

Works in the Methodist Modern Art Collection: 7

Maggi Hambling, *Good Friday: Walking on Water*

Much of the Methodist Church Collection of Modern Art was put together in the 1960s and consequently contains works by some of the finest artists of that period: Graham Sutherland, Elisabeth Frink, Edward Burra, Ceri Richards, and so on. Since interest and recognition of its importance as a national collection was rekindled in the 1990s several works have been added to it. There has been a concerted effort to broaden the heritage of the artists and to 'fill in the gaps' i.e. to cover aspects of the 'Jesus-story' that had been found wanting in the collection. The initial collection had a strong emphasis on the passion of Jesus; in more recent years other areas of the ministry have been added in order to 'complete the picture' so to speak. Should the exhibition at Wallingford go ahead in May 2027 some of those works will be included in the exhibition as we seek to provide an interpretation of the whole of the ministry of Jesus and we will be featuring some of those in articles over the coming months.

One of the most recent additions, however, also has an element of the Passion of Jesus. It is a work by one of Britain's finest living artists, Maggi Hambling. Hambling is known for her heavy use of oils, layering layer after layer on the canvas to create an expressively physical work which appear to be influenced by the late Frank Auerbach. Amongst those who influenced her style was Francis Bacon. In recent years, working from her home and studio close to the Suffolk coast Hambling has produced many seascapes that capture the unyielding power, and overwhelming strength of the North Sea as waves crash towards their destination. Hambling was commissioned by the Trustees to produce a work that would enhance the collection. She came up with *Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006*. It was produced in her clearly identifiable style, unmistakably Hambling.



Although *Good Friday* is part of the title, one cannot overlook resonance with other instances from the life of Jesus. The rest of the title, *Walking on Water*, conjures up thoughts of the post resurrection appearance of Jesus as the disciples struggled to come to terms with what they had witnessed. Having been told to return to Galilee where they would see him again, the disciples were out fishing when Jesus appears to them

walking on water. In one such account, Peter steps out of the boat to walk to Jesus who

appears on the shore. As he began to sink threatening to drown, Jesus walks to him, holds him, and the two make dry land. I can't help but feel that this instance reminds us in a very powerful way that without Jesus we would sink, but if we do begin to sink then Jesus steps out and assists us toward not only dry land but the destination God intends for us.

Hambling's depiction of Jesus is on a stormy sea, so characteristic of her style. He is at quite a distance; the sun appears to be rising; or is it setting? I personally like to think of it as rising, that though this be said to be Good Friday, there is light on the horizon through this extraordinary act of sacrifice and obedience.

Jesus is light and the reflection of that light on the water is that of a cross, which in Christian thought should be dark yet it isn't.

It is a small work, just 53 x 67 cm but packs a significant punch for the viewer.

Revd Bruce