

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.