

## The Stations of the Cross

*Michael Fletcher*

This series of paintings will be exhibited throughout Lent at St Mary's church Wivenhoe.  
Last year they were exhibited throughout Lent at The Oasis/Frinton Free Church.

The initial inspiration for this series of paintings was a posthumous exhibition of drawings of The Stations of The Cross by the sculptor Michael Kenny (1941-1999) held at The Royal Academy in 2005. These had been produced in 1998-1999, the last two years of his life and had been presented to the RA by his widow.

I already knew of the Eric Gill (1882-1940) Stations of The Cross and owned one of the woodcuts he did from the series. These were based on the carved Stations he made for Westminster Cathedral between 1914-1918. This prompted me to visit the Cathedral to see the actual carvings.

Also a friend brought to my attention the work of the American painter Barnett Newman (1905-1970) who between 1958 and 1966 painted a series of large abstract paintings based on the Stations of The Cross.

So by July 2005 I had established a framework within which to begin working. I deliberately avoided looking again at the Michael Kenny pieces as I felt they were too recent and I wanted to avoid being influenced by them. However the Eric Gills proved invaluable in initially suggesting source images for some of the Stations. As did the Barnett Newmans, which although I could only see in reproduction, were simple and monochrome with a sombre seriousness and an essential meditative quality.

There were to be fourteen canvases, each one fourteen inches square, each one divided into a grid of one inch squares, a gold border, half an inch wide at the top and on each side and one inch wide at the bottom. Initially I intended to use a wider range of greys but in the end settled for a black and white palette with occasional touches of colour mixed in.

The paintings were made in no particular order and I often worked back and forth over them, even taking them to Spain to continue working on them there. I finally finished them in 2009, however they did not exclusively occupy the four years I worked on them, other work continued alongside.

Some time after finishing them I discovered that modern versions of The Stations now normally finish with a Fifteenth Station, "A Resurrection". When discussing showing the series at St Mary's our Rector gently encouraged me to agree to paint "A Resurrection" which I believe he wishes to use on Easter Sunday. That painting is now nearing completion.

Michael Fletcher

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\*Since submitting his article for publication in Tidings, Michael has indeed finished the Fifteenth Station. It will have its premiere showing in the church on Easter Sunday.