

VISUAL ARTS IN SALISBURY CATHEDRAL

It never appeared on the job description for the Canon Treasurer, but reconstituting an Exhibitions Committee and seeing the visual arts side of our life develop has been very exciting. We have been so fortunate in the skills available to us, and in the opportunities that have come our way, and are following in the footsteps of those who were responsible for Elisabeth Frink's Walking Madonna and a later retrospective of her work, the large 1999 sculpture exhibition in the Close, and many other events and pieces.

Cathedrals have once again become very attractive for artists, and we were getting such a variety of requests that we felt it important to have a visual arts policy. One thing a policy does is give you reasons to say 'no', which can frequently be very important, but it also lays down the reasons why engagement with visual arts is important for the cathedral. In the policy Chapter says 'Visual art is one of the great civilizing and inspirational achievements of humankind which can speak to us of the transcendent and of eternal verities, as well as challenging our perceptions of ourselves and the way we live. In this sense, it is deeply spiritual... God creates, and his creatures share in that creation through the promptings of the Holy Spirit in a variety of ways, by no means constrained by the Church's boundaries and definitions – the Spirit "blows where it wishes" (John 3:18). In its creation and presentation art elicits wonder, challenges and probes, opens us to hidden meaning, to deep purpose and witnesses to the creativity and energy that has its source in God.'



Madonna and Child by Peter Eugene Ball 2009

In Lent and Easter 2007 I was particularly responsible for Nicholas Mynheer's Sarum Cycle, Stations of the Passion and Resurrection created to be hung in the Trinity Chapel. Lunar Disc by Emily Young came to us in 2005 and, as a result of conversations with me, Emily created Angel Heads as part of our seven hundred and fiftieth anniversary; one of the heads is now in the cloister garth.

In September 2009 we hosted a delightful exhibition in the Morning Chapel of thirty pieces by Peter Eugene Ball. This exhibition was a pleasing collaboration with Rachel Bebb of the Garden Gallery near

Stockbridge. A crucifix from the exhibition was purchased by someone locally and has been hung in the Trinity Chapel this year during Lent.

The committee's work has really taken off recently owing in no small part to the energy, enthusiasm and contacts of Jaquiline Creswell, our visual arts adviser, who has helped us to be proactive and more adventurous in our thinking. Our policy aims for three exhibitions a year, one of which should be 'significant' and in the past year we've already exceeded that! Liminality in the autumn of 2010 was Jacqueline's first exhibition in which eight renowned and local artists - Jay Battle ARBS, Sean Henry ARBS, James Jones, Jonathan Loxley, Rebecca Newnham, Keith Rand RSA, Roger Stephens and Benjamin Stork - responded to and explored the theme of transitional space using the cathedral as their canvas. There was huge variety in their responses to the theme and the space, and all so sympathetically done. The artists gave generously of their time and our education department made fantastic opportunities for people of all ages to engage with these works.

Those who attended the Advent Procession Darkness to Light were entranced when, as 'Lo he comes with clouds descending' echoed around the cathedral, Bruce Monro's Light Shower was turned on under the spire crossing. Designed for the space, this glorious installation of two thousand LED tear drops was not, however, intended for liturgical use, although it worked superbly on this occasion, and also worked as a splendid delineation of the architectural space, so much missed since the removal of the screen. It was joined in the cloisters in the New Year by Bruce's Water Towers - a very different conception. In the early hours of darkness the gently changing colours of the sixty-nine towers made of two-litre water bottles was mesmerizing; accompanied by a variety of music this was a memorable experience. The marketing energies of Sarah Flanagan saw us receive significant press coverage for this exhibition and, consequently, extra visitors.

Also in the early New Year erstwhile member of our Exhibitions Committee, Sophie Hacker, showed her Icons of the Incarnation. These are inspired by Olivier Messiaen's La Nativité, and we had a great evening on 12 January, when the exhibition was opened and Daniel Cook performed the music alongside a film of the artwork and meditations by Canon Roly Riem. Sophie's work has appeared in several cathedrals now to considerable acclaim.



Blue Jeans by sculptor Sean Henry July-October 2011



The Last Supper from Nicholas Mynheer's *Sarum Cycle* 2007

Antony Gormley's *Flare II* has just arrived in the south transept and is with us through the good offices of Madeleine, Lady Bessborough, of Roche Court, one of our lay canons. Suspended in the south transept, it is far more accessible than it was when shown in St Paul's Cathedral and works superbly well in this space.*

Looking ahead there are further exciting installations and projects planned. Sean Henry, who was part of *Liminality* will be having a solo exhibition in July-September of this year with his strikingly life-like (though not life-size) figures placed in and around the cathedral in places that will challenge and entertain. This will coincide with the John Constable exhibition being mounted by the South Wilts Museum.

There will be an exhibition in October of tapestries by Jane Lemon to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Amnesty International; to coincide with the Olympics in 2012 we will be showing Ben Dearnley's *Olympic Gallery*, torsos of recent Olympic athletes, (Ben happens to be the son of Christopher Dearnley, one-time Director of Music at the cathedral); and we are pursuing a retrospective for Helaine Blumenfeld in 2013. The year 2015 will see the eight hundredth anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta and we plan to have a large sculpture exhibition to mark that.

So for something that was never in the job description this has proved an exciting and rewarding adjunct! Over the centuries the Church has been a prominent patron of the arts in all forms, and it's really important that we continue this: as our policy says 'Good art honours the act of creating, delights in form, beauty and colour and is a vital component of a religion of the Incarnation. For centuries forward-thinking churches have used the arts as a method of outreach – to attract and engage outside the formal structures of church membership whilst celebrating the creativity that God gives to human beings.'

Mark Bonney
Canon Treasurer

*See picture on back cover.