclining in death, holds an appropriate place of prominence. Rae discovered the Northwest Passage to the Pacific whilst determining the fate of Sir John Franklin's last expedition, which apparently ended in ice-bound desperation with rumours of cannibalism. London society shunned the bearer of that message, and John Rae's reputation is only lately finding rehabilitation through efforts to restore his Orkney home, Cairston Hall.

At the other end of the Cathedral is an intensely colourful west window by Crear McCartney, commissioned for the 850th anniversary of the Cathedral in 1987. It shows Magnus and Rognvald against a field of Orkney land- and sea-scape. Among the many furnishings and fittings which ornament the cathedral, those that stand out are the medieval floor tiles and Orcadian

Håkon Gullvåg *Paintings for a Cathedral*, 2014
Photo: Orkney.com

Colin William Kerr's oak inlaid communion table, made in 1991. This last signals the strong contemporary interest in this ancient cathedral, which makes it a suitable venue for contemporary music, installations and the performing arts, especially within the annual St Magnus International Festival, founded by George Mackay Brown, Peter Maxwell Davies and the local arts community.

One of the most impressive installations in recent years has been the return of 'St Magnus Sails', a series of large canvases, literally sails, depicting the pilgrimage of Rognvald to the Holy Land and back as well as reference to Rognvald's uncle Magnus. It was commissioned for the St Magnus Festival in 1993 and was funded by the Festival and Scottish Arts Council. Four local artists contributed to the pictorial scheme: Erlund Brown, Dave Jackson, Andrew Parkinson and Mary Scott.

Another recent exhibition, in 2014, featured the work of Håkon Gullvåg, again integrated into the nave and focusing on the life of Magnus. Gullvag's portrait of Magnus has found a permanent home in the Cathedral on a pier directly across from the one in which the saint's relics are immured; and for over a year the artist Russell Gilmour has been painting almost daily in the Cathedral and has produced a collection of more than 200 canvasses depicting the Cathedral interior.

Orkney has many other galleries and venues where modern and contemporary artists are featured and promoted. Stromness, the harbour town of the West Mainland, is home to the Pier Arts Centre, founded in 1979 as a home for the collection of Margaret Gardiner, which includes work by Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson, Alfred Wallis, Sean Scully, Eva Rothschild and Olafur Eliasson as well as local artists Sylvia Wishart and Stanley Cursiter. The 2007 renovation and extension of the building features glass walls open to the harbour view, while the exterior fits well with neighbouring piers and houses.

Among other ecclesiastical gems on the islands, perhaps the most remarkable is the Italian Chapel, so called because Italian prisoners in the Second World War turned two Nissen huts into a baroque-style chapel with *trompe l'oeil* effects, paintings, iron work and carved stations of the cross. Italian restoration artists are still called upon to preserve the work by Domenico Chiocchetti and fellow artisan soldiers. A few years ago, three of the stations were stolen, which has prompted increased security measures.

The Italian Chapel, Orkney

In Stromness local artists have contributed to the décor and furnishings of St Mary's Scottish Episcopal Church. An expressionistic Stations of the Cross series is by Peter Davis. Behind the altar is a tapestry by fabric artist Patsy Bain depicting a school of shimmering herring, known as silver darlings, on a quilted background of various shades of blue and green that form a watery field of crosses. Also in St Mary's, the glass artist Shona Mcinnes has created two stunning windows combining local vistas with iconography of saints Mary, Luke, and John, as well as views of Stromness and references to fishing and agriculture.

Additionally, Mcinnes provided St Magnus Church, in Birsay on Orkney Mainland's west coast, with a window of the saint on the site where Magnus may first have been buried before translation to the Kirkwall and the Cathedral. There are also several private chapels, including the Arts and Craft chapel of St Colm and St Margaret at Melsetter House on the Island of Hoy, designed by WR Lethaby and featuring Arts and Craft décor and furnishings from or inspired by the Morris workshops.

Back on the trail of Orkney's patron saint, the latest expression of Magnus-consciousness is St Magnus Way, a 55-mile pilgrim path leading over land (and water) from the island of Egelsay to Kirkwall. The path follows the route over which Magnus's body would have been taken from the time of his death to his final resting place in St Magnus Cathedral. In addition to the meditative possibilities in such a walk, St Magnus Way offers spectacular views of Orkney: land and sea finger-laced under a dome of sky alive with northern light and ever-changing weather. The art of Creation doesn't get much better.

