

Art in Cathedrals

Newsletter

Summer 26

Welcome to our summer newsletter. In this edition, I am pleased to share a summary of Julia Porter-Pryce's research. As you may recall, Julia — a curator, priest and Prebendary Emerita of St Paul's Cathedral, with a passion for enabling art in sacred spaces — has been helping us think more deeply about the impact of contemporary art in our cathedrals and how visitors experience it. Her research, conducted in person and by telephone over the autumn and winter months, offers valuable insight for us all.

We are planning an informal lunchtime webinar in early October, where Julia will share her findings and we will hear from others about hosting exhibitions, building new partnerships to do so, and identifying work that may be suitable for cathedrals to host.

Art offers a rich seam through which we can find fresh ways to tell our story, engage both new and familiar audiences, and create a bold missional narrative. I am proud of what this small group of committed volunteers has achieved in the two years since it was formed, and I know I leave it in good hands as I step into retirement.

It is with a full heart that I take my leave of you. I offer my warmest thanks for your encouragement and support, and I welcome Justine Horseman Sewell to the group, an AEC trustee with special oversight of comms and arts, and wish her the very best as she takes the work forward.

The Very Revd Jonathan Greener



Sacred Resonance - See Available for Tour

Curating in Cathedrals – an Arts in Cathedrals research project – Julia Porter-Pryce

Summary

English cathedrals increasingly use contemporary art as both mission and strategy. Installations can create sacred encounter, renew perceptions of the building, explore themes such as justice, creation, memory and belonging, and support audiences, income, partnerships and profile. This creates a productive but demanding tension between worship, mission and enterprise.

Key findings

Most cathedrals lack dedicated arts teams or secure budgets, so programmes depend on clergy, existing staff, volunteers and cross-departmental collaboration.

Specialist curators can raise ambition and strengthen artist relationships, but they need time to understand each cathedral's spiritual, architectural and organisational context.

Decision-making is shaped by mission, values, quality, audience appeal, finance, worship, fabric, capacity and strategic fit.

Formal arts policies can clarify choices and support refusals, although some cathedrals prefer case-by-case judgement. The strongest programmes connect arts activity directly to wider institutional aims.

Touring installations, including works by Luxmuralis and Luke Jerram, are attractive because they are proven, marketable and often profitable. They can bring footfall, publicity and new audiences, but also create cost, disruption and repetition. Cathedrals therefore need to ask whether the work genuinely belongs in their space.

Implications

Sense of place is crucial. Major-city cathedrals may connect with festivals, tourism and civic events, while smaller or

rural cathedrals often emphasise worship, sanctuary and local relationships. Successful projects explain why the work belongs there and use proportionate interpretation and activities to deepen engagement.

Risks and benefits

Arts programmes can increase visitors, donations, shop income, partnerships, skills, reflection and profile. They can also strain worship space, staff, volunteers, budgets and communications. Controversial work requires careful interpretation, pastoral sensitivity, volunteer briefing and visible senior support.

Recommendations

Cathedrals should develop clear decision criteria, align arts activity with mission and strategy, plan honestly for capacity and cost, invest in interpretation and volunteer preparation, and evaluate commercial, missional, spiritual, social and cultural impact. Shared case studies, costing models and evaluation frameworks would help the sector build confidence and evidence.

Please contact susan.chapman@englishcathedrals.co.uk if you want a copy of the research in full.

Other News:

Art competition - Divine Designs - Art and Christianity has launched a competition inviting artists, illustrators, graphic designers from across the UK to design the front covers of any of the 73 books of the Bible for a unique exhibition next year.

Multiple submissions (up to four) are allowed and all selected entries will create the final exhibition with seven cash prizes and an overall winner decided by their Panel of Judges. A full colour catalogue of the 73 selected covers will be published as well as go on show in an exhibition from 10th February 2027 to 9th April 2027.

Deadline for entries 21 September - find out more here <https://stjohnswaterloo.org/arts/divinedesigns>

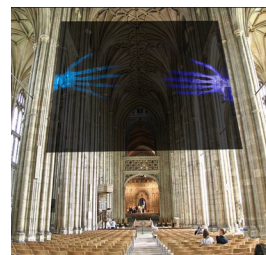
New feature coming soon

We are creating a new page on our website, www.englishcathedrals.co.uk where we can post artworks ready and sensitive to our cathedrals with a summary from our arts curator, Jacqueline Creswell that will include installation costs etc and a contact to find out more.

If you have commissioned new work and it is available for other cathedrals to host, do let us know so we can share it on this page too.

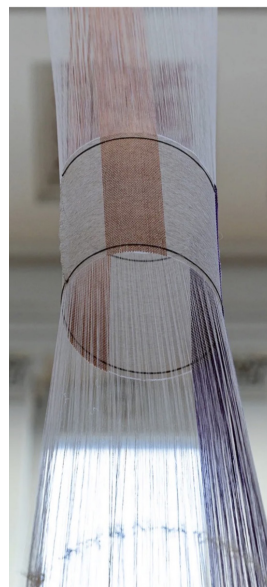
Available for tour:

Halima Cassell,
Virtues of Unity
www.virtuesofunity.com/home



Ben Edge – Two works are available from this work Children of Albion www.benedge.co.uk/latest-paintings-2021-2022

Renaud Muraire –
Sacred Resonance
www.renaudmuraire.com – currently at Canterbury Cathedral



Transformation is a new sculpture by **Hannah Robson** commissioned by The Harris and the British Textile Biennial. The work responds to research into Rayon making and the Courtaulds factory in Preston, drawing from the material held at the museum. www.hannah-robson.com

Touching the Void – needs external funding – voiles by Alexander de Cadenet.

Grounded - A partnership between Helen Barff (artist), Lucy Newman Cleeve (curator and priest), Close Ltd (gallery), YMCA Land Aid House and Refugees at Home- huge potential for community engagement

Noah – a future hope – an artistic exploration featuring three contemporary artists from the faith traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, of the importance of caretaking the earth inspired by the story of Noah, the ancient flood narrative found in all the Abrahamic faiths. Video here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=eq_hOwA-IE&authuser=0



Liz West – Colourwork installations - www.liz-west.com/installation

Do contact Jacqueline Creswell to find out more about the above works and for any help and support with an artistic idea or project.
Jacqueline@visualartsadvisor.org
www.visualartsadvisor.org
M +44 7748833166