Naturally, the end of the pilgrim way is St Magnus Cathedral, which refers to itself as the Light of the North, a light that has drawn Christian pilgrims and many others to these mystical islands for nearly 900 years. Mindful of that heritage, the Cathedral is a partner in the St Magnus Graffiti Project. Under the auspices of Orkney Archaeology Society, professionals from the University of the Highlands and Islands are training 60 volunteers to help survey and record all the graffiti and mark-making in the Cathedral over its 900-year history.

Orkney is blessed with abundant treasures in its cultural heritage, in its Cathedral, in the creative spirit of its people, and in a commitment to the contemporary arts throughout the islands. Orkney is indeed a light in the north – both a destination and a crossroads of cultures in an especially sublime corner of Creation.

Tom Miller is Priest-in-Charge of St Mary's Scottish Episcopal Church, Stromness

Of bricks and mortar

Laura Moffatt reflects on the ACE/RIBA Award for Religious Architecture's six cycles

I first began working for Art and Christianity in 2002 as its Awards Administrator, a new role for a new scheme within an organisation wanting to celebrate and reward the burgeoning numbers of artistic and architectural commissions that came in the wake of the millennium. At the time, the Royal Institute of British Architect's own Awards programme, in particular the Stirling Prize, had won important recognition, with projects like Peckham Library and the Gateshead Millennium Bridge becoming features in the nation's cultural landscape. But there seemed scant chance of a place of worship being recognised in the same vein, let alone making it onto a shortlist of secular contenders. However, through an approach to Tony Chapman, the RIBA's Head of Awards, the Award was welcomed by the Institute and they agreed to support it, lending their imprimatur, guidance on setting criteria and help in finding appropriate architects to join the judging panels.

Many firms of architects were delighted to find such an award had been initiated and the first round of the ACE / RIBA Award for Religious Architecture attracted over 20 entries. Mindful of the financial limitations of many places of worship, as well as the frequent need to re-order rather than rebuild, the criteria has always allowed for both, as long as the modifications to the building are expressly for the worship space rather than for ancillary functions. In attending to this quality – where an understanding of the relationship between aesthetics, liturgy and theology are paramount – the panels were often surprised by the strength of modern interventions within ancient buildings, such as the reorderings at St Peter's, Peterchurch in Herefordshire (winner in 2011) and at All Saints, West Dulwich (shortlisted in 2007). It is notable that all these awards were made in a decade when planning and conservation specialists began markedly to favour a respectful modern approach over fidelity to a historic style, a preference which is commonplace today in the strategies of parishes and architects alike.

In addition to insertions within or reorderings of historic buildings, contemporary new-builds have, arguably, allowed architects to express greater individuality and inventiveness in their responses to religious architecture, and there have been remarkable shortlisted entries for cemetery buildings at Wilbury Hills and within the Islamic Gardens of Peace in Ilford, for multi-faith spaces at the University of Derby and at the Lumen Centre and for two new iconic buildings for the Salvation Army, the Chelmsford Corps Building winning in 2009. Tony Fretton's winning entry in the first year of the Award also made an impact in terms of enlarging the vision of what we consider 'religious architecture'. Faith House is a non-denominational building set within a rural retreat centre on the Poole harbour coastline. Its attentiveness to the landscape in which it sits is evident not only in the modest massing and quiet external materials used, but also in the interior which playfully appropriates slender trunks of silver birch trees as columns.

In 2007 the Award was won by a large new Roman Catholic Church and complex on the outskirts of Basingstoke, the work of Robert Maguire and JBKS Architects, built to meet the needs of a growing Eastern European population. Many A+C members will be familiar with the work of Maguire and Murray in their exacting and avant-garde church buildings of the 1960s and 70s, and St Bede's carried forward some of Maguire's 'signature' architectural devices such as its narrow clerestory lights running around all four walls, its high and beautifully funnel-shaped ceiling, and the adherence to a thoughtful and yet pragmatic liturgical progression of spaces, furnishings and materials. Maguire died earlier this year and I for one was delighted that we were able to give some modest recognition of his contribution to church architecture in this last of his major architectural projects.

Unanimously identifying winners from a relatively small number of entries has not often proved a difficult task for the judging panels, but in the last cycle of the Award in 2015 the deliberations over two very different stand-out buildings resulted in the prize being jointly awarded to Kingston Quaker Meeting House – a resolutely modern building, elegant and poised in its response to the particularities of Quaker worship – and Shepherd's Law, a tiny but muscular chapel constructed by local craftspeople from local stone in the Northumbrian hills above Alnwick, again a vivid expression of the life of prayer and faith led by the Chapel's instigator, the hermit Brother Harold and the Newcastle-based architect Ralph Pattison.

Two such characterful places of worship bring into focus the range of architectural skill that seems to be emerging more convincingly in the UK. For too long the approach towards churches, mosques, synagogues and temples in this country has been hampered by timidity, and there seems to have been little awareness of the more ambitious religious architecture that can be found elsewhere in Europe. But recent years have seen the first church building to be shortlisted for the Stirling Prize (Niall McLaughlin's Bishop Edward King Chapel at Cuddesdon) as well as a much wider public profile for the Church Architecture Awards (now under the wing of the National Churches Trust) won last year by Fielden Clegg Bradley's Stanbrook Abbey in Yorkshire. These advances alongside other considerations have contributed to our decision regretfully to draw a close to the Award for Religious Architecture and concentrate resources on our two other Awards for Art in a Religious Context and the A+C Book Award. Indebted to the panellists who over the years have given generously of their time and expertise and to the RIBA for its encouragement and guidance, we feel confident that the creativity and skill of architects together with the life with which communities surround places of worship will continue to prosper in partnership.

Laura Moffatt is Director of Art and Christianity and co-author of *Contemporary Church Architecture* (Wiley-Academy, 2006)

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ISSN 1746-6229

Art and Christianity is published four times a year by Art and Christianity (registered. charity 1035221).

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Selected exhibitions

London

British Museum Gt Russell St WC1 *Edvard Munch: Love and Angst* to 21 Jul
British Library Euston Rd *Writing: Making your Mark* to 27 Aug
Tate Modern Bankside SE1 *Magic Realism: Art in Weimar Germany 1919-33* to 4 Jun *Dorothea Tanning* to 9 Jun
Southwark Cathedral London Bridge SE1 *Nic Fiddian Green: Searching for God, Almighty Hands* 29 May – 11 Jun

Regional

Bath **Holburne Museum** Gt Pulteney St *Vuillard: The Poetry of Everyday* Life 24 May – 15 Sep
Cambridge **Great St Mary's** Senate House Hill *Liviu Moan: Archetypes* to Jan **Kettle's Yard & St Peter's Church** Castle Rd *Oscar Murillo* to 23 Jun
Edinburgh **Jupiter Artlands** Bonnington House, Steadings *Daniel Lie: The Negative Years* to 14 Jul
Hereford **Cathedral** *Yinka Shonibare: Creatures of the Mappa Mundi* to 1 Jun
Kendal **Abbot Hall Art Gallery** Abbot Hall *Refuge: the Art of Belonging* to 29 Jun
Masham, North Yorkshire **various churches** *Sculpt: 7 Artists across 7 Churches* to 28 Sep
Milton Keynes **MK Gallery** 900 Midsummer Blvd *Paula Rego: Obedience and Defiance* 15 Jun – 22 Sep
Salisbury **Cathedral** The Close *Diane Maclean: Beyond* 12 Jun – 29 Sep
Sarum College 19 The Close *Claire Reed: Architecture of Belonging* to 8 Jun
Sheffield **Millennium Gallery** Arundel St *John Ruskin: Art and Wonder* 29 May – 15 Sep
Wakefield **The Hepworth** Gallery Walk *Magdalene Odundo: The Journey of Things* to 2 Jun
Yorkshire Sculpture Park West Bretton *Kimsooja: To Breathe* to 29 Sep
York **Art Gallery** Exhibition Square *Ruskin, Turner and the Storm Cloud* to 23 Jun

International

AUSTRIA Vienna **Dom Museum** *Show me your wound* to 25 Aug
NETHERLANDS Dordrecht **Museum** *Work, pray and admire: A new view on art and Calvinism* to 26 May
USA St Louis **MOCRA** *Gary Logan: Elements* to 20 Jun
New Haven **Yale Institute of Sacred Music** *Ineffable Manifestations* to 18 Jun

About Art and Christianity

Art and Christianity is the leading UK organisation in the field of visual art and religion, and offers stimulating educational events and publications, advice, information and skills. We rely on funds from membership subscriptions to continue our work so please join and support us.

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